

PARENT'S CORNER



The following stories are part of a new feature to offer parents an opportunity to tell us about their experiences in raising children with FAS or FAE. These compelling stories will be published with very few editing changes. We hope you enjoy Parent's Corner as much as we do and encourage your submissions. Please send to: Iceberg, Parent's Corner, P.O. Box 95597, Seattle, WA 98145-2597

A Grandmother's Story

by Joan Ashford-Martin
Hamilton, New Zealand

I would like to introduce you to my Viola, my sparkling fun-filled Fetal Alcohol Syndrome grand-daughter. She is the natural child of my daughter Melody who is alcohol and drug addicted. Melody is also I suspect, an FAS child as my own drinking had begun to escalate at the time of Melody's conception.

Viola has very little facial affect, except for a tendency to look different in a subtle way. She is however, long and skinny and already maturing physically at the tender age of nine. Her behaviour however is textbook (if there is one).

Viola was born drunk. I knew this, but my doctor, a very learned chap of some 65 years, thought I was mad to think so. I got through the first few months by allowing her as much of a patent medicine (once available here for windy babies) as

she needed, gradually withdrawing it until I had a sober child on my hands. At this point I knew nothing of the FAS diagnosis and was aware only that I had a problem.

Careful diet was one of my discoveries and so I combined this with full-on 24-hour parenting and thought I had the problem well in hand and was even allowing myself a pat on the back from time to time.

The advent of preschool and the amount of input there showed me there was more fun to come. At this time I obtained a FAS diagnosis from the Child Development People here, so I had a little more to work with, but no help.

I became a haunter of libraries and in the course of doing that I began to gather information and apply it to my parenting of Viola.

School is not the nightmare it used to be. She no longer climbs cupboards and throws things at the teacher, and on the other hand they have learned not to over-load her and have become very supportive of us both.

Sadly, Viola's ability to fit the norm is just not there. She is the typical child that everyone knows but everyone is very wary of.

The terrible loneliness of this child is the thing I find the hardest to cope with and perhaps is the worst part of the FAS legacy. I can live with the behavior ups and downs. I can even handle her casual rejection of me when a new avenue occasionally presents itself. Almost impossible to cope with however, is the sheer gut-wrenching emotion that this child's utter isolation from her peers produces. It gets harder to cope with every day and has me often clinging to my own sobriety by the oft-quoted fingernails.

I myself come from a long and inglorious line of alcohol abusers. I can trace alcohol abuse in my own family back to the 17th Century. I have three children with FAE in my own opinion. They are the last three of a family of eight. We are now working together as a family to find out just where we can work to build skills that don't overload but instead enhance their own abilities.

My activity apart from family reconstruction, is being part of a newly formed FAS awareness group. The almost total lack of real information in this part of the world is scary.

Along with a friend who is battling to obtain a FAS diagnosis for her very obviously affected grand-daughter, we are visiting schools, women's groups, doctors and anyone who will listen. We have put together all the information we have and use it along with personal experience to push our message.

Our information is very limited so when we run up against well-read opposition we are often struggling to be convincing. I have big problems with the disbelieving attitude as it makes me feel so helpless.

Alcohol abuse is rife in our little country but it seems as though we have a national blindness to it. We are slowly coming to grips with alcohol related traffic accidents but acceptance of FAS is still a long way off.

We would like to ask your readers for any back issues they can spare us to enable us to keep ourselves armed with updated facts.

Think of us here at the bottom of the world as we carry on our fight.



VIOLA, 8-YEARS OLD