



ophthalmology for the Soul
DISTORTED LENSES

DISTORTED LENS of RESPONSIBILITY

"It would be my fault if my son was successful at committing suicide."

The Emergence Testimony From the Heart of a Mother AN EPIC OF SELF BLAME Son's Suicide Attempts

My name is Jane and this is my story about my son's two suicide attempts and how I have learned to deal with them. No matter who you are, once you go through something like this you are changed forever - - there is no erasing what has happened or trying to rationalize that it did not happen, because it did. When a person can acknowledge the hard truth they can begin to heal.

Suicide is a cry for help, one part of the person wants death, and the other part simply desires for the pain to go away. When a person wants help he will tell a friend or counselor he is suicidal because he really wants to live. Most people have suicidal thoughts or feelings at some point in their life but do not act on the impulse. There is a common myth that if someone talks about suicide they won't do it - this is wrong, they will attempt it.

Families who go through a suicide attempt feel various emotions - shame guilt, anger denial and we wonder if we could have done anything to have prevented it. My son, Jerry, first attempted suicide in 2004 at the age of 22. He was drunk and slit his wrists. A friend had brought him home and he was in his bedroom, I assumed passed out. I went upstairs to get something and noticed his door was open and there was blood all over. As I entered his

room, I noticed he had slit his wrists. I immediately called the squad. He was taken to the hospital and put in emergency protective custody. Because there are such a limited number of inpatient facilities available, he was taken to an outpatient facility and kept overnight. The next morning, I was called by a psychiatrist, who informed me, "You can come and get your son because he is not a danger to himself or anyone else." I was aghast. He went on to evaluate, "He would not have cut his wrists if he wasn't drunk." I thought to myself, "Duh! It doesn't take a psychiatrist to figure that out." Even though I am not a psychiatrist, and simply Jerry's mother, of course it was quite obvious that he would not have attempted suicide if he would have been sober. But that did not mean he still did not need inpatient help. It was evident to me, that Jerry was not fine. I knew in my heart it would be a matter of time and he would attempt suicide again.

Four years later, at the age of 26 what I feared would happen, happened; another attempt at suicide. It was a déjà vu experience; he was drunk and slit his wrists. This time I had stopped at his place for something and found him. Although this time I did not call the squad. Rather, I was able to reach some of his friends who came by. We bandaged him up, and put him in the car and drove him to an inpatient facility. I knew his cuts were superficial and he was not going to die before he received the necessary help but I was not

going to go down the same road previously with the medical professionals not understanding the gravity of his action. I was fearful that they would have him shuffled to an outpatient facility again and then released without the adequate help. This time he was placed in an inpatient treatment center for 40 days, received longer-term care and counseling that he desperately needed. However, I had to argue with people to get this accomplished because he was not a minor and he could have left on his own recognizance. Thankfully Jerry came to realize after a few weeks that he needed to be there and get some help to deal with his issues.

It has been three years since his last attempt and I do worry if it will happen again. When he gets depressed and down spirited he will say, "You would be better off without me mom." I tell him that I love him and assure him that I would not be better off. Yet I have also learned that I cannot be held hostage by his threats of suicide. When things go wrong in his life and he has consequences from his choices and he has difficulty taking personal responsibility. When the pressure is on he will lash out and say, "I should just blow my head off," -it hurts me and it tears me up inside. Yet, I have realized that sometimes this is his way of trying to manipulate me and make me feel guilty. It is a difficult realization and hard for me to say. I had to let go of my self-blame and stop taking responsibility for things that were not mine to take. It was hard for me to say to myself, that I have to live my own life; and that I cannot allow myself to be held hostage and controlled emotionally by my son's choices and consequences. It is not that I do not care about my son, even when, especially when, he accuses me that I do not love him.

My new resolve is to move forward and realize that everyone is responsible for their own life. Most definitely, I would initially struggle with self-doubt; maybe blame myself because I always have felt responsible for things that I cannot control. It would be crushing to lose my son if he would be successful at taking his life. And then I would have to be determined to console myself knowing that I have done everything I possibly could have done and in the end accept the fact, that I have no control over someone else's life.

Distortion: "Walking on eggs and being what my son expects of me will keep my son from attempting suicide again.

Clarification: "My son has been holding me hostage to think it would be my fault if he was successful at suicide.

Lie: "It would be my fault if my son committed suicide."

Truth: "It would be horrible for me emotionally if my son took his life, but it would not be my fault."



Reba's Responsibility
There are so many ways to see life...