

I didn't know my life had been affected by alcoholism until I was an adult

I was born into our family's disease of alcoholism. I never thought there was anything unusual about the way I grew up. There was a lot of celebrating and a lot of drinking, but also a lot of laughter and love in our family. I had a good education and I wore nice clothes. I never realized that my life had been affected by alcoholism until I was an adult.

When I was a senior in high school, my father became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and found sobriety. I remember thinking that alcoholism was reserved for men who slept on park benches or were homeless. I couldn't think of my father as an alcoholic. However, I knew nothing of the disease, its symptoms, or the destructive effects it had on families. He first encouraged me to attend Alateen and later Al-Anon. He would say, "You know, you were affected by my drinking. There is a program where you can get help." My response was always, "I am fine Dad, and your drinking never affected me."

I struggled in relationships, even though I didn't marry an alcoholic and there wasn't much drinking on my husband's side of the family. Yet, I had a fierce temper, and although I had a nice home and a hard-working husband, I was never satisfied or happy. We had a daughter together, and when she was four, we divorced. For many years, I felt victimized, abandoned, and overwhelmingly responsible for the care of our child. It was not until much later that I fully understood my part in the breakup.

When my daughter was a teenager, I got involved with an active alcoholic. He drank every day. I knew there was something different about his drinking, something I didn't recall from growing up around alcohol. We had terrible arguments, and our relationship was like riding a roller coaster. The good times were great, but the bad times were horrible. We were "on again, off again," and I lived in fear and constant chaos.

After his first driving under the influence offence, he was court-ordered to attend A.A. Since I thought I needed to help him stop drinking, I attended Al-Anon. I was hopeful, and I expected the kind women at the meetings to tell me to leave him. I listened attentively, thinking I would hear a similar story that ended with whether the person stayed or left. I was confused and not sure of my feelings. No one told me what to do, even when I asked.

I found a Sponsor and I called her regularly, usually after an unpleasant conversation with the alcoholic. She listened patiently, and finally one day asked me if I ever thought about letting the phone ring when he called. My answer was "no." It was the first time I realized that I was playing a part in the dysfunction, and that I had a choice (to participate in his verbal abuse or not) simply by not answering the phone.

I began attending meetings as often as I could. I liked what I heard, and I thought that perhaps I could learn to be happy. I also thought that perhaps I could make the decision to leave. It was not until I started working the Steps that the fog began to clear. I hadn't realized how distorted my thinking was, and how irritable I had become.

Today, I know that I played a part in every negative situation that occurred in my life. I wasn't responsible for everything, but I wasn't blameless either. I just played a part. I contributed. I tried to fix, manage, and control, and when I didn't get my way, I got angry. I said hurtful things, and I tried to get revenge.

Today, my life is happy. Although I am no longer living with active alcoholism, Al-Anon is my way of life. I had to learn to fix me. I took an inventory. I made amends. I readily recognized my old ways of behaving and, while I am still learning, my life has been completely transformed—thanks to a loving and forgiving God and the wonderful, recovering people of Al-Anon.

The gifts I have received are countless. The friendships and unity I have experienced are lifelong treasures. I learned to give back. I learned to be of service. I am learning that I deserve happiness, and I can solve my problems if I seek the guidance of my Higher Power, "One Day at a Time." I have the courage to change only myself, and I am grateful for the gifts I've received from our program.

By Toni J., Florida
The Forum, February 2017

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