

Mindfully Incarcerated

By Daniel Labbe

It is coming closer to Father's Day, and like every year thoughts of my daughter and the pain my selfish actions caused her and her mother are filling my mind. There is no way I can know all the different ways ~~now~~ the actions that landed me in prison have hurt them, but my imagination never fails to think of just the right thing to wring my heart. I sit with this pain knowing there is nothing I can do to stop it, and nothing I can do for my daughter. That's the worst part of it all; knowing I caused this pain, and not being able to do anything about it. Sometimes mindfulness sucks - Big time.

Back when I lived with my wife and daughter I was a total mess. Drug and alcohol abuse and overwhelming emotional issues combined with a lack of coping skills made for a chaotic life. I loved both my daughter and wife, yet was incapable of truly loving them. Emotionally, I should have never been in a serious relationship. I was too... wounded and overwhelmed, but I didn't know this. All I knew was I wanted to love and be loved.

I met my ~~ex~~-wife when I was 17. We got married when I was 19 and had ~~our~~ our daughter when I was 24, when we first met my then wife and ~~we~~ ~~had~~ fell for each other hard. I loved her as best as I could and she loved me, but

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it was a co-dependent love for both of us. we did everything together and spent all of our time together. She was healthier than I was and was able to love me even when I couldn't love myself. The problem was that when my baggage from childhood would rise up, when depression, sadness, and deep loneliness set in, no amount of love was enough to fill that void. I ~~would~~ would try to drink and drug the pain away. When that didn't work, I mistakenly figured she didn't love me enough or that "love" from someone else was needed.

Towards the end it all became way too much for me to handle. At the time, I had no idea why I was such a mess, and I hated myself for it. My daughter was the only constant light in my life that I could see. Yet this wasn't enough. Nothing could have been "enough". I know this now.

So here I sit in prison wondering what Father's Day is like for a girl who's father violated her trust and left her life over 10 years ago. A girl who has to be reminded of all this, of the absence of her father and what he did, every holiday and maybe even every day. I want to tell her how sorry I am for it all, that I constantly think of her and worry about how she is doing. I want her to know how much I love her and wish I could have been the father she needed me to be, but I can't.

I wonder, what can I do to help ease her pain and no matter ~~what~~ how hard I try, I know there is .

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nothing, absolutely nothing I can do. I am not allowed to have contact with her in any way, so, I sit with this Pain, sit with this Powerlessness and Uselessness and remind myself that no matter how much I hurt, she hurts more. Knowing this has provided me with a lot of motivation. If there is nothing I can do for her directly, what I can do is make sure I address the issues that led me to live such a chaotic life. I can do what I can to heal and to learn ~~about~~ how to lead a healthy life. I can become the person my daughter needed me to be... the person I needed myself to be all along, and by doing this it is in some way like not allowing the Pain I've experienced and caused others to all be for nothing. It does mean something to me... So much so that I have done my best and more to become a strong healthy person. I'm still working on it, but the journey has changed me more than I ever thought possible, and the experience of it all I now hope to use in helping others. Maybe if I can't change what I did or the pain I caused, I can use it to help others in need, and maybe - just maybe - if my daughter ever decides to contact me ~~then~~ I'll be the man she'll need me to be in that moment.

In this moment what I can do is remain open to the pain that naturally arises around this issue, and let it go when it naturally dissipates. This is not how I used to deal with Pain. I used to try to avoid it, escape it, or "fix" it, either that or I would

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Saturate myself in it and ruminate. Neither of these were very helpful.

Being Mindfully incarcerated isn't easy, but it is the best way to respond to the situation for myself, for my family and those around me, and especially for those I have hurt in the past. ~~When the Pain of losing my daughter, of imagining the Pain I have caused her and her mother, arises I do not push it away, nor do I wallow in it, instead I allow myself to feel it in all its forms, and I use the experience to strengthen my determination to heal, grow, and help others. This is the best I can do. And maybe one day my daughter will find some healing, some solace, or something of value in how I have handled my incarceration,~~ and the person I have become. This would be my Father's day gift to my daughter, for I am not the one deserving of a gift on Father's day, and this is the best I can offer her.

Writing this I hope to inspire anyone struggling with guilt, grief, remorse, or shame to be brave enough to allow yourself to feel it deeply, without trying to manipulate it in any way, then to allow it to move on. It does no good to wallow in it. And in this way maybe you can find the courage and strength to continue your journey with greater determination, compassion, and wisdom.

Peace