



Substance Abuse: An Act of Violence Against Self & Others

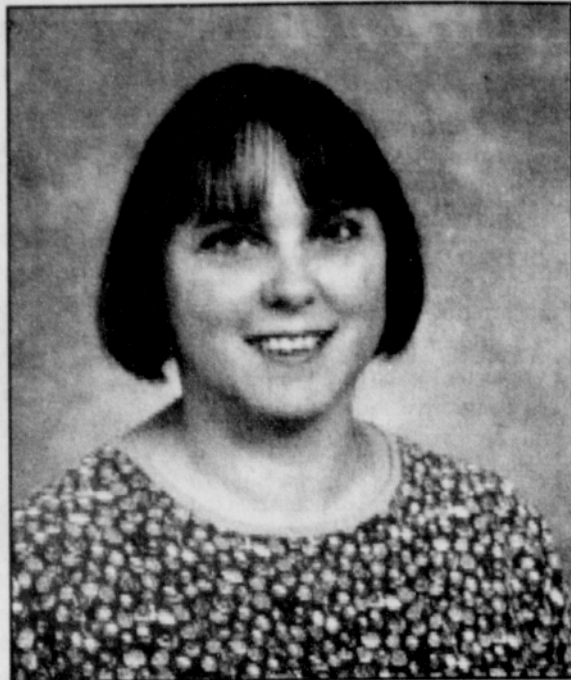
By WYNNE BOYLAN

What does it mean for us, as a society today, when all we have to do is look at family members, friends and acquaintances to find a life damaged by substance abuse? We don't have far to look before locating someone caught up in the web of this affliction. Today what we know about substance abuse is that it can lead to addiction that impacts the individual in every aspect of their lives.

We've all heard the excuses. "It's been a stressful day, I'm overweight, I need more energy, I need to unwind or get into the party mood, I have midterms, finals, just let me get past this deadline then I'll quit, I only use it to party, I can't handle the stress of life without it, I'm dealing with a loss, it's the only way I can deal with my spouse, my boss, my in-laws..." When an individual begins abusing alcohol or other drugs what are

they really saying? I believe that person is saying "I don't care about myself or anyone else." People know about the dangers of using toxic substances and they will use them anyway. It doesn't matter who you are or how you were raised, chemical dependence can happen to anyone.

So why is it people become substance abusers? Aside from a genetic predisposition for addiction in many people, there are still a great many unknowns about



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substance abuse. It doesn't matter what excuse an individual uses when they begin abusing chemicals. The bottom line is this... when you knowingly take a toxic chemical into your body and abuse it, you are committing an act of violence. You are harming your body. At first you may not feel the impact, but eventually you begin to feel the damage.

The spiritual effect of substance abuse is significant. Each time you abuse a substance, you lose a piece of your soul, until there's nothing left but a husk of what used to be your "humanity".

I'm not condemning people who

have the disease of addiction. I'm condemning the act of abusing a substance when you know about the damage your using has caused. Making the decision to use rather than accepting help is an act of violence whether you're ready to admit this or not. If substance abuse is an act of violence, then abstinence would be the nonviolent alternative. If we are to commit to a season of nonviolence, let's begin with abstinence then view this new behavior as a way of "being".

Martin Luther King reminded us "nonviolence in the truest sense is not a strategy that one uses simply be-

cause it is expedient at the moment; nonviolence is ultimately a way of life that men live by because of the sheer morality of its claim." This isn't to say that the disease of addiction is immoral. What I believe Martin Luther King was saying when referring to morality is this: you are making a choice that benefits humanity in a positive way. Let's begin this season by following the example of a great spiritual leader and make a commitment to abstinence and nonviolence today, this season and every season thereafter.

Addictions Abuse As Violence Towards The Self

By DENISE MARTIN

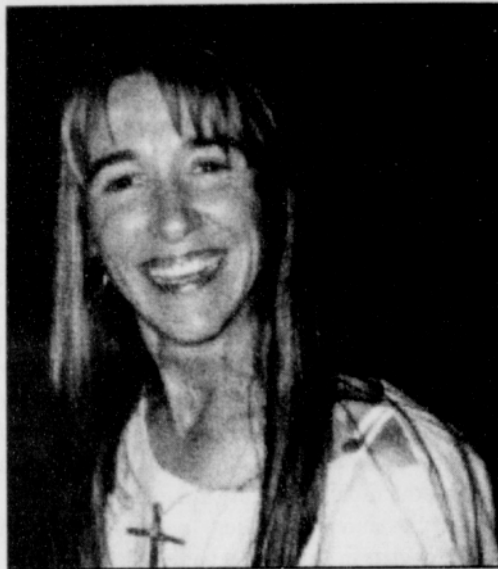
We are overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems 'out there.' But maybe it's closer to home than that. What about the violence we inflict on ourselves with addictions?

No addiction is healthy or life-affirming. So why do we partake in self-destructive behaviors? Why would we trade our health, our dreams, the respect of our loved ones or our inner peace for short term gratification? It always boils down to damaged self-esteem, a lack of self-love. What is your level of self-love? Reflect on whether you are guilty of self-inflicted violence that may be harming your self-esteem. Self-love begets peace, self-hate begets violence. That being the case, our lack of self-love and consequently the violence that some of us perpetrate on ourselves with addictions is the first and foremost problem we must address in order to stop the violence on a global level.

Children who are loved and nurtured, whose parents are physically and emotionally available, who are not traumatized outside the home grow up to have healthy self-esteem and self-love. They are not the ones trapped in addictions or threatening their fellow man.

In order to stop the violence in the world, we must each address that self-defeating demon inside us. We must agree to truthfully examine our own behaviors and look at what substances or obsessions we might be abusing ourselves with.

Remember the commandment that Moses gave us, "Love thy neighbor, as thyself." Therein lies the problem. Most of us don't love and honor ourselves. How then could we love and honor the children or our neighbors? Developing



Denise Martin

self-love is the most important way we can join in this Season of Nonviolence. Tranquility will prevail on this planet once we each commit to working at self-love. I wish you peace on your journey.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

We can all learn from his dream.

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