

The Hothouse Project

Charles Shaar Murray's Journalism as Craft and Art writing course

www.charlesshaarmurray.com/hothouse/hothouse-course

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GIA MARIA BARBERA: Dancing with the devil

It's not a crack house: it's a crack home. By the time an addict is slumped over a kitchen sink on their birthday with a needle hanging out of their own arm, they have been swept well and truly off their feet, to cavort with the hero of the underworld on the dark side of the moon. Never had the term Happy Birthday been said with such decadence.

Sat with the purity of the dose in the heart, an ache in the eyes and dripping with sweat, the one time jolly pop is sat in slothful repose staring at the blood-daubed walls on a cold, damp floor strewn with empty vodka bottles, rolling papers, crack pipes and powder-covered spoons.

Explaining what heroin can push an addict to do is difficult to explain to someone who has no understanding of addiction. The getting and the using and the finding, the ways and the means to get more, just become 'normal' and every story is so similar. Most can say what is terrifying with surviving, though it's the little things like answering the phone when they want to be left alone inside of their own mind ... it's usually the small things that can be more terrifying than the lonely withdrawal at the devil's hour sat at the hands of Satan and his destruction itself.

Surrendering to addiction and choosing recovery is like surrendering at war. Like the soldiers who waved the International flag of surrender and sat with their loaded gun on the ground waiting for someone to tell them what to do. For too long during addiction and even before an addict is in its grip, most had been at war. At war with their self-esteem, and self-respect, their past and the endless nights of self-loathing and mutilation. But more importantly, they were lying to themselves to the point that they don't know who they were any more.

Just as in active using, during recovery people walk in and out of each others' lives: some without saying hello, never mind saying

goodbye. Some are seen often, others never again. Even in recovery some don't make it back. Life for some is just too difficult and has too many sharp edges. Some overdose, some die of AIDS, and the surviving recovering addict is left asking, 'Why them and not me? If I had known their pain, could I have done more'?

Being an addict and choosing recovery is like being the lion who decides to roll over during a fight to save himself a savaging. Just because he rolls over and surrenders to the physical fight, it doesn't mean he does not know how to roar.