

One Al-Anon Journey: A Spouse's Experience with Addiction

Aftermath

I was overwhelmed with feelings of shock, disbelief, grief. I was also overwhelmed thinking of all the things that needed to be dealt with. Immediately after J.'s death, friends came to be with me, which was a huge help. The next day, I went to his AA meeting and told the group what had happened. I went on autopilot to take care of as many details as possible.

Relatives came to help me a couple of days later. I was so grateful for their help and company. After the memorial service we got to work. I forced myself to go to his P.O. box to see what was there – a lot of very sad and depressing things. He had taken out more credit cards, after he promised me that he was done with all of that. He owed thousands of dollars, again. I started calling the card companies and told them he had died and there were no assets to pay them back; I wasn't personally responsible since my name wasn't on the cards. They said they could be paid out of the estate – I said there were no assets, not a thing from the estate. It was so difficult. My grief was replaced with anger at the mess he had left for me to deal with. But I had to keep going for myself and for Robin.

My relatives found barrels of empty liquor bottles in the basement. They told me about it, and then dealt with them for me. I found more containers with alcohol throughout the house over the next several months, cleverly disguised to seem innocent. Each discovery brought more tears and anguish. I made a lot of phone calls to friends and relations, sobbing in fury and despair. I also found very, very sad things in the house that indicated more addictions. In addition, a light went on when I realized the full extent of everything he had bought through the years since his dad died; it dawned on me that buying things was a way he coped with his depression. He had squirreled them away in various parts of the house, including the basement, which I didn't usually visit. It was staggering to see it all: household items, trinkets, clothes, books, records...it seemed endless. I couldn't take it all in. Plus, there was furniture he had gotten for his consulting business, and many tools for different hobbies he wanted to take up in his retirement. I found a non-profit that would take some of the furniture and other things, then sell them and take half the proceeds. This helped with the immediate bills. I was truly afraid I was going to lose our house. It was such a dark and frightening time.

My relatives and I came to an understanding about the money I had borrowed. Very kind friends sent me a most generous check when they heard what had happened. Eventually, I did sell the rest of my father-in-law's property, and was able to pay back everyone. I was surprised by the people who stepped forward to help, sometimes people I barely knew. I was also surprised by the people who didn't show up at all, not even a phone call, people I thought of as good friends who cared about us. It was sad and disappointing at the time, but I realized later maybe they didn't know what to say, and later I was able to let go and move on.

I felt robbed and cheated of the marriage I believed God had in mind for us. The man I loved with all my heart had been kidnapped and replaced by an alien being who was angry, irrational, and often so

difficult to live with. He, or perhaps more accurately, the disease, betrayed me more times than I could count, and yet I still hoped he could be well and our marriage could continue because I remembered the man I had fallen in love with and married.

It was a long time after my husband's death before my anger, caused from finding the secrets he had hidden from me, was replaced by understanding and, eventually, relief and peace that his struggles were over. I was able to acknowledge and understand that all of these sad discoveries were coping mechanisms for his depression. My husband was a wonderful man who experienced tremendous suffering. He did his best to live a good and honorable life, and that's all any of us can do. It took years to fully come to terms with my loss. I was so busy taking care of things I didn't have time to experience and process all my emotions at the time. There are still occasions when grief ambushes me, but that's OK. I feel his absence every day, but as I have processed these events, I find the sadness is receding and instead, I can focus on finding joy. I am grateful for the love we shared. With God's help, and support from family and friends, writing this has helped me let go and embrace the future.