



Martha Tod Dudman

Augusta, Gone
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Q: Do you remember the day you realized, "something is very wrong with my daughter?" What made you realize this was more than just a passing phase?

A: There was no one moment when I knew there was something wrong. There were many. But for each discovery—the pills in her room, the way her eyes looked, her crazy behavior—there was some explanation she could give or I could make up. Even when I made the decision to send her away and get her into treatment, I kept thinking maybe I could fix it myself. Was I giving up too easily? Was I over exaggerating the problem? It was so hard to tell.

Q: What was the most painful thing to endure as Augusta self-destructed?

A: The worst part of all was how sad she was. Her fury reminded me of my own furious adolescence and her despair frightened me because it was so familiar.

Q: Your first drastic move to save Augusta was sending her to a Wilderness Program for troubled teens. How did she do with it? Do you think this is a worthwhile option for exasperated parents?

A: That was a very tough move, but I do think it was the right thing to do. When things get that bad, when you are locked in a battle with your children, you have to get them away from you. I'm sure there are good Wilderness Programs and bad ones, but I do believe that at their best they can be very valuable. They get the kids out of a destructive setting, take them away from the battle with their parents, away from their creepy friends, and many of the kids really do learn a new kind of pride in themselves and a sense of competency and adventure. Interestingly, my daughter also feels that the Wilderness experience was worthwhile and has even talked about working there someday.

Q: Describe Forest Ridge in Oregon, where Augusta was later sent. How did you feel when you first went to visit her there?

A: I sent my daughter to an educational treatment center in a remote section of Oregon. It had a very structured environment and an intense experiential therapy component. It has been very successful for many children, but it was not an entirely successful experience for Augusta. When I went to visit her there, I was very excited about seeing her because we'd been apart so long. I was scared, of course, of how she'd be. But on our first visit out to see her, she was lovely. She seemed so healthy and so dear. I was tempted to take her home with me. Of course, a week after our visit, she ran away and was missing for over eight days.

Q: Eighteen months after this story begins, you write, "I don't know what really helped bring Augusta through to this new, happier, lighter person that she is." That message is both a comfort and a concern for parents. If you happened upon no magic solution, is there really an answer?

A: I guess my message to other parents going through this kind of struggle with their children is to not give up. Keep loving your child. Keep fighting to make them safe. Do whatever you can to save them.

Q: Finally, how is Augusta now? Has she read the book? What does she think?

A: Augusta is wonderful. She is living in California this year, where she is working and supporting herself. She is healthy, she is mostly happy. We talk often by phone. Last September I sent her a copy of the book to read. I was scared about having her read it.

I warned her that it was going to be tough to read, and I told her to remember, the whole time she was reading the first part, that the book got better. I told her in the second part she'd see that I loved her. After she'd read the book she called me up. She told me that she kept waiting for the part where I was so angry. She said, "It isn't just in the second half that you love me, Mommy. You love me all through the book."

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