

# ADVOCATES

First, we listen ...

*"Each of Us Is a Person First"*  
*By Dyanne Andrews, 1<sup>st</sup> Prize Winner*

**"Hi...it's Me !"**

Wow. I guess that for me is the first thing that comes to mind, when somebody asks me, "Who are you?" This could very well take some time to reflect and recite. So, that being said, I hope you brought a warm cup of something yummy, have a very cushy seat and your boss knows that you may not be in for a few days!

Well to begin with, I have ALWAYS been that of a free spirit, emphasis on the word FREE: always full of dreams and big grandiose plans. I never wanted to be Wonder Woman but sure wanted to be seen! I was forever singing, dancing, writing and painting. Anything creative, that my mind could wrap itself around, man I was there! I even remember holding Lawyer's hours from within my closet for all the neighborhood disenfranchised kids, when I was all of 8 or 9 years old.

But by the time I was 10 years of age, I had already been the victim of physical and psychological abuse wielded by my unpredictable father as well as being sexually abused by another family member. Not the glorious childhood that I would have subscribed to, had I been given any options. But, what really made me so angry with that whole period of constant turmoil and pain was that I had been adopted. And, I had always been told that, that had meant that I was REALLY wanted, loved, special. Well, not from where I stood! The shame and horror, still haunts me even today at times. Living with somebody who would beat you senseless, just for playing with make-up and call you a whore at the age of 9 or 10, is just beyond any scope of normalcy. So, I left. Yup, I left and stayed with friends and anywhere that I thought was safe. Not, a great idea! I started hanging out with people that were doing all kinds of drugs. Heroin, Cocaine, Meth, well pretty much ALL of them. You could say they had NO drug prejudices. And just like the old saying goes, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So, I did, and so began my love affair with drugs! Now, not to jump from issue to issue, but it was right around this time that I had developed a very unhealthy no love affair with food and

had wrangled myself up the label of anorexic/bulimic. I was told many years later that this was most likely because of all of the sexual abuse that I suffered and that this was my way of trying to be in control. Again, not one of my finer hours. You see during all of my drug using and hanging out, I wasn't always making the finest choices in the company I kept. I saw somebody that I thought was cute and I would be amazed that they were paying attention to me. For at this point I had no self esteem, let alone low self esteem. I would think that if they found me attractive and wanted to be intimate with me that, that meant that they loved me. Well, as I am sure you have already surmised, that was never the case and when morning came, or an hour later, they were gone, usually with all of my drugs and money.

Anyway, fast forward through the years and a few bad marriages. All with your textbook abuse scenarios. Now you find me raising my 2 kids, alone and still very much on drugs. I always thought that if I wasn't using in front of them, that my drug use even as bad as it was (and that's an understatement) would not affect my kids. Looking back I know just how stupid that sounds. But my addict mind told me different, until the day the door came crashing in.

My whole world came crashing down on me that day! The police came through my door, searched my entire home, found my drugs and arrested me. What a great "Hi Honey, how was your day at school?" picture, huh? Yeah, it definitely affected my kids. That regret I carry with me EVERYDAY ! Well, my name was splattered ALL over the place. The newspapers, T.V., you name it. Branded for life, DRUG DEALER, JUNKIE, LOWLIFE. I could go on, but you get the gist. Now it was at that point (and I think a good one) that I decided to put my life in order. So, I sought counseling, drug rehab and love of my Mother and children who, by the way, have thankfully forgiven me. I came to Advocates just this past year, because at the time I was having some issues with my sobriety and my overall well being. I joined the SOAP Program and have to say, that I actually learned more there, than in any other program I had ever been involved with. I think because here everybody does see each of us as People first and we are not labeled by our diseases. Also, because here you have a voice and it is heard, really listened to! That is So very important to me, for somewhere, while I was floating through my self destructive, excruciatingly painful, hell that I called my life, I lost mine! I became incapable of expressing myself and lost the ability to work my way back. I have found it again! I have it back! Today, yeh I still have stress and bad days/moments, but I am here, alive and I am SO very grateful! Now, if you were to ask my doctor who I am today, (by diagnosis) the list is long. Here goes... OCD, Bi-polar, Body Dysmorphic disorder, Anorexic/Bulimic, Chronically Depressed, PTSD, Suicidal Attempts, Rape victim, Incest Victim, Heart disease, Liver Disease, DRUG ADDICT. Now if you ask me, "Who are you?" This is what I am going to tell you, "Hi, I am Dyanne. Mother, Daughter, friend, Artist, Person! Just ME! Still larger than life at times. For like my paintings, I like

my world colorful! But really, when you see ME, the real ME, it's just ME. That's all you get! And that ain't bad!

Thanks Andy!!!!!!!!!!.