

Book Review

Detour- Avoiding Temptations That Lead to Addiction, by Marilyn Lancelot, Wheatmark Pub., Tucson, Arizona, 2014, 226 pp., ISBN: 978-1-62787-082-5, \$12.95.

Detour is the second book from the pen of Marilyn Lancelot who began her writing career with *Gripped by Gambling*. In this book, Marilyn shares her life-story and how multiple addictions presented challenges to her and impeded her progress on life's journey. The addictions were detours that produced pain and heartache, but which also presented as challenges to be overcome. And, overcome she did! Her success can be your success. This is a book about facing addiction and conquering it. It describes in detail the consequences of addictive behavior and gives hope to those who may be struggling with addiction now. This book is not preachy, but it is informative.

The book contains a foreword, preface and acknowledgements. It also is divided into nineteen chapters. It is easy-to-read and has helpful information woven into the narrative throughout the book.

Chapter one takes a look into the subject of addiction. In it, Marilyn admits that she was ignorant of her own vulnerabilities to addictive behavior. She separates addictions into two categories: (1) physical actions that we engage in such as: gambling, sex, excessive spending, hoarding, exercise and work; and (2) substances we ingest or inject such as: caffeine, alcohol, food, tobacco, and drugs (both lawful and unlawful). The first step in overcoming an addiction is identifying the triggers that brought it on (4). Understanding the "why" of addiction is important. Also, the stages of addiction are given by the author on pages 4-5. Marilyn suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder and this had a major impact on the development of various addictions in her life. She also reviews briefly the 12-step program that helped her recover from her addictions (6-7).

In chapter two, the author defines addiction. Psychological dependency of any kind may be considered a legitimate form of addiction. Addiction is characterized by: 1) impaired decision-making abilities affecting a person's perception and judgment; 2) persistent risk of reoccurrence or relapse; and 3) the unlikelihood of total abstinence without some form of intervention followed by a period of professional treatment. Addictions are not habits as the above information indicates. Marilyn also gives guidelines on how an addiction is diagnosed. A blood test may be used to determine how recently a substance was used and whether or not it is still in the patient's bloodstream. The criteria given in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders include: increased tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and lack of self-control. Some other indicators are: a life governed by addiction and lifestyle changes. What causes an addiction? Marilyn offers the following answers: desire for pleasure, desire for control, a form of self-medication for depression or boredom, indulging the superego (narcissistic tendencies), and daring masquerading as courage or high risk behavior for thrills. What are some of the signs of addiction? Consider the following list: self-denial (denial of the problem), an inability to stop, addiction as problem-solver, the element of secrecy, when craving becomes obsession, excessive behavior (blackouts), risk-taking (stealing, bartering sex for drugs), health issues (physical weaknesses, cancer, heart disease), withdrawal symptoms (going without a drug for a period of time), and relationship issues. What are some of the risk factors involved in addiction? The following list appears in the book: genetics, peer pressure, stress, gender (men are less

cautious in their drug use), tolerance levels (varies among individuals), alienation (isolation or loneliness), dysfunctional family, mental disturbances, and the substance itself (heroin is more addictive than marijuana for example). How is addiction treated? “Nothing can be done until the person is ready to admit that a problem exists” (22). Marilyn suggests the following: psychotherapy, self-help groups (AA for example), withdrawal (removing the substance from the patient body (must be closely monitored), withdrawal from stimulants, withdrawal from depressants, and withdrawal from opioids (Oxycontin, Percocet, Vicodin, Darvon, Percodan). Treatment can be either in-patient (admitted to a facility that treats addiction) or out-patient (patient remains at home but attends counseling appointments regularly). What are some of the complications of addiction? Marilyn lost her home, life savings, and freedom (she was imprisoned for two years). Other complications include: health issues, accidental injury or death, suicide, relationship problems (divorce), child abuse, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and problems with the police. “It’s never a pretty picture” (25).

In chapter three, the author gives some background concerning her own life. She was traumatized in her youth by parents that were alcoholics. She never considered herself a candidate for addiction (27). She moved from one addiction to another.

Chapter four is titled, “The Happiest Time...and Beyond.” Marilyn relates some of the memories of her childhood which represented a happier time for her. Then, she shows the development of addictive behavior by her parents which led to wife abuse and ultimately, divorce. She left home at an early age and began to make a life for herself in Connecticut.

In chapter five, Marilyn relates her first marriage to a man named David. He was a boxer. Within two years of marriage, she had two children. She started drinking beer. When she was younger, she took a vow with her sister that she would never smoke or drink. But, now her vow changed from “not drinking to never getting drunk” (49). Marilyn describes the progression from being a “social drinker” to an addict. At first drinking is a way of dealing with problems, relieving stress, or alleviating boredom. Then, the drinking becomes more frequent with hangovers being the telltale sign. Occasionally, there may be a blackout where the drinker cannot account for his actions or remember what happened. By now, the drinking has become a daily occurrence. The drinker looks forward to drinking. For some, the drinking may become a solitary activity. When the addiction is full-blown, the drinker is powerless to stop. At this time, he may have lost his job or his marriage. It is important to define the role alcohol plays in one’s life (50). Marilyn relates her own struggle with alcoholism and the first time she turned to Alcoholics Anonymous for help (59).

In chapter six, the author relates her divorce from David. She signed up for welfare and set out to provide for five children on her own. She met Wally and married him. She relates that these were the happiest four years of her life. However, he was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 32. At the end of this chapter, she makes a trip to Arizona to be with her sister. Would her future be in Arizona?

In chapter seven, Marilyn meets Tommy. She plans a permanent move to Arizona. She also meets Tony Garza whom she married. He introduced her to gambling with a trip to Las Vegas. After two years, Tony asked for a divorce. Marilyn started drinking again (83). Tony visited one last time—to help Marilyn go through withdrawal symptoms.

Chapter eight continues the saga with her gambling addiction. Tommy returned to her life. Marilyn describes the seduction of gambling. “The fast action soon had me riveted with its repetitious sounds of moving reels and jingling coins. Pull. Whirr. Clang. Pull. Whirr. Clang. Pull. Whirr. *Nothing!* Pull. Whirr. Once I’d been totally hypnotized by these mesmerizing

sounds, nothing could lure me away” (88). She describes her relationship with slot machines as a love affair (88). It would upset her if someone else was playing her favorite machine. If the reels stopped just shy of where she wanted them to it was not a loss, but meant that she had nearly won. After losing several hundred dollars, she thought that this was now the money the casino owed her. The casino employees catered to her. “Can I get you a drink, miss?” “Could you use some change?” “If you need more money, we’ll be happy to cash a check.” “Oh, and just so you’ll know, management has given you VIP status, which means you are entitled to free meals and a free room whenever you visit us” (89). Gambling was the one addiction that could offer her a reward. She could get rich. She believed she could control a slot machine with the force of her will. The chapter ends with the beginning of the account of her arrest.

Chapter nine records the events involved in Marilyn’s arrest for embezzlement. She had been taking money from work and using it to gamble. She forged checks in her boss’s name. This is a clear sign of addiction. Her moment of truth had arrived. This event occurred at the same time that she had decided to quit gambling.

In chapter ten, Marilyn relates more consequences of her gambling addiction. She lost her property (two houses and two trailers) which was signed over to the victim of her crime. She began attending gamblers anonymous meetings in Phoenix. She was the only woman in attendance. Five months passed before she was sentenced. On the way to her sentencing, her daughter, Juanita, suggested that she keep a journal. The diary proved therapeutic and served as a resource for the books she would write. The judge gave her a two-year sentence.

Chapter eleven describes life behind bars. While in prison, Marilyn was able to work outside at a State office. She continued her education, attended 12-step recovery groups, went to church on Sundays, and improved her typing and computer skills. She felt intimidated behind the prison walls and by several of the inmates. Her family visited frequently. She relates that she had to overcome fear. She used humor to help her get through the days in prison.

Freedom is the focus of chapter twelve. When Marilyn was released from prison, her family was there to greet her. Tommy was not there, however. He had been implicated in Marilyn’s crimes and so forbidden to see her again. Marilyn returned to her home in Phoenix. She attended college classes and worked full-time. She sponsored other women gamblers. She underwent a significant attitude adjustment. She gives several suggestions on how to improve one’s attitude on p. 128. Be positive, keep a sense of humor, develop the attitude of gratitude. She relates the death of her son, Graham, who died of acute alcoholism and cirrhosis of the liver (129). About a year later, she learned of the death of Tommy. She continued her pursuit of knowledge about her gambling addiction. She learned that she was an Escape Gambler rather than an Action Gambler. She visited the casinos to escape problems in life and was attracted to the slot machines which did not require skill. Action Gamblers were attracted to games where skill was involved and that gave a sense of power. As usual, the author shares insights into gambling as she relates the narrative of her life. A counselor related to her that it is possible to change the chemistry of the brain through activities such as relaxation, prayer, meditation, eating mindfully, and exercising. This counselor also mentioned that addiction is about mindlessness, whereas meditation, prayer, and relaxation encourage mindfulness (134). She also learned that a chemical called, dopamine, is a naturally occurring chemical that forms the basis for all addictions. While there are other factors, dopamine is the most powerful, since it is directly associated with the feeling of pleasure (134). Marilyn started her own recovery group especially for women. This was a goal she made while in prison. She also started a newsletter, “Women

Helping Women (www.femalgamblers.info) first published in April, 1999 (135). On pages 136-139, she gives a sample article.

Chapter thirteen addresses her life as a responsible citizen. The fact that she was a felon, affected her ability to get a job. Eventually, she was able to secure a job with the state of Arizona which hired felons (143). She applied and was hired.

In chapter fourteen, Marilyn relates that she was able to buy another home. She takes the time and space to warn seniors about gambling. She lists the following reasons why seniors gamble: recent loss of a spouse or close friend, illness, dwindling finances, relaxation, escape from reality, or to stave off the fear of death (149). Casino atmospheres give gamblers a sense of importance. Some signs of senior gambling addiction are: cashing in life insurance policies, secrecy regarding their addiction, withdrawal from family and friends, asking money for everyday living expenses, neglecting personal needs and lying to spend more time at the casinos (150). “At present, senior citizens are the largest group of problem gamblers seeking counseling” (150). Marilyn is a senior citizen herself! She retired at age 70. Marilyn has learned to channel her energies in good ways: photography, writing, gardening, reading, volunteer work, and listening to music. She relates how addiction has affected other members of her family resulting in extended prison sentences and how some of them have had to work to overcome addictions.

Chapter fifteen focuses on the significant changes that can be made with the right help and the desire to be different. The power to change is within each of us. This is an important concept to grasp when we feel helpless in the face of addiction. Marilyn writes of the importance of faith in overcoming fear. She also sees the importance of spirituality. She writes of the necessity of honesty and forgiveness.

Marilyn shares her life lessons in chapter sixteen. She uses the word abuse to focus on the uses in abuses. What did she learn? It took discipline, determination, and dedication to serve her addiction. She could use these same qualities to turn her life around and make good decisions with better results. She writes, “Every life is valuable, and teeming with both positive and negative lessons. In most cases, the negative ones are the ones that teach us the most— primarily, because of their cost” (179).

In chapter seventeen, the author gives a brief survey of various types of addictive behavior. These include: compulsive shopping and hoarding, eating disorders, smoking addiction, shoplifting/employee theft/crime, cell phones and computer addictions, adolescent gambling (computer related), love, lust or sexual addiction, electronic games addiction, prescription drugs, and body image.

Chapter eighteen covers words frequently used in addiction recovery programs. Examples include: enabling vs. supporting; boredom vs. serenity; hobbies and habits vs. addictions; suggestions vs. control; abstinence vs. recovery; excuses vs. reasons; analyze vs. utilize; worry vs. concern; spirituality vs. religion; and denial vs. lack of knowledge.

In the last chapter, Marilyn considers her past and her future. She has grown through her experiences and desires to share what she has learned with others. She has found inner peace and harmony. She is coping differently with new challenges and she is better at handling them. Perhaps her life story will be a positive way for you to begin anew.