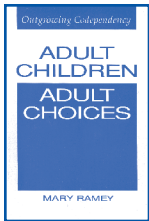




BOOKSHELF

by Stephanie Abbott

Adult Children Adult Choices
by Mary Ramey, Ph.D.



It may be time to revisit the concept of codependency, an idea rather thoroughly out of fashion this past decade. In the 1980s it seemed an extraordinary idea that people affected by someone else's addictions could all have traits in common with each other, and this constellation of traits was dubbed, rather cleverly, "codependency."

Popularizers churned out books, pamphlets and articles listing characteristics of children/spouses/parents who organized their emotional lives around the addict in their lives. Groups formed, people took self-tests, therapists specialized, the popular press featured the topic. Eventually the net got cast so widely that nearly everyone on the planet could be labeled codependent, and therefore, by some definitions emotionally "sick." This more or less made the concept useless and, not surprisingly, we have heard very little about it lately.

For those many people who recognize that addictions in their family members have made an impact on them, the concept does make sense of their experiences and normalizes their own responses. I have never been willing to call those normal responses to abnormal stress "sick."

Let me recommend this book by Dr. Ramey to adult children of addicted parents. Her belief is that "codependency is not forever. ..(these) actions are normal and appropriate human behaviors in certain circumstances

and at certain ages, but present a big problem under other conditions." She believes the problem behavior is a result of being stuck in an early stage of development, which can be outgrown. Now isn't that a more useful notion for the ACOA than being chronically ill?

JERRY MOE SPEAKS AT CIJ CONFERENCE IN MEXICO CITY

Leaders of Mexican substance abuse organizations and government agencies received an extended briefing and discussion for the first time about children of alcoholics. The officials were gathered at a national conference on juvenile justice issues in October in Mexico City. Jerry Moe, National Director of the Betty Ford Center Children's Programs, was asked to make the presentation by the U.S. Embassy, which co-sponsored the conference with the Mexican government. His talk, "Forgotten Children: Kids from Addicted Families," deeply affected the audience.

Miriam Hamdan, a cultural affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy, wrote a note to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy thanking them for recommending Moe:

"He stood up, left the dais and went down to talk to our eyes and to our hearts...He told us that we Mexicans teach our children not to trust anybody, he told us that Mexican mothers are like lionesses in trying to protect their children, but most of the time they are alone, because it is something they don't talk about in public...there was a very high level official from the Mexican Ministry of Government and he did not know

how to react. We the audience had tears in our eyes, perhaps remembering all the times when we ourselves were victims...At the end, many people approached him to hug him... I cannot tell you with words what I experienced with feelings."

Jerry commented to NACoA, "When the audience is in tears, we know they are often hearing their own stories. This needs to be addressed because they create the programs for the children. You know, healing the healers."

Moe's connection with the audience and the impression he made on key officials was so impressive that the State Department asked him to come to Los Angeles in January to brief a delegation of officials from public health agencies in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Mexico City. Said one official in the Chiapas State government after the briefing, "We are going to develop a program to help those children."

A NEW NANACOA IS FORMED

The National Association of Native American Children of Alcoholics, formed in 1988 and a leading advocacy voice for young and adult children of alcoholics during the following decade, has been re-constituted in cooperation with White Bison, Inc., a national Native American non-profit organization headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO.

Called Warriors for Children of Alcoholics, the new organization will pick up the mantle of NANACOA and continue its mission to bring attention to and provide services for Native American children who have been hurt by alcoholism in their families.