

Looking through a glass, darkly Norma Denner

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A real life journey of love, despair and hope
by Norma Denner

NORMA DENNER

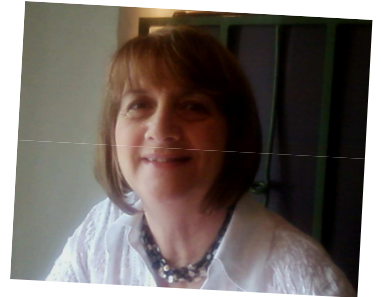
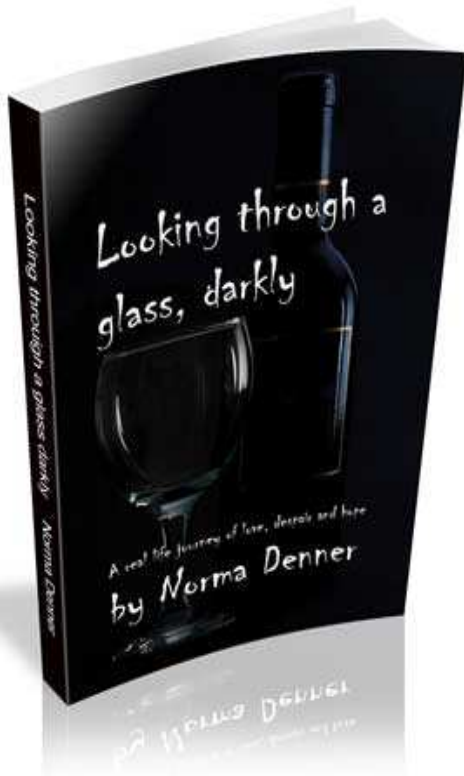
Norma Denner

presents

Looking through a glass, darkly

A real life journey of love, despair and hope

“When I first walked into a self help group many years ago I had absolutely no idea that I was lonely and afraid, I just knew something was wrong. I loved my husband so I couldn't understand why things could get so horribly out of hand and I would end up battered and bruised and tragically miserable. Rock bottom was something I was to hear that made sense, I had reached that place of desolation and, as hard as it was to admit, I needed help.”



Her powerful and honest book reveals Norma's struggle in living with an alcoholic husband while coping with other problems of her own and how Christianity helped her through those difficult times by turning their lives around.

Norma and her husband David have set up Manna Ministries, an awareness programme giving insight into the problems of Alcoholism. Through the programme, they work with the problem drinker and the families affected by alcohol.

“Looking through a glass, darkly” gives hope to anyone whose life has been affected by the destructive effects of alcohol. It proves that, no matter how bad things are, there is still hope.

For more information about Norma see www.manna-ministries.org

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Introduction

Recovery from anything is a blessing. As I sit here trying to find the words to write about my recovery from a recent accident, which is taking far too long to heal, I realise that this has been a stumbling block for me with so many people I have encountered over the years. If only recovery were quick, but it isn't and I had to learn the hard way.

My accident happened only four weeks ago, I fell heavily on my ankle; the outcome was that it was broken and now it is taking an age to mend.

My story with David starts a long time ago, it is a story of brokenness but it is also a story of recovery - and there were no quick fixes. This book is born out of the struggles and the victories of two lives that came together determined to beat the odds.

Norma

This book is dedicated to
Lynne Sandra
and Mandy Emily Kathleen

Acknowledgements.

I would like to thank the following people who have been shining lights at times in a very dark tunnel and have inspired me to write ...

To the families of alcoholics who struggle with a problem too big for them, they are truly the unsung heroes.

To my sponsor in South Africa who was there for me and so many others. She showed me that there was life beyond alcoholism.

To Alanon and my Alanon friends who shared their experience, strength and hope with me.

To Father John Evans who was kind, understanding and wise in a time when I needed this most and has helped more people than he will ever know.

To Pastor John Broom and his lovely wife Elaine (M.B.C. South Africa) and Ike Griffin (Kairos. America).

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Norma

LOOKING THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY.

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Chapter 1

A TANGLED WEB

*Oh what a tangled web we weave
when we first practice to deceive.*

It was just another early morning shift. The Airport was pretty quiet with just a few passengers arriving to check in. Air travel was pretty slow - most planes went to Heathrow. Gatwick was secondary in the late 1960's.

I put my jacket in the locker at the back of the desk, took out a magazine and got comfortable to while away a few hours. There was no fog on the horizon. The most interruptions I might get would be passenger enquiries (mostly the toilets) - I could never understand why a traveller couldn't see the signs.

My friend, a ground stewardess, came up for a chat before going off her shift. Then he appeared in the corner of my eye, the clothes definitely weren't English and neither was the tan. He came up to the desk and I waited for one of the usual basic questions. What I got was "Hello I'm David, I'm an alcoholic and I only have ten years to live." I remained calm as we had been trained to do, my first thought was tough but it was important to be polite.

Pat, my shift relief, turned up just in time. There seemed to be a strange buzz about this silly situation; anyway I was tired and ready to leave. Pat seemed to rummage around in the locker for longer than usual. Then the man called David asked who would like to come and have a cup of tea. Pat had just come on shift, should she accept? No, I was just off so I would go; something was drawing me to this man but a cup of tea would be good;

what harm could it do? In life we make choices; this one would change my life forever.

I put my jacket on and off we went; heavens! Here I was walking across the concourse along to our greasy spoon canteen with this person I had met five minutes ago; not quite what I expected but it turns out David drives a taxi for a company at the Airport.

As we sat and drank tea it emerged that David had just left a rehab clinic and was not drinking. This made very little sense to me as I wasn't interested in drinking; maybe at a wedding or at Christmas but that was it. My passion was dancing and rock music and of course The Beatles. We talked for a while and then I had to be off home. It was late and I needed to be out of here; why was it so hard to leave? When I got home my husband wasn't home from the office and my daughter was still at school. My mind kept wandering back to the man at the Airport.

The next evening I was on night shift, the worse shift; never mind, I could sleep all day tomorrow. The nights at the Airport were sometimes busier than the days; diverted or delayed flights, grumpy and tired passengers. My boss was there; I had to take over from her. We had an amicable relationship, fairly easy, but I was very aware she was the boss. Then who should turn up while I was still changing my shoes; I heard his voice first; my boss seemed to know him; they were chatting across the desk.

I started to tidy the papers on the desk for want of something better to do. My boss waved to the locker and mentioned something about some new magazines I could read if the shift was quiet. She smiled at me, put on her jacket and was off. I was wishing the ground could swallow me up; David was still standing at the desk. This was not an unusual situation; the ground staff and all the employees at the Airport were friendly; we would visit each others desks from time to time. Why then was I feeling like this; like something was going on which it wasn't.

We started to chat, it all came so easily. He asked me if we could have breakfast when I had finished my shift. Before I could say no, as after a night shift I was always tired, he was called away by his boss to take a fare to Heathrow. Well no harm done; I could slip out when I was finished. The night was fairly uneventful, and sure enough who should turn up just as I was about to leave?

We went upstairs to the departure lounge and ordered a full English breakfast; I thought it a bit extravagant. I was used to living on a budget which did not include fancy restaurant food; but it was lovely and so was the company. This platonic friendship was moving a bit fast especially as David was also married; in fact he had been married before and had a little girl. He was now married for a second time to a model in South Africa but this marriage also seemed to be going one way. I really had to get going, I just wished it wasn't so hard to leave.

I slept as much of the day as I could; this was not a bonus for me; it really threw me out. Never mind, I had two and a half days off; this was the good side of working a night shift. The next day I was really busy; most working mums know all about this; trying to keep things shipshape. Unfortunately I was not a very good housewife; hadn't got much heart for it. Always seemed to have stuff to do and as hard as I would try to get everything done there it all was again.

It was early evening, my husband was home reading the paper waiting for his supper; my daughter was playing with the neighbor's children across the road and then the phone rang. Good I thought, time for my daughter to come home. The voice on the other end of the phone was David; I nearly dropped the phone. I managed to keep my voice steady; what was going on? This was not a good plan and not a good time; and after a very short conversation I put the phone down. I retreated into the kitchen making myself very busy, one thing only on my mind. This had got to stop; much too risky.

Walking from the airport car park up the rise to the airport main entrance with not much enthusiasm, a car drew up beside me; the door was pushed open. "Jump in" it was David. What an extraordinary situation; I was in a car driving a few meters up the road to be dropped off outside the entrance to the Airport. I didn't seem to have too much control over my actions and as I shut the car door we had already agreed to meet for a drink at my break time. As I walked onto the concourse I was thinking this man had no thought of being discreet; it's almost as though he had no rules.

As I walked along to our desk I saw my boss packing up to leave. After a few pleasantries and hoping she had not seen me get out of the car earlier we said our goodbyes. Seeing David had put a new zip into being at work. I was looking forward to our drink later on.

I met David but this time it was at the bar; we had drinks and went to sit at one of the small side tables. A man came up; I had no idea who he was but David seemed to know him and they spoke for a while almost like I didn't exist then the man got up and said "sorry to see you are drinking" and walked away. Oh for heaven sakes, I thought, what was this man's problem? We were fine.

My working days were very uneventful for the next week. I was standing at the desk going through some paper work almost at the end of my shift when David's boss approached our desk. He didn't sound too pleased; he was asking me if I knew where David was? I had no idea, why should I know? I hardly knew David. Why was he asking me in that tone as though I should know? He also said I should get David to get back to work or he's out. With that, off he went. I was quite shaken; I wasn't quite sure why this man should think I had anything to do with David's actions. However I didn't want to admit to myself but I had also been wondering where David had been in the past week.

Just before I left work that day the phone rang: it was David. We spoke for a while and by the time I had put down the phone I had arranged to meet him at the Eight Bells, where ever that was, that evening. It wasn't hard to get out in the evening; my husband loved the T.V. I disliked it. I had a network of friends who I could call on and then go to the Eight Bells, a sort of detour, then home.

I finally found the Eight Bells public house. I shouldn't have been here anyway. I thought I had missed him I went inside, had a very quick look around; it wasn't the sort of place I would go into alone. So I decided to leave and was just about to get in the car when that now familiar voice behind me said "Are you leaving?" I just wished I hadn't been so glad to see him.

This relationship was becoming just that; I had to stop it before it got out of hand. This was much more difficult than I thought but then David had his own ideas on the subject. Quite matter of fact he told me he didn't have affairs but was going to marry me. My response was a lot calmer than I felt as I pointed out there were a few difficulties such as we were both married. The rest of the little time we had left we did very little talking.

It was all arranged; we had talked about it or rather David had talked in length on the rehab place he had not long come out of. It seemed to be so important to him. It wasn't difficult for me to spend a day away. There were always new hotels in London to familiarise myself with for the passengers, all part of my job.

David had bought an old large comfortable car; it was sort of nice and I settled down to enjoy the ride. I liked David very much; he made me laugh and did really over the top things that were a bit outrageous but very different to my social circle. All this was going through my mind as we drove along. After driving for some time we turned into what looked like a cross between a hospital and a country house. We got out of the car and went inside. I was introduced to a man who took one look at David and asked him if he was drinking.

Oh no, I thought, what was it with these people? I was then asked to sit in a sort of waiting room. This was a fine old kettle of fish; we had come out for the day and here I was sitting in this room. As I sat there I looked around and was taken with a plaque on the table in front of me; it read "Why be awkward when you can be downright impossible". What sort of message was this? I wasn't impressed with this place.

After what seemed like an age, David came out of the room. He asked if I would like to see around the place. Well anything was better than sitting in a waiting room. There were a few people here and there but I felt a bit out of things. Then David suggested we play mini golf; I thought this was more like it. We went outside and we started our game but was I imagining things or was this more than a friendly game of putting the ball about. At every turn David was competitively trying to win; well, I thought, not really such a big deal, as I am not competitive and I don't play this silly game very often.

The two people David appeared to want me to meet were at the clinic that day; they gave me the impression that they were very concerned but they were pleasant. I don't think I was what they had expected. I couldn't imagine why David would want to spend any time here; he had such a sense of fun and this all seemed so serious. I really didn't feel I was part of this scenario. I had enjoyed being with David except from now on I would try to stay clear of his precious clinic. Apart from now having a shrewd suspicion that there was more to this alcoholism thing than I had realized; I still couldn't see why such a big deal should be made of it.

The next few days I can only describe as agony. I had come to a decision not to see or to talk to David anymore, it was all too much. I had written a letter which I felt would squash any thought of a relationship. I put a lot into the letter making sure it was very to the point; final and very plain. I suppose I can say going to work that day didn't feel good, in fact it was too awful for words. Then the dreaded moment arrived; David came up to the desk and I gave him the letter. He took it and walked away;

I supposed he was reading it but in no time he was back. The letter I had taken so much trouble to write was torn into pieces and back on my desk.

The next day I spent at home sorting out the accounts and my cupboards; I had to keep active to try to keep my mind off the past few days events. I was so busy I didn't hear my husband come up the stairs. In a rather strange but very clear voice he asked me the question that shook the life out of me, "Who was David?"

What could I say, I wasn't ready for this. I had no justification; nothing worked out but what came out of my mouth could not have been more incriminating. "How did you know?" My husband replied, "Oh he phoned here; I answered the phone. He told me his name and that he would like to meet me, would that be a good idea?" My husband's voice was cold and distant. Could this really be happening? From that moment I knew our marriage of ten years was over. Although I couldn't imagine how things would go I knew this was a traverse I would never forget.

I lived through the next few days in a sort of a haze. I still had to go to work and even though this job was almost at the end of the season it still had to be done.

I had confided in my friend at work almost moment by moment on the events happening in my life and although she didn't say much I could tell she was shocked by this new turn of events. She left after the finish of her shift following a short discussion on the next few days as we planned the closure of the job we had had for the summer season.

David arrived that day with the sweetest little blond girl. He lifted her up and sat her on the desk; he was so obviously proud of what turned out to be his daughter. She was a little younger than my daughter and as they walked away across a fairly empty concourse I felt such a feeling of desolation.