

One Professional's Experience

Professionals who work in the field of alcohol studies and members of Al-Anon have this in common: try as they might, they will never "understand" the alcoholic. Fortunately, one need not "understand" in order to work with or even to love.

Even in my very non-clinical role as one who studies the stories of alcoholics, one who explores how tales of "what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now" somehow heal - make whole - those who share them, even that perspective, revealing as it can be, never allows the outsider to get really inside the actual experience of alcoholic craving, alcoholic grandiosity, alcoholic . . . but why go on with the list? You know what I am talking about - all those things that one knows only by experiencing.

But the research perspective can offer some helpful suggestions. For one thing, the healing stories that alcoholics tell are NOT about "what it used to be like . . . and what it is like now": there is no "it" in that hallowed formulation. The healing - making whole - stories of alcoholics are not about "it": they tell about *we*. Whether or not the circumstances around the alcoholic change has nothing to do with recovery: it is the alcoholic who not so much "changes" as *is changed*.

For the alcoholic in recovery as well as those who love him or work with her know deep down that she or he is not "in control." Powerlessness and unmanageability do not end after the Ninth Step. As the Sixth and Seventh of the Twelve Steps continually remind, one does not "get over" or "root out" one's character defects and shortcomings: one "humbly asks" that some Power greater than oneself somehow remove them.

Somehow, as frustrating as it can be to work with alcoholics, even in what is primarily a research role, remembering those things helps me. I hope this telling of my "experience, strength and hope" as a professional working with alcoholics may help those who live with the alcoholic reality every day.

For as I seem to recall, Al-Anon's Twelve Steps are an awful lot like A.A.'s. And wise professionals who work in this field do attend meetings of Al-Anon.

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