



The East Side of Addiction

James DiReda

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The East Side of Addiction tells the story of how drug addiction ravaged a working class immigrant enclave in Worcester, Massachusetts and the close-knit group of young friends who lived there—and how several of the lucky ones managed to survive. Raised on the East Side, Jack, Hank and Jim “JD” learned to idolize not the hardworking citizens of the neighborhood, but the thugs who ran gambling and loan operations for mobsters. Still, they might have escaped lives of crime but for one thing: addiction. In the late 1960s, drugs took the East Side by storm. There, drugs found a neighborhood weakened by the collapse of traditional culture and a group of young people struggling with America’s cultural upheaval and the pain of adolescence. When Jack discovered alcohol, he found a way to overcome his shyness and find his place in the group. And for JD, the first taste of prescription cough medicine stolen from his parents’ medicine cabinet eased the pain of his father’s abandonment. Hank discovered gambling and drugs as a way to fit in. These ventures soon led to addiction, but Jack and JD were not alone. Beside them were their childhood friends from the East Side. As they descended into heroin and prescription opiate addiction, these young men, with names like Fudgie and Kid Paz, Stevie the Sailor, and The Crusher completely lost control of their lives. As the parents of the East Side watched helplessly, their children became hardened criminals. JD moved from selling stolen cigarettes and busting open vending machines to ripping off pimps and consorting with the kingpins of the Vegas Mob. Jack, and Hank, along with other East Side kids smuggled loads of marijuana and cocaine from Mexico and South America. As long as they had drugs and money, the boys from the East Side thought they had it all. But as they descended further into addiction, things began to fall apart. Week by week and year by year, the toll mounted. Anthony and Dumbo died from heroin overdoses. Joey was arrested in a pharmacy robbery. Johnny’s girlfriend Terri ended her life at the end of a rope. Dope-sick and terrified after ripping off the Mob, JD fled back to East Side searching for refuge. Jack found himself in prison, charged with felony drug charges and attempted murder of a state trooper. Still, he refused to admit to his drug problem. But even in these darkest moments, redemption was possible. Hank, utterly beaten by opiates, discovered it first. In the grimy halls of a Dorchester detox, and later, on Boston’s bucolic North Shore, finally got clean. JD and Kid Paz soon joined him. And one by one, their East Side friends began to once again reunite at 12-step meetings and informal gatherings, a miracle happened. The strength of decades-long friendship created a recovery community that would help many others to escape the ravages of drugs. A story of addiction, recovery, and the power of lifelong friendship and deep, abiding faith, The East Side of Addiction is the story of thousands of communities, and of millions of American families ravaged by addiction.

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