

Denial Is Not A River In Egypt (posted June 7, 2006)

My husband and I began attending Al-Anon in the summer of 2000, I at the advice of a close friend in the program, and he a few months later because of the positive changes he began to see in me. While I attended Al-Anon those first few months, he tended his beloved garden, trying to distract himself from the unmanageability of our lives. His flowers and veggies flourished, but his obsessing over our daughter, the alcoholic, only grew worse. Thus he began attending Al-Anon with me. Eventually we found separate meetings we preferred, his favorite being the Monday Night Men's Only Al-Anon meeting at the Alano Club.

Initially, we wondered if Al-Anon would work for us, since we are both atheists. Although Al-Anon is not a religious program, it does speak of a "Higher Power" and a "god of our understanding." Over time, we came to realize that the meetings themselves are our Higher Power," and that this viewpoint doesn't conflict with the underlying principles of the program. We are grateful for the support the program offers and for the empathetic, honest and nonjudgmental people we have met.

Like most in Al-Anon we found ourselves in a position we'd never imagined. We'd been "good" parents to our two children. Our son was successful in school, athletic, popular, loving - everything a parent could want. Our daughter had, from the outset, been plagued by physical ailments and, as she grew older, a variety of emotional and educational challenges. She received special education services, tutoring, counseling, etc. None of it seemed to help.

By early adolescence, she was regularly seeing a therapist (one of many) and had few friends. Of those few, there were even fewer we trusted, but we remained hopeful she would "pull it together" with the help of family, school and therapy. Instead, she quit the few activities she had been involved in. She began running away from home. Despite our efforts to control her activities and get her more intensive therapy, she would slip out/storm out of our home (once barefoot in the snow) and sometimes be gone for several days. Our efforts to find her were usually unsuccessful, unless she called out in fear or desperation and told us where to pick her up - once in an abandoned home that was used by crack addicts.

By this time, we had (finally) begun to wonder if she might (?!) be using alcohol and/or drugs. She denied it, and we had not yet caught her red-handed or blacked out. Several therapists told us she might be "experimenting," as many young people do. None of them seemed alarmed (although they weren't living with her.) We began to question our perceptions. Were we too judgmental? Too negative? Too paranoid?

She began skipping school, instead spending time with peers who drank, drugged, and were sexually active. She refused further counseling. We could occasionally coax/bribe/threaten her enough to get her on birth control, but never for long. Besides, such measures didn't protect her from one of our biggest fears: HIV/AIDS.

Life with her became increasingly frightening and surreal. She and I were a particularly volatile combination, as we always had been. We would sometimes have physical altercations, in which we would roll about on the kitchen floor, grappling for cutlery or pulling each other's hair. I was in therapy, she was in therapy, her father was in therapy - all to little or no avail. Her approach was to divide and conquer, and she had been fairly successful at this since early childhood. She was a beautiful, bright (in many ways) and needy young lady - a regular "daddy's little girl." Her negative behaviors toward me (and my own vulnerability) exacerbated the situation.

After one particularly harrowing disappearance (which resulted in her being raped,) we decided her only chance was to be sent out of state to a private school for children with Oppositional Defiant Behavior (the only diagnosis we were really certain of at that point.) The school was in the middle of nowhere (actually where the classic film, "Deliverance," was set.) Had we known the extent of her addictions, we might have chosen a different placement. However, at that time we didn't have enough information, and we believe to this day that if we hadn't sent her away when we did, she would have died.

Once she stopped arguing with us over her change of venue and began to cooperate with the staff, she made tremendous academic strides. But we later learned she would get high whenever possible on whatever she and her peers could find (gasoline, poisonous plants, stolen drugs, alcohol.)

Eighteen months later (program completed, "Deliverance" at hand,) she returned to Ann Arbor. We enrolled her in a local school for students with learning difficulties. She again did well academically, but continued to get high and to hide it from us. We were still uninformed (despite counseling for all of us) about her alcoholism. Although she suffered from mental illness, she self-medicated with alcohol and drugs - a fairly typical dual-diagnosis scenario.

She had been a "cutter" since middle school. By high school she was displaying suicidal tendencies. She OD'ed on alcohol, prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, etc. Trips to the ER for stomach-pumping and/or stitches became almost routine. Our home became a triage unit and we had no life of our own. We barely (or so it seemed) had time for our son, who was in college by then.

By this time her alcoholism was full-blown. We managed, despite her resistance, to get her treatment, both in-patient and out-patient. Again, nothing worked. We became wardens and prisoners in our own home. We came to accept a life of empty liquor bottles, stolen money, lies, different boyfriends nearly every week - in effect, a life of unmanageability and insanity. Most of our friends and family were (seemingly, at least) sympathetic, but unable to understand why we could not control her, and why she could not control herself. We wondered ourselves.

By the winter of 1999, she had attempted suicide again, and we desperately wanted her out of our home. A "friend" of ours took her into her home, against our wishes, only to

have her own daughter (formerly a friend of our daughter's) unceremoniously dump her at our house on New Year's Eve. Thus began the Millennium.

The summer of 2000 was the turning point for us. She would have graduated from high school, but was $\frac{1}{2}$ credit short and too wasted to get out of bed, except to party. We had no energy left to argue, and no hope for the three of us. We felt the only "solution" would be death - anyone's! Instead of death we found Al-Anon and hope.

Shortly after we began Al-Anon, she turned 18 and got her first DUI (although one of her boyfriends totaled her first car several years earlier while drunk and heading for the liquor store. Had she been with him instead of passed out at his place, she would have been killed in the crash, as the passenger's side was demolished.)

We let the system deal with her DUI. We didn't bail her out. We refused to get her an attorney; she was appointed to a PD. My husband attended her trial and will never forget seeing his little girl (all 4'10" of her) in an orange jumpsuit, being taught by the bailiff how to walk in shackles. She spent 45 days in jail. It wasn't all in one stretch but several, since every time they released her she would be picked up again on some alcohol/drug related offense and returned to jail.

Jail time didn't help. She seemed almost at home there, meeting several old "friends" and developing her junkie bravado. After she was released, she continued using, laying around in a dull stupor, loosing job after job, and disappearing for days on end. Thus began a period of at least 5 years during which we would throw her out, or she would leave (to stay with "friends," or in $\frac{3}{4}$ houses.) Within a month or so she would return with promises of counseling and "contracts," all of them short-lived. Through it all, we kept attending Al-Anon, reading the literature, and sharing with other members.

So, where are we now, in 2006? Our daughter has two beautiful, healthy children (one of whom we have guardianship over because she had a pretty scary relapse when he was about two months old.) Despite the manner in which this little guy (now 2 $\frac{1}{2}$) came into our life, he is a blessing. He looks so much like our daughter did at this age, and he has a sunny, inquisitive disposition. It's like seeing the person she would/could be if she wasn't afflicted with alcoholism. Our daughter, her boyfriend and our 7 month old granddaughter visit us nearly every weekend. The emotional scars are beginning to heal and we have more hope for her than ever before.

She and her boyfriend (who does not appear to be an addict, unlike our grandson's father) are doing a good job raising their child. Our daughter did relapse after this child's birth and spent a week in a psych unit. We don't know if she attends A.A.; whether she is receiving counseling; if she intends to go back on the anti-depressants that were prescribed for her, and on and on ... However, we now realize this is her life. We have learned not to force solutions and that we can't change our daughter. We can only change ourselves (and that is a task that requires constant work and support.)

(Anonymous)