

# We learned to love our son without feeding his addiction

By Mona G., Michigan

My husband and I were shocked the day we discovered that we had spent tens of thousands of dollars to finance our son's drinking and drug habit, when we thought we were paying for his college education. Not only did he not have a college degree but was badly addicted. We traveled to the state where he lived, some 700 miles away, and did an intervention of sorts. It did little good. We came home resolved that we would start attending Al-Anon to help ourselves as well as "to help us figure out how to stop his drinking."

*"I remember shouting at him, 'I don't know how to help you! You refuse to go to A.A. and I'm just done!'"*

Nearly two years later, our son called one day to ask if he could come home to "get his finances in order and move to another place to start over." He was depressed after breaking up with a girlfriend. We wanted to believe that he was not still drinking, but by this time, we were not foolish enough to believe that he was telling us the truth about anything.

Up until that point, we had continued to struggle with setting boundaries, as he would call with one crisis after another, asking for money. We were scared every time we turned him down for we knew it might mean he would have no shelter.

We had gotten better about setting boundaries, although certainly we were not perfect. We continued to give him small amounts of money, but were more deliberate and careful about how we did it. We were about to have our boundary-setting skills tested to the fullest extent.

When our son asked to come home, we had almost two years of Al-Anon under our belts. We were terrified to say yes, but we also knew that with the experience, strength, and hope from our Al-Anon community and with help from our Higher Power, we might just be up for the challenge of loving our son, without feeding his addiction. He might not like what we had to offer, but we had boundaries and he was not going to be allowed to cross them.

We had made great strides in understanding that we had *no* control—and never did—over his

drinking and substance abuse. We did not cause his addictions and we certainly were not powerful enough to cure them. When I finally came to the understanding that we might lose him either by death or by imprisonment, I was finally able to let go. I was tired of crises. I wanted my life back and I had started to find it again in Al-Anon. I kept questioning whether either my husband or I were strong enough to be able to weather any of our son's potential crises.

Our son had been home for barely more than two months when we found out that he was using our credit cards to buy substances. We confronted him and laid out our boundaries very simply: "We will prosecute you if you continue this. We will not put up with your drinking and drugging in our home nor will we finance it. If you want to continue this behavior, you will have to live elsewhere."

*"I learned that the more meetings I went to, the better I felt."*

I remember shouting at him, "I don't know how to help you! You refuse to go to A.A. and I'm just done!" He looked at me tearfully, and said, "I'll go." I could not believe my ears and had to ask him again what he had said. I asked him if he wanted someone to go with

him to his first meeting—my way of controlling and ensuring that he would actually get to a meeting. He said that he did.

My husband and I became ever more vigilant at keeping ourselves living "One Day at a Time" and refusing to borrow trouble. I had a hard time hoping that our son would ever get well. In addition to his drinking and drugging, he struggled with chronic depression and had done so most of his life. I had seen all kinds of signs of trouble early on, and I felt as though that, too, along with every other thing involving our son must be turned over to his Higher Power.

My Higher Power needed to help me detach. I was not responsible for his depression. I had to make "He has his own Higher Power" my mantra. I learned to shut my mouth instead of asking him when and where he was going to meetings. I learned that the more meetings I went to, the better I felt. I depended on meetings, readings, and my Sponsor.

It is amazing that even now that our son is four years clean and sober, I can still go to "the bad neighborhood of ghouls" in my head in an instant and dream up impossible and horrifying worst-case scenarios. When I hear about relapses after 20 years of sobriety, I feel the same cold fear that I felt when our son was in the depths of his addiction. I have learned that I cannot know what is ahead



and I need to live “One Day at a Time” with the help of my Higher Power. When I become entangled in worst case scenarios of my own making, I know the best thing to do is to get myself to a meeting or call an Al-Anon friend, or my Sponsor.

Recently, I visited the large metropolitan area where our son lived when his addictions were out of control. I passed by the area where he’d lived. I had an instant physical reaction in the form of nausea. It did

not last long, but it reminded me of how far we have all come, and how far I still have to go to keep myself free of self-doubt.

I will always be in recovery, just as our son will always be a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. I am grateful for the tools of the program. I know with certainty that even if our son were to relapse today or tomorrow, I have resources to keep myself well—and that is the best any parent of an alcoholic can do.

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