

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: FOREVER THANKFUL FOR DRUG COURT

November 23, 2018

I am forever grateful for *the Daily Item* and their coverage of the drug epidemic and the impact it has had on the city of Lynn. I am especially encouraged by the reporting of Bella diGrazia in the article published on Nov. 14.

Bella covered the impact on the individuals struggling with this horrendous disease, the court system in which these individuals appear, the judges who take good care in this designated drug court and the impact these together have on the families of those involved. Two years ago, I was the last to show up for a conciliator appreciation dinner that was hosted by now-retired Judge Albert Conlon and the Lynn Bar Association and the only open seat was between Mario Capano and Judge Conlon. I was sitting between two distinguished legal scholars and I had to get something off my chest. I had been appearing in Lynn District Court for several years and I had never thanked the court for its help in saving my mother's life.

My mother was arrested in 2000 for possession of drugs and was eligible to proceed through the Lynn Drug Court program. She was required to go into a drug program, which was Project Cope. While at Project Cope she was encouraged to obtain employment after a certain period and Stop & Shop on Boston Street gave an employment opportunity. My mother was a different person during this process and she had self-worth. For the first time, my mother was able to attend my field trip to the House of the Seven Gables in Salem and we started to have a healthier relationship.

During this time relationships began to break down at my father's house and I decided to leave. I became homeless at the age of 16. My mother was able to provide temporary shelter at Project Cope and emotional support. I spent Thanksgiving 2001 with the ladies at Project Cope and I listened to what they were thankful for. Most of these ladies were thankful for their families, even if those same families gave up on them. Drug addiction is a big problem and if the recovering addict is receiving the support needed, they can have a major positive impact in their families and their communities.

My father and step-mother never spoke bad about my mother and understood she suffered from a disease and when my mother was getting her life together, they praised her. I know that my life would be different if my mother never went through Lynn's Drug Court and received the support from the wonderful community-based rehabs and employers.

Today, I am a practicing attorney and am a public servant working every day to help the children in the Lynn Public Schools. Today, my mother is clean, is a breast cancer survivor and is currently fighting lung cancer. Addiction is hard to get over. It is really day to day and I am amazed that with everything my mother has been through, she continues to fight the multiple battles in her life. I know that with continued exposure of this epidemic, more people will seek help. I want to thank the Lynn City Council for creating a task force on drugs. And I also want to thank our elected local and state officials for appearing at this ceremony to show the importance of such an occasion.

Michael Satterwhite is a Lynn School Committee member.