

BOLD Ideas, ESSENTIAL Reading

Surviving Alex

A Mother's Story of Love, Loss, and Addiction

PATRICIA A. ROOS

In 2015, Patricia Roos was a professor of sociology at Rutgers University when her 25-year-old son Alex died of a heroin overdose. Drawing from her academic training as a sociologist, she began to research the factors that lead to substance use and overdose. Instead of focusing on individual-level choice and brain disease arguments, she found a complex web of social factors and institutional failures contribute to addiction.

Weaving together a personal narrative and a sociological perspective, *Surviving Alex* movingly describes how even children from "good families" can fall prey to addiction and recounts the hellish toll it takes on the whole family. Drawing from interviews with Alex's friends, family members, therapists, teachers, and police officers, as well as files from his stays in hospitals, rehab facilities, and jails, she draws a compelling portrait of a young man whose life veered between happiness, anxiety, success, and despair. As she explores how a punitive system failed Alex, Roos outlines a more compassionate approach that would provide proper care for substance users and reduce addiction. She hopes to inspire a moral community of action that will realign public health policy to address the overdose crisis.

PATRICIA ROOS is a Professor Emerita of Sociology at Rutgers University. Among her many publications are the books *Job Queues*, *Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads into Male Occupations* (coauthored with Barbara Reskin) and *Gender and Work: A Comparative Analysis of Industrial Societies*. After her son's death, she realigned her research and advocacy interests to explore mental health and substance use disorders, turning her grief into activism.

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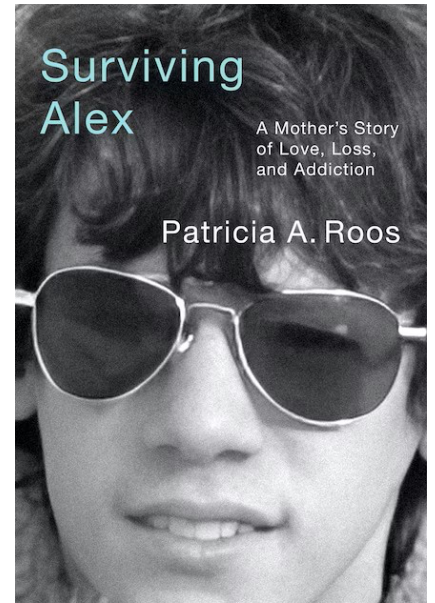
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