

## Daddy's little girl again: making peace with my father

When I was just seven years old, like many little girls, I danced with my father by stepping on his shoes as he glided me around the room. He was tall and straight; everyone said he looked like Bing Crosby when he was younger. I remember viewing the world from atop his shoulders. I felt protected and even cherished; I was his first daughter.

I remember my father teaching me to ride a bicycle. I was left-handed and had insisted on peddling backwards, falling off when it suddenly stopped. He quietly explained to me that even though it seemed right to me to peddle backwards, forward would take me where I wanted to go.

As I grew older, alcohol took my place in my father's life. My dad had a tough time holding onto a job; he spent most evenings at the corner bar. My mother became quieter and quieter.

As time went on, my mother and father began a large family. Within the next ten years my mom had five more children. We moved to the city and my dad found work at a hospital in the supply department. He made little money that was consumed by the size of his growing family. I don't know how he managed to afford to keep drinking, but he did.

The violence and moral decay started when I was around ten years old. He and Mom started fighting physically. Then he started on us children—beatings, humiliations, servitude, and finally sexual abuse. My sisters and my mentally retarded brother suffered the most. As the eldest at home (my older brother had joined the Air Force), I tried hard to protect my siblings and myself.

I was terrified of my dad just as my mother was. With terror came hatred and all-consuming fear. I forgot about the man whose shoes I danced on, whose shoulders I rode on, the gentle teacher whom I had loved. That fear and hatred lasted until I stumbled into Al-Anon.

I fell into mental illness. I was hospitalized and treated for depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. In therapy, I spoke of my feelings about my father for the first time.

The therapist gave me a list of Al-Anon meetings and asked me to attend one. At first I was dead-set against going. Then as I began to feel worse, I decided to take her advice. On my way to my first Al-Anon meeting, I dug my nails into my legs; I was so very frightened.

The more I went, the more I listened, but I just could not let go of the hatred I carried for so long. It had become a part of my everyday thoughts. The person whom I had asked to become my Sponsor suggested I go to an open A.A. meeting. The thought made me ill, but I decided to go.

I met men and women struggling to recover. Shaking their hands was the first time since I had left home that I had allowed myself to be around anyone who had a drinking problem. I touched real people who were trying hard to overcome alcoholism.

The last year of his life I was able to once again see him as a human being.

Unfortunately, my dad never found help before he died.

But Al-Anon has saved my sanity, helped me reconnect with my Higher Power, and released me from the hatred that I carried for too long. I've made my peace with my Dad, even though it came after his death.

By Diana B., Illinois  
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