

MASK's Minute with Mom: Suzanne Somers

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Star of stage, screen and TV, as well as best-selling author and motivational speaker, Suzanne Somers has had a very successful career in the entertainment industry. But behind her seemingly glamorous life, she has dealt with the devastating effects of growing up a dysfunctional home caused by an alcoholic father.

Somers recounts her childhood living with an addicted family member in her bestselling book "Keeping Secrets," published in 1988. Her father, who worked in a brewery, drank on a daily basis. At first, she writes, he would be personable and funny, showering Somers with compliments. But as time wore on, he became angry and resentful, criticizing the Somers and her siblings, and throwing insults at her mother.

On one particular night, Somers' father stormed into her room and began destroying her clothes. Out of fear and rage, she hit him on the head with a tennis racket—so hard, he began bleeding.

"After my mother took him to the hospital," she wrote, "I began cleaning up the blood. That's how I dealt with it, I erased it. I washed for hours, and when I had finished I went into my closet and fell asleep. I hid there almost every night to avoid my father's abusiveness."

As the children grew older, Somers' siblings began drinking and eventually became alcoholics. And while Somers escaped the grips of alcoholism herself, she did fall victim to a string of challenging situations, including getting pregnant and marrying at the age of 17. From there, problems continued, from trying to care for her baby with little financial support, to an extramarital affair.

Somers' childhood and early adulthood experiences have inspired her to dedicate her life to raising awareness of addiction and families. She founded the Suzanne Somers Institute for the Effects of Addiction on Families, and has received a number of awards and recognitions for her work. She received the Humanitarian Award from the National Council on Alcoholism, and the Distinguished Achievement in Public Service Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Somers was named National Honorary Chairperson of the National Association for Children of Alcoholics and was the first layperson named to the American Psychiatric Foundation's board of directors. She also served on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Advisory Council to the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

"I watched first-hand the devastating effects on the family of living with an addictive person," she says in her blog at SuzanneSomers.com. "Addiction is a singular experience. No one can save the addict but themselves. The only help you can offer is love."