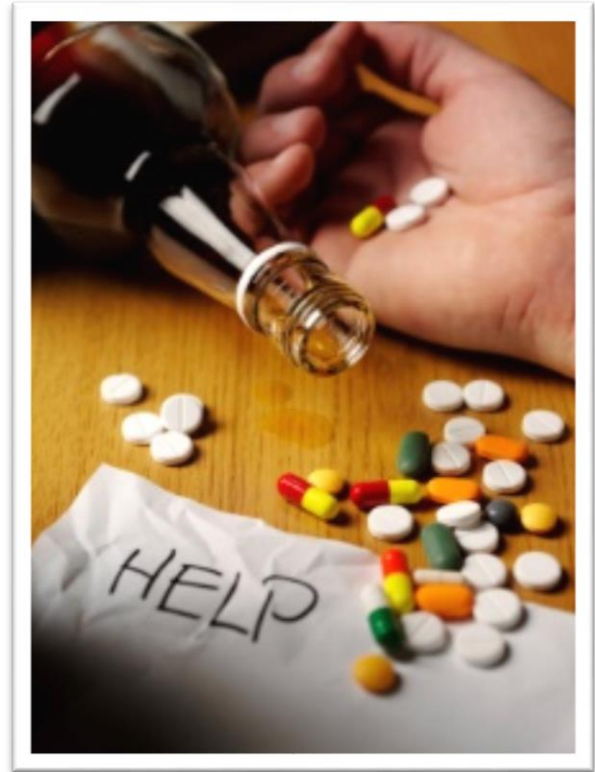


Michael Jackson, Drug Addiction, The Media, and Me!

By Carla Wills-Brandon

Prescription drug addiction is hitting the airwaves as various experts give their opinions on the death of Michael Jackson. Tragic video from 1984 has finally surfaced, with images of the singer frantically trying to put out fire in his hair sparked by fireworks during the filming of a soda commercial. This, on top of a skin condition, auto-immune disease, a difficult childhood and fame, are the conditions blamed for the star's continuous use of strong narcotics for the past 25 years. Doctors, who have written prescriptions for these drugs, will be investigated and because this is a celebrity death heads will roll.

As tragic as the super star's sad ending is, very few experts have held Michael Jackson personally responsible for not committing to a program of recovery and sticking with it. Though the inappropriate and reckless actions of medical professionals must be seriously addressed, Jackson also needs to be accountable for the part he has played in this sad drama. If we as a society don't have expectations of this, we will continue to remain in a pharmaceutical dark age.



In 1972, when I was just 16, my mother died from cancer complicated by prescription drug dependency. Diagnosed with breast cancer at the young age of 33, she then spent the next 5 years in a drug induced haze. Back then, treatments were dreadful and there were no "cancer" support groups. For my poor mother, strong mood altering pain medications, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep aids seemed to be her only choice. Unfortunately, there was a terrible down side to this pharmacological cocktail. How well I remember her standing on the stairs with a vile of pills in her hand, threatening to kill herself because she was so depressed and not sleeping. At that time, I was 14 years old.

Along with a very difficult childhood, like so many other individuals, I also suffered years of physical, sexual and emotional trauma. Over a decade of hurt and grief led to a serious eating disorder. When that didn't work, a few shots of my father's whiskey did the trick. With the help of the booze I could get to sleep and escape the horrors of my youth.

In early adulthood, I was diagnosed with an auto-immune disorder called Crohn's disease and with this, here came the prescription drugs. I never could drink very much, but a hand full of pills followed by a few beers, glasses of wine, or several shots of hard liquor would take away all of my emotional and physical pain and let me drift off into a sort of "coma" at night.

Over the years, with the narcotics, came an increase in sleeplessness at night, so, I learned how to manifest pain, and intensify the agony of Crohn's disease in order to acquire more prescription drugs. Because of the seriousness of the auto-immune disease, all I had to do was squeak, "I hurt" and I could get anything I wanted from a doctor.

Recently, when the latest round of "Jackson experts" announced that the "regular" person couldn't get a hold of the drugs

the singer had abused, I threw a pillow at the television in disgust. It's despicable how the media continues to provide inaccurate information about prescription drug addiction.

Over the last several decades, while this major health concern has been ignore by the press, medical community and mental health care providers, those of us recovering from addiction or who work with chemical dependency have gone to the funerals of men, women and children who have died from prescription drug overdose. I find it dreadfully concerning that only when a major celebrity with a Hollywood drama of a life succumbs to the disease of chemical dependency, does the media, celebrity world and medical community begin to take notice. As I said, this isn't a new issue.

Close to 30 years ago, I tried detoxing off of powerful narcotics for Crohns disease by myself, over and over again. When I would attempt this, all of the tragedies of my youth would bubble up to the surface at once and bury me in unresolved heartache and grief. Then withdrawal would set in, and the physical pain would become too much. Tool-less, I'd run back to the doctors for more pills.

After my second trip to the emergency room, a therapist friend of mine grabbed my husband and said, "Those pills are going to kill her. You have to get her away from the doctors prescribing these drugs!" Two days later I found myself in one of the very few inpatient facilities in the country at that time, which based their treatment program on the disease concept model of chemical dependency. I was detoxed and introduced to recovery programs that taught me I am responsible for my own healing. I learned I couldn't blame any person, place or situation if I relapsed back into addiction.

Like millions of other addicts and alcoholics, be they high profile celebrities or everyday people, with the help of recovery programs I've been able to stay clean continuously for well over 25 years. This recovery has also allowed me to heal from the tragedies of my life.

The media and so-called experts can blame Jackson's addiction on all of his painful life experiences, and they can continue to tell the rest of us that because he was a musical genius, his star fell harder than that of the average everyday person. Having met celebrities with years of recovery from painful drug and alcohol addiction, I know this too isn't true. Jackson was a casualty of a devastating disease called prescription drug addiction. The doctors are accountable for enabling Jackson, but he too is responsible for this tragedy. Sadly, his children will live with this loss for the rest of their lives.

For those brave sober souls who really understand addiction, who have been abused, physically injured, grieved by tragedy, hurt by losses, witnessed wars, been traumatized by 9-11, destroyed by the death of a child, parent, lover, spouse or other loved one, confront a serious illness, or are in chronic pain, there is a "knowing" that nothing can force a recovering person committed to healing to pick up that first addictive drink, pill, needle, joint or hit. Personal responsibility is a must. I'm saddened that an incredibly talented man such as Michael Jackson, along with Marilyn Monroe, Anna Nichole Smith, Heath Ledger and my mother, Carol Lynn Wills, was never able to understand this.

I hope, "one day at a time" I will continue to remember this.