

Intertext

Volume 21
Issue 1 2013

Article 19

2013

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Recommended Citation

Licata, Annie (2013) "Allie," *Intertext*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext/vol21/iss1/19>

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Licata: Allie

Allie

ANNIE LICATA



August. Alright, so she is finally admitting she needs help. That's a step. There's no way she could've kept on living like that—illicitly making money while barely holding on to life in that run-down apartment. Nobody knows what to do next. Everyone is scared. All we know is that she's got a drug problem.

Now that she is off of her medication and spiraling downwards quickly, it's only a matter of time before she hits bottom—again. Maybe she will learn something this time.



There was no way I could understand it at the time, but my sister was sick. She didn't have a cough or anything like that; she was sick with a disease that many don't fully comprehend. I certainly didn't at first. It took me a long time to understand what was ruining her.

My sister. The sister I looked up to my entire life.



It's a good thing that she moved home. It's almost September; school is starting soon, so she better not get in my way. The whole fam-

ily is stressed now that she's home; her boyfriend might follow suit—even though he's been banned from our household. He's a real bad apple and has already spread his seed with one flower. They go to the methadone clinic together to get more drugs to help them get off of the drugs they are already on. I find that hard to believe. \$65.00 a week to keep this fucking charade up.



Round two. Heroin. Round one was Xanax—last year. That phase of addiction led her to the outpatient program, where she was given counseling and weekly drug tests that she failed. “I’ll always smoke pot and drink, so the outpatient program is never going to work,” she said.



Happy Halloween. How did it come to this? I used to have a sister. Sure, she wasn’t always the nicest person that ever lived, but she used to be alive. Now she’s just a ghost, floating through the world of the living. Her face is sunken in, and her skin is pale; she’s just an emaciated shell. Mom told me she’s using heroin. Doesn’t she know that shit kills people? No respect.

I am mad. Frustrated. Fed up. My entire family has been robbed, lied to, schemed, like poor suckers on the streets. Doesn’t she realize what she’s putting everybody through? I’m tired of retreating to a broken home because my sister is high while my mom is downstairs

crying. I thought Mom was making dinner tonight, but I guess not.



She didn’t have to miss family functions or not sleep at night for us to know she was using heroin. We already knew. The recently incarcerated boyfriend, the insufficient funds for basic necessities, the constant weight loss. I said I would never forgive her.

It happened right under our noses. It’s not like the family abandoned her and she came back a drug addict. Allie’s emotional trauma, mentally abusive relationships, external forces and inner conflicts—among many other things—led to her need to get high.



Merry Christmas. I am confused, jealous, and enraged. My mother is always spending time with her, always crying about her. I want to see my mother happy again. I want to see everyone happy again. I want her to pay attention to the whole family and not just to my sister. She is my sister’s mother; but she’s my mother too, and she’s my brother’s mother, and she’s also a loving wife.

In the midst of financial hardships, full-time jobs, and Christmas trees, there was an addict wasting away in an apartment that was twenty minutes from home, and now she’s wasting away upstairs. Even though she’s in our house, she’s not really here. For one thing, she still gets high. My mom is begging her to get help but she won’t. She has the support of

someone who loves her, and she still won't get better. Selfish bitch.



Allie had a disease. In addition to her bipolar and borderline personality disorder, she was an addict. Little did I know that she couldn't help it. My stepdad Eric said she needed to be thrown out on the streets. I just wanted her out of my life, so I could get on with transferring to a new school. Everyone was mad except my mom, who knew that what she really needed was medical attention. She needed therapy and rehab.



Mom is looking into rehab. Allie finally said she would go. After months of my mother going into her room, holding her while she rocked back and forth on the bed, disgusted and ashamed of what she had become, she finally agreed to try. She should be ashamed. Rehab isn't going to help her. She's already gone.

Mom feels responsible in part for Allie's situation. She's always stressed out or on the phone. Insurance company this, rehab facility that. She's even taking off work to help her. It's a full-time job helping a drug addict get healthy. The family is having a hard time accepting the fact that she's choosing heroin instead of the opportunities that were offered to her, but my mom is trying to tell us that she didn't choose this lifestyle.

It was starting to take a heavy toll on everyone's life in the house. My mother kept things going for everyone: she made lunch for my little brother everyday before school, she fed and walked the dogs, and she watched movies on the couch with my stepdad at night. But Allie was dying. And my mom was all she had. So all of that family stuff came to an end.

I was working my ass off and I wanted a pat on the back. My sister was going to either die of an overdose or kill herself if she didn't get help, and all I cared about was myself. When she needed me most, I turned my back on her. And I didn't care. After everything that she had put my family through, I could justify my feelings.



A nice little facility in Florida is \$10,000 for two weeks. What a nice vacation for her. Starting therapy again when she gets back is going to require weekly payments. Her medication, mood stabilizers, anti-anxieties, and anti-depressants cost about \$300 a month—yet another expense. My stepdad just lost his job. And Mom gives me shit for the cost of college applications.

Honestly, I can't wait for Allie to leave. It will give everyone a break. My mom took her phone, her car keys, and everything else she could attempt to control—like that really stops a drug addict. A cloud has risen over this family, and when she leaves, the sun will shine again. Sometimes I wish she would go and never come back.



Allie was driving to Newark two to three times a day to pick up her poison. She mingled with drug dealers in one of the worst parts of New Jersey and stepped over overdosed dead bodies to buy the next bag. Sometimes she would go to hotel rooms for a night with her boyfriend and do heroin and other drugs. She said her favorite part of the day was going to get the heroin—the only exciting and hopeful moments of the nightmare she was in.

Nobody wants to live his or her life like that. Allie knew that what she was doing would leave her dead or in jail. She was certainly not a stupid girl, and at first she thought she could cry alone but come out victorious. Later she knew the only way was to cry for help.



I am powerless. Scared...a little. Allie is leaving for rehab today. Mom is driving her. My birthday is tomorrow. February 4th. It's going to be the worst birthday ever. I wonder if Mom even remembers that she birthed me twenty years ago tomorrow. As if the past few months weren't enough, my sister even ruins things from afar.

Mom keeps saying that when my sister gets back she's going to need a lot of support from us. She said, "Either everybody needs to get on board with her addiction, or you need to get out of my way. Because the only person who is here for her and trying to understand her is me." I'm not giving Allie shit. I don't

really care what she needs; it's not like she has ever reciprocated anything. There is a family weekend at her rehab facility where everyone goes to support the addict and learn about addiction, but there is no way in hell that I am going to that.



It finally hit me when Allie went away. Don't get me wrong. I was so happy when she was out of the house. Everyone seemed a little less worried, like no one was picturing her dead in a ditch somewhere with a needle sticking out of her arm. At least we knew where she was and what she was doing. It was a peace of mind that everyone needed since the ordeal began. But it really sunk in when she left that my sister was a hardcore heroin addict.

I didn't want to go to the rehab facility for family weekend. Nobody in my family was forcing me, but my mom kept saying, "I think it would be best for you, not just for her." She could tell that I was struggling emotionally with the downfall of one of my heroes, my older sister.



I am going to the rehab facility family weekend; for the rest of my life, if Allie gets better, which I doubt, she is going to say that I wasn't there. Even though I hate her so much, I can't live with that. Even though I think that drug addicts make their beds and therefore must lay in them, I needed to be there.



In a large room in South Jersey with a fireplace and a counselor, a group of families sat in a circle and awaited their drug addicts to retreat from their rooms. My mom, Eric, and I sat in the circle where the counselor asked questions about what we knew about addiction. She asked me if I wanted to be there. “No.”

It was a classy facility on a farm in the rural part of southern New Jersey. It was a month-long program. The chances of success after that month in a facility were low unless the addict goes on for extended treatment—like a half-way house. It was a happy place, bright and beautiful.

At the rehab facility, Allie was on a strict schedule. After her two-day withdrawal process, she was woken up early to start arts and crafts, yoga, a massage, or therapy. She was in and out of activities and therapy until around 9 o’clock at night, where she then read and probably tossed and turned. I don’t think she got much sleep.



Everyone is going around in the circle, telling their loved ones how they feel about addiction. The addicts are all sitting with their families. Some are young men and women with their parents, some are men and women with their older children and spouses, and some are my age, or younger. I didn’t know addiction affected so many different kinds of people, so many different families. These people don’t look like monsters. They look like they need help.

It’s my turn to talk. “If this was vice versa, Allie, and you needed to be somewhere for me, you wouldn’t. You would be out getting high. You don’t care about anybody but yourself. When there is no one else but our brothers and us, I will not take care of you. I’m mad about the way you’ve treated this family, and me. I smoked weed for the first time at 11 years old because of you. I didn’t want to be here today, but I came because I want you to get better. I want my sister back.”



Outpatient would have never worked for her. It wasn’t until I was sitting in her rehab facility that I realized how bad the addiction really was. I thought the vomit on the toilet was just from a bad night, but it was actually her brushing hands with death, withdrawing. I thought she was just naturally skinny, but it was the drugs that kept her merely skin and bones. I thought she chose getting high over me, but it wasn’t that.

People think drug addicts or alcoholics want to be the way they are. You hear things like, “They should get a job.” Or “Cut them off, then see what they do.” But a drug addict need not be thrown out like the trash. They need nourishment, constant love, and a reminder that it’s important for them to stay alive. Allie found her reasons, and after rehab and extended care in Florida for a few weeks, she came back clean. Her sober date is my birthday, February 4th. This upcoming birthday, we will celebrate her second year clean. Our home is at peace.