

## Forgiving myself was the only path to serenity

I do not have the compulsion to drink alcohol, but I am drawn to alcoholism in the body of a man. I no longer try to figure out where this began. I grew up in a home without alcoholism.

My first husband and I met in a college bar. The marriage endured 13 years. The drinking increased; the abuse became more frequent.

I numbed out. I smiled at the grocery store. I kept the house spotless. My husband left me.

After the divorce I looked for love, settled for sex—which I called “dating”—and found another alcoholic “project.” I was consumed with my desire to be pretty enough, smart enough, and loving enough to satisfy him and squelch the alcoholism.

I would put my kids to bed so I could hurry up and worry. When he finally came home, I’d hurl myself down the stairs, screaming for him to get out. I’d stick my chin in his face and dare him to hit me, my shrill voice spewing my words of disgust. I know today that I have allowed another to abuse me only to the extent to which I was abusing myself.

I fantasized about killing my husband. What stopped me was the fear that I would not be successful and he would come at me like in those horror movies where the scary creature never dies; that and he only hit me when he drank.

On my last trip to urgent care, the physician said, “You don’t have to keep falling this way. There is help for you if you want it.” I knew she knew. My eyes darted away from her gaze as I drew my children closer to me. Did she know that I held our baby as a shield when he started swinging? He wouldn’t hit me through his baby, and I could still let my sarcastic words tear at his flesh.

In those last weeks with my second husband, he began to attend A.A. I called his Sponsor, who told me about Al-Anon Family Groups. His voice was calm, not raging and laced with vulgar language. Listening to him repeat his message of hope brought tears to my eyes.

It took a lot of courage to go to my first Al-Anon meeting. But by the time I returned to my car, the voice I remembered was the one saying, “You wouldn’t leave him if he had cancer.” I didn’t return to Al-Anon for another year.

I had one more alcoholic marriage in me; this time to a sober alcoholic who talked the talk. This relationship, with his dry drunk behavior, dropped me to my knees.

I returned to Al-Anon and committed myself to working Steps I thought only the alcoholic should have to work. I found a Sponsor who lovingly guided me through the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts using Conference Approved Literature.

I discovered who I was and what I liked and disliked. I began to sort out my life and slowly made healthier choices for myself and my children. The changes in my life didn't happen overnight. I was still faced with challenges and obstacles. My third husband got off the recovery train and left me, no doubt recognizing that I had emotionally left the relationship years before.

I came to realize that 95 percent of the insanity in my life was a direct result of my own decisions. I learned how to forgive myself for these decisions. I gained self-confidence and regained the poise to look forward instead of at my feet. I no longer expected others to change, so I didn't have to. I released the shame that burdened me, and I became aware of and accepted my part in the insanity.

I made amends to my children and to others who were affected by my behavior. I was no longer a victim. I developed a relationship with a Higher Power. I saw that He was there for me all along and that His grace had kept me alive. My Higher Power was the first to grieve, to hold me, to shed a tear, and to comfort me as each tragedy unfolded.

My Sponsor demonstrated by example how to show my gratitude to Al-Anon by helping others. Al-Anon helped me find my voice, but it is in service where I gain the courage to speak. In helping friends and families of alcoholics, I have found true happiness and that long sought-after approval and unconditional love.

Today I embrace my Higher Power with all the passion and energy that I embraced all those alcoholics in the past. I trust that little voice within, recognizing and listening to God's messages. By Barbara W.,  
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