

ADDICTION

SUMMIT



9 Actions to Battle Your Beast

Guest: Valerie Silveira

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Dr. Paul Thomas: Welcome to this edition of The Addiction Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Paul. It's my privilege and pleasure to introduce to you Valerie Silveira. She is an award-winning author—the book, *Still Standing After All the Tears*—an international speaker, and a beast slayer. I like to refer to her as one of my ferocious moms, my hero moms. What you've gone through and what you've been doing for the world is just impressive and amazing. Thank you for being on our summit today.

Valerie Silveira: Oh, thank you so much. It's my pleasure. And it's truly an honor. Thank you.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I was visiting your website. Someone referred me to rockinredhead.com, which took me to your website. I thought that was pretty cool because I see you do have red hair. And you invite others. It says, "I'm still standing. Become an insider. Helps women overcome shame, guilt, and fear so they can live with hope, happiness, and peace." What an amazing mission you have. Thank you very much for bringing this to the world. I am just thrilled that we get to share your knowledge, wisdom, and experience with our viewers.

I wonder, Valerie, if you might start off with just tell us your story. You went through some real tragedy. And I'm sure that journey from there to where you are today is part of why you have such a powerful message.

Valerie Silveira: Well, it's truly the whole reason that I have a powerful message. It's kind of interesting. I call it life's 2x4. You're going along through life, and you have these hopes and dreams and expectations and plans. And then life just sort of whacks you upside the head with a 2x4. And that's happened to all sorts of people for lots of different reasons.

For me it was just a real shocker because my daughter, Jamie... and in my first three books I called her Jordan. And I did that just out of respect for her story because I thought one day she would tell her story. And in a little bit I'll kind of explain how in a way she is telling her story now.

So at the age of 15 she just started going sideways. And this is a very common story, right. This is not the first time you're hearing this I'm sure. And what was so devastating about it and what is so devastating for so many parents is she was the girl who had everything. She was so talented and funny and left brain, right brain. She was artistic. And she could sing and paint and draw. Yet she was the quickest person that I knew.

And it was kind of interesting because she sort of found this lifestyle at the age of 15 through a youth group of all things. So we thought we were doing all the right things. She was involved in youth group. She played select sports, had a great family, very close family. We lived in a really nice area. I'm from the Seattle area.

And so in any case, she started going sideways fast and hard at the age of 15. And there was a guy involved. And so we just didn't know what to do to stop this train. And we didn't have any indication that there was addiction because we didn't find anything. We didn't catch her. We didn't have that going on. You just had what you thought might be going on. We asked a million questions. We tried everything.

At the age of 18 this boyfriend, who turned out to be a gang member... and we didn't even live in Seattle. We lived across the lake in a totally different area. Shocking that she's going out with some guy who's in a gang. And he shot her. And it was an abdominal gunshot wound that entered... well, you're a doctor. It entered from the back, and it just missed her tailbone and her pelvic bones by just... and it missed her iliac vein by "an immeasurable distance," is what they said. So it went in and did all sorts of damage in her abdomen. And then it lodged itself in her abdominal wall.

So there we were in this emergency surgery and in this emergency situation speaking these words: “Jamie’s been shot,” and thinking, “How can I be saying this? This isn’t something I would say.”

So anyway, to make that story short, one of the nights I was lying in the hospital with her she said something. And she’d been very distant and everything. So she said something to me that she never said before and hadn’t said since. She just said, “Mommy, will you pray with me?” And I’m not one of these super duper praying out loud. But let me tell you what. I could make a Baptist preacher proud that night. I was praying my brains out because I thought, “This is it. This is her rock bottom. Somebody almost killed her. So this is going to be the moment.”

And so I learned shortly after that that I was going to have to put on my seatbelt and my shoulder harness because my ride on what I call the roller coaster from hell was about to get a lot worse.

And so over the next decade her life just spun further and further out of control. And here’s the thing. As her life spun further out of control, mine spiraled into darkness. And so this is really where my heart is because I know what’s happening to families because of addiction. They’re imploding. And so much of it has to do with the moms. And I’m not trying to discount any other role in the family, but moms are the heart and the soul of the family. They bring families together, keep them together. And now mom is crying in the middle of the [inaudible]. And I know that because that was me. We have a hard time getting out of bed and can’t function. Now all the shame and the guilt. And what did I do wrong? And how can I stop this train?

And so what happened for me is that probably about four years ago, I was standing in my kitchen. And I said to my husband something that shocked me when it came out of my mouth. I said, “I don’t want to be here anymore. It’s just too hard.” And I was never a depressed person. I’ve never been like that. And when I heard those words come out of my mouth, frankly it scared the heck out of me.

And so shortly after that I decided that I was going to stand up and fight. And I was going to fight to get my life back. I didn’t know what that would look like. I didn’t know how I would get there. I didn’t know what I would use to do it. I just knew that this could not be my legacy and that it wasn’t fair to my son, who was basically losing his sister. And now he’s watching his mom self destruct, all of this.

So I just made a decision. And I fell down a lot. And I didn't know where I was going. And it was a battle royale. But I also realized one thing. I was telling Jamie all the time to stand up and fight, that you can beat this beast. I believe you can beat your addiction beast. But I wasn't trying to battle my own. I wasn't doing anything this, what I call the codependent enabler beast that had literally taken over my life. And so that's when I did what I did and fought through it. And eventually I figured out these actions and what I did and wrote my first book and kind of went on this path.

I'm going to tell you something right now. This is one reason I'm so passionate about it. The best thing that families of addicts can do is to get themselves better, to get themselves stronger, to get themselves more courageous, because the bottom line is this: we don't know what is around the next corner. The other thing is that life happens. You don't just get this addiction thing, by the way. I mean it's not big enough. A week ago last Monday my mom was in life-saving surgery. Life happens. So self destruction is not noble. It's not something that proves anything to anybody.

So I was going along pretty well. And I call it the beast. And maybe we'll talk about that in a minute. But I felt like the beast was sort of at bay, my beast anyway. And I recognized him when he'd try to knock on my door. And I'd be like, "Whoa, you're not coming in." But on the morning of August 29, 2016, he didn't knock on my door. It was a home invasion. And it was the coroner's office coming to tell me that the night before my daughter had been murdered. And it's a murder that's unsolved today.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Sorry.

Valerie Silveira: Thank you so much. And she was shot. So imagine my world is spinning around going nobody gets shot once, at least not in the world that I live in. And now she's been shot twice. And this time it's fatal. So I really had to figure out, did the work I was doing work, because basically my hope was ripped from me because I prayed every single morning for a miracle. Every morning I would pray for a miracle for her. And then I would let her go. And I believed for that miracle. And I felt sort of like I got the cosmic middle finger or something. Basically God pulled the rug out from underneath me. But it was amazing how quickly... I still breathe every single day but in a way that's really important. I still miss her every day, I should say. But I was able to get up pretty quickly because I had become strong and courageous, this whole beast slaying thing that you're talking about.

Dr. Paul Thomas: So some transformation happened for you before you lost your daughter that puts you into a different mode. What do you tell moms and parents who are saying that they're just too exhausted; they've got nothing left?

Valerie Silveira: I hear that all the time.

Dr. Paul Thomas: You must've been there.

Valerie Silveira: Yes, I hear that all the time. I've been there. I know. This is what I believe. And I'm not going to take away the fact that you're exhausted. I don't have a magic pill. I don't have magic fairy dust, as I always say. Nobody's going to sprinkle magic fairy dust over you and suddenly life's going to be okay. You have got to get yourself up off of that mat. And the trick is just to keep getting back up.

But what I tell them is, "If you're so exhausted that you don't think you have what it takes to get yourself better, to work on your own recovery, it's because you've been fighting the wrong battle." So when we fight the wrong battle, of course we're exhausted, because it's an impossible battle.

And so one of the things that's been really helpful, big time helpful, to moms is when I tell them this or ask them this question: "If you had the ability to save your son or daughter from their addiction beast, wouldn't you have done it a long time ago?" So that's such an eye opener. It's so enlightening when they go, "Well, yeah, of course. I would've done it X number of years ago."

Dr. Paul Thomas: I would do anything I'm sure.

Valerie Silveira: You would do anything. That aha moment doesn't mean okay, I don't care anymore. That's not what it is. What it is is it's letting go of control and going back and getting your own life together because let me tell you, we had an event in Philadelphia in April. And we had a mom and a son that came and talked. And he was 16 months in recovery. And she stood up and told her story. And she didn't say that many nice things about him during the journey. And he stood right there. But he told us that what made the difference for him was when his mom got up.

Now I'm not saying that's going to happen for everybody. But when she stopped trying to control his life... because the other thing that we do, Paul, what we do to the people who are living with this addiction beast, what we're

doing to them is we're adding to this burden they're already carrying. We're adding our happiness to their shoulders. That's not fair.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Lack of happiness.

Valerie Silveira: Right. I mean that's not fair to do to anybody. Nobody should do that to anybody. But what we're basically saying is I can't be happy again. And we say these words even. My life is over. And it's terrible until you do this. So they're fighting this thing that is so darn hard to beat. On top of that they're responsible for us. It's not fair.

Dr. Paul Thomas: No. Wow, folks, are you hearing this message? I've raised nine kids.

Valerie Silveira: Whoa! God bless you.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Six are adopted. My wife and I will often say, "Wow, it seems like our happiness is sort of determined by the one who's suffering the most." And of course we're both in recovery ourselves from our own addictions.

And you're so right, Valerie. When you take the focus off of the other person and fix yourself, that's all we have. We really don't control people, places, or things. We'd like to. We think we can, especially parents, right. When they're little babies, we can control them better. But not when they're teenagers and they're making their own decisions. And that's so hard, I think, for people to do. So what do you think is holding moms back or parents back from getting into their own recovery?

Valerie Silveira: I think there are a couple of things. The first thing, really, I've discovered is permission. It's kind of interesting. It's as if somebody needs to come over and ordain them, "You have permission. You have permission to be happy." Because it's counterintuitive.

It's counterintuitive to anybody, if you love somebody, but certainly a mom, especially, because we're so wired to provide. I mean not to provide. That's the men. We're so wired to nurture. That's just the wiring of us. And so when we can't save them... and the other thing is, I remember holding my baby—and it doesn't matter, even when you adopt children you have that same thing—and you know you're going to keep them safe. And you know you're going to teach them everything. And you watch them. And this magnificent person starts to develop. And you have all of these dreams and expectations.

So first of all, your heart shattered into a million pieces. And then on top of that all your dreams and expectations are dashed. They're gone. And then people are saying to you, people who have never dealt with this—you don't want to listen to people who haven't dealt with this by the way because they don't understand—they're saying, "Well, you know what? That's her life. That's her problem." This is my child. It's part of my heart. What kind of a mother would go out and be happy when her daughter's sticking needles in her body? What kind of a mom would do that?

So this is the guilt. See, this is what I call the beast. So the beasts are these things that keep us from happiness and hope and faith and purpose and anything good in life, these things that whisper in our ear and scream in our face that you're a terrible mom and all this stuff, and what kind of a mom. And I actually wrote this kind of story in *Still Standing After All the Tears* about being down on the mat and having this beast on top of me with his claws around my throat. And every time I'd try to get up he'd say, "What kind of a mom would do that?"

Dr. Paul Thomas: Guilting you.

Valerie Silveira: "What kind of a human being would go off and have a life while you're child's self destructing? Wow, you can't even save your own child," all this stuff that we run through our minds. So what really helps them when I talk about this permission, literally just me saying, "You have permission. I did it. I went and got happy again. If another mom can go get happy again, maybe it's okay to get happy again." But the other thing I really think is when I connect the dots between what I said earlier, that what you're doing to your son or daughter isn't helping them. You're hurting them by not going out and getting happy.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Got you. Wow, folks, Valerie just gave you moms permission to take care of yourselves, right. You need to—I don't know if this is fair to say—but be a little selfish.

Valerie Silveira: It's not selfish.

Dr. Paul Thomas: It's not selfish.

Valerie Silveira: It's selfish when you self destruct. That's selfish.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Right, it's self care.

Valerie Silveira: Yes.

Dr. Paul Thomas: And you need to put that energy in the right place, which is taking care of you, because then you are there for your child who's hurting. Then you are that light of hope instead of wallowing in the mud with them.

Valerie Silveira: Yes. You prove to them that in your darkest days... because we're in our darkest days, too. We prove to them that it's possible. It's possible. When you're as low as you can, it's possible to stand up.

I want to tell you a little quick story that I find so important. And it's obviously not in *Still Standing After All the Tears*. I put it in *Misery, You Don't Get My Company*, which is the book I wrote after her death. But Jamie was estranged from me, not in a negative bad way because I had already forgiven her. I let her go with love.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Let her go with love, beautiful.

Valerie Silveira: Yeah, I let her walk her journey out, praying for miracles. She always knew I was here, that any time she wanted to fight I would stand with her. She knew all that. So it wasn't that. But when I stopped chasing her, she respected that I wanted to live a life free from chaos and drama and danger. And so she kind of went and did her thing.

And the last communication I had with her, which was just a few weeks before she died, she said to me something that's such a gift. She said, "Mommy"—she called me mommy even at 30 years old—she said, "Mommy, I'm so proud of you." I know that was a gift for me, but I really believe it was a message. It was a message that I'm supposed to convey to others because Jamie always loved me—

Dr. Paul Thomas: Goosebumps.

Valerie Silveira: But she never once told me she was proud of me. When I was crying in that walk-in closet or when I was guilt tripping her or blaming her or mad at her or putting my happiness on her shoulders, she was never proud of me. She was proud of me when I stood up and took my life back. And that's just such a gift that she left me with.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Folks, stand up. Take your life back. Follow Valerie's example here. And be a champion for yourself and for everything that's good in your life, right. Oh my goodness, this is so impressive. You really touched me with that.

I want to have you go back to this beast because I think so many of our viewers are in the midst of the battle with the beast. And I think if we get it defined for people, maybe they can recognize it for what it is.

Valerie Silveira: Yes. Well, it's kind of interesting. When I decided to call this, whatever they're dealing with, the beast, I thought—I have a definition in the book. I said, “Did I really have to explain it? Is this something people are going to understand?” Do you know not one person has ever really asked me, to go, “I don't really understand this concept,” because when you are living with it, oh, trust me. That name fits, the beast.

So basically the beast is anything that you're dealing with. It could be depression. It could be this codependency. It could be that you're stuck in enabling. You're unhappy, hopeless, helpless. Maybe it's as a result of a son or daughter living with an addiction beast like me. Maybe it's something from your childhood. I've had plenty of people read *Still Standing After All the Tears* that have nothing to do with addiction and say, “Wow, that resonated with me because I went through this.” It could be anything.

Where the beast comes from, and this goes into spiritual armor. And I'm not here to tell anybody what to believe spiritually because I think that's a very personal thing. But if we can kind of all use a common concept it's helpful. And so anything good comes from God. We weren't put on this earth to be in this situation. It wasn't like God said, “Hey, listen, this is going to be Valerie's path. And this is going to be really great for her.” There's free will. There are all sorts of things that are at play here.

So the opposite of all the good stuff comes from the Satan. That's my personal belief. Other people might believe something else. But that's mine. So anything that's not good is not coming from your source, not coming from your maker. This is something out to seek and destroy. And so I just call anything you're going through that is really keeping you from happiness, hope, faith, peace, joy, purpose, all of that, I just define as a beast. And it really seems that people get that quickly.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, that's powerful. I mean for some people it's the love of money and seeking fame and power. And then for so many it's the various addictions. So many people are struggling with food and all the substances of course. And then there are the behavioral addictions. It goes on and on and on, right, the misery that becomes our beast.

Valerie Silveira: Yeah, and the beast, it's almost like there's this whispering in your ear. It's our self-talk. It's that stuff that we just keep running through our brains. It's the lies that we keep allowing ourselves to believe about ourselves.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, and I think you talk about actual steps to overcome the beast. Or perhaps you could touch on sort of your advice to people, your approach.

Valerie Silveira: Okay. Yes, they're not really steps because it's not like you start one and then you go to the next one. Really they're actions, I call them. And I created this heart with a puzzle. And it really kind of depicts this notion of picking up the pieces of your shattered heart and putting them back together by taking these actions. But they're also great for everyday life, just this situation with my mom I told you about, where she had a very, very life-threatening situation and life-saving surgery. It was interesting to watch myself employ those same things in that situation. And I was able to be very peaceful and calm and different than I would have been in the past in that situation.

So basically the first one, action number one... I call them the nine actions to battle your beast. The rest of them aren't necessarily in a specific order, but action number one for sure. It's to decide to stand up and fight.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Make a decision.

Valerie Silveira: Yes, okay, because you might have really great faith, and you might have certain things going on in your life, but if you don't decide... and here's what important. It's not the initial decision that goes okay, I'm done; I'm over it, because guess what happened right after I made that decision? I got knocked flat on my you know what. So it's making that decision every single time that no matter what it takes, no matter how long it takes, and no matter what it takes, I am going to battle this beast. And I'm going to be standing over the top of it.

This is what I like to picture. Maybe women don't like this kind of a picture, but you know what? When you've been in a battle with the beast, I picture him down on the mat. And this time I'm standing over the top of him with my foot on his throat. So I'm standing over the top of my beast. If you don't first decide, you're not going to do anything else. So that's really what's so critical about that. And there's a lot to it. There's a lot to making that decision and

thinking about how fast time is going and all sorts of different things that are part of that.

Dr. Paul Thomas: In my book, *The Addiction Spectrum*, I have an image of three frogs on a log. I've said this in one or two other interviews. But it fits right here so well. They're sitting on this log. And one of them makes a decision to jump in. Then the question is, how many frogs are left on the log? Well, there are still three. That frog made a decision but didn't get into action.

Valerie Silveira: Oh, I love that.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, and what I'm hearing you say with this first process you're asking people to do is not only make a big decision, but act on it, not just spinning in your head well, I'm going to.

Valerie Silveira: No, I like to say it can't be like your New Year's resolution that lasts until about January 15th, right. This is a decision that you're all in.

Dr. Paul Thomas: All in, every day.

Valerie Silveira: And by the way, it's not a question of whether or not you're going to get knocked down. You're going to get knocked down, period, end of story. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger, okay. This is what's going to happen. The difference between people who are standing and people who are not is the decision to get back up.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Absolutely. So folks, you're in a battle, right, with this beast. And you're being called upon to make a decision to stand and fight for everything that's good, everything that is true and good within you. I interrupted you though. Carry on.

Valerie Silveira: Oh, no, I love it. It's like we're working with the same brain here. So action number two is to get on your spiritual armor. And this is when I say, listen, when you're in a battle with the beast, it may seem like it's bigger than you. And it probably is. But it's not too big for God. And so I like to call in the big gun. When I'm in a battle with the beast...

And let me tell you something about spiritual armor real quick too. Mine is dinged and dented and rusted. And I've had it on the floor. I've yelled at God. I'm really real about this whole thing. This isn't some person who's just said, "It's just been so fine because I've been at peace the whole time." No! Let me tell you, I have been furious with God. I've gone through all of it. But through

spiritual armor I have learned patience. Remember, I'm a redhead. [inaudible] I have learned patience. And it's not developed by wanting it. It's developed by going through stuff, right.

And really, I went on what I call a frantic quest for peace. I started to pray for peace more than anything else because I was so tired of living in chaos. But peace doesn't come to you. You go out and get that, too. I thought I would just pray and then he'd lift me up by the shirt collar or something, and angels would start singing, and all this perfect stuff would happen. Well it didn't work like that for me.

Dr. Paul Thomas: So there was action involved in getting your spiritual armor on.

Valerie Silveira: Yes, and keeping it on. Because think about it. Remember, I prayed every morning for a miracle. And I got answered with a daughter who was murdered. Here's what's interesting too. I prayed an occasional prayer because, see, I was trying to manage my prayers, okay. You pray the one you want the most, and then occasionally you throw in a little sprinkle.

So when I was feeling really low about Jamie, I would say, "If she's not going to make it, if she's not going to get clean, then take her home." So when that happened, of course I was going, "Don't you understand simple math, God? Hello." I was pretty upset about it. So what I mean about keeping it on is I was really tested when I prayed.

Dr. Paul Thomas: You were.

Valerie Silveira: And so that was that. And then action number three is to put on your oxygen mask. And let me tell you something. That's all about self care, the whole thing, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. But action number three's interesting because we all know about the oxygen mask and that on the airplane you're supposed to put it on your own face first so that you don't die before you have a chance to help anybody else.

Here's the interesting thing about parents of addicts. When I say, "Go figure out who's wearing your oxygen mask and get it back," well parents of addicts don't have to figure it out. They know exactly who's wearing it. And what I've discovered is oxygen, we're all given an oxygen mask that has our name on it. It really doesn't even work to place it on somebody else's face, maybe occasionally when we're just giving them a hand up, and we're standing with them. That's different than just saying, "Here, take it. See ya."

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, a little rescue breathing maybe, but you don't just give it to them.

Valerie Silveira: No. But that's what we do. And that's why we're self destructing. So action number three is to put on your oxygen mask.

Action number four is to build your circle of strength.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Can I take you back to three?

Valerie Silveira: Please do.

Dr. Paul Thomas: What does putting on your oxygen mask actually look like?

Valerie Silveira: It looks like exercising. It looks like eating right. It looks like getting good sleep. It looks like doing good things for yourself. Guess what it also looks like? It looks like laughter. I had a lady write to me maybe last week or maybe a couple of weeks ago. And she said something about I read your book. I only got to page whatever she said. And I have a whole new perspective. She said, "I laughed—no, I mean a real laugh—for the first time in I don't even remember how long."

Dr. Paul Thomas: That's beautiful. Yeah, in 12-step meetings there's laughter all the time. And these are folks who are dealing with the beast. But they're in this journey together. And you can laugh about some of your hardships.

Valerie Silveira: You should.

Dr. Paul Thomas: You should.

Valerie Silveira: Yeah, as a matter of fact, the beast hates it when we laugh, so we should just laugh all the time.

Dr. Paul Thomas: And God bless you for being able to do that, with everything you've been through. You're a miracle.

I want to tell everyone that this entire summit, I'd say at least 50 percent of the interviews, it's talking about this oxygen mask issue. It's talking about what you can do to take care of yourself because that's where the whole thing begins.

Carry on. I interrupted you. You were moving on to four.

Valerie Silveira: That's okay, though. You know what though? I want to say this, too. And this is something that I've got in my thinking cap for later. But I really know that these actions could help those dealing with addiction, too, because it's any kind of a beast. I love the fact that somebody who's with an addiction beast can stand up and say, "I'm going to battle this beast. I'm going to be standing over the top of it no matter what." I like that empowering thought process.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes.

Valerie Silveira: Or I'm going to put on my oxygen mask, because we think so often that those with addiction are selfish, self centered. And they are, okay. Let's face it. It is true. But they're not taking care of themselves. They don't have the oxygen mask on.

Dr. Paul Thomas: No, they're lost.

Valerie Silveira: [inaudible] helpful for anyone. So action number four's to build your circle of strength. And this one was really interesting. And I've had more people tell me that they thought this one was so important. And if I had to prioritize them I probably would've prioritized it maybe towards the bottom, even though I think they're all so important. But this is about your people, your relationships. And what I have found that we do just in life in general, we put people into these places in our life where they might not belong. Or we set expectations of them that they're never going to meet. So we're constantly being disappointed.

Here's an example. I wanted my husband—I will talk about this in a minute, the victims. But I was the kind of person who didn't want anyone to worry about me. So I just pretended I was okay. I walked around. But I wanted him to know that I wasn't okay, just intuitively know and comfort me. He's not that kind of a person. He's the most amazing person, but that's just not his wiring. So I was frustrated a lot with him because I expected him to be this way that I knew he never was when I married him. And so we do that. Or we try to put somebody in our inner circle that doesn't belong there because they're negative or cynical or whatever.

So the circle of strength is just about beginning to understand your relationships. I call it the ring of fire. Even those people that are just really bleh to be in a relationship with, we learn so much from those people. And so anyway, that's a whole action in itself.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, so folks, your community of support, there are some real powerhouse people, hopefully. If not, get out there and find some. But like you were pointing out with your husband, he didn't meet all your needs. I'm blessed with a wife who... I think I'm a lot like your husband. If she tells me what she needs, I'm pretty good. But I don't read minds, right? I don't read minds. So she'll warn me several times, "I don't need you to solve this. I just want you to listen." That helps me.

But this whole aspect of building this support system is so important, folks, for those of you who are struggling with addictions, those of you who have addicts in your lives, because we don't do well in isolation on an island when were fighting something this big.

Valerie Silveira: No, and that's where you end up, too. So I like to say, "Don't go onto the battlefield alone."

Okay, so action number five is kind of interesting, I don't remember planning it this way, but right smack in the middle, number five of the nine actions, works out perfectly because it is to change your attitude.

And this seems so cliché, blah, blah. We all hear about attitude. But I can say honestly that I know that you need to change your attitude because I'm in the attitude business. And I've got to change mine all the time. It's so easy to get out of whack and listen to your self-talk and be your own worst enemy, listen to could've, should've, and would've. They like to take us on a whole trip down what you should've, could've, and would've done.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Whose attitude are you able to change?

Valerie Silveira: Your own.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Of course.

Valerie Silveira: This is the thing. This is what I keep telling people. There are very few things in this life that you have control over. And we'll talk about that when we get to action number seven more. But we think we have so much control over all this stuff. It's a false sense of control. But there's one thing that we have complete control over. And it's our attitude and therefore our thoughts. And how interesting, because thoughts lead to actions or inaction. So there's so much power. I call action number five your battle changer. I think without it, it's almost impossible to get there.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I am blessed with a very upbeat attitude. But I know people who really struggle in this area. The glass is always half empty, or actually completely empty all the time or most of the time. I mean this is a big ask, change your attitude. For someone who doesn't do that easily or naturally, do you have some ideas?

Valerie Silveira: Well, I do, but I also think that this is why I have these nine actions. They all kind of work together. Because if you... "My life is never going to be the same. If Jamie doesn't get clean, my life is over." This was my attitude. This is what was going on inside here. I said, "I have been given a life sentence." I used to say that, believe it, think it. "My best days are behind me. Anything good that happened, that was the plan." I'm going to have this whole negative attitude. So it is difficult to change your attitude because it's a habit. It's more habit than anything. So there are things that you could do to change your habits. But let's talk about, for instance, deciding to stand up and fight.

Use action number one to decide to stand up and fight. That helps with your attitude. In the workbooks, I have two different workbooks, I actually have declarations. So if you were to say, "I'm going to stand up and fight and that I'm going to beat this beast no matter what," that changes your attitude. So much of it all works together.

In action number five I tell a lot of stories. And a lot of them are about how I didn't have the best attitude. But one of the things to do is to remember how your attitude is affecting other people, because lots of times we don't care about ourselves anymore. We're kind of at that point where we're not caring that much about ourselves.

So even though I think you should take care of yourself number one, initially you can't. I stood up to fight because of my son. Literally I did it for him, initially. Now I stand for me. But I had to find a reason. So I think if you can think about how much your attitude is impacting other people, for instance, with addiction, here's a good one. What if, okay, you have a son or a daughter in recovery? Would you like it if every day someone told them, "You're a loser. You're no good. You're a bad person. You've made too many mistakes," blah, blah, blah? You would be furious. I mean you would go to the mat with somebody for that kind of stuff. But that's what we're doing to ourselves. And when we do it to ourselves, we're basically doing it to other people, too, because that's what's coming out of your mouth.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Wow. So watch your self-talk, folks, and your self-thoughts. I have a son who was beating himself up all the time as he was struggling with

his addiction to alcohol. And he had a wise counselor who very recently kind of woke him up to the fact by asking him, “Well, would you treat anybody else the way you’re treating yourself and your thoughts?” And it was like an aha moment for him. He was like, “Of course not.” He’s a really decent kid. So don’t do this to yourselves.

Valerie Silveira: Exactly.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah.

Valerie Silveira: I had this aha moment when I was in golf camp. And golf is a difficult sport. And we had this golf psychologist come in. And she says to the whole group, “If you spoke to somebody else the way you speak to yourself on the golf course, nobody would ever play with you.” And I looked around the room. And everybody was squirming in their seats, guilty, guilty.

So anyway, your son’s lucky he had a counselor. Lots of times these actions and things that we need to do aren’t necessarily, “Okay, do this now, and do that.” It’s so much just giving people perspectives that they haven’t thought about before.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Right.

Valerie Silveira: Just a way to think about something.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes.

Valerie Silveira: So then action number six—I almost put them together; I almost had eight actions because they’re so closely related—is to adjust your focus. So what happens is we get so out of whack.

And in this action I like to issue a social media warning. And I love social media in so many ways. But I say this because everybody’s life is so visible now in social media. But people are running their highlight reel on social media. And you’re living your crap. And so it gets our focus all out of whack that everybody else has a beautiful life. And everybody’s husband makes the most money. And they go on 52 vacations a year. And they drink the best wine. And they swim with the dolphins. And they’ve got the best kids and blah, blah, blah. That’s what ends up happening. And when you’re living with a beast on what I call the roller coaster from hell, you start to believe that. And I used to do that. I’d see these posts that would say, “If you have the best

daughter in the world...” And I’d think, I don’t even know where my daughter is. And so it hurt.

Dr. Paul Thomas: It hurt.

Valerie Silveira: It made me mad. So here’s the social media warning: lives lived out on social media may appear better than they really are. And I wrote a story in *Still Standing After All the Tears* called “The Old Woman and the Cave.” And it’s a really cool story that illustrated how I was feeling. I was in this self-imposed prison of isolation just focused on Jamie, focused on Jamie. And on the wall of the cave are all these faded photographs of all the other people in my life. But I just needed her to get clean. And so that’s what ends up happening, two things. One, we focus solely, obsessively on this one person, this one thing. And then the other thing is we get everything out of whack, and we ignore all the other people, and we think everyone else has a perfect life. Everybody’s got something.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, you’re not focused right.

Valerie Silveira: Everyone’s got a beast. I don’t care who you are.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. No, that is so true. That’s part of the message of this summit, is that it’s not just the addicts. It’s not just the alcoholics. It’s not just the people who are addicted to their cell phones or the people who are addicted to food. We all, folks, are struggling with this thing called life.

Valerie Silveira: Yes.

Dr. Paul Thomas: We really are. Right down to the point of how to approach life, basically, is what you’re teaching us.

Valerie Silveira: Right, but that’s why we need to link arms. This is why we all need to stand together, because we are all in this together. And so it’s interesting. In the eighth action—I’m going to talk about this a little more because it’s really what’s keeping us from telling our stories.

But action number seven is probably by far the most difficult. For moms of addicts certainly I can speak from experience and from communicating with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands—is to stop being a control freak. Now people don’t maybe like that because they’re going, “I’m not the kind to try to schedule every little thing.” But when we get in these situations and you’re on the roller coaster from hell, trust me. You’re trying to

control everything because your life is so out of control in this one area. I found it isn't even about that thing. It isn't even just that I was trying to control Jamie and, "Do this, and do that. And why are you doing that?" And trying to find her on social media and all the craziness. I was trying to control every other little thing in my life.

And you know what I discovered? The more I did that, the more out of control my life became. And when I learned to take off the Super Mom cape, which, by the way, was the most painful thing I've ever done in my life, and also the most freeing, when I took off that cape—because it was strangling me, basically—and stopped trying to control everything in my life, which we don't have control over—we talked about that earlier—I've never had more control over my life.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, there's this expression of having serenity in the midst of a storm. And folks, when you come to grips with this concept, you can have that.

Valerie Silveira: Yes.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I have moments of this now because of this very issue. I realize the only thing I control is myself, my own thoughts, my own actions, my own behaviors. And I don't control anybody else. And therefore when I'm in the middle of a storm that's of everybody else's making, I don't have to react to it.

Valerie Silveira: Right.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I can be at peace. It's bizarre.

Valerie Silveira: Isn't it?

Dr. Paul Thomas: I only learned that in this recovery journey that you're being invited to take a part of.

Valerie Silveira: It's so amazing because I never imagined me being that kind of person. I wasn't patient. But here's what's really interesting and important now in action number seven, stop being a control freak. This is going to require you to use the F word and use it a lot. And I know everybody wants to use that F word in this journey probably you have a few times.

But I'm talking about forgiveness, and again, one of those seemingly cliché things. But I got to the point where I had to forgive Jamie. And this is why I was able to just let her live her life and do her journey knowing I was here for her, because I forgave her. I forgave her for lying to me. I forgave her for all the stuff. I don't need to get into the list. I forgave her for all of it, I mean really forgave her. And I forgave the guy who went to prison for shooting her in 2004. And I even had to forgive the beast. It doesn't mean I like it or that I was going to not battle it. Now, I use the F word very, very quickly. The reason I'm struggling for words is because it's not a place I ever thought I would be. And I had to work at it. But it's so freeing to stop judging everybody and deciding who gets forgiveness. And it's the same thing.

So then this guy murders my daughter, okay. She's an unarmed girl, five feet tall, and he shoots her multiple times in the chest. Am I going to be able to forgive him? All this stuff that I've been talking about. Whoa, now what?

I can honestly tell you that I have forgiven him. Do I want justice? Of course! Do I think he deserves to go to prison? Yes. But I'm not in the justice business, okay. We have a system for that. And God is in the justice business. Me? Not my business. There's a big difference. A

nd this is where people get so confused on this F word thing, is they think well, that's just saying that it's okay what they did. It's saying that you're going to quit carrying this around. It's destroying your life. So I mean imagine if I was down at the police station every day. It would destroy my life.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Or searching under every stone for this killer.

Valerie Silveira: No, no, I'm not going to do that to my life. But the most difficult thing in all to forgive, the most difficult person, is really yourself. And lots of times we don't even know why we're blaming ourselves. So like the mom of an addict I'm going, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't have married Rich and moved Jamie to that really super nice neighborhood and put her in those really good schools and done all that stuff. Maybe it was that that caused her to become an addict. And maybe it was the time when she was four..." I mean you go through the list a million times. And finally I just had to go, "Whatever hand I had in any of it, I know it's not my fault." I've forgiven myself." But it's so hard.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Wow.

Valerie Silveira: So I think forgiving yourself is probably the most difficult thing.

Dr. Paul Thomas: What Valerie's saying here, folks, about forgiveness, is so key. And, Valerie, thank you so much for being able to display... I mean I feel it in your being that you've forgiven the shooter of your daughter, I mean the person who harmed her and then murdered her. Folks, that takes a whole different level of working a recovery program, what Valerie is sharing with us today. And so I think these action steps that you're giving us are proof positive that this works.

Valerie Silveira: Yes, absolutely. So action number eight is to stand on your story. There's a word in here that's so critical. It's to stand *on* your story. What we've been doing, what people who live with an addiction beast are doing, what their families are doing, what people with all sorts of shameful, so to speak, things, they're living *in* their story. They're stuck under it, in it, wallowing in it with all of the shame and the guilt and the stigma and all of the things that are just so devastating. And you can't live like that.

So it's about shedding the shame, shedding the guilt. And so I feel like it's as if every time the beast would say to me, for instance, "You're a bad mom," it was like a layer of shame just got painted over me. And then she went to rehab and got kicked out. "She's never going to get clean. And I wonder what other people must think of you."

Here's the thing. This is why I know what other people are thinking of me, because I used to do it, okay. I used to judge people. I used to say, "If your kids go astray, it's your fault," okay. I used to say that. I didn't just think it, I said it. And when my daughter became an addict, I fell off the soapbox. And I fell hard. It hurt. And so I'm actually grateful for that lesson because now I'm just so much more...

Actually, Jamie really helped me. Her addiction—I know this sounds really crazy to people, this is a whole other level—gratitude is not something I talked about. But that is in action number two. Gratitude is so important. And I'm not grateful that my daughter became an addict. I'm not grateful that she died of course, of course, because I live with a hole in my heart every single day. But I am grateful for what I've learned on this journey and, by the way, some of it from her. This very broken messed up person putting heroine in her body taught me not to judge people. She was very quick to forgive people. She didn't judge us while we were judging her. She taught me that, just to love people and accept them. And that's so critically important.

So what I'm trying to do in a lot of my messaging, too, this is why I have an open Facebook page. I do have a private group. But it's tied to a membership. It's a paid membership that people paid for to get coaching and training from me. That's something different. But my actual social media presence on Facebook is an open page. And every now and then I get people going, "Well, if you had a closed group, you'd have so many more people that would come."

But I don't want to stray from my message. And my message is that we should not have to be anonymous. We should not have to live in shame, that we're bad people because we have a son or daughter living with addiction, because I I've had this experience a couple of times, where people have said to me, "Wow, I can't believe you would have a daughter who's an addict." And I'm thinking, "What? Should I have a needle hanging out of my arm? What am I supposed to look like?" I had a friend say that to me. "Well, what do they think parents of addicts look like?" So I actually wrote about this in *Still Standing After All the Tears*. And I said, "You know what we look like?" And I went through this whole list of the average person and the successful person and the struggling person. And guess what we look like? We look like you.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yup, absolutely. In my addiction clinic I take care of all those about 30 years and younger who are hooked on opiates. And I mean I have professionals. I have lots of people who are in the tech industry, teachers. And sure, I've got a handful of homeless folks, too. But yeah, this disease of addiction hits everyone.

Valerie Silveira: It's nasty.

Dr. Paul Thomas: It hits everyone. And if you're sitting there thinking, well, not me, ha, I would challenge you to look really closely at your life and see if you really have absolutely every area under perfect control.

Valerie Silveira: Yeah, right. Hey, when you find that person, I want to meet them.

Dr. Paul Thomas: All right. I'll have them send you a message on your website.

Valerie Silveira: Oh my gosh, I can't wait. It's going to be amazing. Yeah, no, we don't have it all together. We're all just trying to make it through this thing called life.

There's a message I'm going to be putting out really briefly, or quickly, too, shortly I should say. The latest school shooting, and I don't mean to get into all of that, but it keeps hitting me. Every time something like that happens, what I keep seeing in social media is, "Where are the parents?" Yes, we're all curious about that, including me. But, "Where are the parents, and you should teach your kids this. And that's why there are addicts, because no one's paying attention."

That hurts, okay, because there are no perfect parents out there. This is happening to people who raise their kids right, not perfectly but right. And so I'm really getting tired of society wanting to place the blame. And I understand why. It's because they're so confused about why these horrific things happen and why these people are becoming addicts. And they need to blame somebody. And the parents are really easy targets when it comes to blame.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, yeah. No, our whole society, the whole pressure of big money, big business, big food, big pharma, big everything is turning life into a very difficult minefield to navigate. And we're losing a lot of folks. And this whole summit is here to empower you with information so you can start from scratch or start from now and start healing. I'm just loving your steps—not steps here. Sorry. Actions.

Valerie Silveira: Actions. It's okay. Well you know what? The last one is interesting because it's what you're doing, and it's what people will do if they follow what you're talking about. Action number nine is to make meaning from the madness. Now it's obvious what I'm doing to make meaning from the madness that became my life. It's obvious what you're doing from the madness that you've had in your life and you've seen in your practice and all that. But it doesn't even have to be that. But what happens is, we start to think, "Who would listen to me? What do I have to offer?"

I remember when I published my first book, and basically you hit the button or whatever happens, and I said to Rich, my husband, I said, "What if nobody likes it? We think it's good. And this person thought it was. What if it's not good?" And I said to him, "Truthfully, if one person, just if one person..." and I meant it. It wasn't something I said. "If one person tells me, "I got up off of the mat because of that crappy book that nobody else read,"—and it's gone way beyond that of course, but—"then it will make this whole thing not okay, but it'll make meaning from this thing."

So now one of the moms that started following me, she ended up coauthoring a second edition of my workbook with me. This is a person that when I met

her nearly two years ago, most of the people in her family didn't even know that she had two sons struggling with addiction. She was still hiding, a perfect church family. And so I can tell you story after story, now, of moms who are standing up. And they're going and doing something. This is what I love about this summit. Now we're not talking about addition anymore. Now we're talking about multiplication.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes, yes. It is time, folks, to stand on our challenges and get out of the closet, get out in the open. We are all struggling. And gosh, Valerie, your program here, your approach and Jamie's story that's giving life to this whole approach and that you have courage to do that, is just precious. I am so grateful.

I want to give you a chance... we've gone on a bit, but I could be here with you all day. Any sort of parting words for our audience, a message of hope or anything you would like to share with them?

Valerie Silveira: I think that what's so important here is that this is all about courage, okay. It takes courage to do anything in life, to change anything, to make anything of ourselves. It even takes courage to live in peace. It takes courage to do all of these things. And what I really want people to know is that they are more courageous than they think. And I know right now you might be sitting here and thinking, "No, I'm not." And people say to me, "Well, I wish I could be as courageous as you." And this is what I want you to know. I used to wish that I could be as courageous as me, too. It's there.

Let me tell you what. I stood up with a tiny bit of hope, I mean a tiny bit, and a shred of self confidence that I had left because I was not this person when I stood up. That's all it takes for you. And so just remember, if even one other person has gotten to where you would like to go, that means it's possible.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes.

Valerie Silveira: Don't ever lose hope. But take action.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Amen, sister. This is a powerful message, folks. And how can people reach you as far as finding your work?

Valerie Silveira: Okay, it's funny you said rockinredhead because I don't use that anymore. But it still works. It still gets to me. But valeriesilveira.com is my website. And you can find all sorts of resources there and also on Facebook. My page is also called Valerie Silveira.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Wonderful.

Valerie Silveira: So pretty easy to find.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Well thank you, Valerie, so much for giving of your story, of yourself, of your spirit and your wisdom, and sharing your journey. This is a powerful message for everyone. And you've blessed us all. So thank you very much.

Valerie Silveira: Oh, thank you. I really can't thank you enough for believing in me and thinking that this work is worthy of being a part of your summit. So I'm super honored and grateful. Thank you so much. And I'm just so glad to know you now.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Likewise. That feeling is mutual.

Valerie Silveira: Thank you.