

## Why this book?

We know it: addictions, no matter how they reveal themselves, are linked to very powerful destructive mechanisms. So powerful that the story often ends in hospital, prison or the morgue.

Faced with this reality, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to overcome it. Far from it. For some it might be substitution, for others antidepressants or anxiolytics, for others still: moving to the other side of the world, a new love, changing jobs... just as many solutions can end up being effective, but not always. It is so difficult to live without drugs, to find yourself faced with emotions you cannot control when an addict has spent their entire life trying to escape what they feel. How can you end this spiral and (re)discover life, a real life!

Because it is truly a question of life or death. And when we choose life, you then have to hold onto it.

Overcoming addiction is a difficult path, filled with pitfalls, relapses and sometimes, at the end of the tunnel, success. A life force miraculously comes to replace the power of destruction which had had a stranglehold over those who carried it within.

It's the story of these "miracles", very much real, that I've chosen to tell you. These life journeys, the battle to get through and start a new life, are examples of courage and determination. Drugs are a powerful companion who it is extremely difficult to separate from.

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This book isn't just another publication on the trials and tribulations in the life of drug addicts. What interests me is a life without drugs, the difficult rebuilding process this implies, and, above all, the hope these stories trigger.

Over the course of my investigation, I've met men and women who, through courage, tenacity and sheer resilience, now manage to abstain from all behaviour-modifying substances: alcohol, drugs and medication.

Among them, I've chosen to focus on the experiences of one woman and three men who have come a long way. They are all different, they do not share the same social background, are not the same age, have not danced to the same music, or worked in the same fields and yet many events in their lives echo each other.

What these four addicts have in common is that, in order to overcome their addiction, they have chosen an American therapeutic method, little-known in France, the Minnesota Model. A form of group therapy which has proven itself for decades around the world despite struggling to gain acceptance in France. But that's another story!

Anna, David, Gérard and Antoine have not only overcome addiction thanks to the Minnesota Model but have also become therapists.

They have chosen to specialise in the field of addiction and, thus, help those who know the suffering that they themselves have experienced.

Before introducing them to you, I would like to thank them profoundly for their trust, the honesty that they have shown

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in this difficult-to-tell story. Passing on their knowledge has become one of the principles of their new lives. They are the proof that one addict is best-placed to help another. A great ambition for these ex-addicts who for years had a strong desire to self-destruct and disappear.

There will be no proselytising in this book, but rather a desire to make a method, that should be part of any therapeutic arsenal available to help addicts, known to a greater number of people. It is not a miracle cure but rather a solution that works for some and deserves to be better known in France.

I met Anna attending group therapy for recovering addicts. The presence of this pretty 50-something blonde seemed crazy to me. What was she doing in this dingy room where 15-odd recovering addicts shared the struggles of their path without drugs? And yet, listening to her, I understood. A codependent relationship with an alcoholic mother, an absent father and three drug-addicted brothers was enough to seal her fate. Today, the mother of three has become a therapist because her recovery, due to her experiences with the Minnesota Model, has literally saved her life.

The statistics prove it, addiction affects all layers of society regardless of age, profession or family circumstances. However, despite this, the image I had of addiction was far from that of this smiling, attractive woman. In addition, the atmosphere in this room also surprised me: the group participants seemed quite happy and full of life, which was quite the opposite of my prejudiced image of addicts. A first ray of hope, tinged with scepticism, appeared in my inquiry.

The first thing you notice about David is a warm-hearted smile. This 70-something French-American with an aristocratic

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air comes from the upper crust, the kind of person that owns properties in Sologne, châteaux in Touraine and sumptuous apartments in Paris's 16th arrondissement. A former banker, he became a therapist after years of alcohol abuse, social drinking to begin with then later full-blown alcoholism (which worsened due to also abusing anxiolytic medication). David benefitted from the Minnesota Model in the US and in turn became its chief advocate in France. He tried his best to open a centre like the one where he had managed to stop using, but without success. Public health policy in our country did not seem to want to support this American method.

In order to meet Gérard, you have to cross the Channel. He has been an in-demand London therapist for some 20 years treating everyone from the depraved children of rich industrialists to famous entertainers and mothers with opioid addiction. A very different world to that of rue Lepic in Paris where he grew up with an alcoholic mother and a father more often in jail than at home. Before stopping the use of wide array of drugs, he had worked in the film industry, sold pre-Columbian art and above all led a wild life. His journey seems like a veritable resurrection, for which he never stops expressing his gratitude. He also owes a lot to the group therapy recommended by the Minnesota Model.

Antoine is a quiet man; however, underneath this unassuming exterior hides a troubled past with a grandmother suffering from multiple addictions, a mother living with depression and a father suffering from high-anxiety after the murder of his own father after the war. From his earliest days, Antoine displayed addictive behavioural traits, notably related to food. He was extremely attached to his mother who developed major anxiety disorders. Growing up in this environment at the fringes of psychiatry led him to use all sorts of substances

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as a means of survival. Swallowing anything in order to escape an unbearable reality. After more than 30 years of destructive madness, interspersed with periods of work in film and a few love stories, Antoine opened the doors of a treatment centre where he rediscovered his taste for life. The power of resilience led him naturally to want to help others drowning in the addiction which almost cost him his life.

These four journeys of resilience form a strong message of hope for addicts who, day after day, are building themselves a prison for which they have lost the keys.