

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

### **Journal Summary Part 7 – Second Residential Treatment Program, Hope, and Reunification**

The day after J.'s dad's memorial service in late fall of 2003, J. was drinking and driving with Robin in the car at 10 a.m. I prayed all day about what to do, and when I woke up the next morning, I knew I was ready for divorce if J. did not enter into long-term treatment. I told him I was certain he had been drinking and driving the previous day with Robin in the car, and we were now facing a crossroads. I think he heard me. We came home for a few days. I made an appointment to meet with the addictions specialist in a couple of weeks, and we returned to J.'s dad's house to start cleaning it out. I found that J. had brought a large bag crammed full of little vodka bottles, and he was drinking all day. As I had feared, he completely fell apart. It felt like I was watching him drown and there was nothing I could do. It was a dreadful time. However, I still believed in spite of everything he was the same wonderful man I fell in love with and married.

I talked with the addictions specialist, and we discussed a few places for treatment. He recommended one in particular that was not too far from where we lived that had a great reputation. I called them to discuss the entrance procedure and how much it would cost. We would have to take out a huge home equity loan to pay the bill, but his dad had left us some property that we could eventually sell, once it was cleaned up from his dad's business. I told J. I wanted us to meet with the addictions specialist. Initially, he agreed, and I prepared a long letter to read to him. When he backed out, in anger, at the last minute, saying he felt manipulated, I was despondent. But then a week later he agreed to meet and the three of us did get together. I read my letter to him. I wrote about our great love, and also my worries over what could happen if he had an accident while drinking and driving. I said if he didn't get help immediately, then our marriage was over. He listened and wasn't defensive. We agreed on the place for long-term treatment, not too far from where we live. Their initial treatment period was six weeks, with opportunities for continuing in after-care. It was his responsibility to call to make the arrangements to begin. J. didn't call right away, saying he would do it after the holidays because we needed to keep going with his dad's house. His ankle bothered him a lot, but he still refused to use crutches or wear hiking boots. I had to let go.

The day arrived for him to start treatment in early 2004; he was already drunk when I arrived in the morning. He was so disoriented that I had to tell him every couple of minutes what he had to do next. It was awful. I got him to the treatment facility, turned around to go back to my place, and fell apart. The staff at the facility called me the next day to say after doing some blood tests, they had determined he needed to be in medically-supervised detox for five days. I caught a bug from all the stress and had to miss work for several days because I was so sick. We wrote to each other every day, and I went to see him every weekend. His letters were full of hope and discovery. I asked him if he would write down some of his insights and share them with me, and he did, for a little while. But I was feeling very run down from all of the stress, plus I was taking care of Robin and working. In addition, I was doing all I could to deal with the cleanup of his dad's property. Every day was challenging. J. was worried about his ankle and the fact it was swollen. I had to bite my tongue so I wouldn't say this was happening because

he hadn't taken care of it properly after surgery. I came across a profound writing about happiness – that it is always there – it's unhappiness that comes and goes. I found it difficult to believe.

I went to Family Program for four days, learned a lot about addiction, met great people, and was confronted with the fact that I still have a lot of healing to do myself. J. "graduated" to another six-week program where he was still living at the treatment center, but in a co-ed dorm with more privileges. It was a good fit for him and he really liked it. I grew more anxious as the time drew near for him to figure out his next steps. I met with J. and his counselor at the center. We discussed options for aftercare. I told J. I wanted him to have as much support as possible, and said he should do whatever the counselor recommends. There was no decision on a plan that day. I knew that if we had more money, I would vote for more time at the center, but J. said he was ready to resume his life and promised nothing would get in the way of recovery this time – everything else was secondary. There was one huge shock in the meeting – the counselor mentioned that J. had relapsed five minutes after he left the first residential treatment program two years ago. I was stunned. I guess the counselor thought I already knew this. A couple of weeks before he left the center, J. picked up on my anxiety over recovery and accused me of being sure he was going to fail. He said this was not helpful to his recovery and was very angry. We kept going. Sometimes he was able to share new insights with me, which I always appreciated.

Shortly afterwards, J.'s time at the center ended. I didn't hear what the aftercare plan was. (This was a big mistake; we should have come to an agreement of what would be happening, and how I could be involved.) The day he left, we immediately drove to his dad's to witness the start of the cleanup of the property. It turned out the contamination was far worse than we had realized. Our dreams vanished of a quick sale of the property and the end of our crushing debt. Also, J. was so consumed with the cleanup and dealing with his dad's house that recovery took a back seat right away. After a couple of days, the first phase of the clean-up ended. We drove back to our respective homes, and I sobbed in despair with my housemates.

The work on the cleanup continued, slowly, but there were some happy moments with J. However, he never talked about recovery. He wanted me to move back into the house, and after I thought about it, I decided I should wait six more weeks. J. was unhappy when I told him. We planned a weekend getaway shortly afterwards to one of our favorite places, but disaster struck while we were there. We had a dreadful breakdown when I brought up my fears of his lack of dedication to recovery. He exploded in rage, and said he did have an aftercare program but the company had messed up the paperwork. We drove back in silence to my place, and he said he was going to his dad's because he couldn't stand to be around me, that I was a threat to his recovery. He refused to answer my calls for a week. When he came back home, we talked for a long time about his dad's property and recovery. He said he knew what he was doing, and recovery was still important to him. The talk helped, and we kept going, but I realized I needed to protect myself and told my housemates I would like to keep living with them; they said that was fine.

Then Robin experienced a serious health crisis, which was initially misdiagnosed, and it led to her being hospitalized. Then J.'s back got worse, and he needed medical treatment. Fortunately, he recovered enough to go on a trip with my family and we had a very nice time. I was glad we were still married. Work on the property continued, and we had to borrow more money for the cleanup. The debt

was a huge worry. J. said he was now rededicating himself to recovery and was going to meetings regularly and meeting with his counselor. Things seemed more stable, and I decided in the summer that if we stayed on track, I would move back into the house before Christmas, 2004.

J.'s ankle continued to bother him, and after consulting with the surgeon, decided to have the hardware removed. The instructions after the surgery were the same as the first surgery – stay off it for a while, use crutches, wear hiking boots. I said I would move back into our house for a little while to help him after the surgery. Unfortunately, the same pattern as before repeated itself: J. ignored all the instructions, and wept with pain at night, only to do the same thing the next day. It was agony to watch. I left after a couple of days because I couldn't stand it. I found an extremely powerful piece on detachment that was eloquent and helpful (<http://www.soencouragement.org/to-let-go-takes-love.htm>).