



BEYOND EXPECTATIONS: FROM A MOMENT TO A MOVEMENT



by
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The history of addiction in the United States has been a long one. Societal concerns, whether positive or negative about alcoholics and addicts, led to the development of institutions, programs, social policies, and treatment endeavors. This was not the case for spouses and children of alcoholics/addicts. The impact of addiction on their lives received little attention until the middle and later parts of the twentieth century.

In the early 1950s Al-Anon was founded primarily for spouses of alcoholics, but it wasn't until the last quarter of the century that interest in the children of alcoholics/addicts developed, when Alateen was launched, the New York-based Children of Alcoholics Foundation was created and, at the forefront for children of alcoholics/addicts, the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA) was founded.

The Early Years

When I consider the blessings of my life I always think of the co-founders of NACoA. They are without a doubt one of the finest and most dedicated group of people I have ever met. In the late 1970s there were a few "voices" traveling around the United States advocating assistance and the need for programs for children in chemically dependent families. These early pioneers: Claudia Black, Cathleen Brooks, Stephanie Brown, Ellen Morehouse, Robert Subby, Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, myself, and others all shared the same message—that children of alcoholics need help and have a right to recognition, support, treatment and recovery.

I believe the children of alcoholics' movement was unique as a mental health and social movement. Unlike other mental health issues, this one was not discovered by researchers and mental health practitioners. Rather it grew from the shared feelings of those raised in alcoholic families who had a felt need to understand not only what happened to them, but also to understand the impact on their lives physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I remember being criticized by academic and quantitative researchers that all of us speakers were "just a bunch of missionaries." We were! However, I like to think we were a bunch of "passionaries." And a broad range of research in recent years has validated what we taught passionately in those early days.

The Transitional Years

Under the superb guidance of the second wave of NACoA Board and staff leadership, drawn not only from those who had learned from their own family histories, but also from great leaders in the medical, social work, business, and advocacy worlds, NACoA today has surpassed our expectations. It has truly become the national organization we could only imagine. One has only to look at the webpage (www.nacoa.org) to see not only the growing accomplishments of NACoA, but also the connections and collaborations with many other national mental health, medical, faith, social work, education and other organizations and agencies. It also does my heart good to see that the importance of research and evidence-based programs are now part of NACoA, including a Board of Scientific Advisors and its hosting of the IDA (Information on Drugs and Alcohol), the comprehensive compendium of data and articles in the alcohol and drug fields.

I wish that all of the original founders could visit the NACoA office in Rockville MD to feel and see NACoA at work influencing decision makers across systems and society and creating tools to help them be effective in providing support and solutions for children of alcoholics. I look to the future and believe that NACoA will flourish. I also realize how fortunate I have been to share the past twenty five years with some of the finest people I will ever know. All of us should be proud that we had the courage to stand up for children and the perseverance to follow our hearts.

The 25th Anniversary Celebration Year

I am looking forward to NACoA's 25th Anniversary year, especially to the March 2008 conference sponsored by the U.S. Journal honoring NACoA's 25 years of bringing hope and healing to so many. Our very first national conference, held in Orlando, FL touched the hearts of all of us, not just the participants, but also the original founders. I will never forget, standing arm in arm with this special group of founders, when we realized that we had done it! It was a celebration of our lives before we met each other, and a celebration of what we did together. We knew that we had started a whole new movement and that we were all the better for it.

I look forward to seeing old friends and new. I hope that you will be there—at the conference and also "there" for NACoA in future years. The children still need and deserve the passionate support of us all.

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