

ARLINEHEPNER

My name is Arline Joyce Hepner. I'm twenty-eight years old. I was born June 4, 1933. I have a younger sister and a brother. At this time I'm a resident of Synanon, and I have been connected with Synanon for slightly over three years now. I have almost a nine-year history of drug addiction and recidivism in and out of the City and County jails.

I was an only child up until I was almost four years old, when my sister was born. And at that time we moved out into what was country then, but isn't now. It was a rather undeveloped area, known as El Monte now, but the little town we moved to was Wilmar, which is no longer in existence since it's been incorporated into El Monte. We had an acre of land, and we thought that was a whole lot of land when we were little kids. We raised poultry, and my father worked for the railroad, the Southern Pacific.

It's funny, but I thought that my family was rather wealthy. In reality, we were lower middle class. There was such abject poverty around us; people around us were so poor in comparison that it seemed as though we were very well off.

I don't recall any unusual difficulties at that

time. I seemed to be very well-liked in school. In fact, they skipped me a grade, and I was the pet of at least one teacher.

When I was eight, my parents decided they had enough of that. They wanted to move into the city, so they traded our place for a four-flat in the middle of a Mexican neighborhood in downtown Los Angeles. And the trouble probably began, really, at that point. Or at least, it began to get worse.

There were three grammar schools in the immediate area and I went to all three. I was unable to get along in any of them. In one of them, I don't think there were fourteen kids in the entire school who were not Mexican. And because I was a Jew, I would be chased home from school. They would throw rocks at me and call me all kinds of names. Now, at this point, looking back, I realize that I provoked a lot of this difficulty I had with my peers in school. I remember I was appalled at the first school I went to, because there was kids fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old in the sixth grade.

This was the time when it was very fashionable to be a Pachuco, and to wear a zoot suit and carry a chain, and have thick soles on your shoes, and razor blades in your pompadour. And the girls wore very short skirts and they would pleat them. This was the

"Zoot Suit" era. And I remember the guys, the cuffs on their pants were so tight, they couldn't get them off over their shoes—they had zippers on the ankles.

Anyway, I couldn't manage. I was miserable. Even the tenants in the apartment house used to ask me how do I feel about the fact that I killed Jesus Christ! This is rather shocking to a nine-year old child, to find out that he's somehow connected with a murder. I don't know if I carried these things to my parents too much. I suppose I was rather a proud spoiled child.

The second grammar school I attended in that area was another nightmare for me. My mother tried to send me to Hader, Hebrew School, after school, to learn something about my culture and my ethnic background. I was so ashamed, I remember I used to try and sneak through the back yards to get over to Hebrew School. I didn't want the kids to see me, because they would heckle me and ridicule me and make things even more difficult.

The third grammar school begins the fist fights—actual fisticuffs. I would really get in a fist fight with these kids after school. Again, looking back, I realize I did little things to provoke it, but I liked to fight.

Then my mother and father, of course, were getting

along even worse at that time—more dissension, more quarreling, more fighting. My mother moved out and got a little house in Hawthorne. My father stayed in the city and took care of the apartment and fiddled around with his real estate, and my mother and sister and brother and I moved out to Hawthorne. And my mother worked the graveyard shift at Northrop Aircraft, working on the Black Widows—it was during the war [WWII].

I went to school out there and had a miserable time. The school system was different and they set me back. Then, my mother sent me to Girl Scout camp for two weeks, and when I returned, she had saved all the dishes and housework for me.

The police knocked on the door one day, to arrest her and take her to jail for assault and battery—she had hit a woman on the head with a sack of bottles. It was in the defense plant while they were standing in line for something.

My mother thought that I was kind of puny, or some kind of a weak child, I don't know, but she was always sending me to camp somewhere. Since I was five years old, I was always in some camp, some health camp, you know. I never could find my place anywhere.

Then we moved back to the city, with the Mexicans.

Then, I don't know, it's so vague, but somehow we got to Eagle Rock, and got a big old house in Eagle Rock. I finished grammar school there, and when I got to junior high school, life became increasingly more difficult. I would never get to school on time. My mother would give me approval for stealing. My mother and father never got along; they fought openly, continuously.

Dixon: Were they living together again?

Arline: Yes, they were still together at this point. They were together until I had almost finished high school. Junior high is a little closer, even though so much (probably the majority of my past) is just blocked out. Just blank. I can't remember it. I remember feeling that I was not a part of the school in junior high school. I don't know if I felt different, but I felt almost like nothing—like something very unworthy and very frightened. I felt that there was something about me that was found unacceptable by people who were decent or who behaved themselves, who were acceptable or popular in a school. I felt that I wasn't liked by them. I don't recall anyone really going out to me, but probably, I guess if they did it, it wouldn't have made any difference, because these feelings were undoubtedly in me.

At this time, somewhere around in the middle of

junior high school, of all things I felt a very strong attraction to a girl. This girl happened to have the worst reputation in the school and was known as the school whore. And I was drawn to this girl as if she were a magnet or something. I needed her friendship. I seemed to be strongly attracted to this girl and it was very important to me that she accept me as a friend and spend time with me. It was through this relationship with this girl that I really seemed to cash in on the direction that my life was going to take. My mother thought she was charming and lovely and wonderful. In reality, she was just a big fat slob and a whore.

She came over and took me out and she introduced me first to marijuana. And on another double date with her, she managed to have me raped while I was still a virgin.

Entering into this life I began to have a need to smoke marijuana all the time. I recall telling myself that I thought that I was being very sharp, what we called "hep;" that I was kind of one jump ahead of the masses—I had something kind of secret on them. And I remember also telling myself that I wouldn't be able to run around or date or spend any of my time with anyone that didn't smoke it. I simply wouldn't have anything in common with them.

I wouldn't have any rapport or anything. If they didn't smoke pot they were nowhere, and I didn't want to have anything to do with them.

Before I graduated from high school, I managed to have one abortion, and a premeditated miscarriage, that is, a miscarriage that was brought on by me and a friend. We were so crude in what we did to knock this child, that it's a wonder that I'm in as good health as I am today. This boy that I happened to be running around with at the time told me that he had helped another girl abort. They got a catheter, put a wire in it, and attached a syringe with Lysol and inserted this into the womb. This would bring on a miscarriage. Well, we did this. It was very painful. We used a broken piece of wire coat hanger. It was rusty. We did this twice; the second time it finally worked, and I miscarried.

I don't know how I managed to graduate from high school. I think they kind of just pushed me through. A strange thing happened: there is a service club known as the Optimists, and there was a service club for the wives, in Highland Park where I went to high school, known as the Optimisses. And, by God, these ladies took me out and completely outfitted me with everything I would possibly need to graduate. I wondered if this would be so there wouldn't be any

slip-ups, to be certain I would graduate. I mean a complete outfit—a suit and gloves and hat and bag. It was very nice. And I graduated.

My father left my mother at this time. And my mother somehow got knocked up by someone who was repairing the house, and so my father helped her with this child. He only lived to be eleven months old. I think he died when I was holding him. It had a pinched intestine and couldn't get any food. The eleven months that it lived its head grew, but its body didn't. It could only get like a couple of drops of food at a time. My mother would shovel food into it, and it would vomit the food up; the food would come out of all the orifices—out of the nose and the mouth—and the child would turn blue, and she would dump it into a bath tub. Well, the last time this happened, I happened to be there and she told me to give it artificial respiration. I was trying, then I called the Fire Department. I tried to do this thing, but the child turned blue, then purple; I think it was dead by the time they got there. They took it anyway, and they notified us from the hospital that it had died.

So, when I graduated from high school, I thought, "Well, my parents are divorcing." I was pathologically insecure anyway, so I thought, "I'll get married and

walk into the sunset with somebody, and everything will be peaches and cream, and wonderful and secure." This was in my poor lack of ability to see any reality.

So I married a Catholic policeman that I had been dating. I thought he was a very nice fellow, simply because he never tried to kiss me or hold my hand or get fresh in any way—I thought that this was a criteria for manhood. So we got married, and he began drinking. He was twenty-five per cent Indian, but he would be drinking and act just like he was a hundred per cent Indian. He would beat me up and his mother would watch—she enjoyed the whole thing very thoroughly. So we stayed together, like about two weeks at a time, and then I would leave him and live with my mother, who belonged to numerous lonely hearts clubs.

Somewhere around this time, was my first arrest for narcotics. The police busted into the house, but they couldn't find anything but the hypodermic needle marks on my arm. The dope was hidden outside. And my mother was really very unconcerned about the fact that narcotics officers were running in and out of the house. The only thing she said to them, and I quote: "You'll tell her not to tie my bathroom up for such long periods of time." Because drug addicts

generally prefer to go in the bathroom to take their dope, and lock the door. If they are using heroin, they have got to use steaming water. They cook it up in a spoon. Usually the bathroom door has a lock on it. And the cotton is there, and all the things that you need.

That was all. Then I moved out. She was also taking in a few boarders, and I became attracted to one of the boarders. And he tried to get me to quit using drugs, but what happened is, that I introduced him to drugs. He and I used and were together for approximately the next four years, committing all kinds of crimes, using drugs together, until he finally went to the penitentiary.

After that I used dope steadily, with the exception of a week I spent in a sanitarium. I took too many pills trying to kick my habit, and I woke up in there two days later. It's strange, I don't remember how I got there. I think I've done ninety days in the County jail three times. And one hundred and eighty days once, all for hypodermic needle marks on the arm, which they call "vag addict." Other than that, it was committing crimes, all kinds of petty crimes—forgery, prostitution, burglary, thievery, stealing anything that wouldn't bite, or could be moved or carried, or could be sold. Stealing

from everybody and anybody. Stealing from my friends; stealing from my parents; conniving; lying; cheating.

My last trip to the County Jail, which was November of 1958, I got ninety days, and also arrived there seven months pregnant, with what we would call a "trick baby." That means that one of my clients, when I was prostituting myself, impregnated me. Of course, I don't know which one, because I turned many tricks to support a habit that ranged somewhere between \$50 and \$150 a day.

I had this baby two days after my ninety-day sentence was up, and my mother was there at the hospital. I had it in the Prison Ward of the Los Angeles County General Hospital. My mother was there to meet me and told me about Synanon. Prior to that, I had never even heard of it. In my drug stupor, you know, I didn't hear of anything. I was very suspicious and very skeptical. Of course, I didn't trust her anyway, because most of the things that she had told me were lies which I found out later, and I came to believe very little of what she said.

But, anyway, she brought me and the baby down to Ocean Park, California, and took me to this beat-up store front, with a bunch of what looked like beatniks running around. That was the original location of Synanon, a far cry from what they have

today. She rented a little place next door, and the three of us cozied it up together, and I tried to attend a few meetings at Synanon.

I realized in about two weeks that it was going to be impossible for me to do something about my problem and live with her—she being a partial reason, I believe, for the conditioning that caused it to be inevitable that I would be a drug addict or some other kind of a nut.

Perhaps I should mention that during my years of active drug using, I had two full-term babies, neither of which I knew the father of, really. One I sold for a bail bond and a writ of habeas corpus to get out of jail, and the other one I adopted out.

So I stayed in Synanon. After a couple of weeks and much fighting with my mother, she moved back into the city and I moved into the club. This proved again to her that I was irresponsible, of course, that I didn't want to take care of the child; that I wanted to hang around the club and have a good time. It was still beyond her. If she could accept the fact that drug addiction is only a symptom of a deep underlying conflict, one or more conflicts, she might, whether she likes it or not, have to face up to the fact that she might be partially responsible for my inability to face reality and could only

handle my anxieties and frustrations and problems if I administered self-therapy—get myself drugged and sedated heavily with narcotics.

And there I lived for seven months. Six months after I moved in, we got our new quarters, the Armory in Santa Monica. A month after that I left. I left, and I was gone for nine months. The conditions that I left under were this: One of the Board Members told me in the old club that they didn't think that they could help me; that I was just simply too sick and they would have to commit me. Well, this shook me up pretty badly. This upset me and I tried to take inventory of my behavior, and somehow try to break down some of the blocks that prevented me from looking inside and becoming acquainted with myself.

Anyway, I found myself attracted to one of the guys in the club. Of course, I put a cloak over him, and he became all things. I was still probably incapable of really having a healthy love for another person. He probably filled some kind of space, out of longing or loneliness. He was having some difficulty at that time in the club. He thought he should have a better position; he couldn't take one of the most important mechanisms Synanon uses—that is environmental manipulation. When you take a very insecure or suspicious frightened person, and you begin

manipulating his environment, it's very very difficult for him to realize that this is very essential to his ever becoming stabilized inside, or ever becoming an inner-directed person. He couldn't take this manipulation of his environment. He had been around the club for a long time, and he no longer thought he was sick. And I suppose he thought he should be making policy or something. But even the policy makers are subjected to the therapy and forced to grow and look at themselves and take inventory and try to improve their behavior and become more honest.

So one night, strange as it seems, we both made an independent decision to leave without consulting the other. But we left together, and I lived with him at his mother's for a week, and then we got our own place. About a week after that, he didn't come home for a few days, and when he did, he came home very late, and he came home loaded. I could, of course, just look at him, being around so much dope for so long. I immediately knew that he was loaded, and I left him and I moved in with my father.

I had a lot of difficulty getting rid of this person. He had been going to a psychologist for awhile. The psychologist, in fact two of them, told me that he had some kind of a deterioration and would get progressively worse. He would follow me, and

watch the house, and spend two or three days out in front of the house where I lived with my father. He gave my father heart trouble. He'd break in, follow me to work, follow me to school. I began going to a psychologist at that time, and he would follow me there. Finally, I took two or three trips to Central Narcotics Bureau, in downtown LA, and got him arrested for being under the influence of drugs. But that won't repair the damage to my father's heart.

I lived in Synanon seven months and was gone for nine. During that time I was accepted by the State Board of Education. They have a division called Vocational Rehabilitation, and they help people who are mentally and physically and emotionally handicapped, if they qualify. It's very difficult to get accepted, especially if you are a drug addict because it's thumbs down. They have had very little success with people with character disorders, like the homosexuals and the alcoholics and the drug addicts. But they did accept me, and they were going to send me to college for two years.

Well, I thought I'd go to Santa Monica. What I was doing, I believe, was rationalizing my way back into the club. Seven months simply wasn't long enough for me to make a real flip. For me to make a real transition, to really alter my attitudes and my

beliefs and my feelings, and to really grow and undo twenty some years. Seven months wasn't enough time.

So I moved back in and I've been back ever since. I've grown tremendously since I've been back. I was unable to go to school and live here at that time. We were very short-handed and there was lots and lots of work to be done. So I quit school. I am now in process of completing my second semester part time. I believe that I'll always go to school. At this time, it is not feasible for me to go full time. I don't know exactly what it is I want to take. My past—my police record and my addiction record—may or may not be a handicap, I don't know. Like I say, what I'm most capable of, what field I'm most fitted for, I simply don't know; I haven't had that much experience with school. But I will pursue it part time, or possibly full time.

That's the only plans I have for the future—to continue that way. Also I'm in no hurry to leave Synanon. I don't feel I'm isolated from life; I feel like I'm right dead in the middle of life. Like, your daily life is your best teacher. I have a very large family here; I'm loved by a lot of people; I feel that I live a very healthy productive life. Very stimulating.

The atmosphere here is one of learning. Everything

I know, practically—outside of how to obtain money or illegal drugs—I learned here. I was an illiterate when I came here. In fact, I don't believe I'm exaggerating to say that one of the pictures that I had of myself, one of my self-images, was of being a borderline mental defective. Somehow my parents conveyed to me that I was stupid or an idiot or whatever it was. I can't, I suppose, blame them one hundred per cent, but I thought that I was a defective person, and since then one of the many things I found out is, of course, that I'm not. I've also had insight since I've been here. I mean the kind of insights that, when they hit you, you are nine feet tall for that split second—like, I was a human being, and I was born a baby girl—these very elementary things which were very significant and very important to me in my process of capitalizing on my sensitivity and my awareness.

Dixon: What happened to your brother and sister?

Arline: My brother and sister are fine. When my parents divorced, my brother was about twelve. The court took him away from her because they found her to be an unfit mother, and they put him in a private school. My dad payed for this and the boy grew up very well. He is, at this time, in Oregon, in the University, pursuing a career in Business Administration. My

sister is going to UCLA. She's going to become a teacher. She worked for Bank of America for several years, and now she's gone back to college and she wants to teach elementary school. My brother or sister never had any difficulty. Neither of them smoke or drink. They have never been arrested for anything. My sister, when the family broke up, did become very religious. Although we are Jewish, she became a Jehovah's Witness, and would peddle pamphlets door-to-door. Then it was the Christian Four Square Gospel, and she was kind of a religious fanatic for a few years, while she was very young. But this is all dissipated, and she is very thrilled about her forthcoming career. And she is doing very well in school. My brother is too. I'm the one that's smashed, I guess.

Dixon: Do they accept you as their sister?

Arline: Well, for so many years past, I hardly ever saw them.

Years and years ago, I never saw my brother or my sister. During the growing-up process I was growing up absurd, and they were growing up much more responsible and much more stable. There is a gap between us. I see them now, and I have a great deal of respect for them both, but I'm still relatively a stranger to them. I'm not able to see them that much. Perhaps if we did spend more time together we

would grow closer. I feel closer to my brother than to my sister. It seems my sister still retains a lot of animosity toward me, from childhood, I suppose, when I beat her up a few times, but there is love and warm and tender feelings between us.

Dixon: Has your mother learned to accept Synanon? I think: it's so odd that she would know about Synanon and yet not understand it.

Arline: I don't think it's odd at all. I think it's something that you must come to expect from people who don't find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, and therefore it's not necessary for them to investigate anything. If she would investigate, she might have to accept the fact that she might possibly be, in some way, responsible for my drug addiction.

Now she comes down, and I see her about two or three times a year, and I wish it were less, frankly. She upsets me. It's a traumatic experience to see this woman. She's a real example of the long-suffering: "I sacrificed for you so much, and look what you've done to me. Your father is no good, and your sister hates me, and your brother's gone off and deserted me." I find this woman obnoxious. She's dirty and sloppy and slovenly and filthy to me. Now maybe I'm not objective about her—she has a way of reactivating all these old guilt feelings, and I would prefer not

to see her. The less I see her, the better. She's getting along well; she fiddles around with real estate. She married some man almost eighty years old, who has a lot of money, and bought her a house. She has some other income property. She's not hurting. I mean, security to her only means financial and material accumulations; she has no other conception of it. She is very disgruntled and frustrated and dissatisfied and always will be, I guess. I can't help her—I'm still too emotionally involved with her.

Now, my father I feel differently towards. I think he's come to terms with a lot of things. He comes down here now every Saturday night to open house, and he does whatever he can for the club. Seeing him doesn't upset me; he's very kind, and is trying to be very understanding. He is a very good warm man. And it's very nice that he is proud of me at this time—he is proud of my slightest accomplishment. Although I don't really do anything that most of the other kids here do not do, still he's immensely pleased, and it makes me feel good.

Not to reiterate, but possibly to expound a little more on my family and my home situation. I recall that my father was very strict. My mother accused him with running around with other women, and he would come home sometimes at four or five o'clock in

the morning—she said in a state of intoxication. Of course, I was in bed. If he did go out, which he did—he really did go out with other women—I am, of course, sympathetic and understand, because my mother made herself as unattractive as possible. If he wanted female companionship he had to find it somewhere else because his wife certainly refused to accomodate him.

He was very, very strict with me, and my mother, if not naturally too lenient, was more lenient because it gave her an opportunity to thwart this man. Any way she could contradict him or go against his wishes, she would do so. This seemed to please her tremendously, to be able to do this.

During my early junior high school years, before I began getting high on marijuana and pills and running around with a fast crowd, I went through a very intense tomboy stage. I would run madly home from school, throw on my levis, and dig holes and play with the boys. I really thought I was a boy, I suppose. I remember the angriest I ever had seen my father was when I shot eight holes in the living room wall with a gun—this upset him tremendously.

I thought I'd just mention very briefly something about my first experience with heroin because it's significant to me. I was still in high school,

and the girl I was running around with met a couple of Merchant Marines. These Merchant Marines managed to bring in some very good heroin on their ship from the Orient. Most of the heroin you find around is cut; you are lucky if you can find any two and three per cent pure. This was very very good. These Merchant Marines took me to their house and gave me an injection intravenously, of heroin. Now most of the time, on your first injection of heroin, when you shoot it directly into the blood stream, you become nauseous. You experience a reaction to it because the body is not acclimated to it. You are not used to it. It's a foreign substance thrown in, and you usually react violently—vomit, or at least have stomach cramps. I had none of these things. None of this discomfort, none of this reaction. It was great; it was everything; it was the culmination of everything I had searched for. I was probably about seventeen at the time. It was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. For about twelve hours, I was in some kind of a euphoria. The minute that heroin hit my blood stream all my anxiety dissipated. I felt no pain or strain, and of course, I made arrangements to get more.

I thought, "This is the answer. This is the moment of truth. This is the only way to live." I

was singing its praises very strongly. In comparison to my normal state of confusion and fear and feelings of nothingness, no identity, it was great.

So, from that point on I pursued it. I have never been able to repeat my first fix, my first experience. All the dope, all the heroin I've shot since then, has not been as complete an experience as my first time. That first time was probably the first feeling of any kind of well being that I had ever known.