

Therapist Speaks From Experience.

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Co-dependent parents both died as a result of their problems.

Author and therapist Linda Meyerholz's expertise on codependency comes from a lifetime of study. Her first exposure came early - within the walls of her parents' home. Later, she focused on herself as she battled addiction, and then on other addicts.

On the surface, Meyerholz had an adult life most would envy. She had a husband, four children and a decorating business in Denver. When her children were in their teens, she switched to broadcast journalism, landing her first job in Denver, then moving on to San Francisco. She followed that up with a stint in the lobbying division of a major law firm in Washington, D.C., "the bedrock of American codependency."

Outwardly successful, behind the scenes Meyerholz struggled with a host of demons. The pressure of her career, the demands of four teens and the stress of a failing marriage made her anxious. When she told her doctor, he did what many doctors did in the 1970s; he prescribed tranquilizers. He also told her that the bourbon and water she had each night to wind down "wouldn't hurt". He was wrong. "I was on the fast track to death," said Meyerholz, now 63. "My thinking was getting muddled. The pain was tremendous. By 1982, the combination of the two nearly killed me."

While interviewing former President George Bush, she noticed him looking at her strangely. Reviewing the tape later, she was horrified to find she'd repeated the same questions without realizing it. "I was losing my ability to do my job," she said. It wasn't until she checked into a rehabilitation center that she began to get at the underlying issues that led to her addictions.

"My parents were brutalized as children and they brutalized their children, not because they disliked or hated us, but because they knew no other way," she wrote. "It never occurred to adults in my neighborhood that anything about their lives could be changed." Although her father made sure she got a good education and good medical care, he also abused her sexually.

When she told her mother that he was abusing her and her sister, her mother said, "If you'd told me earlier, it wouldn't have happened to your sister." Years earlier, at the age of 5, when she heard her mother say she loved her younger sister the most, she decided to win over her mother, an emotionally distant woman raised in an orphanage. "I vowed to work hard for my mother and make money for her so she'd love me as much as my sister," she said.

She became a doer and giver, showering loved ones with gifts, anticipating others' needs, sublimating her needs to those of people around her in hopes of earning the love and acceptance her mother never gave her. What she knows now, and what she helps others understand is: "You do not have to buy and earn other people's love. Both of her parents died as a result of codependency, she said, her mother at age 48, her father six months later at 52. Unable to win love and acceptance from her parents, she married a man who was unable to love her as well. After 25 years together, they divorced.

Having visited some of the behaviors she learned from her parents on her children, they became estranged from her. Intensive therapy and committing to the 12-step program used by Alcoholics Anonymous and other groups helped her heal. In the process, a friend and mentor encouraged

her to explore her theory that codependency leads to dysfunctional relationships and addictions. Her book, **Codependency Sucks**, is the result.

Today, she lives in Bonita Springs, with her husband George, a retired veterinarian she describes as intuitive and caring, a trait she found common among veterinarians. "They have to be connected to their...intuition because their clients cannot talk to them," she said. That sensitivity helps in their human relationships, too. These days, she's on a one-woman campaign to wipe out codependency, counseling individuals and conducting monthly family workshops on the topic. "We live in a dangerous world because we are not living in a balanced society," she said. She hopes to lessen that threat one troubled person at a time.