

It Takes a Town

By Ben Jacques

I was chatting with Jim McIntyre last Thursday at the Farmer's Market. Jim is our chief of police, and we were at the Substance Abuse Coalition booth. Chief McIntyre was saying that earlier they had found two guys unresponsive in a parked car.

Sadly, it's getting to be a familiar story in Stoneham. Drugs. Overdoses. First responders. Sometimes, if it's heroin, Narcan can keep them alive until they get to the ER.

It takes a town to raise a child. To keep her safe. To teach him well. There are countless messages bombarding us every day that promote drinking, drugging, smoking.

It's great when a community comes together to fight substance abuse. To learn, to teach, to practice. To support those addicted and help them find a path to recovery.

I recently met with Maureen Saltzman, reference librarian at the Stoneham Public Library. She has prepared listings of books and films that deal with addiction—fiction and nonfiction—from personal stories and memoirs to informational and instructive. All the books and DVDs are available at the Library, either on the shelves or through the Noble network. Her research is impressive, and we will soon post it on the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition web page.

Here are two nonfiction titles published this year: "Many Faces One Voice; Secrets from the Anonymous People," and, "Loving our Addicted Daughters Back to Life; a Guidebook for Parents."

Looking for a good novel—I admit I like fiction—I chose a title Maureen recommended: "Father of the Rain," by Lily King.

In this intriguing novel, set in an upscale Boston suburb, an 11-year-old struggles to come to terms with her father, a fun-loving narcissist and alcoholic afflicted with class and racial prejudice. Nevertheless, she dearly loves her father and tries to please him. Separated from him when she and her mother leave home, she returns as a 29-year-old woman to try to "fix" him.

"King is a beautiful writer," writes Liesl Schillinger in a New York Times book review, "with equally strong gifts for dialogue and internal monologue. Silently or aloud, her characters betray the inner tumult they conceal as they try to keep themselves together, wanting others to see them as whole."

There are dozens of movies that show us the anguish of an alcoholic's or addict's life. Few of them, however, show the constructive steps that can lead individuals and families to recovery.

One of my favorite movies is “Tender Mercies,” with Robert Duvall and Tess Harper.

A wide range of DVDs, documentary and drama, are available at the Library. Here are a few titles: “Close to Home, with Bill Moyers.” “Postcards from the Edge.” “Pleasure Unwoven: a Personal Journey about Addiction.” And, “My name is Bill W.”

It’s a rare family that doesn’t include an alcoholic or addict. Addiction needs to be talked about, and learned about. Both sufferers and families need our support. Thanks to all those combatting substance abuse—caregivers, first responders, support groups—and the resources of places like the Stoneham Library—there is hope.

Ben Jacques is a member of the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition. More information can be found at www.stoneham-ma.gov/school-department/pages/stoneham-substance-abuse-coalition. You’ll also find a link to the Coalition’s Facebook page.