

Pain of addiction, joy of recovery

Sondra Kinsey
Capital Times Staff

The hidden pain of her "normal" early family life led Elizabeth into the pit of addiction to "everything but heroin." An autobiography, "Elizabeth at 33" is about that pain and her joy in recovery after being "high every day for 13 years."

"I grew up in a typical little town and came from a normal middle-class family, close-knit and loving," Elizabeth says ironically, adding, "We'd all gather at my grandmother's house for Sunday dinners, known as one-shot, two-shot, three-shot, four-shot dinners. It was my mother's medicine."

Written and performed by Elizabeth Hissner, the 60-minute play evoked a lively question-and-answer session from the audience in the packed Gallery Lounge Nov. 1.

Asked what made her get sober, the now vivacious Hissner said she was just dead inside.

"Everything was crumbling," she said.

During the play, Elizabeth says that toward the end of her addiction, all her clothes were black.

"I had been going to my own funeral for years," she says. When she got sober she threw away all her black things.

Presented by Open Stage Of Harrisburg, a non-profit organization, the play was brought to Penn State Harrisburg as part of the current drug and alcohol awareness campaign.

Hissner said she has performed the play about 20 times for women's groups, for juvenile offenders, for staff training in substance abuse, in prisons, in hospitals, and in rehabilitation centers.

"Addicts are usually depicted in the gutter with no hope," said director Don Alsedek, a local resident. "We wanted to show that addicts can and do lead productive lives after the wonderful journey of recovery."

Hissner is now the primary therapist for the New Perspectives Addiction Treatment Center's women's program in Lebanon. She also provides education and consultation for area schools and community agencies, teaches classes for drunk-driving offenders, and facilitates intervention groups.

Hissner is a University Park graduate in Administration of Justice. "The idea then (while addicted) was to be a lawyer," she said. In one part of the play, she mentions how she used to "pick fights" at school to deal with her anger. Knowing her history and

More Elizabeth on 13

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November 21, 1989

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