



Secrets: A Story of Addiction, Grief, and Healing by Ann Cookson

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Diane Atwood: Welcome to the *Catching Health* podcast, where we talk about all things related to health — physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, you name it, we talk about it. I'm Diane Atwood, your host and producer, and my guest today is Ann Cookson. Ann is a Maine author who is active in her community as a literacy volunteer. She is also a mother who lost her daughter Sarah to an opiate overdose four and a half years ago. Because of her personal loss, she is a passionate advocate for families who have lost loved ones to substance use disorder.

She is the moderator of two Facebook groups, *Mainly Writing: Talking About Substance Use Disorder* and *ME Team Sharing Maine*. Members are parents who've lost a child to substance use disorder. She also has a Facebook page called *Faces of Addiction*, and Ann is currently co-writing another book tentatively titled *You Are Not Alone: Finding Hopefulness*, which continues the conversation of substance use disorder and the family connection.

As a Maine author, she published her first book in 2018, titled *Secrets: A Story of Addiction, Grief, and Healing*, which I have read and found to be a raw and deeply moving story that is not only about secrets but is also about uncovering the truth. Hello Anne. Welcome.

Ann Cookson: Hello, Diane. Thank you for having me.

Diane Atwood: Well, thank you for spending time with us today. I have to say we are recording our conversation near the end of May 2021. COVID restrictions have been relaxed here in Maine and more and more people are venturing out. Many of them I've noticed, including myself, still wearing masks, even though they've been vaccinated. But I'm curious, how did you fare this past year plus during the pandemic?

Ann Cookson: Well, I admit that I struggled somewhat. When we first became aware of the pandemic, I had been ill for about six weeks. I came down with a respiratory illness, which I ended up with bronchial pneumonia. So, this lasted for several weeks and I, I know we'll

never probably know if it was COVID or not, but meanwhile, it was challenging to get through this time and like most people, I felt rather isolated. I wasn't able to be with my family like I would like to be, it's actually been a year since I've seen some of my grandchildren. But that will soon change because I'm fully vaccinated now so we will soon be getting together again.

Diane Atwood: Excellent. And you certainly have been productive.

Ann Cookson: Yes, but, you know, during COVID I still struggled with being motivated to write, even though a reader approached me and commissioned me to write a book for her, a children's book, and I have not been able to do that yet. It's only recently that I've become motivated to start writing again. I do have a wonderful friend. Her name is Laurie and who I am co-writing the book with. And almost daily we were in contact with each other just to check on each other and make sure we were doing okay, and we would meet know, when we could, wearing our masks, you know, being careful. So, I'm so thankful to have a good friend like that.

Diane Atwood: And is she also a mother who has lost a child to substance use?

Ann Cookson: No, she's a mother whose son is struggling with heroin addiction.

Diane Atwood: You know, I want to get into your story, but you are so into now helping other families and keeping track probably of statistics. It was such a huge problem four and a half years ago. Do you think anything's changed in our state?

Ann Cookson: I think they are in the process of trying to invoke change. I know the governor has an options program and I'm somewhat familiar with what they're doing with that program. So, they are attempting to do there I know they have quite a bit of money that's being utilized to address this issue or substance use disorder of the addiction, but they have a long ways to go, and in my book, I touched on some of these things that they still have not resolved yet.

Diane Atwood: Right. So, you chose to write this book about your experience. Were you always a writer or is it just something that came to you as a process while you were trying to make sense of all that happened?

Ann Cookson: I have always been a writer. Just never formally a writer. I have been writing short stories and poetry for many years, but I was never a serious writer. It was more of a hobby until I went back to university and I actually took some creative writing classes and discovered that I was in love with writing even more so than I fully realized.

Diane Atwood: And is that very recently?

Ann Cookson: That was back in 2009.

Diane Atwood: Well, congratulations on doing that. That's huge, I think. So, your book *Secrets* is such an important book, not only for those who read it, but it must have been even more so important for you to help process, make sense, make peace even with what happened to you. Is what I said accurate? Is that what happened for you?

Ann Cookson: Yes, it is relatively accurate. It was definitely a process that I needed to get through and I realized that I couldn't run away from it, you know. I needed to face it. And

with my writing that allowed me to do that to a great extent. It was extremely hard. It was probably one of the hardest things I ever did, but I was determined that I was going to be transparent, you know, I wanted to present something that was as honest as it could possibly be. And I believe I did this at the expense of my family.

Diane Atwood: That's a question that I planned to ask you later on in our interview. I'm curious about their reaction, but why don't you give us a, I guess, a synopsis of what the book is about.

Ann Cookson: Well, essentially the book is about family dysfunction. It's about my daughter who struggled most of her entire life with depression and anxiety, social anxiety and I think that probably led to her developing substance use disorder. It's about processing this whole event that unfolded throughout our lives, ending with the loss of our daughter. I found her journals and I used her journals. I, I merged her words with mine. My intent was also to give her her voice because I don't think she ever was fully recognized for her struggles or her voice fully heard. And I wanted to give her that opportunity, using my own voice. She no longer had one.

Diane Atwood: Now she was living with you at the time that she died. Is that right?

Ann Cookson: She was. She had been with us for a few months.

Diane Atwood: Okay. You might think I'd want to dive right into that, but instead I'd like to back up several years, because when you shared some of the excerpts from her diary, they started when she was a teenager, right? When she was about 13 or 15 years old, I think?

Ann Cookson: She was 12 years old when she first started writing.

Diane Atwood: And you didn't read the diaries or the journals until after she had passed.

Ann Cookson: That's right.

Diane Atwood: So, at 12 years old, was she already troubled? Was she always, and what did you discover that you think is most meaningful? An eye-opener or wow, I wish I had understood this better.

Ann Cookson: I was aware that she struggled with her relationship with her father, and that was something that was very troubling for me and I felt rather hopeless on how to fix that. So, as I read her journals, that really was reinforced.

Diane Atwood: Could you see sort of the seeds planted of her going down the path she did?

Ann Cookson: I believe I probably could see that. I saw too, that she was really struggling with her self-esteem and finding a purpose. She longed to be closer to her dad and so, I observed all of these troubling behaviors and her sadness and I did the best I could to respond to them. to give her some sort of activities that would bring her joy, give her a purpose.

Diane Atwood: In your book, you mentioned that something happened, and did she have surgery? I can't remember what it was when she was given the prescription for Oxycontin or Oxycodone.

Ann Cookson: Yes. Yes. She did have surgery. She had actually major surgery and the aftermath of that was that she was recovering from that and she did have pain, so they obviously gave her pain medication. But at that time, it really wasn't monitored, and they didn't ask us family questions. You know, if there was a family history of addiction or alcoholism involved or anything like that, they didn't ask those questions and with her being 18, she was of age at this point so, and she wasn't living with me then, although she had come home to recover.

Diane Atwood: So, she had major surgery when she was 18 and to help manage pain after the surgery, she was given a prescription. Do you think that that is what triggered her substance use?

Ann Cookson: I think it was the beginning of triggering it because it wasn't long before she had another surgery, too and I think by then she had developed an addiction.

Diane Atwood: And how did it unfold after that? Could you see the signs that she was becoming addicted to the pain medication and then did other substances sort of come into the picture that you were aware of?

Ann Cookson: I didn't really know the signs for addiction at the time, I knew that there were some unusual behaviors that I didn't fully understand. Her sleeping habits were changing. She was in and out of the household and when she was home, she would leave for hours at a time and then come back. Her behaviors became erratic. She came more moody. Her eating habits were changing and at some point, during the, all of this this slowly evolved, I started missing spoons in the house and her father would comment, where are the spoons, you know, and, and I said, well, I don't know. It never occurred to me that that was a sign, that there was a problem. As I have researched and become more aware of some of the signs to look for, for someone who's struggled with addiction and that's one of the things there'll be spoons missing.

Diane Atwood: At some point along the way, you did recognize she had an issue, and then what was heartbreaking to me is that you tried to find help for her and it sounds like there was one roadblock after another. Can you talk about what some of the, the roadblocks and the issues were?

Ann Cookson: Well, Sarah really was interested in getting help. She did want help, but she was so fearful and distrustful and we found someone, a police officer in Wiscasset, who he had a program there that was supposed to help those who are struggling with addiction and it was supposedly non-judgmental, but it was connected to the police and Sarah did not trust the and she wouldn't become involved with that, even though we did go down and speak with him and I actually spoke with a counselor there. She was looking into something else and sort of other treatments and modalities and I was respectful of that. I knew she wanted to get better, but it didn't happen.

Diane Atwood: You were in a real bind because she was of age.

Ann Cookson: Yes.

Diane Atwood: So, she is an adult and she can make her own decisions. And you were her mother and so mothers step in and try to do whatever they can to help their children. I just think that it's heartbreaking and so frustrating to read about the different things that you

tried to do and how, because of insurance issues, doors closed, because she maybe didn't want to hear it from you that closed a door. How did you even cope during all of that?

Ann Cookson: I have no idea how I coped. I was in crisis mode and I knew that I needed to be strong through this and do what I could. I wanted to save her life.

Diane Atwood: You wrote about getting a prescription for Narcan and so, tell us what Narcan is and what pushed you to that point.

Ann Cookson: Sarah had already overdosed once. She had shared with me in September that she had overdosed somewhere else and was hospitalized briefly for treatment. So, I spoke with my personal physician and shared with her what was going on and she said, yes, I think that it's time for you to have that in the home, just in case. This was a nasal; it was applied nasally. And so, I did pick up the prescription, but it's interesting that I still was in denial, you know, so I didn't look at the instructions on the prescription or how to utilize it or use it. I just put it away in the file cabinet and just kind of was in the back of my mind thinking, oh, I'll never need it. I'll never need to use that.

Diane Atwood: And did you try to use it when you found her?

Ann Cookson: It was downstairs at the time I found her; she was upstairs in her room. So, I did, I went down to get it, but she had been unconscious for too long. She was already blue, and she was face down so I couldn't, I didn't have the strength to turn her over, to use the Narcan on her. And by then her father had already called nine one one and at that point they were arriving because they were very, they were only five minutes away.

Diane Atwood: All right. Well, since we're, we're there, let's talk about what happened. Maybe talk about what happened during that week of her life. Were there special stressors that happened ?

Ann Cookson: She lost her boyfriend in September. So this is going further back rather than this week. So during that time period between September and December, she was really struggling with the loss of her boyfriend. And he actually had OD'd in our driveway in the middle of the night and we didn't know that, you know, I never heard anything and that's when she came home it was in September after this all happened. She was receiving communications from his family and they were threatening her. And she even had death threats.

Diane Atwood: Because they were blaming her for his death?

Ann Cookson: They were blaming her, and they told her that she's the one who should have died rather than him, that it was her fault. So, she was carrying that guilt with her and that grief and sadness and that's what she said one night when she OD'd the first time in our home. I'm just so sad. She said that over and over again. So, two weeks later, she OD'd for the final time.

Diane Atwood: How many times did she overdose?

Ann Cookson: In my home twice.

Diane Atwood: So, after she moved back home in September, it happened?

Ann Cookson: Yes.

Diane Atwood: How did you deal with that incident?

Ann Cookson: I called crisis, but she wouldn't go to the hospital and she wouldn't allow anyone to come to help her.

Diane Atwood: So explain to us, how do you know, this may sound like a stupid question, but how do you know when somebody's OD'd?

Ann Cookson: I was hearing very labored, heavy breathing coming from her room and it was like she was kind of gasping for air. So, I went into her room and she appeared to be sleeping, but she was kind of slumping in her chair at her desk. And so, I knew something was very wrong and I saw the paraphernalia. I saw there was a spoon there, there was a hypodermic needle there all the paraphernalia. So, I just freaked out. I mean, I just, I lost it. We woke her up, we revived her and she started vomiting and she was getting rid of all of the drug from her system, but it took several hours and she was very, very sick.

Diane Atwood: How many different substances was she using? Was it just heroin by then?

Ann Cookson: No, I think she was using other substances as well, but this heroin was mixed with fentanyl and that's what actually killed her.

Diane Atwood: She purchased some heroin and so she figured she was getting pure heroin?

Ann Cookson: I'm sure that's what she thought she was getting.

Diane Atwood: Where would she get the money to pay for this? Was she working?

Ann Cookson: She was working off and on. Yes. But then again, I don't know exactly where she got all of her money to do it. You know, there were times when she asked for \$20 for gas or \$10 for this or even \$5 for that, and I would give to her to help her with her gas or whatnot. So, I'm sure that many times that little bit of money that I would give her probably did go for drugs. So, I got to a point when I realized she was actually struggling with addiction, I wouldn't give her any more money. I would put money in her tank, follow her to the gas station or if she was hungry, I'd make sure she had food, you know, and I'd have her come home and I'd feed her, but I stopped giving her money.

Diane Atwood: Was she angry?

Ann Cookson: No, she wasn't angry. She was really sad when she realized that I knew, there was a lot of shame attached to this and she wasn't happy who she was. This wasn't who she was. It was the drug that had changed her from someone very different from who Sarah was when she was younger.

Diane Atwood: Did she ever you think make a serious attempt to get clean?

Ann Cookson: Well, you know, one thing I'd like to address is the stigma attached to substance use disorder. And we're trying really hard not to use the word clean because that refers to the point that they're dirty and people who are struggling with substance use disorder are not dirty. No, they have an illness, whether it's heart disease or diabetes, this is an illness this is a brain disease. And so, I think it's really important for us to be aware of that and try really hard to show compassion toward them and recognize they're not dirty.

Diane Atwood: So, I didn't know that, and I apologize. That's a term that I've used it, I've heard a million times. So, what is the proper term?

Ann Cookson: The proper term is in recovery.

Diane Atwood: Okay and that's something that you yourself had to learn probably?

Ann Cookson: Yes, yes, and you know, I think I talked about that a little bit in my book about my previous thoughts on addiction, which were really very narrow. At the time I was thinking it was a moral affliction, you know, that people choose to use drugs and it's because they have a definite moral issue. So, I've come to realize that that really is not the case. Once you use a drug especially heroin, you no longer have a choice. For some people, it can affect you that quickly. And it changes the chemicals within your brain. So that's why scientists have discovered that this is a brain disease, a brain illness. That was such an eye-opener for me to realize that Sarah wasn't, she didn't like who she was, and she was so shamed by who she was and once she used, she no longer had that choice.

Diane Atwood: How does one get healthy when they're addicted to drugs?

Ann Cookson: That's a good question because it's such a complicated illness, a disease, and usually someone who's struggling with substance use disorder is almost always involved with mental health issues and challenges. It's usually involved with trauma as well. So, you have to use, there are multiple modalities of treatment that are offered for someone who is struggling with substance use disorder. The first step really is for them to want to become healthy. It's a mindset, but once that's the case, you have to get them into appropriate treatment and when I say appropriate, I mean long-term treatment. It's really mental health treatment as well as avoiding the triggers that will cause a person to fall back into using again. It's not easy. It's very, very challenging.

Diane Atwood: That last day she had OD'd just two weeks before. You must have been walking on shards of glass worrying.

Ann Cookson: I was. I would wake up in the middle of the night and check to make sure she was breathing.

Diane Atwood: Wow. I just, I can't even imagine the level of stress that you were under and you have three other children? You have a family, your husband, were you all in this together trying to help her, or did you find that it became a little bit fragmented?

Ann Cookson: My son and my oldest daughter they had their own families, they were busy with their own lives. They realized that Sarah was struggling, but they weren't involved in these final months. However, her sister Heather was, and Heather was terrified. she actually came and stayed with us with Sarah two or three weeks before her final overdose, just to spend time with her sister and monitor her behavior and to try to reconnect with her. And Heather had five children of her own. She was hoping that maybe she could make a difference, you know? So, she stayed with us for a week and then she, she had to go home and there was this ... sorry.

Diane Atwood: That's okay. The pain never goes away, does it?

Ann Cookson: Well, okay. I'm going to breathe... I didn't think I was going to do this... Well, I'm still need to breathe.

Diane Atwood: Take whatever time you need.

Ann Cookson: I think as we talk more and more about it the memories come back more strongly, but yeah, this was really hard on her sister Heather, after Sarah died. She struggled for quite a long time, but she's doing well now.

Diane Atwood: Good. Sarah died the week after Heather left?

Ann Cookson: It was two weeks, I think.

Diane Atwood: So, you're on high alert all of this time and she comes home one day, you're cooking supper. It's kind of a normal routine. She goes up to her room and you called her to supper, and she didn't respond.

Ann Cookson: Yes.

Diane Atwood: So, what happened is that the one thing that you had been worrying and worrying and worrying and worrying about it happened and your world came crashing down. At what point did you decide I need to write about this.

Ann Cookson: Oh my. A couple of weeks after she passed, I left for California. I went to visit my sister, and this was something interestingly was already prearranged cause my sister was having surgery and she needed my help. So, plane ticket was already bought. So, I took Sarah's journals with me and while there I started reading them and that's when the seed for writing this book really was planted when I was in California.

Diane Atwood: As I mentioned in the introduction, it's a pretty raw book. You don't hold back on a lot of things. Like you say, it's called *Secrets*. You share some family secrets to bring them out into the open. Was the family thrilled that you managed to do that? Or did they wish you hadn't?

Ann Cookson: I'm sure they wish I hadn't. I know that my husband was definitely not thrilled. He would quiz me while writing the book what I was writing about, and I wouldn't really share too much with him because it was still too raw, and I knew that he probably would not be happy with what I was writing

Diane Atwood: Because you wrote about him and the relationship he had with Sarah?

Ann Cookson: Yes.

Diane Atwood: Have, they all read the book?

Ann Cookson: No. I haven't even read the book. Not as a reader.

Diane Atwood: Oh, my goodness.

Ann Cookson: My son read the book. Heather has not read the book. Sherry did start to read the book, but it was just too painful. It triggered her. So, she had to stop.

Diane Atwood: Did all of this, this experience with losing Sarah, with writing the book, did it change the family? Did it bring you closer together? Did it fracture your family? How did that all play out?

Ann Cookson: Well, it brought Heather and her family closer to us because I actually brought them back home once I came back to California, once I realized the state she was in. And so, we healed, we took that year to gather, to heal together, and that was really a blessing in disguise and I'm very thankful for that. It did add a lot of stress to our family though, because there were so many people in our small home. As far as my husband is concerned, I'm no longer with him. I left him a year after I finished writing the book. With Donny, he has read the book and he was very supportive of me after I'd written the book and even while I was writing the book.

Diane Atwood: And this is your son?

Ann Cookson: My son, he actually, after the book was written, he read the book and then he started talking about the book to coworkers. He worked for an agency that was involved with providing home supports for people with mental health challenges. And he would share it with his friends as well. And he actually went with me to a book signing and to an event. He was very supportive. Even though, as he read the book, there are parts of the book I would say didn't quite agree with but yet he still supported me because he knew that was my way of expressing my emotions and processing the whole event. He recognized that and I'll always appreciate that.

Diane Atwood: Would you say you're a different person than you were four and a half years ago?

Ann Cookson: Oh, absolutely. Very much different.

Diane Atwood: How so?

Ann Cookson: Oh, I feel stronger. I feel that I've found my voice. Actually, by leaving my husband, it allowed me even that time, I desperately needed to find who I really wanted to be. And I grew stronger that way. It was all a process that just unfolded gradually. I have found an inner peace and acceptance of what's happened, how it unfolded, who I want to be, who I want to become as a person.

Diane Atwood: So, who are you?

Ann Cookson: Who am I? Oh, goodness, I'm not sure how to respond to that question. I'm just me. I've learned to be happy again, you know, it's okay to smile. You go through the grieving process and you'll always grieve, it's always going to be there, but I always knew that my daughter wouldn't want me to overly grieve for her because she was such a loving person. And because she loved me, I knew that she would want me to be happy again, you know, to find my way.

Diane Atwood: And does her spirit still hover?

Ann Cookson: I do feel her sometimes, yes.

Diane Atwood: She's probably proud of you.

Ann Cookson: Well, that's what my other children say, because they say they're proud of me too.

Diane Atwood: That's lovely.

Ann Cookson: It is really lovely, and I'd like to say too that with Sherry I'm so proud of her. She has achieved so much. Despite struggling with losing her sister, she's achieved her master's degree. And she's now an LCPC. She's just completed a training in trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy. So, she will be focusing on youth up to the age of 21 who have experienced trauma and who are actually in recovery. And Heather is now a businesswoman and she has recently achieved her real estate license. We're all evolving and I'm on friendly terms with my husband. We speak often.

Diane Atwood: Well, it sounds like, you know, we all can learn something can't we? What is it that you would like people to walk away with either after this interview or after they read your book?

Ann Cookson: I hope that my readers will recognize that addiction is a very complicated issue. I'm hoping that as they read the book, they will recognize the process of grief and how complicated grief can be as well. I think we need to respect ourselves enough to, to allow ourselves to grieve, you know, we need to allow ourselves to feel and to move through this process because it is a process. It takes time and there's no timeframe to grieving, and we all do it in our own way. And I hope that as I wrote the book, I showed that that was the case. It's okay to grieve. We don't need to run away from it. We need to face it, head on and let those waves just wash over you. Because the waves go away.

Diane Atwood: They come and go don't they?

Ann Cookson: They do. Yes.

Diane Atwood: So, in talking about how complicated grief is, did writing this all down and then publishing a book, help you to move through your stages of grief?

Ann Cookson: I think it definitely did help me move through the stages of grief. I also received some grief therapy too, which was helpful. I think it's important for us to purge all these feelings and writing helped me to do that, to actually process everything. Actually, I think I did it rather chronologically and that was important for me to start the healing process. When I say start the healing process, that's exactly what I mean. It takes time. Writing that book was a long time for me. That was a year of writing and it was like, I was so driven, and I was writing day and night, and when I wasn't writing, I was thinking. I'd wake up in the middle of the night with all these thoughts, thinking, okay, this is how I should formulate this or whatnot. But it helped me to be present in the moment and to be focused. And these are all so important in order to walk yourself through the process of grief. You have to be present and you have to feel, you have to allow yourself to feel because if you run away from those feelings, you're never going to really fully heal.

Diane Atwood: Hmm. This book that you're working on now with your friend, *You Are Not Alone*, is that going to be mostly about other people's stories?

Ann Cookson: It's going to be about other people's stories, but it's going to be much more than that. We're going to be talking about the process of grief. There'll be a chapter on grief. We're still formulating the outline for the book, so it's not written in stone yet, but we want to talk about harm reduction. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that.

Diane Atwood: Why don't you explain it.

Ann Cookson: Well, in Portugal, they look at addiction much differently over there, as well as actually in Oregon, they passed a new bill in Oregon about dealing compassionately with those who struggle with substance use disorder and looking at ways to prevent overdose. It's conflictual because it can involve in safe needle exchange. It can involve in just providing a safe place for someone to use so that it would prevent an overdose. They're going to be with people who will monitor them to make sure that they are safe. But meanwhile, when they are ready, they're going to offer them treatment and open up those doors for opportunities to get healthy. It's already been proven to lessen overdose. And it's been proven through other models. They're treating these people with compassion rather than judgment. They're trying to remove the stigma attached to addiction and it's inclusive. They're providing communities for these people to live and work and offering all these other opportunities so that they can be treated appropriately, whether it's for their mental health or feeling like people care about them. And when you struggle with substance use disorder, you struggle with shame and judgment and stigma. So, by addressing all of these issues and recognizing how complicated it is, harm reduction, I think, is a viable option in order to improve the outcomes for people who are struggling.

Diane Atwood: Instead of shutting doors, like what happened with you and your family it's opening doors.

Ann Cookson: Yes. And that's why I'm hoping that by writing this book, Sarah's death isn't for nothing. I'm hoping that this is opening a whole wide range of doors. And by presenting more awareness of this issue and the truth about this issue, people can become better informed and then when you're better informed, they will look at this much more differently, and there'll be less stigma.

Diane Atwood: Well, kudos to you for doing this for doing all that you're doing, for being able to move through your own personal grief and to turn it into something as positive as all of the things that you're doing, not just your book *Secrets*, but the groups, writing the second book.

Ann Cookson: Thank you. I'm hopeful.

Diane Atwood: Any other last words of wisdom before we say goodbye?

Ann Cookson: Oh goodness. I think it's so important that we learn acceptance. We all struggle, I think. We have this inner child within us and this inner child often feels fear, the fear of being judged, so I think it's important for us to recognize this inner child within and to learn to accept ourselves for who we are, not how someone else wants us to be. And this is part of the whole self-discovery evolving when you finally discover that it's okay. You've been through a lot as that inner child, but it's okay. Things will be all right, because you are facing your situation and you're doing the best you can to move forward through it. I know that I'm always going to grieve Sarah in the loss of her, but through her loss, I've discovered how important it is to be grateful for what we have rather than focusing on what we don't have. And I've learned the importance of showing compassion and empathy. I think these are extremely important things that we need to show and they're greatly lacking in the world around us. I learned if we want to be noticed, we need to make a little bit of noise. You don't get anything accomplished if you stay silent. And that's why I wrote the book. I'm not staying silent, not anymore. I'm using my voice. I think it's very important. That's how we'll invoke change.

Diane Atwood: Well, I think you are doing that. You are definitely doing that. Bravely doing that.

Ann Cookson: Well, I hope so because it took a lot of anger at first. I had to process that anger somewhere else, you know.

Diane Atwood: Anger and sadness, probably blame, shame, a lot of negative emotions that you must have been feeling, and yet you turned them into action in a positive way,

Ann Cookson: Still trying

Diane Atwood: Well, good for you. And thank you for being willing to come here and talk about it all out loud. I know that as a writer myself, it's easier to be in kind of your own little world writing away. But then to actually use your spoken voice to express yourself, it's, it's different. It's challenging.

Ann Cookson: It's very challenging. Yes.

Diane Atwood: Well, you've been a wonderful guest.

Ann Cookson: Well, thank you very much for having me. I'm very appreciative of that.

Diane Atwood: You have been listening to the *Catching Health* podcast. I'm Diane Atwood, host and producer. And I've been talking with Ann Cookson, author of *Secrets: A Story of Addiction, Grief, and Healing*. For more information about *Secrets* and Ann's other projects go to mainlywriting.com and mainly is spelled M A I N E L Y. And if you'd like to talk with Ann directly, you can send her an email. Her address is Ann with no E, it's ann@mainlywriting.com. And if you would like to read my blog *Catching Health*, listen to more episodes of the *Catching Health* podcast and find a transcript of my conversation with Ann, go to catchinghealth.com. That's it for now stay well. And I hope you have a great day.