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.

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