

*(This submission was sent to me by a Catholic parent desperate to stop others making the same mistake. The account is very real and the effects on those concerned are ongoing. I have left it in the original format and ask that you take the time to read it through. This is a harrowing account that I am certain is being repeated in countless homes...)*

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*“Father...I think I’ve killed my son!”* I blurted suddenly in the Confessional, MY world in tatters.

Shock, horror – surely this is not true. Where is he going with this? Unfortunately, the statement is very true, I have killed my son. Don’t judge me though. I am a ‘very good’ and ‘very model’ example of Catholic teachings and virtues – I try hard and I read lots of spiritual books. I attend Mass most Sundays, I go to Confession regularly and I ensure my children do the same. My wife and I are committed to keeping them in a safe environment and teaching them of the dangers in the world. In fact...it is really difficult to see how I can honestly be held to account – it’s not like I can watch them all the time.

Some of you will switch off or flick to the next page at this point because you can already see the ‘trademark’ slip into diatribes against the modernist world and evils of internet and like technology. If that is the case, I wish you all my prayers and hope you don’t find yourself facing the same dilemma I did just a few days ago...or worse. Melodrama, they say, is the easiest way to turn off your intelligent and well-informed audience. However, despite the tabloids assuring us otherwise, real life, Catholic or not, is exactly that...one very big stage full of slips and tragedies for the unwary or the disinterested.

So how did I kill my son, you remind me with a slight degree of irritation – after all, your time is important to you. Did I reverse the car inadvertently into him after hearing he had missed the school bus? Was it that broken window that caused me to snap...or maybe just a bad day at the office? NO, NO, NO! I killed him in the worst possible way, I failed him in my duties as a father and as a Catholic. I failed him as a mentor and as an example and all because I let myself ‘die’ first.

Now, you are confused – or am I insulting your intelligence, because we should all know where this is going. So, how did he die?

It is really sad to learn he has not been missed. There was no funeral, no well meant words of sympathy or prayers for his soul. Just nothing – almost as though he was still here, still ‘with us’, but of course he isn’t. He can’t be and my family have to accept that? I know...more amateur ploys to keep you reading, you are thinking – nobody really died you assure yourselves!

It’s difficult, when you have been blessed with children, to recognise you need to fight every step of the way to remain faithful to God to protect them. You try to be charitable, patient and trust them. But you know what really hurts? When every message you get is centred on mercy and charity and never-ending debates on which Catholic is following the right path. I don’t think any teachings in recent years properly opened my eyes to the danger that would take my son. I don’t blame the church, I don’t even blame the cause – I blame myself...and rightly so.

Sure, the school had clear policies and safeguards and I trusted them – who wouldn’t? It was a good school and, just to be sure, my wife made a point of keeping her eye out for any ‘issues’. Neither of us were naïve or negligent, we talked to our children each day (well my wife did...but that’s the same, isn’t it?). They were aware of the types of sin that exist and how to invoke Our Lady for protection...and never to forget their Guardian Angels. When they returned home we showed genuine interest and asked if anything was wrong. (Well, I did when I wasn’t busy at work or ‘de-stressing’ from work – but that’s not my fault).

Of course, as they grew in ‘wisdom’ and ‘maturity’ we let them own phones and laptops...because they could be trusted. We had raised them and how could they possibly be led astray – they were honest ‘traditional’ Catholic children. They never lied to us – well, not serious lies. My son played sport, had a host of friends, debated all the time about the troubles in the church, assured me he was okay about puberty and that ‘stuff’. (That saved me some

difficult chats, I thought as I went back to my computer). My wife on the other hand was a lot more meticulous and I thought 'over bearing' at times. Some of those talks she used to give to the girls...

It was my wife who noticed he had become sullen and withdrawn just after he turned fourteen. I was busy (with Football Manager) at the time and barely heard a word she said. 'Puberty' I told her sagely, still working out why my game wasn't updating as it should. (After all I do work long hours and I can't be expected to do everything). It was only when we happened to clash over the amount of time that he spent on his phone that I recognised the problem. 'Alpha Male' syndrome I told my wife with a satisfied nod. I didn't mention that he had laughed at me when confronted and had called me a hypocrite – cheeky 'so and so'. Anyway...problem solved.

Anyone still reading?

He actually died over a 6-month period, from what we could gather from friends (well those that felt secure enough to talk about 'it'). Even I eventually realised there was a problem, but I was too late to help because I had died 10 years earlier...and NOBODY knew that. Though my wife suspected and prayed constantly for help...you see, she had been alone through most our marriage. I hadn't realised that my wife blamed herself for my irritability, my inability to talk on anything other than the superficial matters – my lack of emotional intimacy. I hadn't even realised that she was so close to breakdown that she had packed her bags twice determined to take herself and the children away from 'this' loveless marriage! But that's for another confession.

Attendance at Mass can be such joy when you are newly converted or in a real state of Grace...but when you are in a constant state of denial and self-deceit, it becomes something to fear...to loathe. I could give all sorts of excuses to my wife on why we shouldn't attend Mass and thereby avoid that dreaded confessional queue. I would even 'accidentally' drink coffee an hour before Mass thinking she was too dim to recognise the patterns. I had reached the point where I had run out of priests who didn't know me...and my temptations. The 'half-truths' no longer worked in confession and I was too scared and humiliated to really trust in God. My life had become a sacrilege and I was unwilling to make that choice that every addict must face.

A man named Carnes once wrote, 'A moment comes for every addict.'. Well that moment certainly came for me...or more importantly, my wife.

One morning I was downstairs, early (probably 3am), flicking through 'that' never-ending progression of pornography sites – each click of the mouse just a little more disturbing than the last. My recent Act of Contrition discarded as easily as unwanted advertising through the mailbox. Despite all the well-worn and tired professions to 'amend my life', I found myself sinning again, it was that easy. But how hard the despair and shame hit when that brief thrill extinguished itself...how quickly I would throw myself to my knees resolute that 'never again...'. Only to find myself back in front of those images a day later ensnared in a never-ending cycle of destruction and self-loathing.

My wife had heard me creep downstairs, but this time did not turn over and 'pretend' nothing was wrong. This time she found the strength to face her fears and quietly follow me, and wait and watch from the shadows of the hallway. Watch as her husband of 20 years abused her marriage and her love and her trust – over some graphic, make believe images of degradation and filth. I broke her heart and our marriage in that moment of weakness and she never even let me know she had been present. You see, she couldn't face me at that moment, she didn't recognise the animal in front of the computer. Instead, she held back her tears and returned to bed still blaming her own inadequacy and lack of strength for the death of her husband...and children's father!

So, how am I still writing and why is my son still alive...yet dead – like me? He found my internet browsing history accidentally, and because friends at school had mentioned this 'stuff', he had a peek. He probably knew it was wrong, but you see, those images are more poisonous to some of us than others. Like many vices of the senses, they affect each of us differently. Unfortunately, for my son, he couldn't escape the vile images; no amount of prayers stopped his spiralling addiction to see more. I think he started to kill a few of his friends as well because he had images on his phone too...

And that's what it took for me to make that decision to change. You see, I could make endless excuses where my own spiritual life was concerned but when faced with the realisation that your own selfishness and sin were going to send your son to Hell, well that's different Perhaps that's God's intervention – a lifeline he sent us both. All He needed was for me to grasp it and trust He could hold my weight.

So, I sat with my son and told him of my life of lies and pornography. I told him I would get help for my addiction, that there was hope and a positive way forward. I showed him my love by sharing my own weakness; knowing the terrors I faced were the same as his. I knew what he was feeling, and I wanted him to understand he need not face this alone. For the first time in my entire parenting history, I sat and listened to him; I cried with him and I asked for his forgiveness. I told him I loved him; I told him it was not his fault AND I told him God will always love and forgive him...and me. This is a beginning and will be as hard as any job I have been 'paid' to do. He knows he can't do this alone and he knows that I can't either. You see – we are both addicts but with a firm will and submission to God there is a future.

We both attended Confession and after some hard admissions we left the box, alive again. Hopefully he will recognise my mistakes and learn from them...I think he will be a great father. As for me, thankfully and by the Grace of God, my wife told me of her life living with a sinner. She forgave the sinner, but our marriage has a long way to go before she can truly forgive me. You see, I trampled all over her and left her broken – that can't be fixed overnight. One day however, she promises me, we can be whole again. I suppose that is what charity and hope provide in a Catholic marriage and for the first time in my life I feel happy; I really put my trust in God.

But I will never forget I am 'one click' away from death...always!

DEO GRATIAS