



Library podcast

Paula Becker discusses 'A House on Stilts'

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[00:00:36] Hi, everybody. Thank you all for being here today. I'm Stesha Brandon, the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at the Seattle Public Library. And as we begin today, I would like to acknowledge that we're gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We honor their elders past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this land. Welcome to this afternoon's event with Paula Becker, presented in partnership with YouthCare, Accelerator Y, University of Iowa Press, and Elliott Bay Book Company. Thank you to our author series sponsors Gary Kunis and Seattle City of Literature and to the Seattle Times for their generous promotional support of library programs. Finally, we're grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. So to library foundation donors here with us tonight, thank you very much for your support. Now, without further ado, I'd like to introduce our speakers. Paula Becker is the author of *Looking for Betty MacDonald: The Egg, The Plague, Mrs. Piggle Wiggle and I* and co-author of *The Future Remembered: The 1962 Seattle World's Fair and Its Legacy* and *Alaskan-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, Washington's First World's Fair*. Paula has written for [History Link.org](http://HistoryLink.org) since 2001 and as a staff historian and her more than 300 essays on the site document all aspects of Washington state history. Our moderator Ross Reynolds is KUOW's Executive Producer for Community Engagement. Before that, he was a KUOW program host for 16 years.

[00:02:17] His awards include the 2011 Public Radio News Directors First Place in the Call-in category for "Living in a White City". He has also been KUOW's News Director, Program Director and he hosted the weekly KCTS-TV interview program 'Upon Reflection'. Ross was news director at KBOO Radio in Portland, Oregon and News/Public Affairs Director at WCUW Radio in Worcester, Massachusetts. Paula and Ross will be speaking with Aaron Fox, director of Young Adult Services at Accelerator Y. Accelerator Y is the largest provider of housing for homeless young adults in King County, providing housing to nearly 300 individuals on any

given night. Accelerator Y offers a variety of housing programs that are geared toward supporting young adults who are aging out of foster care and or are experiencing homelessness. One of these programs, Young Adults in Transition, consists of 20 studio apartment style units located above the downtown Seattle YMCA, which is just across the street and provides short term supportive living environment. While in this program, participants receive case management and support in building life skills to prepare them for moving into permanent and independent living. They'll also be speaking with Christopher Hanson of YouthCare. Founded in 1974 as one of the first shelters to serve runaway and homeless youth on the West Coast, YouthCare works to end youth homelessness and to ensure that young people are valued for who they are and empowered to achieve their potential. But before we get to the panel, please help me welcome Paula Becker.

[00:04:04] Thank you, Stesha. Thank you all so much for being here. This day has been a long time coming. I'm so glad to be here at the library.

[00:04:13] Thank the Seattle Public Library, which is very important to my family, was very important to my son Hunter. I told the Seattle Public Library Foundation members who were here a little bit earlier that Hunter and his siblings and I were here on the very first day this library opened. And I well remember us coming down the Book Spiral together. I'd also like to thank Elliott Bay Books and Karen Maeda Allman, who's been a longtime supporter of my work and listened very patiently to me going on and on and on during these years that this book describes. And then during the years when I was working with the material to bring it to publication, I would also like to tell you guys a quick little story. Another reason that I'm really glad that we're here in this particular space is that when my last book, *Looking for Betty MacDonald* came out, University of Washington published that in 2016 we had the launch here. And one of my dearest memories from that day is that Hunter didn't show up for the launch. And I was thinking, oh, darn it. Hunter didn't get here. And about maybe 20 minutes into the program, the door opened. And I was, you know, Betty MacDonald, M and Pa Kettle. You know, Mrs. Piggle Wiggle I was kind of going on and on with my spiel. And at the same time, I saw out of the corner of my eye, oh, wow, that's Hunter. Hunter got here. He made it, after all. And I was thinking, great. But then he just stood in the door for about five minutes and I thought, OK, trying not to get off track. And then he actually left.

[00:05:48] He had someplace he had to go to do a job. And I really treasure now the memory of him being at that book launch, along with so many other people who have loved me and supported me. And I like to think that in a certain way. He's here with us today. So that's another reason I'm glad that we're here. I would really like to thank of the University of Iowa Press, my publisher. This is a difficult subject matter. It has a strong ending, but not what you would typically call a happy ending. And that's something that a lot of publishers are - they shy from. And University of Iowa Press instead engaged directly with me and helped me to make this book the absolute best that it can be. There's no one from the press here today because they're in Iowa. But I want to shout out James McCoy, who is the director of the program, and my editor. Jim, if you ever hear this on the radio. Thank you. Also, Carlyn Craig, who is my

audiobook publisher, Post Hypnotic Press brought out and is in the process of bringing out the audio edition of a *House on Stilts*. I was able to voice it with Carlyn up in Vancouver and she is has that available. Also thanking Christopher Hanson of YouthCare and Aaron Fox of The Accelerator Y. You've heard a little bit about those programs and you'll be hearing more about them in our panel discussion. But I really want to say that those two programs were among the organizations that were able to help Hunter when my husband, Barry and I were not able to help him.

[00:07:22] And sometimes, despite a family's very best wishes and despite resources, it takes other organizations to be able to provide that kind of help that individuals with all kinds of situations need at that particular time. I believe that addiction, homelessness and mental health are community issues as well as family issues. And the more the community can embrace that and come with solutions to help families during their struggles, the better it will be for all of us. I would particularly like to thank my husband, Barry Brown. Where are you, Barry? Oh, there he is. I said take pictures. Take pictures and he's taking pictures. And my son, Sawyer Brown, and my daughter, Lily Brown. They are incredibly brave to support me in the telling of this hard, hard story that our family went through. I would particularly thank Barry, who, of course, we all lived through those years together. But Barry was gracious enough to help me take the maelstrom of memories and put them into a more chronological order, which became then my framework for starting to deal with this and making it into the book that it is today. And he read the drafts. I don't even know maybe 50 different drafts. And he just re-read the book and said, wow, this is a good book. I'm very touched. Thank all of you for being here.

[00:08:51] This is an extraordinary gathering. There are so many people here who have loved and supported me and my my whole life, really, my parents are here, my mother who took that beautiful picture, that University of Iowa Press turned in to the cover, I'm sorry, I always was telling you to put your camera away. Your pictures are great. Many of you who are here today knew and treasured Hunter from the time of his birth and hoped with us before his death and have grieved with us and supported us since. So thank you for helping me to be here and to tell this story. And I want to hold space for a Hunter's story or my version of his story, because Hunter had he written a book, and he was a very good writer, he would have told a completely different story in many ways. Any any memoir is from the perspective of the person writing it. I wish I could have read Hunter's version of this story, and I would also like to take just a moment before I start to acknowledge the presence of other people here today who worry or grieve for a family member who is battling addiction or lost to addiction.

[00:10:06] I'm so sorry for your pain and I wish you strength.

[00:10:11] So here's what we're planning for today. I'm going to read a little bit the prologue from the book and then we're going to have our discussion and then I'm going to read a little bit more and then we will close and have plenty of time for question and answer. This book is about my journey toward grace and strength in the face of powerlessness. This is a place that many people, parents especially get to. One way or another, sooner or later, in different ways

on very different paths. My path was my oldest son Hunter's battle with drug addiction. I wrote *A House on Stilts* in hopes that others who are struggling with a family member's addiction might feel less alone and with the hope that people who have not faced that trauma might get a glimpse of how brutalizing addiction and this experience is for the people with addiction and for their families. And will respond with compassion rather than judgment and with a soft heart. When confronted with an individual who might remind you of Hunter or a mom who might remind you of me.

[00:11:25] And I'd also like to say that I'm an ambassador for a program called Shatterproof. It is a national organization that is dedicated to ending the agony that addiction causes families. And I'll have some materials from Shatterproof on my table when I'm signing.

[00:11:40] I would encourage you to go on their website and at the very least, sign up for their advocacy alerts that will tell you when it's time to call our elected officials and ask them for help in ways that will help families and people battling addiction. So first, I'm going to read you the prologue to the book. I am in the kitchen baking lemon black sesame seed muffins for my 18 year old son, Hunter. It is a bright mid July morning and the sunlight is a soothing coda to the gray Seattle spring we've recently endured. Hunter is newly home from a three month drug rehab program where his father and I desperately hope he has been yanked back from his recent plunge into prescription opioid abuse. Our lives have veered savagely off the placid road that Hunter and his younger siblings, Sawyer and Lily, traveled with us in the years before Hunter started using drugs. Our old safe patterns have become unfamiliar territory, but I am endeavoring to hold on to what is still familiar baking these small mouthfuls of comfort. A new variation on a recipe I've followed perhaps a hundred times. These should be lemon poppy seed muffins, since those are Hunter's favorites.

[00:13:01] This batch is meant to be a welcome home treat for him, but Hunter's sobriety so fresh, prompts me to substitute black sesame seeds. Poppies are opiates after all, consuming them might spur a positive response on the opioid urine test we are administering randomly. I take conservative precaution substituting the benign dark specks for their narcotic counterpart.

[00:13:28] Hunter, meanwhile, unbeknownst to me, is downstairs in his basement bedroom shooting heroin.

[00:13:38] We realize, finally, we confront. Hunter bangs out the front door, running, clutching his bag of drugs, shouting, "These can't be in our house," to me, and "fuck you" to his father. Bound for the street again. Once he is gone, I knit all day, huddled beneath the quilt in the overstuffed armchair where Hunter used to fall asleep when he was a toddler. Board books and goldfish crackers by his side. I breathe, light some incense, knit some more. I write a poem trying to frame the pain to puncture it, pin it down like a butterfly pinned to a board to contain it. But still it seeps and stains. None of my tricks deliver me to solid ground. There is no comfort, and I cannot find a way to save my son. Memories shimmer before me. Hunter's sweet young face whose easy, guileless laughter, his strong, small arms slung around my

neck as he jumped up to hug me. Where is that little boy? What part of him still lives inside this drug addicted teenager? Hunter's drugs mean that he cannot live with us, but we decide that on the nights when he can't find a friend or fellow forlorn to take him in, he can sleep in what we call the house on stilts, a treeless treehouse in our small backyard. He comes and goes. I leave a sandwich, a box of Lily's homemade cookies, a bottle of water, vitamins, his toothbrush. He leaves a Q-Tip cotton coaxed from its tip. For what I guess must be no healthy purpose. We do not know when he will come and go. Stealthily he avoids us coming after dark, leaving before dawn. But I look out the window of the house on stilts. I look out the window over the kitchen window. And when my son is present, the stained glass windows of the house on stilts glow with the light of the small lamp within like a church on Christmas Eve. This is my only solace and it is fleeting. And I cling to it as I once clung to him, sweet smelling, freshly bathed.

[00:16:02] Parenting publications often refer to parenting as a journey, promising to help moms and dads navigate each turn from birth to launch. I contributed for years to a local magazine called Parent Map. Such a reassuring title because, hey, if there is a map, parents can buy one, borrow one, forecast.

[00:16:23] The road to come. Maps mean cartographers have charted the way road builders have leveled and landscaped it. Or at the very least, some traveller has scratched the path with cyphers suggesting left is easy walking, right as the cliff. But being the parent of a teenager with addiction is like trying to navigate a dark room blindfolded. You bump around desperate for clarity. Feeling the objects in your path to try and figure what they are tripping, falling. Occasionally your blindfold shifts enough that you catch a glimpse in that infinitesimally, less dark moment of what the room contains. Then the blindfold slips back. The darkness rendered even blacker by the fragment of paler dark. We were a family just like yours, perhaps. We loved and protected each other. Read Harry Potter books, picked apples and peeled them and added sugar and cinnamon and baked them into pies. We followed the recipe. We followed the rules. Barry and I knew we were not perfect, but we could sometimes feel perfection in the moments we shared. People looked at us and thought, blessed children, lucky mom and dad.

[00:17:51] We did not know it when we lived these years, but we were taking part in opioid addictions, horrific zeitgeist. We numbered among the now legion middle and upper middle class families. Previously privileged not to have experienced opioids, ruinous effects among the parents who thought their children impervious to this scourge. America flails now in the teeth of the wolf that is addiction. Opioids black-market and legally prescribed have become for millions of families their personal pathology.

[00:18:28] Families have always struggled when a member is abusing, often silently, usually in shame.

[00:18:37] American society now struggles openly because the growing consumption of illicitly manufactured fentanyl laced heroin means more people are dying. Use can be disguised or contained within families.

[00:18:52] Death cannot.

[00:18:54] We now acknowledge and we must, that opioid addiction cuts across all barriers economic, racial, educational, age and gender.

[00:19:04] My family's deeply personal story has become universal. This is this story of my journey as a mother down years of unmarked roads, of grasping blackness, begging for clarity. It is my story. But there were others walking, sometimes crawling the path with me. My husband Barry, our middle son Sawyer, our daughter Lily and Hunter, our beloved eldest child. Careening, slashing, plunging, pounding ahead. Some of us think that we can choose our stories, map our journeys. Being Hunter's mother has shown me we cannot.

[00:19:55] So I'd like to call Ross Reynolds and our panelists and to the, what is this thing? The living room.

[00:20:05] Thank you, Paula. Many of you might know this story firsthand. I wonder if any of you had a chance to read the book. It's out. It's really fresh out. A lot of familiarity with what's going on here. I'm going to start by talking to two people whose organizations worked with Hunter. And part of what this book tells is how the limitations of love and a family and how at some point there's a pulling away that goes on. And fortunately, there are other organizations that can kind of jump in and do some of that support work. Aaron Fox is the Director of Young Adult Services at Accelerator Y on the end here. And it's the largest provider of housing for homeless young adults in King County. And then next to him, Christopher Hanson, Director of Engagement Services with YouthCare that was founded in 1974, one of the first shelters for runaways. And I want to start with you, Aaron, because you actually knew Hunter. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your impressions of him.

[00:21:08] Yes. When we met Hunter, he was well into his addiction and it was actually starting what I felt was starting to come out of that state of are young adults in transitions, which is kind of a dormitory style living situation right across the street, 20 bed studio apartments. So he had his own studio apartment, little mini fridge, microwave, toaster oven, those type of things. And he was, he was just a normal young man. He was dealing with his addiction. But we have a full team of staff that supported him. He had a really good rapport with us. You know, he had his ups and downs, but always he always thanked us for being there for him and for allowing him to go through his process. We are a clean and sober living. We don't allow drugs and alcohol on the premises. But if somebody is under the influence and they can maintain themselves, we allow them to be in our space. And Hunter, regardless if he was under the influence or not, was always somebody who could contain himself and be able to interact with staff. And so

probably our biggest issue with him was paying the rent. But he always tried his best and we worked with him. So it was very a very collaborative type of situation with Hunter.

[00:22:21] Christopher, you dealt less directly with Hunter, but your organization deals with a lot of kids, some of whom are like Hunter. I wonder if you could talk about the challenges of not only working with homeless youth, but homeless youth with substance abuse issues.

[00:22:34] Sure. Thanks, Ross. Thanks, everyone, for being here today. Thanks, Paula. Our work at YouthCare with young people, we see a lot of staff that come to this work into these jobs because they want to help, because they want to support young people, you know, who have experienced circumstances in their home or family or are suffering from addiction and end up on the street.

[00:22:57] And soon in their training, when they start off in their work, they you know, we have to share with them the fact that we can't force people to change. And that really rang true for me and a lot of what Paula shares in the book. And so part of work at YouthCare is really practicing a bounded way of holding people accountable to train our staff and motivational interviewing and to first help them survive and then stabilize and then to thrive. And we do that through a variety of interventions from outreach and engagement, shelter and housing. For both of you

[00:23:35] Like, I'm kind of curious about how you deal with the fact that you have some kids in there who don't have substance abuse problems, others who do. It sounds like a whole other set of issues.

[00:23:45] Yeah, I would say, you know, it's interesting that question I think highlights a bigger conversation that we need to have in our community, and I really appreciate how you put Paula over homelessness and addiction is not just an individual problem or a family problem, but this is a community problem. And the solutions to that also need to be based in the community. And we need to explore more collective solutions and emerging kind of philosophy that's informed a lot of work and programs of the last 10 years has been the idea of housing first and that housing is a human right and that we need to put folks into housing and then, you know, work on supporting them through the other variety of challenges or issues that might be facing them, impacting their situation. And I think that that is something that we still need to embrace as a community, but we also need more and we need more options because moving someone to the housing is not the last step. It should be the first step. And there are a lot of folks who, you know, through their stages of change, get to a place where they want to make a change. And if all of our housing options are only housing first and more predominantly with people who are actively using, there's not a lot of places for folks to go who are right at the point where they want to stop using.

[00:24:58] Aaron, and how about the same question for you, dealing with kids who both are dealing with substance abuse and others who are not.

[00:25:04] One of the things that I think with this generation, these are young people that really support each other really, really well. And so regardless if they are coming from foster care or just an abusive household, they're dealing with addiction or a lot of LGBTQ people who are being shamed and not allowed to stay in their homes. So we see a lot of different reasons why people are dealing with this stuff that they deal with. But the community of young people support each other really, really well, regardless of what barriers they are dealing with. A lot of the young people who are dealing with drug addiction, a lot of it comes from the circumstance. I mean, it's just tough being out there on the streets and, you know, to kind of numb some of that pain. People drink or smoke or do other drugs. And that's a lot of what we end up seeing a lot of times with people, they have nowhere else to turn. Anything that's going to make them feel better. So that's where they turn. But regardless of the reasons why they're in, the situations that they're in, they all have, they all have situations that they need support in. And regardless if they are in a situation like Hunter to where they actually have some support of their family, the reality is when people are dealing with addiction, with mental health, things like that, oftentimes the people that get hurt the most are the people that are closest to them. And that's their family and family just they just can't put up and deal with all the things that come with these situations. So that's where our service providers are able to help. And I think Hunter was definitely somebody who had both aspects. And that's why later on in his life, I really began to see that change with him. So I think it's very, very important that people have families that are dealing with this, no matter how hard it is to continue to have a house on stilts to be able to provide that support.

[00:26:38] I want to follow up on that with both of you and starting with you, Paula. You were part of what you realized in this through the course of this situation is the limitations of what you can do. What could organizations like these do that even a caring, loving family like your own could not?

[00:26:53] Well, it's interesting, because during the time that Hunter was accessing the services of both these organizations, it was really four to five years into addiction kind of penetrating his life. And we had had him in and out of the house and on different harm reduction drugs. And so we had been through a lot already by the time he was in this situation. And I think the important thing is that he he knew how we felt about a variety of, you know, limits and things in his life in ways that we could help. And he, a person needs to want the help. You can't make them take your help. And the help that Barry and I could give at that point was not help that Hunter wanted to take. But the hope that these organizations were able to help him are we're offering him he was able to accept those services. And it's so important that people who are struggling with mental health or with addiction issues, you know, it's not a one time thing like, well, I'm offering you help today.

[00:27:59] But, you know, the clock's ticking because it may not be ready today, but they might be ready a week from now or they might have a relapse and then need need that support

again, it's very complicated and we can't pull the plug on the availability of that kind of assistance.

[00:28:17] Christopher, how about you? When you're dealing with some youth, particularly with these kind of substance abuse problems. Are there things that you can do that are maybe beyond the capability of families or they provide a different kind of assistance for them?

[00:28:28] I don't know if it's really necessarily beyond the capabilities of the family. I think that it's really about that we might just have a different role than the family, even in support of families. We all know that, you know, they can be fraught with different dynamics and complexities that really get at the core of who we are as human beings. And, you know, challenge our notions of what connection is and things like that, and so, you know, as a service provider, we really try to, we also know that we are not a family. And so we have to practice those boundaries as well. Part of that is, you know, showing up, being consistent. We say something that we're going to do that. We do that and we follow up with them and, you know, practice unconditional positive regard with every young person that walks through our door and understand that, you know, if they don't want to make a change that day, that we're going to be open the next day and the next day after that. And we really focus on relationship and rapport building and working through motivational interviewing to support young people, to make their own change and discover their own strengths and leverage those in the path for that they've identified for themselves.

[00:29:32] And so we just I think the biggest thing for us is being consistent and occasionally asking questions, too, about like who are the natural supports in your life? What are those relationships like? How can they support you on this journey as well? Because we also know that we're also not going to be around forever in our young adult services.

[00:29:51] And so we've practiced consistency.

[00:29:53] I just want to also say that it was really important. My perspective was that part of what was really important was that Hunter sought your services out himself. Right. So there Barry and I were like, we're going to help you. Here's how we can help you. We can help you over here. And, you know, don't do this. And it was there was a pushing away, which happens in families. You know, I mean, he was a young teenager when this started going on, but he went toward the services that YouthCare and then was housed by Accelerator Y in one of those apartments across the street. And those were very good years for him and his young adult life. They were probably the best couple of years.

[00:30:34] So you can't help everybody, can you? I mean, are there points at which in your experience with these young people, you have to draw a line and say, we can't go further with you.

[00:30:44] Everybody has to have some level of accountability. And there are we have those things in place. You know, for from a housing perspective, we have certain rules. You have to be productive at least 30 hours per week. That means work, counseling sessions, whatever it might be. You know, I think the biggest thing for us is service providers. Going back to the question is one of the things that I know both YouthCare and Accelerator Y do well is is there's. We don't judge. It doesn't matter what goes on in your life or what decisions that you make. It doesn't mean if you commit a crime, if you kill someone or not. We don't judge you. We support you wherever you're at. And I think that's one of the things that a Hunter and many young people see from both of our agencies that, you know, sometimes with families there's regardless if they're judging or not, they feel like they're being judged. And that's where sometimes they distance themselves. And I think we are both of our agencies, do a really good job of making people feel that they that whatever mistakes they made is not the end of the world. And we can work with you.

[00:31:34] And with you. We can't help everybody. We can't. I believe that we can help everybody in some way. You know, we may not be able to get the ultimate outcome that they want or that we would want for them. But, you know, given peace and given a peace of mind for an hour or two a day is still very valuable. And I think it still helps people get to where they need to be. So even though when you think about help, even though we may not have have enough of an influence to change behavior or change some of the circumstances, we are helping every single day in a small piece of their lives. And regardless of that's just getting good food for the day or, you know, getting connected with mental health services, physical health services or what or what not even get connected to like food stamps or whatever other services that we can get. We always see ourselves as helping. But at the same time is the young person who dictates what plan they have. We don't tell people what what what to do. We support them or whatever they want to do.

[00:32:24] We may be on the brink of billions and billions of dollars coming towards dealing with the opioid crisis because of payouts from companies and families like the Sacklers, or, as I like to call them, sack of shitlers to go into this issue. And it's interesting to me. I mean, Paula, if you had material means to help with this. And so many families don't, but, would the infusion of billions of dollars. Of course, it depends on how it's used. But do you think that could make much of a difference in a crisis we're seeing across the board, starting with you guys?

[00:32:56] Yeah, I think totally. I mean, for me, it goes back to what we were talking about earlier on in the conversation about how the family sometimes can't meet all the needs, and us as providers we're not going to be able to do that either. It really is going to take a more collective approach and more housing options, more treatment options when folks do, you know, feel if they that they are detaching from family or being pushed away from family in some cases. We have to have more, more spaces, more beds, higher pay for people to go into trained clinical positions so that we can like have a larger workforce and a workforce that's able to also survive, especially in our region of King County, where costs are skyrocketing. It's

looking at it from all those different angles and then using those resources to come to bear on it.

[00:33:42] And how much do you think more money could do to. I was shocked when we were talking ahead of time. You said there's five beds for kids who need detox services and don't have private means.

[00:33:52] Yeah, those are those are for the minors and that's for the whole state. The money, the money definitely things. My personal beliefs is that mental health is a public health crisis and that is not being addressed the right way. When we break a leg, we can go to a doctor. We feel okay about having a doctor help us to get better. But when we are having voices or other things that are going mental health, the stigma is just that is just not the same. I feel that all those dollars should go towards addressing mental health because I truly believe that if we can address the mental health crisis, then we can better deal with drug addiction and we can better deal with homelessness because a lot of the people who are accessing these services kind of alluding to what Christopher was talking about are being served by people, by people who are not really qualified to be able to help them. And so a lot of people who are dealing with mental health issues are in a lot of our programs. But though those programs don't suit their needs. If we could find other programs that would suit the mental health needs from a housing perspective, I think we'd be able to alleviate homelessness in a lot better way.

[00:34:48] You had the billion dollars, you put it into mental health services? Absolutely. How about you, Christopher? Same.

[00:34:56] I would agree with that, and I also think that we need to understand that after care or support for a person who has been lucky enough to go through a rehab program, it's not I mean, the rehab programs right now, most of them are 30 days. That's nothing. That's enough to get someone detoxified and maybe thinking clearly a little bit. But it's it's not time for change. It takes a long time and a lot of support and different kinds of support, lots of sometimes harm reduction drugs like Suboxone. Sometimes I think always emotional and mental health support and sometimes physical support, sometimes a roof over a person's head for years. You know, we're used to thinking about addiction like or, you know, going to rehab like you sprained your wrist. It's not your, you need a body cast. And maybe for a long time to get beyond that and to claim the rest of your life.

[00:35:54] And I think we really need to understand that as a society. Part of your struggle was the fact that you tried a lot of different programs with Hunter and none of them seemed to catch. And that made me think about the broader societal issue. There's probably people within a mile of here who are suffering from serious opiate problems, don't have a supportive family, maybe have no money at all. And frankly, the book maybe a little bit depressed about us dealing in our society with this this larger issue. Given the resources that you were able to bring to bear on the fact that it didn't quite catch the way you wanted it to.

[00:36:29] Right. Well, if it makes you depressed, do something about it.

[00:36:32] Let's contact elected officials and let's change that. Let's change that. You know, Washington is a pretty compassionate state and a lot of areas.

[00:36:41] And we need to bring compassion to bear for people who have all kinds of addiction, mental health problems, homelessness. My God, you don't know how easy it is for people to be one day sitting in biology class and making A's and a couple of years later in turns there, the person sitting in this on the street with this cardboard sign. You know, when you see that person, that's your kid.

[00:37:06] Looking forward how this is going to go in the future. You tried a lot of different things that didn't necessarily work out. And I'm wondering in the situation that you guys are in where you're also dealing with kids where things don't always work out. How do you kind of cope with that? What's the next step to take? How far along the line can you go with the kids?

[00:37:28] Well, one thing that's very important for us as service providers is to, is self-care. I mean, I think both of our agencies do a really good job of allowing us to take time off. We do retreats for staff and to build each other up and to kind of get through this heaviness. I don't watch a lot of news because my news is every day I see it every day and every single day. So that's how I personally deal with it. But I think education and talking to others and when we hear things, you know, industry some about, you know, you see you might be with your own and you're all with your own group of people and and challenging them, challenging your mom to have a different perspective and not just to think about the homeless crisis and opioid crisis and all the other things that we're dealing with that contribute to homelessness as a factor. Because all of these situations, I believe, are in all of our families, regardless of his homelessness, if it's mental health, it's drug addiction. Somebody you know and your family, if you don't know, somebody in your family is experiencing this. And we need to get this word out and we need to educate the public.

[00:38:26] We need to educate the public better. We need to have more people in this room that are hearing this message, because the reality is, is there there's a lot of misnomers that are going on with youth and young adult particularly that are dealing with all of these situations. And the reality is, if we don't address this with youth and young adults between the ages of all the way down from 12, all the way up to 30, they're going to be the ones that are going to be on the corner at 50 and they're still going to be in the same situation. We see a lot of people that are in shelters for 40 years. And it's because these these situations have not been addressed. And public knowledge is the key to us being able to vote for the right things that we need to vote for. Get the money to go to where we need to go. And there's a lot of opportunities for us. And there's not enough of us that are not speaking up and addressing this challenge because it didn't hit us firsthand. But if you really look a little bit deeper, I guarantee you it's in all of our families.

[00:39:19] Yeah. I just wanted to share, too. I think last year in our Point in Time Count here in King County, survey and count of individuals experiencing homelessness that we can see 50 percent of folks experiencing chronic homelessness in King County first experienced homelessness as a young adult. And so I think when we're talking about resources, we also would like to advocate that, you know, those come into the system sooner and are able to enhance youth services. And then to respond to what you're saying earlier about like how do we, you know, like like what's next and how do we cope with when we can't always help everyone? I think it's resting in the knowledge that the responsibility for one to change is their own. The responsibility that we have is to show up, show up in people's lives, show up in your friends' lives and your family's lives. Be supportive. Don't give up hope. Practice setting a boundaried way where you're taking care of yourself. And also learn how to ask for help. And that's going to be something that really helps to alleviate and change stigma around all this.

[00:40:21] Finally, Paula, you you write in the book about how it is Hunter did find these organizations. He took initiative and he found them. But at some point along the line, he seemed to lose this initiative and his desire to do things. That it was a hard time prodding him to do things.

[00:40:36] Well, that was a long-time situation. And I think it has to do with the effects addiction has on physically on a person's brain and also on the social behaviors around addiction are very sticky and entrapping. And the more energy is being sucked into feeding the the addiction, the less energy or, you know, impulse people have for other things. Hunter was particularly extreme in that way. I mean, there are people who hold down jobs and still have active addiction.

[00:41:12] Hunter was not one of those people, but I think he fell on a spectrum. He was to one end of it in terms of his ability to to be functional during this. But his heart was always in the in the right place. And I do believe that he he wanted to be better. And the organizations were able to help him find a way that he could be better for a good amount of time of his adult young adult life.

[00:41:38] Christopher, what about those young people who they seem like they're hitting a dead end? They don't seem to lose the motivation. I think you mentioned earlier it's got to be something you want to do to kind of move out of it, but you must encounter kids who were having a real hard time with it. Yeah.

[00:41:52] We do all the time. And I think that. Something that we need to make sure is available is access. When we look at the stages of change and how someone, you know, is struggling with maybe its addiction or even another behavior that is unhealthy. You know, there's these cycles of being in pre contemplation or contemplation. And, you know, when they come into our centers, they might be at a place where they're not contemplating change, but they might be, you know, on a Saturday. You know, I'll just say, even this morning, I was up on the U-District at the farmer's market and I encountered a young person who'd fallen off his bike

and cut his ear. And he needed a place to go right then and there was a pretty severe cut. And he was clearly someone who probably was had some chemicals in him and was struggling. And there was no place that I could tell him to go. But in that moment, we were having a conversation where he wanted to do something and he wanted some help. And so I think that in those moments in our programs where, you know, seeming like someone's not getting it or hitting a wall, that's just right there in that moment. There's going to be other moments. And we have to keep showing up and keep hope for those moments.

[00:43:06] And that's a lot easier for a non-family member to hold space for.

[00:43:11] I got a lot more questions, but I'm a radio guy and I know how to hit a time post and I'm hitting my time post, so thank you very much. Thank you so much. Thank you.

[00:43:24] Thank you so much. It's my mission to take this story and make sure that people in the Seattle community and beyond understand the important work that organizations like YouthCare and Accelerator Y and Shatterproof and the Recovery Cafe and there are many other organizations that are helping people, meeting them where they are and having the help ready when the person is ready to take the help. And I don't say when the person wants the help because I think the person can want the help very desperately and not be ready to take it yet. So thank you. I'm going to read you something that took place in the in the book, it takes place when Hunter is 21 and for a certain period of time, it was kind of the last thing in the book.

[00:44:11] There's a lot more story in the book. I'm happening to read you the parts that are a little more declarative. Because I feel like this particular gathering asks for that.

[00:44:21] This is a chapter called Love Is and this takes place after Hunter had some real difficulty in Portland. I've read that when an airplane is about to crash, a prerecorded voice barks Brace, brace, brace. I had been braced for Hunter's death for six years now. He was still living despite my terror, despite all odds. After the failure of our last attempt to help Hunter, I knew with an on an almost cellular level that Hunter would die or Hunter would not die. But utterly nothing I might do or not do would tip the balance. I understood that Hunter's addiction was something I could not change.

[00:45:09] Gratitude for the wisdom to finally accept this truth bloomed in me seeping through everything.

[00:45:18] Maybe all children recede as their adult selves emerge. Maybe parents whose children stay the path can see the progress. Watch the growth like time lapse photography for Barry and me, the dissonance between who we felt Hunter was as a little boy and the actions he took as a teenager and young adult nearly destroyed us. They broke the childhood moments, burned the bright pictures one by one. I knew rationally that Hunter's childhood was warm and loving and full of goodness. But what came after it did its best to rob me of that

certainty. My work. I now saw my Hunter work was to see those moments without clutching or judging them. I hoped they could again be something I knew I owned rather than something I felt was stolen from me. A friend once told me after her house was burgled, an irreplaceable heirloom jewelry taken. Those things are still out there and they're still mine wherever they are. This brought her piece about the loss. I tried to let the millions of bright moments that were my memories of Hunter's childhood be like that still out there and still mine. People with drug addiction cannot help but see their families as prey. It does not mean they love us less. The need to fund the addiction is completely opportunistic and families open, vulnerable, loving, trusting, wanting desperately to normalize the person with addiction and see him as once again part of their whole our nature's perfect victim, a ready source of cash given or taken to the same end. I had made the journey from denial and revulsion in response to this fact, to an understanding that people with addiction did not. My beloved son did not mean this personally. I now fully comprehended the reality that Hunter loved me, loved his father and sister and brother, even as we separated ourselves from him, except a distance that brought protection reinforced our boundary walls. Addiction destroys relationships, including the addicted person's relationship to himself. Craving and terror of experiencing the agony of withdrawal impel a person with addiction to prioritize the substance they crave over everything else.

[00:47:55] I finally clearly saw that we could not heal Hunter, however mightily we would have if we could. We could not get clean for him or maintain his abstinence. We could love him fiercely, but we could not repair addiction's damage for him unless the person with addiction is striving even harder for wholeness than everyone who loves him.

[00:48:20] He will remain fragmented, broken from himself and from others trapped by the physical toll the abuse substance takes, and by the chaos into which craving that substance and struggling to obtain it have the power to cast him. Society, friends and family can support recovery, harm reduction, drugs, suboxone, naltrexone, methadone can help, but only the person battling addiction can do the work of recovering. For families, the struggle to decide and decide and decide what choice to make in each separate instance, the struggle to support without enabling is never over. There is no inoculation against addiction. Opioid addiction has no boundaries whether class, income, race or gender. It sinks its fangs with equal fervor into beloved children and neglected ones into the one society predicts will fail and those who appear most destined for success. It happens in all kinds of families. Parents, siblings, spouses and other family members are collateral damage. I write this knowing that there are people who will judge our actions, question every choice.

[00:49:38] Find us deluded, lacking. Those to whom the shattering of the idealized child has not happened or has not happened yet. But there are others, good parents to whom this bad thing is now happening, who may feel less alone for knowing my story. This is for them. You do not love a person with addiction any less. When you stop allowing him or her to prey upon you. But you do value yourself more. I still love Hunter. The difference now, my love for Hunter is, it cannot any longer do.

[00:50:26] So before we get to Q&A, I have just two more short little things. The first thing is that I mentioned that writing is really important to Hunter. I have almost none of the things that he wrote, but I have one poem that he sent to me in December of 2013 when he was nearly 22. He was living at the Accelerator Y apartments across the street. He was taking some community college classes. So I want to read that to you right now in memory of Hunter.

[00:50:58] Crafted myself a computer. No, I crafted myself. A computer.

[00:51:07] With only the most rudimentary tools, ones I got from my parents passed down a bloodline. Keep them under my skin, inside my ribs, below my bones. They sit in my skull. Long time ago, lived in the old country. Kept me alive, kept me around fleeing from shadows that haunted the glades to fires with meat, tents made of hide, axes of iron, cookware of bronze, children alive playing in mud, women alive, giving me warmth, lying on me as I slip off my ghosts. Chest holds a rhythm like carrion, drums. Possible paths, genetic tattoo. Circuits so short, wires so long. Third eye peers down at the Emerald Glen, shining, radiant dew of sunrise, fifty five hundred year deep hibernation ended now. Curse breaking out of the stupor. Fine working order city made newer. Three pairs of eyes scanning, vibrating ley lines.

[00:52:25] Crafted myself. A computer.

[00:52:31] And lastly, I end the acknowledgements section of the book with a thought that lifted from. The burial service in the Book of Common Prayer, which is may light perpetual shine on Hunter and may he know that we remember him.

[00:52:47] So if you knew Hunter, could you please raise your hand? All right. Thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for helping me hold his memory. And I would like you if you're willing. I would like to have a say together. Hunter, we remember you. Hunter, we remember you. Thank you all so much. I would be very happy to take your questions.

[00:53:14] First of all, thank you very much for sharing such meaningful words and to the service providers for sharing their wisdom. There is a current of conversation in the community that seems simplistic to me, but I'd be curious to know your thoughts and that is that the criminal justice system has some role to play, too, if you will, coerce people to face up to the problem and go into treatment somehow assuming the treatment was there in their prominent voices who are advocating for that. Can you comment on your thoughts?

[00:53:48] We can force people into treatment. We can't force people into recovery. And I think that the the opportunity needs to be presented in the criminal justice system should absolutely present the opportunity. But we cannot legislate or mandate recovery. I would say that it's very important to me that people who are on harm reduction medications like Suboxone and methadone continue to be allowed to access those when they're incarcerated. That's to not to do that is cruel and not to give people the opportunity to to get started on those drugs when they're incarcerated and keep on them after is also cruel, in my opinion.

[00:54:26] Another question.

[00:54:28] Paula do you perceive a big difference between opioid addiction and alcohol addiction.

[00:54:35] Well, my experience with Hunter had to do with opioid addiction so that that's the biggest piece of that. I think it's much easier to have alcohol addiction and not have it be as visible a disruption in your life in terms of, you know, you can go and buy it in a grocery store. Right. You don't have to to obtain it illegally. I think that addictive behavior is present in all different kinds of places and that for the people who are in a family where alcohol addiction is the is the addiction, they're going through the exact same situation that we were going through with Hunter.

[00:55:17] More questions.

[00:55:20] Can you talk a little bit more about what we can all be doing?

[00:55:24] Thank you, Cami.

[00:55:26] First of all, we can show up with compassion for every young person or person of any age that we encounter on the streets who looks like they're struggling and not say, gosh, I better walk faster, at least smile, at least engage. And if you feel up to it, you know, ask them if they if they're hungry, buy them a sandwich. That's not going to perpetuate their addiction. Believe me, you can't starve a person into recovery and you can't mean them into recovery either. So if we also up a little bit more compassionate for that second, then we need to vote for politicians who put forward the the kind of changes that need to happen in this country so that addiction recovery is paid for more fully. I want to say that Shatterproof, the organization that I'm an ambassador for is in the long process of putting together a list of rehab programs that are vetted and rated, which you would think if you had never tried to find a rehab program, that you'd just be able to Google that up. But guess what? You can't. And this is not faith based programs, but evidence based programs. We need more of that. You need to support the good work of organizations like YouthCare and Accelerator Y that are helping people. And those are just the beginning. But I think really, if you just look at a person who's struggling and say, that could be me, that could be my daughter, then act the way that you would, you know, on that.

[00:57:01] I live in a condo on First Hill and we would see we're right across the street from the methadone clinic and some of us in the building decided that we really do need to now. And we have formed a committee where we do raise funds. We've collected backpacks and given to YouthCare and to have toured the facilities. And I think we've tried to induce other condos to do this program, we have specific ways that can be done. But so far, we haven't gotten any condo to say they want to follow this example. But we are interested in doing that and can give

step-by-step ways that we have formed this committee and how we are raising money and raising awareness and volunteering.

[00:58:05] If possible, we'd be glad to share it. That's wonderful. Do you know every organization has a page that says, How can I help? And you can volunteer, you can give money, you can give items. All of those things. Do something.

[00:58:20] Another question.

[00:58:22] Thank you, Paula. I have a question for you. You talked about the organizations that were helpful for Hunter. Were there any organizations that were helpful for you as a parent going through all of this?

[00:58:38] I did not do as good a job as I could have done of looking for those organizations. I'm sort of, by nature, very stoic. I knew that there was, for example, Al-Anon. The meetings felt like they were far away. And at times when I had commitments with my other kids and with my husband and I didn't really reach out to that, I feel like now there are more organizations that help families. The Recovery Cafe has a program for families, and I think that it's important to get that support. There are also many, many more families that are vocally and obviously struggling with a child's drug addiction now. And so which is it's sad that it's easier to find community because there's more community to be found.

[00:59:26] Hi, Paula. Thank you so, so much for your honesty in writing this book. It's just incredible. I was just reading the last chapter before this started and I'm kind of blown away by what you've accomplished. So thank you so much. Hunter in the book doesn't have very many encounters with the criminal justice system, although one for vagrancy. But you do refer in the book to the family need to protect yourselves. And I wondered if you could speak a little bit about how families are implicated when an addicted family member is doing things that are illegal potentially in the family home.

[01:00:09] Right. So that's a good question. Hunter did have a number of encounters with the criminal justice system. And I will say that in every encounter that I witnessed or anything that I subsequently learned about by, for example, reading police reports and what not to do later on, he was treated very well by the officers who dealt with him. We had officers who brought him to the home and were very, very kind and really saw that this was someone that they could hopefully, you know, break through the shell when Hunter was less than 18. I was undone by the idea that he was breaking the law and that it was as if I was breaking the law. That was really hard for me. I'm not you know, I'm a pretty I'm a pretty rule following person. And those of you who know who know me will know. And it was just crazy making that he was that he was, you know, doing these things that were against the law. That was part of once. But nor would we have put him out of the house as a minor no matter what. And that was part of us not really knowing what was going on, partly sort of on purpose. I mean, that's that is to make something very complicated, very simple. But a piece of us now not knowing was that we just

couldn't know because of what would happen once he was 18. It felt very clear cut to me. And he he knew Hunter was very clear on the fact that he could not be shooting heroin in our basement. I think that would have been the case if we had had no other children. The fact that we had two other younger children. It was clear cut. That doesn't mean it was easy. It was hell, but it was also very clear cut.

[01:01:55] I don't know if that totally answers your question. It's a really big question. The big question. But thank you for addressing that much of it. More questions? Paula.

[01:02:06] And the other people who spoke. What would you have public officials do to help you and other families who are going through this?

[01:02:16] First of all, I would say that addiction treatment should be available to everyone no matter income or, you know, ability to pay. Absolutely. That needs to be something. And then supporting organizations that help people who are struggling with addiction. And I would ask. I would say that would be the first question to ask of anyone who's running for public office. I mean, I think that Bob Ferguson has done a great job of fighting the opioid manufacturing. You know, that kind of action in public is really important. A lot of people have had personal experience with it and tap in the elected offices tapping on that and just showing up as someone for whom this is a piece that matters. Do either of you have any thoughts about that that we could ask elected officials to do? Like, if we if we around the world what would we have Jenny Durkan do?

[01:03:14] I would say, what's your plan or your commitment or, you know, your values to prioritize funding and budgets and tax revenue towards evidence based solutions and programs, not just fund them, but fund them to do the work at the level that we need to really address the scale of the crisis of homelessness and addiction.

[01:03:36] Yeah, we have a focus on youth and young adults. Older adults are a little bit more stuck in their ways. They've been around for a little bit longer. And I think there needs to be more attention addressed specifically to the youth and young adult population.

[01:03:46] Thank you. Anybody else? I saw Campbell. Did you have a question?

[01:03:51] I was really excited to learn about the diversion program that you brought up multiple times in the book and sort of some of the positive moments in that and all the frustrations that you suffered through that. Can you offer any new reflections on that process kind of after the fact in terms of how that could continue to be expanded in a useful way, or if it's just something that is an unusual diversion? That is an obstacle potentially coming to them.

[01:04:15] So the question is, there is something in the criminal justice system called diversion and there's a juvenile version of it. And Hunter had experience with the juvenile version. And there is, you know, for adults now with adults, it has to do with drug court right. And I observed

drug court and I thought it was amazing, a fantastic opportunity. Can you talk a little bit more about that, Aaron?

[01:04:36] Yeah, we at our gate facility out of the 20 beds, eight of the beds are connected with King County Drug Court. It's a great program. They pay for their housing. They it's a pretty strict guidelines for them to follow with their treatment plan and everything like that. That is another area that I definitely think we need to put more support in, because the bad part is most of those people have committed an offense. And so that's why they went to the court system. So people who are not who have not been offenders don't have that access. But having that type of program for people who are not offenders and continue to put more money into programs like the King County Drug Court program are definitely way that we've seen a high rate of success for youth in young adults and also with older adults as well.

[01:05:15] Great. Thank you.

[01:05:17] I think we have time for one one more one more question.

[01:05:21] You mentioned in the panel about long more long term care. And that's the one thing that I really see missing in my limited experience. And it's something. I'm wondering, can that be one of the things that we start to work on with our government officials? Absolutely. It's just a critical piece. I mean, people that go through alcoholism, they don't even start to really recover for a couple of years. And this is so much more difficult.

[01:05:49] Long term care, very important mental health support during recovery, very important. Sober housing, very important. I have a little bit about some very bad experiences Hunter had in the so-called sober housing industry. And down in Oregon, sober housing is a place that people who are in recovery can live, you know, rent rooms and whatnot. And there are requirements for it, but it's not regulated. And my personal opinion is it is a great idea. It's necessary. But to have an unregulated industry like that, that takes people, families at their most vulnerable. You know, it's it's it's just a recipe for disaster on some of those houses are great and some of them are just money mills.

[01:06:36] And so to me, to have the sober housing industry regulated and to have rules, you know, like you would for a nursing home or something like that would be a really, really big help.

[01:06:50] I think that's all the time we have for questions. Thank you so much. I will be here signing books after. Thank you for coming.

[01:07:02] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.