Vanessa Misty Boyle attended Schaumburg High School. Vanessa hopes to earn her bachelor’s degree in nursing at NIU, after which she plans to earn a master’s degree to become a certified registered nursing anesthetist. “Cocaine Psychosis” was important to Vanessa because it brought back memories of growing up with her father, who had an addiction. Vanessa’s interview with her father was helpful in understanding what he went through to overcome that addiction.

Vanessa wrote this essay in Susan Jardine’s English 103 course during the fall of 2010.
“You never know what you have until it’s gone.” My father is one of those few people who understand what it feels like to have lost. He learned very quickly what it feels like to be alone and feel as if there is no escape. My father’s life was dramatically affected when he resorted to cocaine to avoid dealing with his depression. The cocaine addiction seized his life, spiraling it downward into a bottomless hole without a fragment of hope to help him find his way out. I chose to interview my father about his experiences under the influence and about how his life today is seemingly different because of his addiction.

My father never used to rely on drugs to make his reality bearable. As a child, my father was the go-to man. In other words, everyone knew he was the guy who would get things done. He was reliable, smart, and incredibly strong, and he was a hard worker who always put family first. Protecting my family and ensuring our needs were met were his number one priority. As an adolescent, little did I know, my “oh so perfect” family was actually quite tainted. My father had been taking steroids for quite some time because of his fixation on improving his physique. Time passed, and unfortunately my father had to undergo back surgery from a previous motorcycle accident, which resulted in his use of painkillers. It was after the back surgery that my family began to fall apart.

When I asked my father when he began to use cocaine, he responded, “My turning point started before cocaine; it was the steroids. I researched how to take them and use them, but I didn’t know that when you come off steroids that there came depression. After depression came the pain pills for my back, and once those stopped, I needed drugs.” My father was constantly looking for a way to substitute one drug for another to aid him in escaping from his depression. The drug he resorted to after his painkillers, unfortunately, is one of the most addicting drugs a person can take. “I needed medicine to make me feel better. Once the pain medicine was gone, the depression was still there,” my father explained.
The fact that my father’s depression was so deep that he needed to rely on a powerful drug, such as cocaine, confounded me. Along with the depression that followed his steroid use and an aching body from his injury, my parents’ marriage began to crumble. “I was in a marriage that was over before it ended, and I couldn’t stand to see it fall apart sober,” my father stated. My father loved his family dearly and could not stand to see it slowly disintegrate right before his eyes. His only way out from facing reality was his new obsession: cocaine.

My father’s new cocaine addiction took a toll on his life. It separated him from my family and changed him entirely. I asked my father how the drug made him feel when he was under the influence, and he replied, “The first line made me feel like I was on top of the world. The second line: it felt like I was going down the hill … when I was out of cocaine, I panicked wondering where I could get more. That first line I felt like a million bucks, and nothing compares to that first line.” The feeling of that first line was a feeling my father would never get back, but one that he would continue to chase for several years. My father began to isolate himself, exploring his new obsession. The drug had taken over his mind, and ultimately, he was no longer the driver in control of his actions; he was the passenger. Cocaine was considerably more powerful than his brain and took it over. I asked my father what types of thoughts he conjured while under the influence, and he replied:

In a four bedroom house and basement, I isolated myself in one room, which I called the blue room. I destroyed the entire house. I would be looking for answers. I have no idea what information I was looking for, but I destroyed everything. The big screen TV spooked me; every part of the house spooked me. The TV would talk to me, and I would talk back. I really genuinely thought it was alive. The hallucinations and fear-filled delusions occupied my father’s perception. The cocaine changed his perspective on life, and unfortunately for him, my family could no longer stand to be around him anymore. My father took drugs to help relieve the stress and depression he was carrying on his shoulders and ended up packing more depression under his belt when he drove his family away from him.
For four whole years, my father continued to partake in drug use. When asking my father how much cocaine he purchased in his lifetime, he stated, “I spent $80,000 worth for sure. Within three or four months, I spent $40,000. I got the money from my 401K from the job where I worked seventeen years that I got fired for because I didn’t show up because I was on cocaine: a job I loved.” Not only did the cocaine take his family away from him, but it also cost him a job he put so much heart and time into. Digging himself deeper into a hole of debt day after day, and into a never-ending cycle of depression, my father continued to snort lines, searching for answers but always coming to find himself alone, with no one by his side.

My father continued to rack up his debt and fall deeper into his depression and drug addiction after my family left him, but after some time, my father obtained the strength to go to a rehabilitation center. I asked him what his motivation was to quit doing cocaine, and his response was, “All along, figuring that I was a failure as a father and a husband was what fueled my fire.” The motivation to get back parts of the life he traded for his addiction prompted my father to get the help he needed, but there was one incident that encouraged my father the most: the death of his brother, Tommy. “When I decided to go to rehab, I had half a gallon of vodka and some cocaine, and the night my family told me my brother died, I didn’t even respond because I was so messed up. When I sobered up, I decided to go to rehab. It was then that I realized my brother was really dead,” my father explained. It was a substantial reality check to my father after he realized his brother had really passed. My father finally came to realize his family was drifting away from him, and he was running out of time and losing out on some of the most precious moments with the people he loves, all because of his addiction.

Today, at age forty-four, my father, Kevin Patrick Boyle, is drug-free and moving forward with his life. It took plenty of courage to quit, combined with cravings, relapse, and fear of withdrawal, but my father did it. I asked him what he can take away from his experience being an addict for several years. His response was, “I can take away that family is more important than any feeling you got on the face of this earth. You cannot take back the wrongs you have done. Although people forgive you, they will
never forget. The most important relationships I have tried to get back, I know I never will.”

My father’s addiction was a radical turning point in his life. If my father had not chosen to get clean and go to rehabilitation, I am not sure where he might be, or if he would even be alive. His experience has changed my life and sculpted who I am and the traits I value in life. I have come to learn that life should never be taken for granted because at any second of any day, a loved one could be taken away from you, and nothing hurts more than not being able to talk to someone you love when you know that they are gone. When my father was on drugs, I truly felt like he was gone. He was essentially out of my life, and I am grateful finally to have back the loving father I have known and loved for all my childhood.

At the end of our interview session, I asked my father how his cocaine addiction transformed his life. He replied, “It keeps my focus. Every morning when I walk my dog, I pray to God and thank him for every blessing I have. I will never pass a rose bush without ever stopping to smell it.” Although my father’s drug addiction took away many precious years with his family, his job, and, ultimately, who he used to be, his experience shaped him into a better, clean father, one that he has worked so hard to become. It is unfortunate that he cannot rewind time and fix the mistakes he made in the past, but he is constantly working on the life he has sculpted for himself, improving who he is and valuing the time he has to spend with his family now more than ever. My father closed our interview stating, “Although a rose smells good to me today, it will never smell as good as before I destroyed the cartilage in my nose.” The effects of his drug addiction will always be with him physically and in his memory, but the love and respect he receives from his family for coming clean will always be in his heart for the rest of his life. From his experience, my father learned that nothing is stronger than the love you get back from family, and I learned that nothing feels greater than to have my daddy back.
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