

Beyond Parody: Drug Addiction, Mental Health, and Poverty Are NOT Going to go Away

by Ty Bechel

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Have you ever sat in silence for more than 5 minutes? You can hear cars driving by, the light hum of the refrigerator, or the heater or air conditioner *kicking* on. Silence is usually avoided by many of us. It creates this awkward feeling of restlessness and sometimes anxiety. This same type of uneasiness can be felt when you stare into someone's eyes for a minute or two without speaking. If you slow down momentarily and experience these feelings, and allow yourself to examine them, it is almost like baptism under fire. Change can begin here.

Human beings have this innate and perennial, ability of escapism. We avoid conflict if it is meant to do us harm. We evade situations that make us uncomfortable, kind of like everyone in 2020 when speaking about racial diversity and equality. Some of us get lost in the light glow of our smartphones, thumbing through funny yet pointless memes. Others drink while some do drugs. Believe it or not, *retail therapy* is a real thing. For those older readers who are not hip with the language, retail therapy is usually buying things to make yourself feel better. That was condescending of me. And I assure you it was only to make a point.

Forget generational gaps. Let us talk about ways to break intergenerational cycles damaging to individuals, families, and communities. Now, let us use this time for a moment of silence. I am going to trust that you do this. Close your eyes, sit in silence for 30-60 seconds, and think about bad habits or behaviors that have been passed down from one generation to the next.

Welcome back. How many children were raised in an abusive and alcoholic home and grew up alcoholic themselves? How many of you grew up watching your parents be in a toxic relationship together or in multiple unhealthy relationships? How many grew up in poverty and are still in poverty during adulthood? How many of you grew up in a racist home and found yourself clinging to ideas you do not share out loud because you know they are ludicrous? Why do we cling on to these things that are destroying us?

You may disagree, and you may even get uncomfortable, but clinging on to these damaging thoughts and behaviors passed on is a form of addiction. We are all addicted to the past. For change to begin, we must have an idea that is different or something to rattle us to want to change. We are supposed to evolve, not devolve. Stare in someone's eyes and sit in silence while you do it for a short 15 seconds. It does something to you. We are so stubborn that we instead escape into our mindless evacuation chambers and abort reality altogether.

We need each other. Drug addiction, mental health, and poverty are NOT going to go away. We need to begin helping each other more, not less. Our communities have the

power to help one another more than any government could in 1,000 lifetimes. Mark Twain said, “Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” I think the final part of his quote makes much sense. If we do not mind (or understand) the injustices, then the human beings experiencing will never, ever matter. This is not a parody; our communities can rise together and make intergenerational changes as we have never seen. We must endure the uncomfortable silence and eye gazing enough to realize we are in this together.