

I PORTRAIT OF ADDICTION

Moyers on Addiction: Close to Home

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HOST: Bill Moyers

PORTRAIT OF ADDICTION

Ms. PEGGY HASSETT: ...I was 10 and I remember that they gave you ether then. And I remember the feeling of floating off under the ether and I loved that feeling.

Ms. MAIA SZALAVITZ: It was just like being lifted out of my mind in a very nice way because my mind wasn't a very good neighborhood for me to be in. I wasn't very safe there.

Mr. LOUIS JONES: You know, the scenario is that you start smoking pot, drinking beer, then you go to the hard drugs. I went straight to a spike in my arm.

Mr. DAVID PATRICK COLUMBIA: I am the kind of person who wants to just do it and do it and do it and do it. You know, 'his eyes are bigger than his stomach' sort of thing.

Ms. KIM WOZENCRAFT: You know, I--I couldn't possibly be addicted to drugs. I was a police officer doing my job.

Mr. ALLEN JAMES: It got to the point where I was using two, three times a week, and then every evening, and then all weekend long.

Mr. RAY DIAZ: In fact, of a group of about 40 of us lively, robust, healthy, intelligent, beautiful youngsters, I think I'm probably the last one alive.

(Sponsorship of program)

BILL MOYERS: I'm Bill Moyers. Hardly a family in this country has been spared direct or indirect experience with addiction, including my own. My wife Judith and I thought we knew about addiction, until it came close to home. Then we discovered just how naive we had been.

Ten years ago, our oldest son plunged into a long and painful struggle with drugs and alcohol. Our entire family was swept into the ordeal. It's come to a happy place for us, fortunately, and our son is doing well. Many others are not so lucky.

What we have learned from our experience and are still learning prompted this series. It's not about the use or even the occasional abuse of a substance. We are talking about that obsessive desire where a chemical you take, drink or smoke becomes the master of your mind and the tyrant of your life.

That's what we'll be reporting: the experience of addiction, how it happens and what can be done about it.

MARY: OK, Denise, now you're gonna hear the beeps for about two minutes, just slow, loud beeps.

MOYERS: Scientists will show us how drugs hijack the brain...

Mr. HYMAN: Literally, what this allows us to do is get an image of desire in the brain.

Nice-looking brain.

Unidentified Woman in Van: I tell the girls all the time that if you forget your last high, then you gonna use again.

LASHANNA: Hi. I'm Lashanna. I'm a addict.

MOYERS: We'll go to places where people are working to break free from addiction...

LASHANNA: ...and the new friends I met, the best friends I ever had, they clean.

MOYERS: We'll talk to kids in danger of becoming the next generation of addicts...

JOE: I mean, they just kind of told me, 'Look, Joe, you're an addict. Look at you.' And I said, 'Why? How? Because what? Because I hang out with my friends and do drugs?'

SASHA: This whole jail is mainly filled with people with drug problems. They steal for their drugs, they have sex for their drugs. It's all for the dope.

MOYERS: And we'll report on the fight to change our national drug policy.

Ms. RAYLES: The bottom line is that we would rather have that bed space be taken up by a rapist, a robber or a murderer than someone who has an abusive substance problem.

MOYERS: Let's begin with some real experts, people who speak from personal experience. They agreed to tell us their stories so we could offer you this Portrait of Addiction.

Mr. DIAZ: I remember it almost as if it was today. A friend of mine who had already been using took me up to the roof and I thought it was for pot, marijuana, and we went up there and he had already used heroin. He was using it intramuscular and skin popped it, and then offered me some. And there was this--as soon as I injected it, or he injected it for me--at those--in those early days I had a needle--needle phobia--I remember this warmth, this serenity.

Mr. DANIEL HARKINS: My father dealt with the family by drinking. He--I--I remember very well, he'd get a big bottle of Almaden and kick back in front of the TV and drink--drink his wine. And around the time I was 19, I took a semester off from--from school and I was working and coming home with the family, and I discovered alcohol was a very, very efficient way of dealing with the family. And it worked for a while. It--you know, just get a buzz-on and everything's fine. Everything's fine.

Ms. WENDY WALKER: It was on my first date. I went out to a place called the Audubon Ballroom. There was a big dance there. And I remember there was a bottle of Seagram's 7 or something. So I got very sick and even that night, my first time drinking, I was able to hold a lot of alcohol.

Ms. HASSETT: You know, I didn't drink in high school, college. I had no uproarious stories there. I got--I started after I got married and I--I moved to another community and I didn't know people. And when I went out socially, I was very shy. But I learned if I had a few drinks it would loosen me up. I felt--I--I felt as good as everybody else there.

Mr. JAMES: I came home from two years in the armed forces and...

MOYERS: Vietnam?

Mr. JAMES: Yeah. And I'd a--I'd avoided any serious drug use there, but when I came home, I was living in Harlem. Almost everyone I knew was involved with some kind of drugs but principally heroin, which is something that had been a taboo for us since the time that I was small. We--we sort of grew up with that being a thing that was full of mystery, but certainly bad.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I'd been very terrified of the notion of any kind of drug. I kind of thought I might have to do them at some point because I remember drug education telling me that peer pressure is gonna push you into doing drugs and I knew that--it seemed to me if peer pressure is gonna push you into doing drugs, then anybody who doesn't do drugs must be a total geek. And since I'm a total geek and I wanna get out of being a total geek, I

better do what peer pressure says. So that drug education was not particularly effective. But I do remember one sort of principle that came out of that drug education, was I remember they taught me about tobacco and it caused cancer and it was really, really bad for you and it didn't seem to get you particularly high, and I remember thinking, 'Nah, I don't think I'll do that one.' But--and I remember, 'Alcohol--well, that makes you physically out of control. I didn't like that one. Marijuana, that sounds interesting.'

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I started using as a result of working undercover narcotics on the street level. I would go into a town with an assumed identity, rent an apartment and buy drugs for a period of 60 days or 90 days, sometimes stretch into several months.

MOYERS: Do you remember the first time you used?

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I was--I had a neighbor who was selling and I had discovered this over the course of becoming friendly with him, and went in with a state agent. He said, 'Just do like I do. Do--do exactly as I do.' And the cocaine was laid out on the mirror and--and he snorted it and handed me--I think it was a rolled-up hundred-dollar bill, and I snorted it. And I liked it the first time I did it.

Mr. COLUMBIA: We were all in--out in suburbia in very fine homes and having very good dinners and very good wine, and then it was kind of chic to bring out the coke after. And they'd put it on a mirror or a--a piece of glass or something like that and break it up and break up the lines. And we'd be talking about one thing or another--never about drugs, of course, always maybe about politics or something like that. And in the midst of our conversation we would be doing this. And w--everybody felt very in and very with-it and very, you know, together.

Ms. WALKER: I started cutting classes, which was something that I never did because I enjoyed my classes, and hanging out in the bathrooms and drinking Wild Irish Rose, you know, and at first it was on a--a rare basis, and then it became almost a daily thing that you start looking forward to.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I had tried cocaine for the first time when I was about 17 and I really liked the feeling of power and glamour and sexiness it gave me. And my boyfriend suggested, 'Well, gee, you're going to this Ivy League school. That'll be a great market. You know, there's lots of people with lots of money there.' And when I got there, I was so intimidated by all those people with all that money, I felt so left out and so scared of them and so poor. I just felt like, 'Well, gee, here's this great source of lots of money. It'll give me friends. It'll give me drugs. It'll improve my social life. People will want me.'

Mr. JAMES: Friends that I grew up with, people that I was young with were all using drugs and I--I either found it right away or over time it became clear. They were using heroin and, in fact, the--the--the--in social situa--we were very social in the '60s. And in social situations it seems like they had a kind of connection and camaraderie that I couldn't break into. Actually they were on another planet and I--s--speaking another language, and I really couldn't break into that. I was somewhat alienated and I--I thrashed around for a while, but eventually it was offered to me, and I tried it. And--and we were snorting then, and then I was--I went for the idea that, well, if you inhale it rather than inject it, you--you're not gonna get hooked on it. I--I wanted to believe that.

Mr. JONES: I started using when I was 19. I mainlined cocaine--speed actually and then it was cocaine, then--it didn't even matter, you know--then it was heroin, and I found a way of getting outside myself.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I would wake up in the morning and roll over and open my top dresser drawer and get the cocaine mirror out and snort some cocaine to get started. And throughout the course of the day take a--another hit whenever I felt I needed it, whenever I was coming down too far.

Ms. WALKER: You don't know you're falling in love with it. You don't know that it's beginning to take a priority, except for one day you wake up and you know you gotta have it. You gotta have it.

Mr. HARKINS: I love how I feel after three or four beers. I mean, it's an ecstatic feeling, and I think--and that--I--I sort of grew into that. I mean, it was--I think if there is a genetic difference between an alcoholic and a non-alcoholic, I think a non-alcoholic who's had three beers will feel pleasant and relaxed, whereas I felt ecstatic. I just felt truly ecstatic.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: It's a euphoric--you know, it--all problems disappear and you just--you feel very physically good. You feel as though your--your thinking ability is heightened somewhat, though--though oftentimes it's not. It was just a--a general feeling of well-being.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I soon was, you know, in a very glamorous world. I was selling to celebrities. I was getting behind the velvet ropes at the exclusive nightclubs of the '80s. I was selling on Wall Street. I was selling on Fifth Avenue. I was selling at Columbia.

MOYERS: You weren't selling to the down-and-out...

Ms. SZALAVITZ: No.

MOYERS: ...on the street. You were selling to...

Ms. SZALAVITZ: It was, you know, what you would call, quotes, "Nice, middle-class people."

Mr. COLUMBIA: Once you de--decide you'd like to have some or do some, then you have to get it. And when you know you have to get it--then you--you make whatever contact you have to make to get it. But oftentimes in--in--in these recreational drug things, you don't get it right away. Be--the person you can get it from says, 'Well, I have to call so-and-so and I'll let you know,' etc., etc. And you find that when that's happening, you're waiting for it to happen and you become--you--more desiring of it. You just can hardly wait. And it takes over your mind. You just think--all you can think about is getting it. You're not even thinking about what's going to happen when you get it and how you're gonna feel. You're just thinking about getting it. I gotta have it. I gotta have it.

Mr. HARKINS: During a drinking session, all right, if you were to bring in a tray of eclairs right now--I'm quite fond of chocolate eclairs--and said, 'We got lots of 'em, Dan. Help yourself. Have as many as you want,' I'd certainly have at least two eclairs. I might even have three or four. I like eclairs. But I would get to a point where I don't want another chocolate eclair. I've had enough, thank you, whereas that doesn't happen when you're drinking. That doesn't happen. I could be bombed out of my skull and I have to continue. And then, of course, you wake up with a hangover the next day and the only cure for a hangover that really works is alcohol, and so that--you know, the cycle continues.

Ms. HASSETT: Even though in the morning, you--you say, 'I'm not gonna drink,' then you seem to hit it like a blind spot in your brain, where you go on automatic and you're going to to have that drink. Everything else sort of--sort of fails. You're--you're going to have that drink. You--you hit--you hit a blank spot or something and you're not thinking anymore, 'What about the kids? What about the marriage? What about'--you know, 'I have to be up in the morning at 6:30.' You just hit this blank spot and you go to the refrigerator, you open it, and you pull out that bottle of wine.

Mr. DIAZ: I would do a lot of cocaine and I would be too high, too agitated, to excited. I'd drink a lot and it would bring me back down a little bit to an acceptable level. I'd wanna go back up there again, and those are the cycles that you see minute by minute in people who use cocaine and alcohol, and they are very commonly used together.

Mr. HARKINS: If for some very strange reason you wanted me to have a beer right now, it would take an enormous amount of persuasion. I doubt very much you could get me to have a beer right now. But if I were to give in, I would have the second beer very, very quickly. The--the craving for the second beer is a lot different

than the craving for the first. And once you've had a second, a third seems like the best idea in the world, and so on and so on. And the idea of stopping at that point seems absurd.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: Cocaine is a very tricky drug because cocaine is not satiating. One hit of coke makes you want 100 hit of coke--hits of coke. You know, one hit of heroin will do you quite fine for four or six hours. But one hit of coke and all you can think about is more.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: Injecting drugs is--is a very, very strong sensation. It's something to--it's so strong that months after I had stopped, I found myself on occasion witnessing someone inject drugs and I actually got the physical taste of the drug in the back of my throat. Just the--the visual stimulus of seeing someone inject drugs was enough to trigger that kind of response.

Ms. HASSETT: You know, it's not like I was throwing down martinis either. I mean, I drank white wine. And--and that's--you know, that's where--I drank an aperitif wine first, and then I switched to Chardonnay, whatever. And--and the next day I would be appalled at how much was gone. It was like a half--half--those--they had handles on them, like a half-gallon or whatever they are, and I would be amazed the next morning how much I consumed.

Mr. DIAZ: I wasn't so addicted that I wouldn't have been accepted by the Air Force, obviously, and then I became a full-blown addict in the Air Force.

MOYERS: Heroin?

Mr. DIAZ: Morphine. Morphine. Yeah, it was available in the ba--at the base in those days. There--in every facility in--on any base there's an emergency pack in case war breaks out, and these are bound up by metal bands so that you can't get in unless there's a war and you need all that emergency medical supplies. So I helped myself to every package in every facility for four years.

Ms. WALKER: In order for me to sit here and have this conversation with you, I would need to have had a drink first just to calm me down, because after a while, physically, you begin to depend on it. So if my mind--my mind may be telling me, 'Wendy, you don't need to drink,' but if my hands are shaking and if I'm sweating and I've learned that you take a drink and the symptoms go away, you know what I mean? So that gradually you learn this stuff, that this is how you medicate the symptoms of this disease. I use disease now. Back then I had no clue, you know. I just knew that if I took a drink, I was able to move on. But then it fools you because you only need to take the one, Bill. You know, you don't--but then you take that one and, boom, you--you want more.

Mr. DIAZ: Heroin is an incredibly good feeling. I mean, it's not a coincidence that people use it, misuse it and abuse it and become addicted. It's an analgesic. It's a painkiller and so it also kills emotional pain as well as physical pain.

Mr. HARKINS: I remember it was New Year's Day 1990 and it was a horrible New Year's, horrible Christmas, and I had some cheap champagne and some football game was on. I don't even watch football, but I was--and about three glasses of champagne into it--and, you know, my life was just awful at that point. '89 and '90, which was toward the end of my drinking, were both really, really bad years. And I--I had--was on my third glass of champagne or so, and I turned to my friend Kevin and I said, 'This is why I drink. My life is just awful right now, but I feel great,' and I did. And I knew it was delusional, but I was just high. It--it took me to a place where everything felt just fine.

Ms. HASSETT: I--I can still feel the warm feeling going down and--and even into your fingers and just feeling relaxed. You know, that terrible, intense tenseness would dissipate. You had one of those experiences.

Ms. WALKER: I liked the effects. I liked it. I liked it--what it did for me, because it took me from reality and put me wherever I wanted to be.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I became very cynical and had a very depressive way of thinking. Like, I sort of--you know, the vulgar term would be, 'Life sucks and then you die.' I just had this way of viewing the world that really made me very uncomfortable. And I kind of felt that if life was horrible and short and then you were gonna die anyway, why not have anesthesia?

Mr. JONES: I can clearly remember my using because of pain and my using because I didn't know where to go with the pain or what to do with it and my looking for a way to escape the pain and it wasn't that I started out seeking pleasure, and I can't really recall it being pleasurable.

Mr. COLUMBIA: See, I think that a lot of people do drugs because it adds drama to their lives. It's like a self-dramatizing situation where your--your life becomes more interesting in your own mind, because I've got this problem and I don't know--I don't know what I'm going to do about it, but I've gotta do something about it, because if I don't do something about it, I'm going to be in trouble. And there's a drama.

Ms. HASSETT: I never drank in the morning. I never drank at lunch. My kids never came home and found me drunk. I--I didn't drink all day long. I didn't drink till 6:00 or 7:00 at night. And I would say--you read all those tests in magazines, you know, if you pass--or flunk six of these, then you're an alcoholic. I would take them all the time. And so that--most of them said 'Do you drink in the morning or do you drink at lunch?' and I didn't, so I used that for a long time. But the next day, as--as my drinking progressed, the next day I would feel horrendous, so you wind up--it--it controlled my life anyway because I was looking at the clock for half the afternoon.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I felt I had lost control over it, that--that I couldn't make it through the day without some cocaine. You know, that was what my day was about, was--was acquiring and using cocaine.

Mr. DIAZ: When I came back from the Air Force--and remember that the Air Force, the military--the military structure that's--that's operant there contained me from acting out, from being out of control. It provided external controls for me that I didn't have internally. Leaving that and coming back out into--coming back into society was culture shock and I didn't negotiate that culture, that shock very well. I began selling drugs on a wide scale in order to maintain my habit and--and that--that didn't go--that--I wasn't successful for long because the drug culture, unlike the larger society's culture, is a culture where you start off at the top and you quickly go to the bottom, where in society you start off at the bottom and you work your way up. So I worked my way down quickly, in less than a year.

Ms. WALKER: Everybody around me drank and nobody else was working. It was the w--the lifestyle for me. But I guess when I started having blackouts, when I started having those experiences where I couldn't remember how I got home or where I was or things like that, something started going off in me that something is wrong.

Mr. HARKINS: I got pretty drunk and ran out in the rain in my underwear--the underwear happened to be red; that figures into the story a little later--and And was just shouting and hooting and hollering, nothing big. Not that big a deal, but my downstairs neighbor didn't particularly appreciate it and she called the cops and the cops showed up. And I had to show up in court the following week and the judge is, you know, reading the little document and says, 'You were outside in the rain in your red underwear!' He was apparently just appalled that my underwear was red and--but, you know, that's a sign. If the cops are showing up, that's--that's probably a sign.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I think the time it--it really hit home was when I had begun injecting it and I found myself crawling on the floor searching the carpet for one more little rock of cocaine.

Mr. JAMES: I mean, this led me through some bouts with prison. I mean, I became a thief in order to support a habit that was really expensive. There's no job you can have that can support a speedball habit. I mean, you either have to have old wealth or--or you have to take money where it lies. And--and so this led me to--I mean, there were periods that I spent alone where I was just living on the fringes of society if it--if I was living at all.

Ms. HASSETT: I lived in a nice house. I had a bunch of cars. My kids were in private school. I--you know, I looked all right. What was the problem? Problem was I was dying. You know, I was--I was dying.

Mr. JAMES: Eighteen years later, and a marriage and an abandonment and estrangement from my son and a zillion other things--also three careers. I'd had periods of intermittent abstinence--three careers where, as I just was about to move over the hump, so to speak, into unknown territory of success, I would always fall into addiction again.

Mr. COLUMBIA: Then there was a point, and I can't remember exactly when it happened, I just remember that it happened. There was a point when I would do it every day. I would have it and I would compulsively do it every day, even though I didn't really enjoy it, which is--sounds very strange, but nevertheless, that's the way it was.

Mr. DIAZ: I used cocaine for about 10 years. Never missed a weekend in 10 years. Never missed Thur--Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Binges of cocaine use for 10 years.

MOYERS: What were you like on those binges?

Mr. DIAZ: Violent. I mean, you begin--thi--you--this begins over time. You begin in gregarious, interesting, very social and you end up--you end up paranoid, angry, assaultive, out of control.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: It's funny, because the moment I got arrested, for a very brief moment I felt this sense of relief because I was like, 'Ah. The worst that can happen has happened. It's over.' And, you know, then, you know, being in jail was terrifying. But I have to say, the moment I got out, I went back to my apartment and I found some drugs that I knew the cops hadn't found, and I knew where they were. And I went and I got them and I injected them and--I mean, now how irrational can you get? You've just been arrested for this stuff and then what do you do but as soon as you go home you do this?

Ms. HASSETT: I didn't go dance on top of a bar somewhere. You know, I didn't--I didn't grab other people's husbands. I didn't do any of that, which supposedly I thought were the hallmarks, you know--this is what you did, and I didn't do any of that. It was so boring--just day after day of feeling like a piece of junk.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: It's a hell. It's really--you know, you--your--your life becomes about, 'Where am I going to get the next dose?' You're disconnected from friends and family. Your--your emotions are dulled to the point of almost being non-existent. There's--there's no--there's no life. There's no soul, there's no spirit left in you.

Mr. COLUMBIA: I couldn't imagine a life that I would be happy in. I--I couldn't imagine life working out in any kind of way to accommodate me. You know, what I would like to do--would've liked to do if I could is get a place to live and get an unlimited supply of alcohol, and just continue to drink and drink and drink, and that would've been fine. If that had been offered to me--if somebody says--you know, some eccentric millionaire said, 'All right, if you'd like, I'll provide you with an apartment and enough food to keep yourself alive and all the alcohol you want,' thank you. You know, that's fine. That's fine. I'll just--I'll just do that.

Mr. DIAZ: I was in a relationship then with a lovely woman who I put through much suffering because of my escalating addiction over the years and binging, and she was becoming both psychologically and physically sick and she left me. She was smart enough and wise enough to leave me. And a woman who I cared for and loved very much, and yet, she played a--she played an important role. She--she--she would keep me in some ways only--only addicted those Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. I wouldn't go beyond that because she would complain and harass me, and so that was the s--the external control that kept me from using even more.

She finally ended up leaving and--and even when I loved her very passionately and would miss her, I remember my first thought was, 'Whew, glad she's gone, you know. Now I can really stretch out here and enjoy myself.'

Mr. JAMES: It was very frightening to discover that I actually had an addiction and started immediately trying to--to withdraw from it and get away from it.

MOYERS: What did you do?

Mr. JAMES: I tried--well, a couple of times I tried just cold withdrawal with somebody helping me and I found before too long I was entirely too weak for that. I just didn't have the stamina and the moral conviction for that.

Ms. HASSETT: Every single day I would wake up and I'd say, 'Today'--you know, is the day I stop,' and by 3:00 or 4:00 every single day I knew that I would--I knew that I'd have to drink that night. And then I'd say, 'Well, I'm gonna stop at two or stop at three.' And I went to Mass every morning and I would pray that I could stop at three drinks--which, in fact, I did, but they were in vats.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I mean, my situation was unusual in that I was a police officer. I wasn't someone who was just struggling against an addiction. I was in this--this world where I would lose my job immediately and might go to prison if I admitted what I was doing. But at a certain point, I realized--in the last investigation I was doing that--that I was strung out and I feared that my partner was killing himself. And I...

MOYERS: Using.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: Yes.

MOYERS: You knew he was addicted, too?

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: Oh, absolutely.

MOYERS: And you were addicted?

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: Yes, and--and I went to the sergeant and said, 'We've got drug problems,' and they put him in the hospital for a few days and he got back out and they said, 'Go buy more drugs.' They--they wanted cases, they wanted numbers. They didn't care that their narcotics operatives were strung out on drugs. It didn't--it didn't matter.

Ms. WALKER: I was in a battle for my life with this thing called alcoholism. And my alcohol told me, 'Cut your face.' I went to a mirror--I was living in Brooklyn--and I took a razor blade and I cut one side of my face. I cut this side and I stood there and I remember this vividly. I wasn't in a blackout. And then it told me, 'Cut the other side,' so I did that as well.

Mr. DIAZ: I had a gun in my pocket and obviously I was looking for someone who had drugs and there's no one out at that kind of--kind of time in the middle of the morning, in the South Bronx again, and--and I'm 25 and just realizing, I'm gonna be like this for the rest of my life. This is who I'm gonna be like for the rest of my life.' I'm talking about 1968 probably, '67, '68, where an axiom cliché 'Once an addict always an addict' was very much an accepted one, and--and--and that's frightening to think I'm only gonna get worse I'm gonna lose all my teeth. I'm gonna lose an eye. I'm gonna suffer and be miserable walking around the streets like this, in the middle of February, zero degrees, waling around looking for someone to rob. I think it--the thi--the thoughts were, 'I should kill myself. Why would I wanna live like this for 20, 30 more years?'

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I kept buying drugs. Eventually, my partner and I wound up getting shot and I left the department. Getting shot was--was--was--was a form of death for a long time. And I--and I relied on prescription drugs very heavily for a long time after that instead of dealing with the terror.

Ms. HASSETT: I wanted to die. I remember thinking at points, 'I'm just gonna raise these children and then I'll die.' And that--and I think really, initially I got sober just because--I smoked my head off at that point. I

would smoke in bed and I was afraid the house was gonna burn down. And I would--you know, the kids would be burned to death. So I knew that--that I wanted--I wanted--I love these children and--and that's what--what did it.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: One day I was sitting in my apartment and I recognized that, A, I was living in a filthy mess that was almost indescribable in the stench. It had blood on the ceiling. There were dirty wine bottles. There were dirty needles. There was dirty laundry. It was just horrible. And I was sitting in this place and I was begging a man I despised and thought was really stupid and ugly and would never imagine myself sleeping with, but I was begging him for heroin. And I just--I just knew that I was about to violate all of my principles in order to get drugs. And I knew that that was the hallmark of an addict for me.

Ms. WALKER: It's the insanity that happens when you're in the throes of this disease. Sometimes when people ask you, 'Why do you drink, Wendy?' you get angry because I didn't know. I--you know, I didn't know myself why. I just didn't know. God, I didn't want those things to happen. I didn't wanna cut myself up. I didn't wanna jump out windows. I didn't wanna end up in places where I didn't know how I got there with people who I don't know who they are, you know. I didn't want that. I wanted a life like, you know--when I came out of my mama's womb, I didn't say, 'When I grow up I wanna be a drunk, I wanna be a tramp.' I didn't say that and I didn't want that, but that's what happened.

Mr. JAMES: I would sometimes look at all the tight spots I had been in, too, and how many times and every time I walked into a hallway or in--into a bar or wherever to--to buy drugs, I could've died right there. Every time I mixed up some potion somewhere and injected it into myself, I could've died right there.

Certainly I've been in prison and people have just, unexplainably--you know, you're--you're injecting an unknown substance that's produced without controls. And, of course, the things that I did to get money. Some of them were just incredible, unbelievable. I couldn't even believe that was me. Sometimes it would make me sweat and cringe just to think of some of the things that I had done.

Mr. JONES: I definitely lost power over my own faculties at some point, you know, in terms of things that I wanted to accomplish. Somebody said that dreams is--is for an addict is drugs ends all dreams. You know, dead actually, you know. And I felt a lot of my dreams had died, you know.

But when I tested in 1986 for HIV and primarily possibly due to my addiction, due to my use...

MOYERS: Needles?

Mr. JONES: I was an intravenous drug user primarily and then I began to use different drugs, experimenting with different drugs, mixing different drugs. And I had gotten sick, and I went to the Department of Health for testing and I tested positive. At the time I was on heroin and so I didn't really feel the result.

Mr. DIAZ: I probably got myself arrested. I got myself arrested. I'm saying on some level I think that it was a choice and--and some wise judge gave me--gave me options: Go to jail or go to treatment.

MOYERS: And you chose?

Mr. DIAZ: And I chose treatment.

Mr. COLUMBIA: My roommates had a bottle of champagne in the fridge, and I ran out of my alcohol supply and I'm like, 'I gotta buy that champagne off you. You guys gotta sell that champagne off you.' And my--and my roommate said, 'You're gonna have to dr--stop sometime.' And he was absolutely right. You don't think in those terms, but eventually this binge would have to come to an end. And I decided to end it for good then. That was--ended up being the last drink I had.

MOYERS: On your own? You just stopped.

Mr. COLUMBIA: Oh, I checked into a mental health facility the next day.

Ms. WALKER: Her name is Geneva S. I used to drink with her and run up and down the street with her. And I noticed for two years I never saw her anymore too much. You know, she just kinda--I mean, I used to watch this woman hallucinate up and down the street. But all of a sudden she was gone, and come to find out she had went into Alcoholics Anonymous, had been in Alcoholics Anonymous for the past two years.

MOYERS: AA?

Ms. WALKER: Yeah. I remember her coming to--I was working in a grocery store then, and I remember her coming in the grocery store and by now I had heard that, you know, she's an alcoholic. Well, I was 26 years old at the time, so, of course, I didn't see myself as an alcoholic. I was much too young for that. I mean, to be an alcoholic you had to drink a long, long time. That was what I thought. So I remember when she came up to the counter, I was being facetious in my own nasty way and I said, 'Geneva, do you think I'm an alcoholic?' you know, not really serious about it. And she looked at me, and she was very serious, and she said, 'Wendy, I can't call you an alcoholic. Only you can do that.' And I said, 'Well, you know, I'm 26, so I'--you know, I didn't give it another thought.

Until one day, God, I didn't have any money, OK, and I figured, you know, if I go down to Geneva's house and tell Geneva I need \$2 to get me a bottle because I'm gonna tell her I'm an alcoholic. So I get down there and, of course, Geneva's on her--she was very active in the program. So she was on her way to an institutions meeting. And I never forget it. I had a bandanna around my head 'cause, see, in my addiction, me and soap and water weren't friends at all. I had no time for that. I really had no time for it. So I had on--a bandanna on my head and I had on a pair of orange shorts that was--I don't know if I can use this word, but they were very funky, OK, because...

MOYERS: Funky?

Ms. WALKER: Very funky. So she asked me if I wanted to go with her to this institution meeting. And I still got in the back of my mind, I wanna get these \$2, so, yeah, I'm gonna follow her wherever. So, you know, I thought, you know, she was going in a car or something, but she took--she went on a public bus--a public bus. And I said, 'Well, you know, she's probably gonna sit way at the other end and let me be way up here,' because I was horrible. But she didn't, Bill. You know what she did? She sat down next to me, you know. She really sat down. And I was looking like that and she talked to me. You know, everybody on the bus knew that she was talking to me.

MOYERS: What was she saying?

Ms. WALKER: About the program and...

MOYERS: About AA?

Ms. WALKER: Uh-huh.

MOYERS: I mean, all these years later, you still remember that. It must've been something.

Ms. WALKER: Bill, it was the first time, you know, you--I guess you would have to have seen me and smelled me to understand. To have somebody acknowledge that they know you on a public bus with people around looking, nobody had done that in a long time for me.

Mr. COLUMBIA: When people start treatment, they look like hell. They look like a bunch of Dick Tracy villains or something. I mean, everybody looks ghastly. And just a few weeks later, they start looking pretty good. And that's--that's something you see right on the surface--people. You see a very dramatic--that's--that's

one thing that I do like about AA, you see some poor bastard come in, and he's shaking and it's my first meeting, and they look awful. And you may see 'em two months later and looks pretty good.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I was in the detox for seven days. It was not fun. You feel, like, so vulnerable and so uncomfortable and you have this dreadful fear that your source of comfort is gonna be forever taken away. So it's not so much the vomiting and the shaking and the puking and the diarrhea that gets you, but just the mental anguish and the insomnia and the sense that you're never gonna be comfortable in the world.

Mr. JONES: It took some time before it sunk in that, you know, I have this result, this diagnosis, and what am I gonna do with that? That was an awakening. I think there was a number of awakenings that jolted me to, like, some type of personal action, some type of hope perhaps, some type of 'make this next detox, go to this next program.' They just didn't have me just lay down. I think that happened for me in--in--in 1989 when I came out of my last detox and I went to a soup line, 'cause I came out of detox. I was living in an abandoned building in Harlem, and I wondered, 'Well, I'm not going back to that abandoned building. Where am I going? Well, I'm hungry. Let's go to a soup line.' So I went to a soup line East Harlem--to the East Harlem Shelter, and found more than just soup.

Mr. JAMES: I went in and got a change of underwear and a clean shirt and a place to be still and safe for a while--to develop some regular regimen of getting up and doing work and eating regular meals and spending time paying attention to other people.

Mr. DIAZ: I walked into this therapeutic community and--and people opened their arms to me. When I sit down with a group of men and women who begin to talk about, 'I've been afraid all my life. I've been angry with my mother for a lot of years. I was raped by my stepfather'--you know, these--these hurtful, painful things that people hide--when you begin to talk about it and everybody in the group says, 'Happened to me,' you know, all of a sudden you're not in this alone and that's very powerful to feel that you're not in this alone.

Ms. HASSETT: I can't expect you to know how I felt, but had you been an addict or--you would instantly know what I talk--what I meant when I said I was trash. You know, I wasn't. I--maybe I behaved like it, but I wasn't. But someone else that had been--been there could--would say instantly, 'I know what you're saying.'

Mr. JONES: It's like AA or--or NA or--or Gamblers Anonymous or anything where people are coming together. I think it also happens like with--when there's an earthquake or a national disaster and people just forget about their--their status in life, strata--strata in life and they just begin digging people out.

Mr. DIAZ: For forever I'd been feeling that I have no character, I have no willpower, that I'm a bad person. All of those things that society and one places on themselves when you don't understand addiction. And then to realize that it has nothing to do with any--any of those things. It has to do with a genetic predisposition that, 'If I don't pick up that drink, I'm OK.'

Ms. HASSETT: It helped me enormously to think that I had a disease, that it wasn't just a moral failure on my part. My mind needed training. It really did. It was a weak muscle or whatever.

MOYERS: An addicted muscle.

Ms. HASSETT: Yes, it was an addicted muscle, exactly. And it takes a lot of work to--to make it a strong one.

MOYERS: What made it so hard to stay off?

Mr. HARKINS: Oh, well, one reason is that by the time you want to quit, you've really messed up your life. That's just the way it is. It's--you know, it always works out that way. Very few people go into an AA meeting saying, 'Things are great, but I figure, you know, they might get bad,' you know. You've really messed up your life.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: It took me--it took me a while to develop the willpower--develop the willpower or--or recognize that this--if I--if I snorted this cocaine, it was not going to make me happy, it was not going to make me feel good, it was going to make me miserable. And it was most likely going to start me on--on a run of just doing more cocaine.

Mr. COLUMBIA: It was--I remember once I--I was talking to a therapist about a problem I was having, and it had nothing to do with drugs or anything like that. It was a--it was a personal problem, probably a relationship or something like that. And I was being very compulsive and obsessive about it and I felt like I couldn't stop. And she said to me, 'Well, you--you--you can and you must.' And I said, 'How?' And she said, 'The same way you take your hand off a hot stove.' And actually that's it. It--you just stop.

Mr. HARKINS: I--I was saying earlier how early recovery is real, real tough. And that's something I realize why--why do people always relapse--because it happens all the time. And I think the reason is, as difficult as drinking is, early recovery in some ways is even worse. But eventually you turn a corner, and in my case, it was about seven months--about seven months into my recovery I started feeling better.

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: I would up enlisting in the Air Force, which I suppose was a--a form of treatment. You know, getting--getting up at 5 in the morning and running and doing pushups and that kind of thing during basic training, I--that was very helpful. And--and I think that gave me a bit of a--a grip. It--it got me back into my old physical self where, you know, I could--I could start to feel good again, feel physically good, because the drugs run you down, you know. They run--run your body down terribly.

Mr. COLUMBIA: I used to smoke three packs of cigarettes a day and I just smoked all the time. I smoked until--I had respiratory problems when I was smoking, and I'd cough and have a hard time breathing, and so I stopped. And I only stopped because it was--to--from my point of view, it was either stop or die. And so I preferred the alternative of living, and so I stopped.

Ms. HASSETT: I don't--I don't know what made me wake up one day and say, 'This is it. I can't take another minute of this.' But once I got going in recovery, I knew that I had to pray. I knew that I had to find a god that I could believe in. I knew that I--that I couldn't do it on my own. And I--I believe that there is some spirit within me that is my strength.

Ms. WALKER: The power can be whatever you want it to be so long as it ain't you. For me it was Geneva. She was my power greater than me. She was my guiding light.

Then it became my AA meeting and my peers and my support in there. And eventually, when I got some of the same and the guilt out of my life, I was able to say my higher power is God.

Mr. JONES: I mean, however a person gets this--gets in touch with--you know, there's a choice and an option and an alternative. To me that speaks to freedom. And that to me is what recovery is about. Recovery's about change and change is about freedom--you know, having freedom.

Ms. HASSETT: You can plan your day. When you're drinking, you can't. Your day is planned. Bang, at 6:00 I used to think, 'Don't get on the phone and don't do whatever.' You're free. I mean, it's enormous freedom. And there's--there's a--you are so used to hiding--hiding how much you drink, that being honest, first of all, with myself. I was trying to kid myself all of the time. And I don't have secrets. I don't--I don't ever have to be a phony again. I don't have to wear masks. I--you know, this is who I am.

Ms. SZALAVITZ: I remember sitting in the bathtub in the rehab, and when I stepped out of the bathtub, I f--my body felt comfortable. And I just felt warm and nice and safe. And I thought, 'I can do this.' I thought, 'There is pleasure here.' I also remember swimming in the swimming pool in the rehab and again feeling like, 'Ah, there is some other joy other than drugs.'

Mr. HARKINS: I plan to live a ridiculously long time. I plan to live another 100 years, and I'll see if I succeed. But I plan to be one of these people that lives just forever. And I don't think of myself as not drinking during that tie. I mean, I--it's ridiculous for me to imagine quitting, you know, 10 years from now. Who--I don't know what I'm gonna do a week from now. But today, not drink, piece of cake.

Ms. WALKER: As you and I are sitting here doing this interview, I'm sober, see? I wanna be sober right at this moment, but I have a disease that can trick me when I get up from this chair and tell me that I don't wanna be sober. But I can make a commitment to you, Bill, or to anyone that I--I can't make a commitment that I can stay sober the rest of my life. That's just too long for me. Even after working on 14 years of recovery, the rest of my life is too long. I can make a commitment that I wanna stay sober this day.

Mr. COLUMBIA: I have to say to myself, 'I am the only person I can depend on'--not that I can't depend on others, 'cause I can--but I am really the only person I can depend on, and I am really responsible for myself. And I am the only one will--who will have to pay the price. And so I have to constantly take myself in--in--in rein because I don't--I'm--I'm--I am led into temptation all the time. And--and that's just the way it is.

MOYERS: What's been the hardest thing about staying clean?

Ms. WOZENCRAFT: It's not--it's not so hard anymore. It's--maybe I've just grown up, you know. Maybe it's having children and a family that's part of that--part of understand that--that's no--that that's no way to live. It's--there's too much--there are too many wonderful things in life to--to allow your focus to diminish to the point of crawling on the floor and looking for one more hit.

(Graphics on screen)

Kim Wozencraft's most recent novel is "The Catch." Her first, "Rush," was made into a major motion picture.

She has been free of cocaine for more than 15 years.

Ray Diaz served as Director of the Mayor's Office of Drug Abuse Policy during the David Dinkins administration.

He has been in recovery for 29 years.

Peggy Hassett is in marketing and public relations. She is a trustee of the Hazelden Foundation.

She has been in recovery for 19 years.

Allen James is an independent consultant.

He provides writing, planning and training services to not-for-profit service organizations.

He has been in recovery for 12 years.

David Patrick Columbia is a social chronicler and columnist in New York City.

He quit smoking 17 years ago. He no longer uses cocaine compulsively.

Louis Jones is founder and executive director of Stand Up Harlem, a community of HIV positive addicts and ex-addicts.

He has been in recovery for 8 years.

Wendy Walker is a senior counselor at Hazelden New York.

She has been in recovery for 14 years.

Daniel Harkins is an actor.

He has been in recovery for 5 years.

Maia Szalavitz is a journalist.

She served as researcher for CLOSE TO HOME.

She has been in recovery for 8 years.