

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

Journal Entries, Part 2 – Marriage; Discovery of Alcoholism; Before First Separation

Spring, 1995

Something absolutely dreadful happened. We are supposed to be getting married in a week, and we had the worst misunderstanding ever – it was related to his jealousy. I tried to explain but he wouldn't listen to me, didn't believe me. I could barely function for several days. I started to seriously question whether we should get married. Some of my relatives are concerned that I sound so unhappy. I had an emergency session with my counselor, and we talked about how torn I was about moving ahead with the wedding. She suggested that I go to our church, then just sit there for a while, think about J. and see what images came to mind. Were they happy memories of the time we've had together, or were they the difficult times? So, I did that and all I could think of were the happy times – how he makes me laugh, that he's a good listener, and we have so much in common. I left the church with a lighter heart, confident that this was the man God has in mind for me. We are going ahead as planned.

Spring, 1995

We are on our honeymoon. We are having the most absolutely fabulous time. Every day is fantastic. I am so happy. The wedding was wonderful. When I made the vows, I knew I was making them to God as well as to J. I will do all that I can for as long as we both are alive to love, honor, and cherish him, for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Please help us, God, have the life you intend for us.

December 5, 1995

I've been so busy that I haven't written in my journal. I'm so worried about how much J. drinks. Even when he is very sick, he drinks a lot. This can't be good for him. We went out to eat, and he got so angry in the restaurant – he waved his arm at the hostess in disgust; he yelled that the waiter needed hearing aids because the waiter couldn't hear him in the noisy restaurant, but the fact is that J. has a soft voice. He saw my face and asked me what was wrong – I said I would have handled it differently. He got angry with me. (*Warning sign: he had been drinking heavily.*)

His unreasonable anger continues to be a worry. There have been so many times when something trivial seems to upset him all out of proportion. I notice that it is impossible for me to make an observation without him taking it as criticism, like when I remarked it was better to hold a CD by its edges rather than on the disk because that might make it skip, and he got very defensive. Why? He was very abrupt with Robin a few days ago, who wasn't doing anything wrong – should I say anything? We had a huge jealous scene when we were on vacation with his dad and Robin this fall, when I happened to briefly watch a guy ride by on his bike. He apologized later, and admitted that he was not doing what his counselor suggested when he was getting angry. When he talks softly and I can't hear him, he gets annoyed if I ask him to please speak up a little. I hurt his feelings when he was cooking a new recipe with lentils. He brought up that maybe they could have been cooked longer and I agreed with him that they were a little crunchy. Then, he accused me of being grumpy when all I did was agree with him, when he

had brought it up in the first place! He gets upset if he sees me yawning, and says I must think he's boring, rather than believing me when I say I'm tired. He isn't eating very much for dinner, and when I ask him about it, he says he's not hungry. (*Another warning sign – alcohol is replacing food.*)

January 20, 1996

We had this weird argument one night over whether he was lazy. He said that he was, and I said no he certainly was not lazy. He kept on saying that he was, I kept disagreeing, and said maybe he wasn't doing everything he wanted to do because he was tired. Then all of a sudden, he switches to saying that I think he's lazy, I immediately object and say no, I do not think that at all, and once again he retreats to the damp, unpleasant and unfinished basement to get away from me. (*Missed warning sign – he had alcohol hidden in the basement.*) How do I handle a situation like this? My counselor suggests that I say "I'm sorry you feel that way – that's not how I see you at all."

Another time, he brings our dinner and I notice that he has burned his hand. (*Missed warning sign – accidents that seem odd.*) I asked him what happened. He says it's all he deserves. I feel dreadful and start to cry. How do I handle this? My counselor suggests same approach – "I'm sorry you feel that way – that's not how I feel."

My counselor suggests that I say that it is very important to me that he keeps having regular contact with a therapist, to deal with his feelings of anger, jealousy, and low self-esteem. She also suggests that I say "I am worried about you, and the terrible stress you have in your job. It would be comforting for me to know that you have someone to talk to who can help you." (*I wasn't able to bring myself to say these things because I was too nervous and afraid.*)

March 9, 1996

We had this very weird and scary episode when we had a misunderstanding about our tax return. It started during the day, and then continued after he came back from his night meeting for work. I stayed up way past my usual bedtime to talk to him after the meeting was over. He said the meeting was difficult, I expressed sympathy, we had a brief discussion about the tax return and then I said I was getting tired. He stayed in our bedroom for a little while, then left and I turned out the light and went to sleep for a couple of hours. Then he came back in, turned the light on, and started asking me odd questions, like "What did you say?" when I hadn't said anything, and asked me what I had for dinner. He finally shut off the light, but I couldn't get back to sleep for hours. I got up when the alarm went off, and he asked me how I slept. I did my best to be diplomatic and said he woke me up, that he had turned the light on and asked questions. He said he didn't remember doing that at all. He was quiet for a while, then he got angry and said he was upset about the tax return. I asked for a time-out twice, and then tried to explain what was happening with the return. He was still very angry. (*Missed warning sign – he had had an alcoholic blackout.*)

I said it felt like he's been irritated with me all day, that I'm bugging him, and I don't know what to do. How can I stop the downward spiral when he's upset? What can I say to him that doesn't make things worse when he seems distressed?

March 13, 1996

There have been so many communication misfires between us – the temperature in our house; how I talk to people I know and he doesn't when we're at an event; I want to go to the cardiologist with him so I can understand more about his health but he doesn't want me to; he says when we disagree about something I act like he's always wrong and I'm always right. I continue to worry that he's not eating enough.

I'm very concerned about how tired he is. Sunday, he looked shot, even after he'd had a nap (most unusual for him). He starts to talk about the car he wants to fix up and gets sad, starts to tear up, his voice drops down and it's hard to hear him. Instead of asking him to repeat what he said, which bugs him, I guess at what he said and I get it wrong and then he's angry at me for not understanding what he said. It makes me so sad. Why can't we talk to each other?

April 6, 1996

We had a lovely time visiting an historic city with my parents. Most of the time it was wonderful. It was so nice to see J. happy and relaxed. This is the man I married! Thank you, God.

April 20, 1996

Something so weird and frightening happened last night. I had gone to bed and J. was in the kitchen. He said he had had a very tough day at work and wasn't ready to go to bed yet. I heard loud voices. I got out of bed and walked towards the kitchen. I could hear J. talking to himself, but he was using two different voices; one was pitched high like a woman's voice, and it seemed like he was arguing with himself. He sounded angry. I was so freaked out I didn't know what to do, whether I should go into the kitchen and talk to him or not. I decided not to do anything right then, and I went back to bed and just lay there. I was awake for a long time. I was able to go to sleep before he came back to bed, and he seemed OK in the morning. I don't know what to do. Please help me, God. (*Warning sign – mental problems are getting worse.*)

April 27, 1996

Things are much better. J.'s mood has improved, and we are very excited to be planning a weekend get-away next month. He makes me laugh every day. We are connected at the heart. I am happy.

June 3, 1996

- Friday night: J. was upset that I wandered into kitchen to watch him deal with a clog in the sink and barked at me, saying, "Are you supervising me?" I scurried away like a scared little girl. He didn't eat much for dinner. (*Missed warning sign – he didn't want me in the kitchen so I wouldn't see how much he was drinking.*)
- Saturday morning: J. doesn't seem like his normal self yet; I made a comment about his mood/spirits and he gets angry, starts to walk away, I ask him to come back and ask him why he's

angry. He says he's mad at himself for hurting me. I agree that I will bring up my feelings at the time we are having a misunderstanding.

- Saturday evening: he's angry about something, and I try to stay out of his way. He cooks dinner and I stay out of the kitchen. He is very tired, and we don't talk much at dinner. Then he says as we are going to bed "Talk to me in the morning about what I've done wrong." I feel very bad that I've hurt his feelings in some way, and I'm not sure what I said that upset him.
- Sunday morning: he finally seems like his normal self. I ask him why he was angry yesterday; he said he didn't feel angry. I repeated his words back to him and asked him if they sounded like angry words to him – he said yes.
- Sunday afternoon: I feel sad. We went over the words again, and I ask him point blank, are you angry at me? He said no. Then I asked if he's not angry at me, who is he angry at? He says he doesn't know. I ask him to see his counselor and he agrees. I ask him to hold me and say he's sorry, and he does.

June 17, 1996

We had such a wonderful time together on our get-away weekend! No misunderstandings, just a lot of fun poking around a new place. This is why I fell in love with J. and wanted to marry him. He made laugh, and is such good company. Thank you, God!

July 6, 1996

I am heartbroken, in despair, and so very, very sad to say that I now understand the source of so many of our problems. A few days ago, I was looking for an empty box, and since I couldn't find one in the house, I went outside to the trash containers, dug through some things, found the perfect box, opened it up, and there were two very large, empty bottles of vodka. I was absolutely stunned. My heart was pounding and I felt like I was watching a movie, rather than living my own life. It hit me that this explained so much of his "odd behavior" that I had attributed to him being tired or stressed or a result of the medications he's on for blood pressure and depression. I was so upset I couldn't talk to him right away about what I had found. He accused me of being distant that evening, and I'm sure I was. I didn't know what to say. "You are an alcoholic" kept going through my mind, but saying the words to him was something else. The next day after work I told him what I'd found, and he said he would quit drinking immediately. I knew this was going to be difficult, and I decided to buy three different kinds of gourmet chocolate ice cream, thinking that might be a good way to distract himself from wanting to drink.

J. stopped drinking for three days, saying he could beat this thing, but he couldn't make it and now he has gone back to drinking again every day. I'm not surprised, but I'm so very, very sad. I think I'm taking his problem more seriously than he is.

I went to three Al-Anon meetings last week, and I'm going to do all I can to go to at least one meeting every week. I've already met some very nice people. Fortunately, there is a meeting very close to where I work.

July 7, 1996

These are meeting notes I made after meeting with my counselor, where we reviewed the issues I want to discuss with J. She helped me find some words I feel OK saying.

- I would like to go with you to your next counseling appointment to share these concerns I have – is that OK with you? This is because I am concerned and worried about you – not because I’m a caretaker or supervisor.
- There have been events in the past few months that have scared me and make me very concerned about your health, like the time you don’t remember turning on the lights at night and waking me up; and not eating enough when you’ve been drinking. I want someone else besides me to know about them.
- I am worried that a lot of the time you seem tired and listless with no energy, and you don’t have much appetite.
- I want you to do what you need to do to take care of yourself, so you can have the energy to be with me. I want you to be present with me. I like you better when you’re not drinking.
- I want to say these things to your counselor, and I want you to know what I’m going to say beforehand so you know what they are.
- I’m hopeful that this can be a new start.

July 14, 1996

I was not able to bring myself to say all those words to J. I’m too afraid that he will get angry. It’s so difficult for me to face him when he’s angry.

I’ve told several close friends about what is happening. It helps to talk about it, but there is the danger that word will get back to him. I worry about what he would do if this happens.

July 18, 1996

Draft notes to prepare for conversation with J.

- I keep thinking about what happened Sunday night. I was nervous about dancing together in the kitchen because when you’ve been drinking it seems like you forget that my joints are fragile and I can’t do sudden twists or turns. When you’ve been drinking you are less inhibited about your dancing and you will make sudden moves. You hurt me unwittingly in what was supposed to be a playful gesture, and it hurt for more than one day. I believe you would have been more careful if you hadn’t been drinking. I know you didn’t mean to hurt me in any way, but when you’ve been drinking you don’t realize how strong you are.
- I would like you to know how your drinking affects me.
- I can’t discuss important things with you because you can’t pay attention when you’ve been drinking.
- When you’re jovial, I don’t know if you’re responding to me or to the alcohol.
- You are more emotional when you’ve been drinking – do I believe what you say as the truth then, or afterwards when you’re not drinking?

- It is far more likely for you to get angry with me when you've been drinking.
- It doesn't feel like you're really with me – I feel like I'm losing you.
- You don't have the energy or emotional support for me.
- I want to be with you as a whole person, not just the body you inhabit but the whole wonderful man I married.
- I appreciate the fact that you have cut back.
- I need to know that dealing with the drinking is a top priority for you. You said at one point you had plans to see your counselor every two weeks, but could you go every week? I would find that reassuring. You also mentioned that your health insurance had authorized you to go for six visits. I need to be able to trust that you will see him for a while, because it would help me know you are committed to the process. We will find the money so you can get the help you need, regardless of whether your health insurance will pay for it.
- One thing that concerns me is the reason why you started drinking so heavily in the first place – cutting back on the amount you are drinking deals with the result, but the underlying cause or reason is still there.
- How much is OK for you – one beer, two, or is there no OK amount? What about the interactions with your blood pressure medicine and the anti-depressants? Would you be willing to go through an assessment program to determine where you are on the scale?

July 20, 1996

When I tried to have this conversation with J., it did not go well at all. I could not bring myself to say everything because I was afraid of his anger. I decided just to talk about the time he hurt me unwittingly. He came home after work, and said he had had a good day. I told him about him hurting me, and it was like I completely deflated his balloon. He said he was “feeling gay” when he hurt me. He said he wished he could go for an entire week without me criticizing him. I said each time I made an observation about something he said or did, I had done my best to be fair. I said this situation was very difficult for me.

After a couple of days, it seemed like things were OK between us. Then he asked me to help him with an article he had to write for work. I did this and sent it to him. When he came home, he was in a rotten mood, saying he was very disappointed in what I had done, and then he kept saying it. I felt worse and worse.

We did the laundry late one night, and his socks weren't in the drier long enough to get completely dry. He said, “It's what I'm used to” and I told him to stop, that this wasn't fair. He apologized later, and said he saw his counselor who “blew the lid off,” which deeply affected J, and made him angry. When we finally got to bed, I told him I felt like I had let him down.

My counselor suggests that I say to J. that while his counseling is very important, I don't want to get caught in the line of fire, so we need to have a plan of some sort. Can we listen to music together, go for a walk, light candles, get take-out so no one has to cook, or do something else to shift his emotional state? *(I wasn't able to say these things.)*

My counselor says it is ok for me to ask J. how much he remembers of last night. I can say “It’s painful for me to see you when you can’t get food in your mouth, you can’t walk in a straight line, and you have to hold onto a door to get through it. It’s difficult for me to come home at the end of the day and wonder which man is going to be home – the man I married – the kind, wonderful, funny, creative man – or the shell of a man who is absent from the conversation.”

I need to work on having this conversation with J. about how his drinking affects me, but I dread doing this. Why is it so difficult for me to stand up for myself?

My counselor also suggested that I have a conversation with J. about me needing a safe place to be when he’s angry – how do I discuss this with him so I can protect myself? Some possible words: “How can we work this out? When you are so negative and angry towards me, I need you to stop or go someplace else. I realize you may need to get the anger out of you, but it’s not good for me to be around all these negative feelings when you need to let it out. Can you find a healthy outlet for your anger? We could brainstorm this together.”

Or perhaps, “Are you willing to talk about this? I have some ideas – do you want to hear them or do you have some ideas?” Or, “What can you and I agree to do when you feel so angry? It might be helpful for you to take a walk, or the two of us could sit on our porch. I’m willing to participate in what you think would be helpful.”

What do I say when he says he’s a bad person? Maybe “I’m sorry you feel this way. I know this is difficult. I’m sorry you’re having to go through all this.”

My counselor and I also discussed another issue – what do I do when J. doesn’t say what he truly feels and misleads me, and then he explodes later because he wasn’t honest at the time. Possible words: “I would appreciate it if you could work with your counselor on saying what you really mean. I want to support you but it confuses the heck out of me when you say one thing but don’t mean it. It takes energy away that I could use to support you.”

July 22, 1996

I called someone in the program to get advice on how to deal with my anxiety and fear. She suggested that I create a gratitude list – take five minutes and write down everything I am grateful for. This sounded silly, and she could tell I was skeptical. She urged me to give it a try. I said OK. I did it, and I felt a tiny bit better.

July 24, 1996

It happened. I confided about J.’s problem with a man I work with from time to time, “Chris,” whom I think of as a friend, when I was at a really low place and had started to cry. I made the huge mistake of not saying right then, please don’t share this with anyone else. He then told other people, who then must have told even more people, and then word got back to J. Oh, he is so angry with me. I don’t blame him. I feel awful. I wish the earth would swallow me up. I can’t take back the words I said. I have apologized and apologized and it doesn’t matter. Please God, help us.

July 25, 1996

I came across these words: “Whatever you do, don’t shut off your pain; accept your pain and remain vulnerable. However desperate you become, accept your pain as it is, because it is in fact trying to hand you a priceless gift: the chance of discovering, through spiritual practice, what lies behind sorrow.” I can’t imagine being able to do this.

July 27, 1996

I called a good friend, “Jessica,” to get her thoughts. We have known each other for years; she has struggled with her own addiction and is doing great now. She had told me recently that her father, “Robert,” who had been an alcoholic for years, hit bottom several years ago, and then went to a residential treatment program for three years. She said he came out a transformed person. She listened to me spill my guts with everything that’s happened, had some helpful thoughts, then gave me her father’s phone number. She said he would be happy to talk to me. So I called him, and we talked for a long time about what had been happening with J. It was obvious he knew what he was talking about, having lived it himself. He said an alcoholic who is drinking is basically a crazy person – they can’t think straight. We talked about what real recovery means. He told me emphatically, “Half-measures get you nowhere,” and said it sounded to him like that’s what J. was doing. He asked if was J. willing to go to meetings every day and find a sponsor and talk to him every day; I said probably not. So far, J. has been going to meetings only some days and didn’t have a sponsor. Robert was quiet for a while and then he said, “You are in for a very rough ride.”

I told him I was going to Al-Anon meetings, and he said that was the best thing I could do. He said he was willing to talk to J. I thanked him but said at the moment, I wasn’t ready to give that a try since he was already so angry that I’ve been talking to people. He wished me luck. He said that I needed to live life one day at a time. We hung up and I wanted to cry. Please, God, help me know what is the next right thing to do.

August 5, 1996

Over the weekend, J. invited me to go for a ride in his treasured sports car to a scenic spot not far from our house. He was already sitting in the car in the driveway when I happened to come out of the house, and he suggested we go for a drive. I said sure, I’d like to come. A couple of times as he was driving up the winding road the wheels left the pavement, but it wasn’t until we returned home and I saw him get out of the car and weave his way towards the house that I realized he was drunk. I am absolutely sick with fear, dread, worry, panic. What do I say? What do I do? Drinking and driving is absolutely not acceptable. I know what it’s like to be injured in a car accident, and I do not want this to happen to someone else or me or him. I must find the words to say to him very soon.

August 7, 1996

I told J. I knew he had been drinking and driving in the sports car, and that I will not accept this. He wouldn’t look at me, didn’t say anything when I was done, and walked away. What am I going to do?

August 9, 1996 Draft notes to prepare for conversation with J.

- I feel sad and worried because it feels like I'm more concerned about what happened than you are, and it is extremely troubling to me. When I talked about you drinking and driving with me in the sports car, you didn't say anything. That fact that you did go driving with me when you shouldn't have is extremely upsetting, which is why I would like us to have clarity on what drinking limits are best for you. I am willing to do whatever is necessary to help you and be supportive. But I am establishing a line in the sand – if you drink and drive again, I will separate.

August 15, 1996

I'm so sad. J. found an outpatient program nearby and started going. I was very excited because it seemed like a good fit for him – he liked the counselor and he liked the other people in the program. So he went for a couple of times, and then catastrophe – the counselor said the funding had been cut, he was losing his job, and the program was over. J. was devastated. When he came home after the meeting, he said several people in the program were crying when they heard the news. Dear God, how can this be? I feel like I had hope, and it's been taken away from me and us. They say at the meetings that I need to let go and let God. I hear the words, but I can't do it.

August 20, 1996

I talked to Jessica again, and told her what her dad had said to me. She suggested that I could write a letter to J. and read it to him, and tell him how his drinking affects me personally. I could picture myself doing this, and worked on the letter for a couple of days. I finally got up the courage to read it to him on our porch, speaking calmly, and I could tell he was listening. I also told him I would separate if he were to drink and drive again. He didn't say anything. I gave him the letter. I've done what I can right now.

August 28, 1996 Other continuing issues to discuss with my counselor:

- J. continues to be upset that I told other people about the drinking. I can't take away what happened – I can't. I didn't do it on purpose to hurt him – other people violated my trust. I'm so very sorry and there's nothing I can do about it now. How can we move forward?
- He is angry a lot of the time, and we have frequent misunderstandings. I feel like I'm back to walking on eggshells. It seems that I'm not allowed to get frustrated or annoyed with him, but it is sure OK for him to get angry at me for little things. As a result, I avoid telling him that I'm annoyed or irritated because I'm afraid of his reaction. Why is it so difficult for me to stand up for myself?
- J. says he wants me to bring up issues at the time, rather than wait until later to discuss, but this is difficult because usually he's been drinking when we have a misunderstanding, so it's difficult to have a rational conversation at that point.
- We are continuing to have difficult time talking about finances; we can't even seem to come to an agreement on paying for groceries.
- I can feel myself withdrawing when he's drinking.

September 15, 1996 More issues to discuss with my counselor

- I was worried about him driving on Labor Day when we went to visit his dad. I volunteered to drive, and he looked offended but I was still worried.
- In the past we agreed that we would ask the question “Are we OK?” when it seemed that we were not in synch. I do not get annoyed with him when he asks me, instead I’m glad that he’s checking in as we agreed to do. However, he gets annoyed with me when I ask. It seems there is a big double-standard here in our relationship. He gets annoyed when I bring up things that I’m concerned about, and he doesn’t have something “equal” to say to me – as if it’s only OK for me to bring things up when he has a tit-for-tat about my behavior. So I can’t criticize him for something unless he can then find something to criticize me for? So when/how can we have a discussion about something that’s on my mind? When is it “acceptable” to tell him something?
- He was upset that I was standing in the kitchen while he was making dinner and, as a result, all my previous frustration came out about not being wanted or welcomed in the kitchen while he’s cooking. Then I apologized, and tried to explain that my mother complained about being a “slave” when no one was in the kitchen with her when she was working, so I feel guilty when I’m not helping him. I told him he is welcome to his alone time. Then while we were eating, in anger he announced his decision that I could take over cooking dinner from now on. I was very sad, and didn’t ask him if I got a vote on that. He has always cooked dinner, and seems to enjoy it. (*Red flag – he didn’t want me in the kitchen because I would see how much he was drinking.*)
- We had a terrible misunderstanding when he didn’t leave a message that he would be late; I simply asked gently if he could let me know when he’s going to be late so I won’t get so worried. He got very defensive, threw a sock across the room in anger and was all hunched over, as if he expects me to hurt him. Then he says during our evening prayer that “no one’s to blame.” I couldn’t sleep that night I felt so terrible. I tried to talk to him the next morning but didn’t get anywhere.
- It seems like he thinks I’m going to hurt him like his mother did with undeserved blame or criticism. He then acts like a martyr, saying he’s the bad guy or thinks I’m trying to blame him or find fault when I’m just trying to figure something out. It seems like he can’t be objective. When we have a misunderstanding, I want to find a better way to communicate, but he acts like I’m saying there’s a problem with him personally, rather than looking at the behavior – it’s not who he is, it’s what he is doing.

October 1996, notes from meeting with my counselor

J. and I had another big misunderstanding/disagreement over something minor, and his anger at me over something trivial is very upsetting. I rehearsed with my counselor again how to talk to him about getting counseling.

My counselor suggests this possible wording when I have this conversation with J.: “I’m sorry you have this struggle with anger, and I love you. I can’t change or fix you. You need to see your counselor. I am clear on this. I am not explaining myself again. You said you were going to see your counselor, and I was very relieved to hear you say that you were going to see him again. It is very important to me. I

hope you have been able to make an appointment with him sometime soon. Also, it would help me to know that you are seeing him on a regular basis. I don't need to know what you are talking about – I am reassured to know that you are going. If it's OK with you, I would greatly appreciate it if you could tell me when you go."

November 1996, things to discuss with my counselor

- J. promised he'd go see his counselor, and tell me when, but then he didn't go for several weeks.
- When I brought something up one evening, he slumped over, and said "no serious discussions," because he just couldn't deal with it then. So when do we talk?
- We had an argument/misunderstanding one evening last week, then he apologized the next morning, and didn't drink all day, and not much the next day, but over the weekend he was drinking both days. When Robin called for a ride, I worried whether he should go, even though he seemed sober.
- How do I tell him I don't think he should drive?
- If I'm not asking him to stop drinking, am I giving approval when he is drinking? What if he pretends he hasn't been drinking?
- Do I ask him again to stop drinking, or say again how it affects me?
- Should I not ask him again about seeing his counselor until after Christmas?

Late November 1996

My counselor and I talked about the fact that she feels she does not have enough experience dealing with issues related to addiction, and recommended that I find someone who does. Fortunately, I was able to find another woman who came highly recommended and she is able to see me on a regular basis.

I went to my first open AA meeting, to try to get some insights from other people struggling. It was very interesting and enlightening, and I'm so glad I went. It was also very depressing because J. seems very far away from wanting with all his heart to do whatever it takes to deal with this disease, unlike several of the people I saw. The intense desire, the "fire in the belly," doesn't seem to be there with him.

When I talked to my new counselor about how to respond when J. says "What have I done wrong now?" or "I'm always the bad guy," she suggested I could say, "I hear anger" or "I hear sarcasm" or "I hope it looks better in the morning."

Other things she mentioned that I could say to J.:

"I expect you to be sober if you're talking to me about something that's serious and important."

"I can tell when you've been drinking. I don't like it. It makes me feel uncomfortable. You change when you drink and I miss the real you. Your drinking affects us. It's not fair to pretend that there's nothing wrong. I'm not attacking you – it's the truth. I don't want to live this way. I want to have peace in my own home."

Questions to ask my friend Jessica:

- Is it true as long as J. is drinking that counseling won't help?
- Is he hurting himself or negating the effect of the medications he's on (*for depression and high blood pressure*) by continuing to drink?
- Is it OK to read Al-Anon and other recovery literature in front of him?
- Should I write him another letter?
- Should I be more persistent after the holidays about suggesting that he see a counselor who specializes in addictions?

December 14, 1996

I need to free myself from guilt. I am not causing J. to drink. I need to focus my eyes and mind on something else, so my feelings will be clear.

J. is angry with me because, according to him, there is an ever-widening circle of people he works with who he says treat him as if he were a child molester, or don't look him in the eye and turn away. I said to him that it's not fair that he blames me for everyone else's behavior – it may have nothing to do with anything I've said. My counselor said she was proud of me for standing up for myself.

J. complained that he has no one to talk to except people he pays. I said that he always has me to talk to, and he said "That's why I'm working so hard to keep you."

Another day J. said that he wants to "get back to where we were," that he feels like we're drifting and growing apart. I told him my feelings haven't changed, but I cannot tolerate drinking and driving, that I will pursue a separation the next time it happens. I want us to have a long life together, and it's important for us to have joy every day. I want to stop the train of worry and fear. Thank goodness for Al-Anon meetings. They are my anchor.

January 16, 1997

My counselor suggested one strategy might be to leave the house if I come home and he's drinking. I tried that for the first time three weeks ago. I came home, J. had cooked dinner but was obviously intoxicated, and I told him I was leaving the house for a few hours. I left right then, but at first wasn't sure where to go. Eventually, I decided to go to a restaurant nearby. The staff knew me and could see I was upset. They asked me what had happened but I couldn't explain. I got a table in the back and sat there while I tried not to cry too loudly. I called J.'s dad to explain what was going on and asked him what to do. He said he had no advice to give me on what to do or say to J., that I was there and he wasn't, and that he trusted me to do the right thing. I felt so alone. When I got home, J. had gone to bed and had thrown the dinner into the trash. I felt so bad, but just went to bed. We didn't talk about what had happened the next day.

A week later it happened again, and this time I called a friend on the spur of the moment and asked her if it would be OK if I hung out at her house for a couple of hours. She knew the circumstances, but I had not asked her in advance if it would be OK if I did this. I went over there and I talked to her

while she spent time with her young children; her husband was working. I returned home later that evening. Again, J. and I didn't talk about it the next day. Then the same thing happened again the next week – I came home, J. had been drinking, and I turned around and left the house, and called my friend. She was gracious and said it was OK to come over, but it was very awkward – she and her husband were going out and had hired a babysitter. I came to their house and hung out with the babysitter and kids, and realized I couldn't keep doing this to my friend – she has her own life to live and all this turmoil is not good for her and her family.

The list of issues to raise in my counseling session after these events:

- Should my next step be when I come home and he's drinking to go away overnight, rather than just leave for a few hours in the evening?
- Should I ask to go with him to see his counselor and bring up treatment?
- Should there be an intervention?
- Should I mention that his dad knows about the drinking and actually brought it up himself with me, before we were married?

January 23, 1997

On Saturday we had an argument in the morning and he left to go hiking by himself. Around 6 that night there was an absolutely dreadful, gut-wrenching, I-wish-the-earth-would-swallow-me-up experience. I watched J. arrive at our house so drunk that he couldn't walk up the stairs without holding on to the steps. He was returning from hiking and had stopped to give Robin a ride from work. I was horrified. I came to an immediate decision. I told him I was going to leave the house in the morning and stay away until Monday afternoon, to give him a chance to think about his behavior. He asked me to stay so we could talk about what had happened and all of his feelings that led up to drinking and driving, and I said no, that there was never an excuse for drinking and driving. I called a friend from work and asked if I could stay with her for a couple of days while I figured out what to do. She very kindly said yes. J. slept upstairs. I packed my things and left early the next morning.

While I was at my friend's house, I made a lot of phone calls to my relatives, J.'s dad, and friends who had experience with addicted loved ones. I talked to my friend Jessica's dad, Robert, again. I got the name of someone who did interventions, and talked with him. He explained the process. I was able to reach a medical doctor who specializes in addictions, and discussed different ways things could unfold. I had an emergency session with my counselor. I called an attorney and made an appointment to get more information on a legal separation. I prayed for guidance, and came to a decision about an ultimatum. When I returned home and saw J.'s car in the driveway I wondered if I would find him dead on the floor from drinking. It was agony to open the door to our house. He was alive but looked awful. He said he had gone camping. I told J. he must completely dedicate himself to recovery if we are to continue in the marriage. He said yes. I said if he were to drink and drive again, I would seek a separation and would get a court order for him to leave the house if necessary. I asked him if he understood, and he said yes. I asked if he agreed with what I said and he said yes. Then I said I would seek God's will for me, I will not be an enabler, and I will take care of myself. He said he understood. We will go see his counselor together and come up with a plan, but first he will see his counselor alone. *(Notice that I did not follow*

through with my earlier boundary from July – that if he were drinking and driving again, I would separate. Looking through my journal, it's as if I "forgot" I had told J. I would separate.)

January 25, 1997

I wrote a letter to J.'s counselor, because I'm afraid J. won't be honest about what happened. I hope I'm doing the right thing.

January 28, 1997

We have gotten through the last few days, with some bumps. But we managed to connect and there were some positive times. I have caught a terrible cold and J. has been very concerned about me, cooking great food and wanting to help me get well. The love is still there. He says he has been going to meetings.

The list of issues to raise in my next counseling session:

- Should I take all the bottles out of the house and tell him what I'm doing?
- He says that he has no friends, and it's my fault. How do I respond to this?
- He says he wants people to approach/reach out to him – should I suggest to anyone that they do that?
- Should I tell J. I'm seeing a lawyer?

January 30, 1997

J. has started to make another effort for recovery and found an outpatient program nearby. Things seem better at the moment.

Draft notes for the conversation I want to have at some point in the future with J.:

- How can I let you know that something is really bothering me? If you can't hear it from me, then tell me someone you will listen to.
- Writing letters is a way that I know to communicate. I care about you, and don't know other ways to reach you. I'm willing to try other ways if you're willing to be open.
- I'm thinking of going to more open AA speaker meetings so I can learn more about the disease myself.
- It makes me happy to hear you are going to meetings. I would still like you to follow through with getting an assessment. In the meantime, please focus on your recovery so things don't get worse. It's up to you.
- Your recovery is your life – it's more important than work.

My counselor gave me my own homework – write down the list of rules that applied to my childhood. It didn't take me long to make the list:

- Do anything to make my mother happy – sacrifice anything, say anything, do whatever it takes so she will be happy and her depression will be cured.

- Lie still, and maybe he will go away.
- Don't talk to the person you are having an issue with – use an intermediary to carry the message.

She said something that made sense – when we experience trauma as children, our default response is “don't talk, don't trust, don't feel” and it is very difficult to move beyond this response, even as adults. We also talked more about J.'s anger, and things I might say to him:

- What was it about what I said that made you feel you “can't say anything right?”
- It's not about me winning – I want us both to feel that we're winning.
- If he says he's angry, I can ask him what he's angry about, or if he wants to tell me why he's angry.
- When he's angry, I don't have to feel responsible for his feelings. I can be supportive, I can listen, I can pray, and I can be with him in silence.

February 4, 1997

When I got home on Friday after work, I could tell J. had been drinking; he was also sick with my cold. He got very angry when I tried to share my advice on how to treat a cold. The next day it turns out he was really angry about the fact I had written to his counselor behind his back. Somehow, we got through the weekend, and there were even some good moments. Tonight, when I rounded the corner to turn onto our street after work, J.'s car was gone. I immediately panicked, wondering if he was drinking and driving. It was very scary for a while, but he was sober when he arrived a few minutes later. He had given Robin a ride home from work. Is this how I will feel every time I come home at night and his car is gone?

February 6, 1997

I have called J.'s dad a couple of times to tell him about what's happening, and see if he has any advice. He keeps saying that he has no guidance to give me, that he doesn't know what to say or do, and that he trusts my judgment. Please, God, help me.

February 8, 1997

I met with an attorney to talk about a legal separation. She was very nice. She said we could also separate and live apart without a formal legal agreement, depending on the circumstances. We talked about how long it would last. I said I was thinking maybe three months. She said in her experience, six months was a better indicator of a person's commitment to sobriety. I was stunned. I can't imagine living apart for that long. I was very sad when I left.

February 13, 1997

J. says he's tried going to a few AA meetings in the area, but he doesn't identify with the people who go so he doesn't get much out of them. I don't know what to say. It seems to me that this is an excuse to not go, but I'm not telling him that. I keep hearing at the meetings that his recovery is his business, and I need to keep my hands off his recovery and instead focus on MY OWN recovery. And yet, in spite of so many difficulties between us, the love is still there and I want us to keep going and be

together. We got together to enjoy time with his dad and Robin, and it was very nice. I am calling family members and friends frequently for moral support. It helps a lot. Please, God, help us find our way. (*Complaining about the people attending meetings is a sign that dedication to recovery is lacking.*)

February 25, 1997

J. continues to be angry about who I've told. A few days ago, we had another very sad conversation but somehow got through it. I have apologized and apologized; I feel terrible, and I've told him that. Will this ever get easier between us? A couple of days later J. cooked a wonderful dinner and we were able to reconnect.

February 26, 1997

J. told me he met with his counselor and it was a good session. I'm so relieved.

March 4, 1997

We had a sad encounter over the weekend. I am close to my relatives, and some of them know what has happened. They want to know how things are going with J. with recovery, and how I'm doing. In the past, I always left the door open because I had nothing to hide. Now that it's awkward, I've been closing the door. He told me he didn't want me to do that because it really hurt his feelings. I said OK. So how am I going to be honest with my relatives?

March 20, 1997

I was happy all day today! J. and I connected, work went well, and then we went to church together for dinner and a program. This is why I fell in love with him and wanted to get married! Thank you, God, for bringing us together. We are planning a trip to see my relatives this summer.

March 21, 1997

J. and I had several communication misfires tonight that we couldn't resolve. He got angry, went upstairs to sleep, and all the joy from yesterday is gone.

March 26, 1997

We are dealing with a crisis with Luke. He has been out of prison for a while, but now he has been in a fight. I feel sick. J. is extremely worried. When does life get easier? Plus, we had more arguments this past weekend about what I say about J. to my relatives. Please, God, help us.

April 2, 1997

J.'s dad was here for the weekend so we could be together as a family. J. has been depressed about Luke's situation, so it was nice to have a distraction. We had a special dinner Saturday night and one of my friends from work came over. J. cooked a wonderful meal but he seemed unhappy and was acting oddly. I have a feeling he was drunk. I'm not totally positive, but I'm pretty sure – so how do I respond to this? I'm afraid that if I say nothing, he'll feel like it's OK to do it again, or drink and drive,

which is what I'm truly afraid of. I don't want to be an enabler. Should I tell him again I will separate if he drinks and drives?

His dad left Sunday afternoon, and yesterday at work my friend who had come for dinner took me aside and said did I realize that J. was drunk Saturday night. I said I suspected he was but wasn't completely sure. She said she was sure that he was. I felt awful. How can it be that I still can't tell when he's been drinking? J. could tell when I got home that I was upset, but we didn't talk about it. What am I going to do?

- Should I insist that he go to an AA meeting every day, and get a sponsor?
- How can I hang onto myself when we are in the midst of a misunderstanding?

April 4, 1997

I had an emergency meeting with my counselor today, and we figured out what I'm going to say to J. about the dinner and the drinking. We are leaving tomorrow to go one of our favorite places for the weekend, and I will bring it up in the morning before we start driving. I'm so nervous, but I have to say something.

April 7, 1997

It was so difficult to bring it up, but I went ahead anyway. J. listened to what I had to say: that I know he was drinking when his dad was visiting, that I will separate if he drinks and drives, that he needs to focus on recovery and find a sponsor, go to meetings, and see his counselor – in other words, follow through with our agreement that he would put recovery first. He said yes. He said he was so upset about what happened with Luke that he turned to alcohol. I said he needs to figure out another way to cope with distressing events, such as making phone calls to friends in recovery. He agreed. Then we started our trip. We had a wonderful time together. The love is still there, in spite of everything. I want with all my heart for our marriage to succeed.

April 14, 1997

I can tell it bothers J. when I talk about things I've learned at Al-Anon meetings. I don't think he likes it that I'm going. Too bad. Those meetings, the people I'm meeting, and the literature are what's keeping me sane. When I say something to stand up for myself, he has said with anger, "Is that what your Al-Anon friends are telling you to do?"

We are making more arrangements for the trip this summer to visit my family. J. really wants to go so he can go hiking. I wonder if this is the right thing to do. Will it be too much of a distraction from work on recovery? I am trying to let go and let God, but it's so difficult.

April 19, 1997

A couple of days ago we got more bad news about Luke – he has been arrested and will probably go back into prison. J. was so down, and I was frantic that he would be drinking and driving. He hasn't been going to meetings on a regular basis, and once again my hopes for changed behavior have been

dashed. I met with my counselor again yesterday, and we worked out some possible things to say when next I talk to J. about my fears, when I'm hurting from his anger, and when I mistrust him:

- I'd like to have hope that you will seriously dedicate yourself to recovery, but it's difficult to have hope when you have not followed through in the past.
- When I suspect that you're drinking, I panic and I'm terrified. I'm so scared that you won't make it, and something terrible is going to happen. I don't want to live in fear.
- I'm telling you again that if you drink and drive, I will separate. I don't want to be put in that position.
- When you're drinking it takes away from me what I want – YOU.
- I need to see you pursuing recovery – and I'd like you to let me know how you're doing it. My trust has been violated in the past, and I need to know you are actually following through.
- You're more important to me than your job. If you need a leave of absence from work to pursue recovery seriously, we will figure out the finances. I am willing to do whatever it takes.

When I woke up this morning, I decided I had to say something about J.'s lack of dedication to recovery, and he got so angry. He says he's doing all he can right now and to just leave him alone. On my way into work I had to pull over so I could cry. At noon I headed to the regular Al-Anon meeting. As I went up the stairs along with several others, despair overcame me. I bent over in agony and started sobbing. The woman behind me stopped and helped me get off into a corner. She held me for a minute. I have seen her at the meeting many times, and always get a lot out of what she has to say. On the spur of the moment, I asked her if she would be my sponsor, and she said she could be my temporary sponsor, because she and her husband would be leaving the area at some point in the next couple of years. I said that was fine – and my heart felt lighter. Thank you, God, for bringing hope into my life.

April 24, 1997

Today J. and I met with J.'s counselor to talk about his plan for recovery. The counselor brought up J. going to 90 meetings in 90 days, and I said I didn't expect J. to do that. The counselor was very surprised. He asked me what my reasoning was. I said I didn't think it was realistic, that J. escaped from the world on the weekends and went hiking or did other things, and I didn't want to set him up for failure. I said if J. would commit to five meetings a week, then I would be satisfied. J. agreed. We also agreed he needed to find a sponsor and meet with his counselor on a regular basis. I stated calmly and clearly that I would stand by him if he followed through on these things, and that I would separate if he were to drink and drive. *(It was a mistake not to insist on 90 meetings in 90 days; J.'s counselor was right - this is a good way to kick-start serious recovery.)*

April 25, 1997

I can't believe it has been ages since I've written in my journal for myself. How did I let it go for so long? It seems like all my effort has been going into dealing with J., and my own life has gotten left behind. I have such a long way to go. I have been completely wrapped up in his life, what he's doing, and I have neglected my own life and what I need to do. I need to start over again.

Changes I would like to make:

- Write in this journal several times a week. I need to bring it with me in my car so I will always have access to it.
- Do the Al-Anon readings more faithfully.
- Learn how to be detached from J. so he can be responsible for his life and I have some control over mine.

Right now, I feel angry that I have let so much time slip by me – all these misunderstandings J. and I have had – and I’m sure 99 percent of them happened when he was drunk, and all my worrying about what I might have done or whether I had made a mistake means nothing. The more I think about it, the angrier I get. I deserve better! And at the same time, I’m aware that he is disappointed and angry at himself at all the time he has wasted.

Dear God, please help me on my own path of healing. As I write this, I am starting to cry. I’m not perfect either.

April 26, 1997

I am amazed at how much writing in my journal helped me with my feelings of sadness, anger, and despair. I also exercised today, even when I wasn’t in the mood, and I have more energy. It sounds simplistic, after all these months of hearing “take care of yourself” at the meetings and in the readings – and every time I make the effort to do it, I’m amazed that I feel better, calmer, less frantic and worried, less afraid. I can write in my journal after work and be completely honest, so J. won’t see me doing it and ask to read it. When I’m ready, I can ask J. to listen to some of my readings that I find helpful. I can continue to ask God for help, and act on my own using my instincts when I don’t have a clear “message.” And I can look for reasons to be happy and hopeful every day.

April 28, 1997

I went to a meeting for work today, and alternated between feeling sad and being OK. J. hurt his back over the weekend and the pain now goes down his leg – it’s difficult for him to stand or walk. I fear this will delay him from following through with getting a sponsor – they were supposed to meet for coffee early this week and I don’t think it’s going to happen while he hurts this much. It’s very difficult for me to let go of this – I want to jump in and tell him what to do so his back/hip/leg will feel better, but I can’t control what he does.

I talked to Robert about whether it was a good idea for J. to go on our planned trip to see my family. He said he thought the best course of action would be for J. to stay home and instead focus on his recovery. However, if J. insists on coming, maybe if he went to meetings while we were out there it would be OK. I’m trying to let go of whether J. comes on the trip or not, but pray and leave this in God’s hands.

I get angry when I think of all the misunderstandings we’ve had because he was drunk. But I’m trying not to revisit that place – pain lives there and what good does it do to dredge it all up?

May 2, 1997

I met with my counselor. She said what I'm living through is a way for me to have a stronger connection with God.

May 5, 1997

When I came home Friday night J. was drinking, and when he asked me why I looked sad I said it was because alcohol took him away from me. We got through the night – I told him I was going to an Al-Anon meeting the next day. I'm glad I did tell him, even though at the time he wasn't happy about it. I said I was taking care of myself. He said earlier he wasn't making excuses for why he was drinking but it sure sounded like it to me: he couldn't get a doctor's appointment for 10 days; I was "too hard" on him that morning about taking care of himself; work is an avalanche, and a few other things. It sounded like blame and pity.

I went to an Al-Anon meeting the next day as I had told him I would. I heard the term "dry drunk," which was explained as someone who wasn't drinking, but was still exhibiting all the behaviors of someone who was drinking – irrational anger, blaming, not taking responsibility...boy did that sound familiar! Then I called my sponsor, and she was helpful, as always. She suggested that I read some the literature on detachment. I hadn't made the link before between powerlessness and detachment. She also said something that really hit me – we are responsible for the effort, and not the outcome.

It made me think more about the parallels between the surgeries I have had, and this experience. After the surgeries, I knew I needed to keep doing the physical therapy exercises, even when it didn't look like they were doing anything. I had made the decision to keep on persevering. I told myself at the time to do everything to foster a good outcome, but the final result depended on many things and some of them were out of my control. I told myself it was OK to be sad when the surgeries didn't heal my body as I had hoped, but I had to let go, and accept what had happened after mourning the loss and acknowledging the disappointment. Even though the outcome was not as positive as I had hoped, it hasn't been a waste because I learned things about myself and life. I may not be as active as I want to be, but I can still be grateful for what I do have. There are lots of people who are worse off. My experience with these surgeries has many parallels to that of people whose loved ones struggle with addiction. We must do our part, and then we must let go of the outcome. God may have a different plan for our life.

May 6, 1997 Notes from an Al-Anon meeting

- God guides my hand, God loves me. I can invite God to be present in my life. Another way to look at the word "intimacy" – "into me I see."
- Thoughts on awareness/acceptance/action:
 - o First, notice what is happening – don't jump into action first. Instead, become aware that something is taking place.
 - o Then, look at why I am doing something – what is my motivation? Am I trying to please others, instead of being true to myself?

- I need to do something to advance my own recovery every day – spiritual awakening is the most important part.
- What is the difference between interdependence as opposed to co-dependence?
- When a person is feeling overwhelmed, they may be tempted to look for someone to blame for their problems. *(Later on, I realized this could explain some of J.'s anger towards me.)*
- Taking care of myself involves the deeper core, not just the physical.
- This is a “God-help” program, not self-help.
- When I’m having a problem with other people, I should look to the 12 Traditions for guidance; when I’m having a problem with myself, then I should look to the 12 Steps.

May 9, 1997

I feel like I’m swimming in molasses today. I found out yesterday that J.’s back pain is from a ruptured disk, and it’s pressing on a nerve and rapidly getting worse. Yesterday I felt frantic and overwhelmed at the thought of J. having a lifetime of back problems. Over the phone, I prayed for help in living in the moment with my minister from church, and that helped. Then I passed a terrible wreck on the way home; I’m sure people died, and I realized that even if J. has a bad back, he’s still alive and I can hold him. So I am trying to live each day, one at a time, and appreciate things I have in each day – the life of J., my family, food, sunshine, walking, and laughing when I can (and looking for reasons to laugh). There are many blessings in my life.

May 10, 1997

An image came into my mind, as I frantically wait for a message from God to tell me what to do. At work, we have a place where each of us has a folder for mail and messages. Every time I walk by it, I check it to see if anyone has put anything in there. I’m imagining that I have a folder for God, and I’m constantly checking it to see if a memo has arrived in the last five minutes detailing what I need to do next. Haha, the joke is on me, of course I’m not going to get a memo. But now when I can catch myself doing it, I laugh at myself, and attempt to turn my mind towards something more useful, like saying “Let go and let God.” I am not in control of J.’s choices.

May 14, 1997

J. received an injection for his back a couple of days ago, to shrink the tissues, which has a possibility of working. I went with him to learn about possible side effects and warning signs. He is supposed to sit up straight and not slouch. I knew this would be difficult. Yesterday I was frantic, sure that if I didn’t monitor J.’s posture that the injection wouldn’t work, and then it would mean back surgery. I cried and cried with worry and anxiety. I asked him if it would be helpful if I reminded him to sit up straight – he said yes. However, we got off to a bad start when I gently said for the first time that he needed to sit up straight, he did it for one minute and then resumed slouching. I said it again, he sat up straight for a minute, went back to slouching, and when I told him again he got very angry at me, so I quit. I called my sponsor, and she reminded me that God has a plan for J. and this may be leading somewhere I don’t know, and that I needed to let go. Then today a co-worker brought in an article on different treatments for injured backs, and the minute I read it I felt hope, that I could relax, that if the

injection doesn't work there are other options, including stretching and exercise, so there is time and other possibilities.

May 22, 1997

When I got home after writing this last entry, I found J. was sleeping upstairs. When I saw him and he woke up, some kind of emotion showed on my face. He was very angry with me, saying that he could tell by my face that I was upset with him for taking a nap, which wasn't the issue at all – I was very worried about him because he never takes naps. I couldn't explain myself in a way he could hear me. It was awful. Another dreadful misunderstanding.

I met with my counselor and she said what he saw on my face was fear, fear that he'd been drinking and had passed out. This made a lot of sense. She also made the suggestion that I give him information in small bite-sized parts, and I could wait to see if he gets it before I give him more.

We also talked about abuse in general, which both J. and I have had to deal with. She said one of the after-effects of abuse is that we do not trust ourselves in a fundamental way. For us to fully heal, our spirit needs to get back in our body – that our spirit has enough trust to come back home. This is very profound. I need to think about this a whole lot more.

May 27, 1997

The injection for J.'s back seems to be working. The pain is less and he can move around better. What a relief! He is going to meetings, but the misunderstandings continue. However, there is still joy when we are in sync. He said something that surprised me and made me sad. He said he didn't want me to bring up anything serious after we have been intimate, because it feels like I'm using that emotional connection in some way and he doesn't like it. I said I would stop. But he is right – I have looked at this time as an opportunity when he could be more open to hearing me. So when is a good time?

We are both going on the trip to spend time with my family, and he says he has researched where some meetings will be taking place. I am feeling more hopeful. Please guide our steps, God.

June 11, 1997

We are with my family. J. has been to a couple of meetings. I haven't seen him getting drunk, although he is having "non-alcoholic" beer, which does have alcohol. J. lost his wallet at a restaurant a couple of days ago and is worried and angry. This morning he barked at me over nothing and I was able to tell him to stop. It got better. We have seen some lovely places on our own and J. and I can share that. My family members are doing their best to include him in the conversation. Sometimes it feels a little tense but mostly I think it's going well. Best of all, the treatment for his back seems to be working and he can walk without being in a lot of pain. Thank you, God.

June 20, 1997

We came back home a couple of days ago. Unfortunately, there was a sad misunderstanding among my relatives and me right at the end of the family gathering, and I'm feeling very low.

Misunderstandings are rare for us, and how I don't know how to fix this. J. and I both went back to work. Then J. had his first appointment with a psychiatrist yesterday, and said it went OK. That's all he would say. I was able to tell him tonight how sad I am about the misunderstanding with my family, and he held me. It felt really good.

June 21, 1997

I'm not happy with myself or the world. Yesterday morning, I was still feeling very sad about my family and J. held me. It was so comforting. We both went to work. Then when I got home, the minute I walked in the door I could tell he was in a very different space. He announced that he wanted to go camping again. At first, I thought he wanted me to go too, but then he said he preferred to go alone. It made me sad. This morning he told me he feels like I've been putting him under a microscope because I asked him about statements he's made referring to camping – that I said I'd go with him on the next trip last time, too – when he says he needs his private space. He reminded me that I've told him in the past that I will support whatever he needs to do for his recovery, so now he's criticizing me for once again not living up to my words. This made me sad, and my feelings are hurt. I feel like a little girl who's been rejected, and I want to hurt him back. He went off without me and I'm alone and angry. I am busy planning all kinds of retaliatory statements, actions, etc. I know this is ridiculous and way out of line with what actually happened.

This comes on top of continuing to feel awful about my family reunion. I am still crushed about the misunderstanding with my family. The tears are rolling down my face as I write this. I want J. to hold me and reassure me as I struggle with this terrible pain and he's not here and that really hurts. And yet he expects me to be there for him no matter what! He said on the family reunion there was only one person who didn't treat him differently, that everyone else seemed to be very aware of his drinking and was not as friendly towards him. It may be true, although I hope it isn't.

At any rate, I'm miserable, in a terrible funk. Please God, please take away my childishness, my need for payback, my need for excessive attention. Please help me grow up. I had more insights into my relationships with my relatives during the reunion, which was gut-wrenching. This is so painful, to look at myself in the mirror, to see my soul, and to see things I don't like. I think it's time for me to do Step 4, the fearless moral inventory.

I feel like there is a huge hole in my heart from my childhood experiences. I can hear my mother's voice as she talked about her misery, that she wished she were dead, and feeling like it was my fault she felt this way. I want someone else to fill this hole, and I have learned in counseling that this isn't possible. Only God, and the changed thinking of my own adult self, can fill the hole.

June 26, 1997

Am I asking my family members to fix the hole in my heart? This is too great a burden to place on anyone. I know I must do it myself, yet I feel trapped in old patterns. J. says he's not working with his sponsor anymore because things weren't going well. I am sad and anxious. I hope he will try to find another one.

June 28, 1997

I know one of the keys to dealing with resentment is to be more grateful, but unfortunately, I'm just not feeling very grateful right now. I feel like I don't get a vote in my own house. J. bought a major item I would have preferred in another color, but I'm afraid if I say that, I will irreparably hurt his feelings so I'm swallowing again. This is difficult. I'm feeling so down – please, God, help me be more grateful and to worry less.

July 1, 1997

Friday evening was tough – we had a huge misunderstanding over how I deal with the towels when I did the laundry. J. was very angry at me. He asked me three times about the “big deal” I was making – it was terrible. We really didn't get back in sync for two days until we went out of town for a day. Then when we came home there were two messages from Luke – he's out on bail and wants money. I don't know how J. has managed to deal with this situation for all these years. We were up for hours. I ache for J. He is thinking about going to visit Luke.

July 3, 1997

These are the issues I want to discuss with my counselor when we get together:

- J. has stopped going to outpatient treatment, and has lost contact with his sponsor.
- Should I talk to my family to see if they think they treated J. differently.
- We have come to a standstill on the house repairs, and there is a lot left to do.
- I have a bad case of the blahs, have no enthusiasm for anything, and I'm not happy with this mental state.
- I'm depending too much on our marriage to make me happy.

July 5, 1997

I met with my counselor, and it was a very emotional session. I cried non-stop almost the entire time. At one point, I complained about the plumbing in our house, and she said how about if I work on my own plumbing. More slogans – first things first; how important is it?

She asked me to find my four-year-old self. When I closed my eyes, I imagined her sitting on my lap, and she was showing me rocks she had found. I opened my eyes and my counselor pointed out she had rocks on her windowsills. I asked what it meant to pick up rocks, and she said it means you're connected to the world. The second I heard that phrase, I knew that's what my problem has been for a while – I haven't felt connected to anything, including myself. So, I'm imagining my four-year-old self is here with me and we are walking hand in hand, and are just “being.” When I told J. about this insight about myself afterwards, I told him that is one of the reasons I love him – I can just “be” with him. It's a relief – some of the time – when I'm not worried about whether he's drinking. However, I still have a long way to go before I reach the place where what's happening with him does not dictate how my day is going and how I feel.

July 8, 1997

Heard at the Al-Anon meeting – I cannot depend on others to make me happy. That really hit me. I also heard a phrase that made a lot of sense, the “nudge from God” to do something. I can check in with myself when I need to make a decision, and see if I feel called to go in a particular direction.

July 11, 1997

We had a tough weekend – more misunderstandings, one after another. I realize again and again I must build a life for myself apart from the marriage, with my own friends, interests, and pursuits. If I can only be happy when J. is happy, where does that leave me? I said at the Al-Anon meeting that I believe gratitude is the key to happiness, but it’s difficult to feel grateful right now. Then I heard a news story on the radio and realized that service and helping others is a way to be happy.

A few days ago, J. told me it has bothered him for ages that I haven’t invited him to exercise with me. I was stunned, and at first apologized three or four times over the course of the evening. Then the next day I got angry and told him he needs to speak up sooner if I’m doing something that bothers him, because it means I don’t know that I’m unwittingly hurting him, and meanwhile a huge load of resentment builds up in him. I told him this is not the first time this has happened, and I cried a lot. After other incidents like this have happened in the past, he always promises me he will speak up the next time, and then once again he doesn’t. Why? I don’t understand it. When another issue came up, he pounced on it as if I’d been lying to him, instead of the truth, which is that I forgot to tell him something – and it was not something major. This pattern is so demoralizing. So once again I’m thinking about having a “hedge” in my life that guards my private space.

I had a long talk with my sponsor. I asked her about J. not keeping the agreement he made with me and his counselor back in April on the number of meetings per week he would be attending, and having a sponsor. She suggested I say something like, “Help me understand what you think our agreement is with the recovery strategy we discussed with your counselor.” She also said that when I’m trying to decide whether to say something to him that I know will make him defensive, I could ask myself, is it necessary/is it true/is it kind? This also includes being kind to myself,

She also had some words I might say when I sense something is wrong: “Is there something bothering you that I’m responsible for? If so, I’d like to address it. If not, I’ll assume you are processing something, and I will give you the space you need to do that.” (*I was not able to say these words for a long time because I was afraid of J.’s anger.*)

July 15, 1997

I finally figured out what I wanted to say to my relatives about the misunderstanding, made the phone call, and got through it. I feel better, and I can talk to my relatives now without feeling awkward.

July 23, 1997

I’ve had more rough times with J. We met for dinner at a restaurant Thursday, and he didn’t like the table I picked and snapped at me twice. I didn’t say anything because I could tell he was in a bad

mood – he had had a tough day at work – but I don’t want to be the dog he kicks. I talked to my sponsor, and she suggested saying something like, “It sounds like you’re angry and that you’ve had a tough day. I did the best I could to pick out a table. We can move if you like. You don’t need to bark at me.”

Then what was supposed to be a fun weekend with his dad, who came for a visit Saturday and Sunday, got off to a dreadful start. Friday night J. and I were supposed to meet for dinner at a restaurant near where I work, and then go to a dance performance. About 15 minutes after he was supposed to arrive, I started trying to call him. I left a bunch of messages, but he never picked up. I gave up and went to part of the performance by myself so the ticket wouldn’t be a total loss. When I got home, he had already gone to bed and was snoring so loudly I couldn’t sleep. I realized he had been drinking and had forgotten all about meeting me. It was terrible. I slept upstairs. When he saw me crying the next morning and asked me what was happening, I was nervous about having a huge argument right before his dad was due to arrive. Instead, I said, “I’m on my own journey, too.” Eventually I was able to put Friday night behind me and we had a nice time with Robin and his dad. We went to see an art exhibit and saw some lovely things. J. cooked a wonderful dinner and we ate out on the porch. Sunday afternoon, after his dad left, I went to the funeral of a good friend and J. was very supportive. This is the man I married! I don’t understand all these abrupt changes in his behavior. And what am I doing? It’s like I have a divided life. Everything can seem calm on the surface but underneath I’m treading water as fast as I can to keep from drowning.

I talked to my sponsor about what had happened Friday night and she said it’s OK to say how the drinking affects me. I can say, “I get upset and scared when I know you’ve been drinking.” That isn’t a judgmental statement. I can be honest next time. Thank you, God, for bringing my sponsor into my life.

July 24, 1997

How do I deal with J. projecting things onto me that are not true? He keeps saying that he has to get permission from me to do things, when he doesn’t. He says he sees a look on my face that tells him I don’t like what he’s going to do, but maybe the look he sees is that I’m worried about him because he’s tired. Why doesn’t he ask me? I don’t know when I’m making “a look.” I can’t read his mind.

My sponsor had some helpful words I might say to him: “I want to reconnect with you; it’s been very difficult between us lately. I feel like I’m losing the person I care about.” (*It took me a long time to be able to say these words.*)

July 25, 1997

I’ve been in tears for most of the afternoon, first with my counselor and then with an Al-Anon friend. I was trying to get ready to have a conversation with J. tonight about his drinking last Friday, but now I don’t think I will. I think I need more help figuring out why I want to talk and what I want to say. My Al-Anon friend reminded me that I’m responsible for my feelings. I’m married to an active alcoholic, and he won’t understand what I’m going through because he can’t.

J. and I argued last night about me expecting him to ask me for permission – I told him I don’t. He said something hurtful, and it made me angry. But did I speak up AT THE TIME and say, “That

hurts!”??? No, I didn’t, because I was scared. God, please help me know your will. Help me lose my ego. Help me heal and be whole.

August 2, 1997

I did talk to J. that night, but not about our agreement on his recovery – just about why I was sad, that I felt like he is piling stuff on top of me. We managed to recover afterwards and had a nice evening. He went camping that weekend by himself after we attended a concert together.

Sometime soon I’ll ask J. if we can re-agree that when he feels angry, he’ll write down why. And I want to talk to a friend, who counsels people on addictions, about the agreement J. and I made – is this current approach doing anything? Is it enough? He’s not drinking and driving, but he’s not going to meetings regularly and doesn’t have a sponsor.

It was a jolt when I saw this journal in a different position than where I’d left it. I asked him about it, and he said no, he hadn’t read it, but he didn’t look at me and I don’t believe him, now that I think about it more. From now on I’m going to leave this at work, or hide it upstairs if I do bring it home.

August 6, 1997

Yesterday started out OK, although someone almost hit me on the commute to work. I went to my Al-Anon meeting and saw my sponsor. J. and I talked briefly while we were at work – he said it was a busy day. Then I ordered take-out and brought it home. J. was working on a home project, but he was upset that I was late with dinner when he was ready to eat. I was very sad. He slept upstairs.

I called my sponsor today. She had some ideas of things to say:

- “I’d like to find a better way to have a conversation when you’re angry. Could you make a suggestion about how to make that happen?”
- Do you want to change our contract about your recovery? My understanding is that we have an agreement, but it doesn’t seem to be getting fulfilled. How would you like it to go?
- What’s going on inside you? The energy between us isn’t comfortable. Can you please share with me what’s happening? I’m feeling left out of the process, and I don’t understand what’s going on. I would appreciate hearing anything you can share with me. I want to know what’s going on with you. I’d like to invite you to join me in exploring our relationship together.
- It’s scary for me, as well, when things change. I’d like to focus on sharing, not reporting. This is new ground for both of us. I need your help and support.
- I want us to move forward together.”

My sponsor also said that it might be scary for J. to see my behavior changing, so he’s trying to hook me back into my old way of behavior, to go back to our old dance that is more familiar to him. Sometimes I feel like life is just a daily slog, without joy, getting through one difficult thing after another, with no end in sight. I’m so discouraged. Please, God, help me and help us keep going. Please help me live one day at a time.

August 7, 1997

- What is my motivation for detachment – love, fear, retribution? Perhaps J. is seeing my efforts at detachment as indifference – he recently brought up “my indifference” in a stressful conversation.
- My sponsor commented that what I am doing in my own behavior is moving my own mountains; I’m learning to relate to the world in a new way. When things are changing and the ground is moving, nothing seems stable.
- I talked with our minister at our church and she said I am walking a tightrope. She also had an insight into a pattern J. and I have. She said we should talk about the fact that it seems my opinion matters a whole lot to J., and if I don’t share his opinion, then he feels rejected – not just his opinion, but him as a person. This is a huge weight I am carrying.

August 8, 1997

Heard at an Al-Anon meeting: “An expectation is a premeditated resentment.”

I also heard that alcohol is not the problem itself, it has become the perceived solution to a problem. It’s crucial to address the real problem in order to have a chance to deal with the drinking.

I can tell the difference between detachment and withdrawal is going to be difficult for both of us. I’ve been calling J. at work during the day, just to check in, and that seems to help. I wanted to talk last night about the recovery agreement, but after we reconnected, I got scared and didn’t. I was afraid it would be too late, plus I was afraid, period. I talked to my sponsor today about it – she reminded me I am moving my own mountain, I need to be sure of my motivation, and we discussed the three-day rule/suggestion: before I make a big decision, wait three days and then decide.

Thank you, God, for sending my sponsor to help me. Help me be willing to help others when it’s my turn. Help my faith to increase, and my trust in you. Help my ego to decrease in size and my humility to increase. Thank you for helping J. and I to reconnect last night.

August 10, 1997

I’m on a camping trip with J., looking out over a lovely valley. I’m reading a self-help book and skipped ahead to the last chapter. There’s a fable about a woman who was shipwrecked, then sold into slavery, then shipwrecked again. Each skill she learned after each “accident” she was able to use in her new life. I feel entirely ready for God to use me, send me, direct me to where I’m needed to do His work in the world. I can remember when I was younger of being afraid to say “I’m here” to God because I was afraid of what I would be asked to do – afraid it would be too difficult or uncomfortable. But this experience over the last 13 months has removed all fear – well, most of it – because I’ve already experienced the worst, and I feel God guiding me. God has been with me, and fear is being replaced by trust. I don’t have to clutch or grab at my life. I hope that I can view unexpected events as opportunities or adventures or surprises as opposed to trials to be endured. I want to have joy in my life again – joy from the inside, not because of outside circumstances that are subject to change. I want it to matter less whether someone else is in a good mood. I want to be in charge of and responsible for my own life. This is my job.

August 12, 1997

We exercised together last Friday night after work, and J. got to experience the benefit of how exercise can help him deal with stress in a positive way. Afterwards, he said he had had a difficult week, and now he felt better. We went camping together, and it was great. We had a chance to talk Sunday morning and I brought up all my concerns including the recovery agreement, and me having to worry about how he interprets my reaction to something. He listened and said he would think about what I said. It's a start. He also told me that several of his relatives struggled with depression, and others were alcoholics. I listened and held his hands. This helps explain why stopping drinking is so difficult for him.

We heard from J.'s dad that Luke is out of jail, and is now living near J.'s dad. God, please help us all.

August 14, 1997

J. said this morning that he wanted to do something different this evening after work. He's going to run, and work on the AA Big Book and study the Book of Job.

I had a great talk with my sponsor, and shared with her my feeling that initially I was dragged kicking and screaming down this road of dealing with J.'s addiction and recovery. Now, I not only accept that it might be good for me, but I'm willing to keep going because I know I need it myself. Please God, continue to guide me on this path. Direct my will so I can be and do what and where you need me to.

August 15, 1997

I had a session with my counselor. She suggests saying to J., "I'm going to practice something new – I'm not going to check out your face to see how you want me to respond, but instead I'm going to check out how I feel right now about being in this position. I'm going inside to see how I feel." (*I was not able to do this.*)

August 16, 1997

It is very difficult to feel that I'm stuck in the same old place again with J. due to another misunderstanding. I was talking in my sleep, J. heard me, and was upset by what I was saying. He asked me about it when I woke up. I have no idea what I was dreaming about, but he didn't believe me. We were not able to resolve this before I left. Some days I'm in no rush to go home, and this is one of them.

August 18, 1997

We reconnected over the weekend. J. decided not to go camping by himself because he didn't feel well. Instead, we hung out together, did chores, and enjoyed being together. It was wonderful.

August 20, 1997

Well, that didn't last. Turns out he was angry when a relative called Sunday and he heard me talking about how things were going and I said, "we have a long way to go." I reminded him that he told me earlier months ago he didn't like it when I had the door shut. He got very angry.

My sponsor had some great thoughts. Possible words to say to J.:

- “Our marriage is supposed to be a partnership. It seems in your eyes I can’t do anything right. I might need some time to myself to replenish my spirit.”
- It seems J. feels powerless, threatened, and insecure by my new behavior.
- My sponsor said I seem willing to doubt myself in order to make J. feel better – this is a very old pattern from earlier in my life.
- She suggested some words: “I feel vulnerable right now. My last intent is to hurt you, and if I did, I apologize for any hurt I’ve caused you. Maybe you could check that out with me at the time, rather than hold it all in. I want to support you in your recovery – how can I do that? What do you need from me now? And this is what I need from you....”
- There seems to be an unspoken assumption between us – when one person is feeling bad, the other will take care of him/her. But what happens when we both feel bad? We haven’t learned how to take care of ourselves.
- We need to face the reality of our relationship, discard expectations, and nurture what brought us together.

August 21, 1997

I feel much better today – talking with my sponsor helped a lot yesterday. She said it exactly; that I’m willing to admit to something I didn’t say or do to placate J. just to have the tension level decrease. The minute she said it the arrow hit home, and I knew this was very important. When we talked today, I told her it seems true, and she said this old pattern of behavior could be counterproductive because it feeds his sickness. So I must learn how to hang on to myself.

An Al-Anon friend said the way she prepares herself for a conversation she knows is going to be difficult is to imagine it happening while she meditates, and often that helps make the conversation easier when it takes place. She also said in the early part of recovery, all the issues that need healing are going to come up in your face and so things feel difficult for a while, maybe a long while. God, help me to be steady and trusting, and guide me to what I need in this process.

August 23, 1997 Heard at an Al-Anon meeting:

- Faith is when fear says its prayers.
- Welcome fears along the journey – they can teach you a lot about yourself.
- Be a loving witness and presence of love.
- Wear life like a loose garment.
- If you can be grateful and present in the moment, then faith comes from there.
- God broadcasts all the time, but I’m not always “on” to receive the broadcasts.
- Keep a “God log” to remember what happened with God’s help.
- There are three kinds of business: my business, your business, and God’s business.

August 24, 1997

Yesterday J. and I had a “throwback” argument, where he is angry and jealous because he is revisiting a misunderstanding from years ago, and continues to hang on to his anger. He says I’m untrustworthy. I did not call for a time out, which I should have done since he was angry. Instead I told him he was hanging onto a grudge, waiting for an opportunity to interpret my actions in that light. He eventually said he was misdirecting his anger at me, instead of what was happening at work – a first – and apologized, saying “I’m taking this out on you.” I was angry about it all night, and was tempted to say bitter words, but I didn’t – thank you, God.

August 25, 1997

J. went camping without me again, but we connected before he left and there is no bitterness or resentment this time about him going alone. I have truly relished this opportunity to be by myself. Even though I don’t think I monitor his behavior, I guess I’m aware of what he’s doing and therefore adjust my words and actions to his moods. I’m noticing that when he’s not around, I worry less about what I say and do.

He is now back, had a great time, and is the kind, funny, gentle, thoughtful man I fell in love with – a totally different person than the one I was dealing with two days ago. Maybe this person will be around more often.

My sponsor and I are going begin working on the Steps in the Al-Anon book, “Paths to Recovery.” I thought about one of the First Step questions, “How have I tried to change others?” The memory came back of the first weekend after discovering the two empty vodka bottles hidden in the trash, when I bought three kinds of chocolate ice cream so he’d have an alternative to alcohol. But at some point, I came to realize that his drinking was completely beyond my control.

August 26, 1997 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Between the walls is the dance floor of life.
- We are able to have a relationship with God when we are focused on the present moment – not when we are thinking about the past or the future.
- Don’t let your battleship mind overload your rowboat backside.
- Self-love includes not only the good parts and traits, but also the parts that need healing.

It was really nice to see J. so happy yesterday – it gives me hope for the future. I also learned that it’s a darn good thing I kept my lips zipped Friday night when I was so resentful, so I didn’t have to apologize later for my words. Thank you, God. Please continue to direct my will and life.

August 28, 1997 Thoughts from counseling:

- We should share the impact we have on each other.
- When I see “the face” coming from J. of anger/fear/panic, I should ask him, “What’s happening?”
- J. and I are both struggling with huge issues from our childhoods, and they are still affecting the way we relate to each other.

Labor Day, September 1997

After a peaceful time together Saturday and Sunday, we had a dreadful morning and J. has left in anger to go camping again without me. First, he was mad that I was making too much noise on the porch ripping up old credit card receipts when he was reading. But did he speak up at the time? NO! Instead he got more and more frustrated until he exploded. All he had to say was, “What you are doing is distracting,” and I would have stopped! He said I should have noticed that it was bothering him! And then we spent a very difficult time going over finances. I brought up that I’ve paid for many things for him, and save him money by helping him do things he used to pay people to do for him. I would like us to talk about how to divide up the bills so it seems more equitable. He was angry, resentful, and sarcastic at times although we ended OK, I guess. He said something that referred to what I had said in January about the house being in my name so I’d get a court order to get him to leave, if necessary, if he was drinking and driving again. I wonder if we need to talk about that more, and what’s the best way if we do. After J. left, I ended up calling some friends and went to visit an elderly friend I trust, and cried the whole time.

God, please help me on this journey with so many unknowns. Help me to trust you more, understand myself and J. better, let go of hurts from the past, and move on with less to carry. God, I put my trust, my life, in you. Please guide me. Help my ego to learn to surrender into your love. Lead me to what you want me to do.

September 3, 1997

J. came back from camping and he was still angry with me. I felt very sad at work, called my sponsor, and we were able to get together for a few minutes. She helped me with some words to say to him:

“What do you need from me to clarify this – I’m hearing a lot of fear about the house and our finances. We have a partnership. I’m not trying to get something out of you that you’re not willing to give. It makes me sad that you think I’m trying to gouge you. Our relationship should be about what we can give to each other. I’m committed to being with you. I want us to be together. I don’t have the answers but I want to look for them together.”

Then when I got home, J. said more hurtful things about my “mercenary” attitude, then switched topics and said he has no support from me to rest if he is sick or tired, and that I’m not supportive of his recovery. I was stunned. I don’t know where this is coming from! I have been pleading with him to spend more time on recovery, and I have told him many times that he needs to stop when he’s tired! This is so unfair! I just don’t know what to do. Please help us, God.

September 4, 1997

I felt sadder and sadder at work as the day progressed. I decided on some words I need to say to J. when we met together after work at church: “It’s not fair to me when you think you can read my thoughts or imagine what’s going on in my mind, based on an expression you see on my face. This is paranoid

thinking – you are imagining things in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, and the words I say to you. This is your stuff to deal with. I want to feel safe in my own house. I welcome your recovery.”

So, after the service I brought up this topic, and I could feel my heart pounding but I forged ahead anyway. Then I said that we were going to do an experiment so he could see what it felt like to me when he said he knew what I was thinking. I said, “Let’s assume that you think I’m stupid. I know you don’t, but let’s assume that I know you think I’m stupid.” He immediately said, “But I don’t think you’re stupid.” I said, “But I know that you do! I can see it on your face!” He said, “But I don’t think you’re stupid!” I said, “No, you’re not telling the truth. I know that look on your face! I know what you’re thinking, and you think I’m stupid!” He was getting more upset and said, “NO! I don’t think you’re stupid!” I said, getting louder and more insistent, “No, you’re not telling the truth, because I know what you’re thinking and I see the look on your face that says YOU THINK I’M STUPID!” This went on for another minute, and he was getting so agitated that I stopped. Then I said quietly, “This is how I feel when you say you know what I’m thinking, and it’s not what I’m thinking at all, and you won’t believe me when I tell you.” He was quiet, and we didn’t talk about it anymore. We went to the movies, were able to laugh, but the mistrust is still there.

September 5, 1997, morning

I woke up this morning and felt very sad. I worked on words to say:

- “What do you need from me to feel supported in your recovery? I want to be helpful, but I don’t know what to do or how to do it.”
- “It seems you don’t trust what I say. I feel like I’m up against a wall. This is extremely painful.”

September 5, evening

I am still very sad, thinking about maybe needing to separate from J. He doesn’t trust what I say, that I support his recovery, that I want him to rest when he’s tired or sick. He keeps insisting I say one thing but he looks at my face and can tell I don’t mean it. How do I deal with this? I told him I’m demoralized. When he got defensive and said angrily that he was “all wrong,” I said his feelings are his feelings, but this is how I’m feeling as a result of what he is telling me.

September 6, 1997 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Human doing vs. human being.
- Get quiet enough to listen. Be willing to be clueless when you don’t know the answer.
- Easy does it, but do it. So what’s the “it”? Work the 12 Steps.
- And this in particular really hit me – I may be powerless over a loved one’s addiction, but I am not helpless. I still have choices.

We exercised together after work, which was really nice, and then he hit his head on something and it started bleeding. I can’t believe it. Why can’t we spend time together when something doesn’t go wrong?

September 7, 1997

I feel so sad and bleak and hopeless. I simply don't know what to do. I thought we had come to some understanding through several painful conversations all last week that I wanted him to rest when he was sick or tired. In the morning, we enjoyed some quiet time, and I reminded him that his special "sky chair" (*my wedding present to him*) might be fun to put up so he could relax on the porch. He liked this idea. We did chores in the morning, then after lunch he left the house for a while. I went ahead and sat in the chair for 10 minutes, before he had had a chance. He came back home. Now that I think about it, based on his reaction, I wonder if he had been drinking. He was so upset that I had sat in HIS chair – he was crying – and said I had "pushed him out of the way." Of course, I immediately got up and apologized and apologized, but he refused to sit in it for the rest of the afternoon. We are back to worse than square one. I just don't know what to do. Is a separation the best course of action? I truly don't know. I'm praying for guidance, to live with this discomfort, and wait for God to guide me.

September 9, 1997 Heard at the Al-Anon meeting:

- Want what you have.
- Use each moment.
- To live in the present is maturity.

J.'s over-reaction to my sitting in "his" chair is still rolling around in my head. This morning I fell apart and prayed for help to cope, and I feel better now. God, please guide my steps so I follow your will, and not my own or my ego. Let me be a channel of your peace.

When I met with my counselor, she had these thoughts: I need peace of mind. I need to reach my bottom before I can decide on a course of action regarding whether separating is the next right step. She mentioned the slogan, "First things first." But first, I need to decide what the first thing is.

September 10, 1997

J. called me at work to say that he needed to go camping alone tonight, in order to work on his recovery. It's a week night – why tonight? I said if that's what he needed to do, then that's what he should do. I want to be supportive of his recovery, to contradict what he said so very bitterly last week. But it still seems odd.

September 11, 1997

This morning, J. came back from camping and said it was helpful. I called my sponsor, and she had some suggestions. She said I need to pay attention to what I need to weather this difficult time in the marriage. She used a phrase that struck me, "speak your truth." She said I should think about how I would fill in the blank in this sentence: "In order to live my life lovingly, I need to have _____ in my life." Or, "In order to love you the best I can, I need to do this..." She emphasized that I most likely won't get permission or approval from J. when I say these words because he might see it as abandoning him. I am very sad. God, please help us.

September 12, 1997

I met with my counselor today. We discussed that I feel it's my fault when J. gets angry – this is not true. I need to take care of myself.

Words to say: After the storm has passed, I can ask him how much he really means when he says hurtful things. I can also say, "I feel like I'm back to being a child when you get angry at me for nothing. When that happens, I need to leave and take care of myself. You need to do your homework that you told me about – write in your journal instead of getting angry at me."

September 17, 1997

I talked again with Robert (*my friend's father*) about what I should do about J.'s lack of recovery. This is what he suggested to say, in a loving way and not with anger:

- I'm very tired of living in uncertainty, and I choose not to go on living this way. Based on the opinion of other people who are in recovery, you are not truly pursuing recovery now. They have lived through this, and they know.
- Until you are in recovery, I'm not willing to go down the tubes with you. We can't be together until you have true, committed recovery under your belt.
- You must go immediately into a strong program, and I need to have proof that you are committed, including daily meetings, and talking every day with a sponsor. I have no reason to trust you.
- Half measures get you nowhere, and that's what you are doing.
- This is the opinion of people who are familiar with long-term recovery.

As I heard Robert say these words, I felt sicker and sicker and I realized that right now, I am just not ready yet to say these things. When I told him this, he said again that I was in for a very rough ride. It was an incredibly depressing conversation.

I also talked today with one of the ministers at our church, who has had experience with addictions. I raised some questions: is couples' counseling a band-aid at this point? Should I have the conversation (above) alone or with someone else? When do I lay out the option of separation or recovery? She said she didn't feel like she could answer these questions for me, that I needed to pray for God's will. Please, God, help me.

September 23, 1997

The topic at the Al-Anon meeting today was detachment. There were lots of interesting observations. Let go and detach from the situation – I will be more joyous and free. Detachment is related to expectations. Detach with an axe. You can't hold anger against someone without being burned by some fire. Recognize the hooks that get me pulled back in sooner, so I can avoid the train wreck. Pray several times a day about detaching – I need to practice learning how to do it. Perhaps I'm the needy person. I need to be centered and connected to me. Disengage first, then detach. Detachment can feel like abandonment, but it isn't. I can detach from the outcome.

After the meeting, I realized that I am not detaching from J., but the situation. I still love him and I can pray for him. The slogans are coming into my mind – one day at a time; pray for willingness; first things first; let go and let God. They all apply to my life right now – it's living them out that's so difficult.

September 25, 1997

"I'd rather have cancer." That's the thought that's going through my mind. J. had a bad day at work yesterday and took it out on me last night. He barked at me twice for something trivial and stayed angry all night. I didn't get sucked in, or get down, and managed to keep going. When I woke up this morning, I was so sad. He just called me now at work to apologize. He's leaving for a conference out of town related to his job – earlier today I was sure he'd be drinking there, but now that he has come back to himself, I'm feeling more hopeful. Dear God, help me to have compassion and not to feel sorry for myself.

September 26, 1997

J. called me last night from the conference. He sounded like he might have been drinking but I'm not sure. The constant anxiety is getting to me.

September 27, 1997

J. got back from his conference and we went to an event together. It was really nice. We have reconnected and it feels wonderful. This is the man I married.

September 28, 1997

Once again, I'm stuck in a dreadful place. J. left early in the afternoon to go for a hike. He got home several hours later, longer than I was expecting him to be gone. He said he had taken a nap but I'm wondering if he has been drinking. I can't be sure and it's driving me nuts. If he has been drinking, then he was drinking and driving and I said I would separate. This agony of doubt continues. I didn't say anything because I wasn't sure. He cooked a wonderful dinner and I don't know what to do. Why do I doubt myself, wondering if J. has been drinking?

September 29, 1997

When I woke up this morning, we talked about how angry he was at me earlier in the week. I said we need a new plan for when he is angry. Then I screwed up my courage and told him I was also worried about his sobriety. He listened and did not get angry. At least I said something. We did household chores, and I baked a big pan of one of his favorite desserts. Someone looking at us from the outside would be thinking that we look so happy together. And, on some level we are...but underneath is desperate worry and fear.

September 30, 1997

I went to the Monday Al-Anon meeting today, and heard more about detachment. We need to avoid “savior behavior” when we rescue our loved one instead of letting them experience the natural consequences of their actions. We need to mind our own business, while we live our own life. What are the hinderances in my own life? We detach but we’re not emotionally dead. We can pray for others’ connection with their Higher Power. I can’t give J. the “want to do this,” in other words, to embrace recovery no matter the cost. It is possible to hold hope and pain at the same time. Life is about finding our greatest joys, and finding answers for ourselves. I also heard the term “self-medicate,” – that people who are struggling with depression will seek out ways to feel better, including alcohol and drugs. This helped me understand more what J. is dealing with.

Then from work, I called Robert again to talk about my worries over the drinking. He listened, but said he has no other advice for me, other than what he said a couple of weeks ago. No one can decide for me about confronting J. with my fears and being ready to separate if he doesn’t seem committed to beginning a very strong program. I have to decide what I’m going to do, and at this point I just don’t know yet. I’m so sad. Please help me, God.

October 3, 1997

I saw something today that brought up my sadness over life not working out for me to have children. J. listened and held me and it was so comforting. The love is still there and I’m so glad and grateful. But other times lately when he asks me if something is up because I seem sad or preoccupied, my first reaction is to lie and give an excuse – something hurts, I’m tired...when what’s really on my mind is I wonder if I should separate; will J. find a sponsor who has time for him; will J. make the time he needs to make so recovery is his number one priority. I keep going around and around in circles – am I doing the right thing, am I being an enabler...and should I mention my worries to J. before we see our new couples’ counselor for the first time next week? Please God, help me to know your will.

Thoughts on amends from the meeting. I can acknowledge to myself what I did right, and take responsibility for what I did wrong. I can build a bridge when I make amends, but the other person doesn’t have to walk on it. When a person makes amends, he/she can feel lighter, and a weight is lifted.

October 8, 1997

We had our first session with our new couples’ counselor. It went OK. When he asked us what outcome we would like, I didn’t say, “I would like J. to be committed to sobriety, talk to a sponsor every day, realize the impact his drinking and anger has had on me, and how it continues to affect me.” Why didn’t I? I can feel my anger and resentment developing now towards J., yet I didn’t speak up! I’m going to talk to my counselor about what is holding me back. I am appreciating the irony that it drives me nuts when he won’t speak up, and here I am doing the exact same thing.

There’s no end in sight for J. at work – it will continue to be stressful every day. I just don’t see how we’re going to cope. I’m afraid. God, help me in my fear.

October 9, 1997

I saw a picture in a restaurant of the obviously mentally damaged/homeless man that washed windows around town, with his obituary underneath; the owners wrote that he was a wonderful person but suffered terribly from mental illness. Sometimes when I walked near him, I could hear him talking to himself, and he would rock back and forth constantly if he was sitting down. After reading this and knowing more about his story, I started feeling very sad for him, and then for J. – that he might end up like that. I was feeling so bad I went to exercise in the hopes I'd get some clarity. I felt a nudge from God in the direction of, "work on your own stuff until things become clear with J." and I felt lighter – for a while – with that thought.

I'm so worried about J. I feel sure sobriety won't last with his current approach. I'm hoping my counselor can help me figure out what to say to him, and to the couples counselor when we see him next time. J. told me he had decided he would rather miss our mid-week church service and instead go camping tonight by himself. It still seems odd to me.

October 10, 1997

My counselor had these suggestions for how to word the things I want to talk about with J., in advance of our next couples counseling session:

- I am so scared at the possibility you might start drinking again
- I get very hurt by your anger, especially when I think you are deliberately trying to hurt me.
- I don't know if I trust myself to talk about these things in depth now, on our own. I'd rather talk about them with our counselor, so we can get some coaching on how to talk about changing the communication dynamic between us.
- I can't talk rationally about them myself now; I know these are hot buttons between us. Our counselor can help us get through them.
- I'm not saying this to blame you – I know part of this is my responsibility.
- Earlier in both our lives, direct communication didn't happen much. It's brand new for both of us, and we're not good at it. We need to practice it more.

We got some very surprising news about Luke. A relative called to say Luke has been dating a woman he met very recently, and they are planning on getting married soon. This relative said she had met the woman, "Debbie," and she seems very nice. I can't believe this is happening so fast. Then Luke called J. and, of course, Luke wants money so they can "get off on the right foot." J. hasn't asked me for my opinion, so I'm doing my best to keep my mouth shut.

October 11, 1997

I'm feeling very sad, frustrated, and angry. We had another huge communication misfire last night, over what seems like something minor. It was very odd.

Today, we bonded in the morning and then he was sad and said I didn't understand how difficult his job is. I disagreed and said at least every other day, I commiserated and told him I could see how

stressful things are for him, and I always did my best to offer support. After I tried to work through it, he said it felt like we were miles apart and brought up something else that was bothering him. He said, for the second time, that he didn't want me to bring up a serious topic after we had been intimate, that it gave him a very bad feeling beforehand to wonder if something unpleasant was next on the agenda. I immediately apologized and said this wasn't my intention, that I had been thoughtless and I would be sure not to do it anymore. But it's like the idea is there now in his mind, and I fear that he will bring this up again and again in the future to throw at my face when he is angry about something else. He was angry for hours, left the house to do errands, and I tried to call my sponsor and an Al-Anon friend, but they didn't answer so I left messages. When he got back, things seemed better. He cooked another wonderful dinner and we had a nice evening.

I just don't know what to do. I said I wanted to be kind to each other for the rest of the weekend and until we go on vacation in a week. But my stomach is in knots and I wonder if there is truly hope for this relationship and marriage, or whether we've done too much damage to each other and we'd be better off if we split up.

I'm trying to be an adult, not a whining, oh-pity-me child, but I'm having a tough time. Please, God, help me to do your will, help me to grow up, help me to move forward.

October 12, 1997

It has been a very challenging day. This morning we talked for a while about the next time we see our couples counselor and what we were going to bring up. I did my best to use the words my counselor suggested, and I said I was worried about the drinking and that sometimes he said or did things on purpose to hurt me. J. got very angry and defensive. I reminded him of our agreement, that he would write things down when he got angry and he said no, he wasn't going to do that. He got up and left the room. We avoided each other until later in the day.

I was able to call my sponsor, and she had some suggestions:

- I can be a broken record, and not back down;
- I can stay in my position;
- I can be clear about what's bothering me and use "I" language. I do not need to adjust my feelings to accommodate his sickness.

Later in the afternoon, J. said he was sorry he got so angry. We had dinner together and got through it. I am so tired. God, please help us.

October 14, 1997

The agony continues. I didn't sleep well and I'm so tired. J. woke up angry and I found out this morning why he was so upset a couple of days ago. He accused me of being "infatuated" with Chris, (*the man I interact with at times through my job that I had confided in, who then told others*). I told J. emphatically that he was mistaken, but he wouldn't let go. At least I know now why he has been feeling so down since Friday (at least that accounted for part of it), and why he has seemed so negative towards

me. I said that I can't live like this, when J. does not believe me when I say something. I told J. he needed to find a coping mechanism besides hurting me when he was hurting – and even if I hurt his feelings it is NOT OK to hurt me in retaliation. He is still very angry over who I've "told" about the drinking. "Confiding" would be a better word – I never told anyone in anger, or hoping word would get back to him so he would be motivated to take recovery seriously. I talked to people I thought I could trust, when I was in despair during the very early days of discovering the hidden alcohol. Chris was one of the people, and betrayed my trust.

J. and I agreed this morning that we would talk about this with our couples counselor. I am nervous about this but hopefully we can clear the air over this issue and put it behind us so it doesn't keep coming back. I tried to say more to reassure him so we could leave on a positive note, that I love him, that I only want to be with him, that I want with all my heart for our marriage to keep going. I called my sponsor and we had a quick conversation. She suggested that when J. is feeling jealous, I can say, "I hear you're hurt. I've given you no reason to worry."

I went to the Al-Anon meeting and heard some helpful things. An expectation is a resentment in training. We need to live without expectations. I can't come from a loving place if I operate out of fear.

Help me to grow up, God, and be an adult – that is what I want – to be healthy and whole, accepting responsibility for my actions, my happiness, my choices, my life. I want to stop whining and blaming.

October 15, 1997

J. called me at work today to say he made an appointment to see his counselor tomorrow to talk about what happened over the weekend. He is also going to meet with his sponsor, today after work. I call this "positive steps." The longer I live with J. in non-drinking but non-recovery mode, the more I feel I don't want to continue. If this past weekend is as good as it gets, it's not good enough. I want peace where I live. Plus, I think if I "settle" for less, then there won't be any motivation for him to change. That's my thought today, but God I want to do your will and not be selfishly directed by my ego.

October 17, 1997

Yesterday, I had an evening meeting for work that ran late. When I got home, J. was very angry that I had "guillotined" the evening when I should have been helping him pack for our family vacation. We leave tomorrow. I know he could be angry about things that came up with his counselor. He didn't bring up what they discussed and I didn't ask.

October 19, 1997

We made it to our vacation spot with J.'s dad and Robin, and I can't believe it, I got hurt unloading the car right after we arrived. Walking is quite painful. The vacation won't be ruined, but it will be different. I am sad. J. is sympathetic and said he would find some crutches for me.

October 27, 1997

We are back home. We had some lovely times together as a family and J. and I didn't have any major misunderstandings, although I felt sad at times. I managed to have fun in spite of my injury – the crutches helped a lot. It was very difficult to pack everything up yesterday and start driving away from this place that we love, back to all our problems. This afternoon we talked about the future, and what we might do in retirement, which is years away. Now, I'm starting to wonder if my depression is creeping back.

October 28, 1997

I talked to my sponsor; she encouraged me to think about “the next right thing” and not project too far into the future. She also said I should ask God what my depression has to offer me – what is its gift. I can't believe depression has any gifts at all, at this point. But she is very wise and doesn't say things just to try to make me feel better. Her words have a purpose. She said I can pray for willingness to let go and let God, if I'm not ready to let go right now.

October 29, 1997, early morning

I am hoping that if I write down what I'm feeling, that I'll be less anxious and fearful. I feel depression coming back. I'm so afraid – of J. drinking, or not doing enough for recovery. I want him to change his thoughts and quit blaming me for everything. I look at all the issues before us and I'm overwhelmed. Please God, help me face these fears one day at time.

After dinner

I am in agony now. We had our second session with the couples counselor after work, and we talked about the people I've confided in about J.'s drinking. I re-lived what it was like back in January when he was drinking and driving and had Robin in the car with him. J. is clearing the kitchen now and he's angry – from the other side of the house I hear loud sighs and slamming cabinets and other things. I'm telling myself we had to have this conversation in order to move forward; I prayed for guidance today, and I did my best to be honest. The marriage may not make it and it won't necessarily be “my fault.” I said I was sorry I had confided in people who turned out not to be trustworthy because they told some others. I meant it when I said I was truly sorry – but I haven't heard him say yet that he's sorry he endangered my life when he had been drinking and was driving, or for the other times he was driving and drunk and what might have happened to him, to other people, to Robin, to our future. I've heard at Al-Anon meetings that since J. isn't truly in recovery, I'm going to get blamed a lot.

Oh, this is so difficult. I can't live the old way, assuming blame and responsibility that isn't mine and then being resentful – and the new way is terribly uncomfortable and difficult. My stomach is in knots and I am waiting for the explosion to arrive. The longer the evening goes on the more I fear it will happen. I remember when Robert (*my friend's father*) told me that I'm dealing with a crazy person and that I was in for a rough ride. I wish J. were going to a good counselor so he could deal with the pain from his past, which is the real reason he's drinking. God, please help me to know what to say and do.

I know I need to let J. process this – and it may not be anger at me – it may be anger at himself or the world or whatever. This is what I lived through earlier in my life, when my mother was struggling with undiagnosed and untreated depression. She was angry at all of us a lot of the time. When I heard her storming around the house in a rage, I was sure it was all my fault because I'd done something wrong, that I was a terrible person and I deserved to be punished. I would do anything if only she would be happy. When I heard her say that she wished she were dead, all I could think of was that it was all my fault she felt like that, and I would be desperate to make her happy again. That terrible ache and fear is still inside me – how can I make the person I care about be well and happy? I grew up thinking that it was my responsibility and it is ingrained in my being. I've had enough counseling to know I can't take J.'s hurt away, just like I couldn't take my mother's away. I would if I could – but I cannot. This is J.'s journey – it is impossible for me to be the crutches for him. So please help me God to know what I need to do and then do it.

October 30, 1997 before work

It helped last night to read Al-Anon stories in “Making Crises Work for You.” J. seemed very angry at bedtime but we didn't talk. This morning we exchanged hugs but didn't talk. He cleaned and reorganized the kitchen – it looks great. He seemed down when he left for work. Part of me is wondering – did he call his sponsor last night, the sponsor who is supposed to be helping him work through these things? Has he called his sponsor at all in the past 10 days? Will he go to a meeting – or am I the target for anger – because “it's all my fault”? Even though my stomach is in knots I feel that I'm sticking up for myself.

Please God, help me get through today with you guiding my thoughts instead of my ego being in charge. Help me to be an instrument of your will, and do your work in the world.

At work

I'm trying to get through the next few hours – the rest of the day. I did the Al-Anon reading for the day, I wrote in my journal at home, I listened to a healing tape in my car on the way to exercise before work, I've made Al-Anon phone calls. I've done everything I can to take care of myself but somehow, I am just frantic, frantic. I'm so worried that J. is angry at me. It was so nice to just stand in the hot shower after exercise, and the thought came to me that this shower is the highlight of my day, and it's all downhill from here. It made me sad.

Please God, help me to lessen my grip on fear, on control. Help me to trust you more, remember that the world is in your hands, and you are with me and J.

Later

I received some thoughts today from a program friend – think about what makes me feel nourished, and what it would look like if I were taking care of myself. I need to do the work for my own recovery, then relax, trust God, and try to breathe.

October 31, 1997

At work

My counselor and my sponsor had helpful thoughts. Think about what it means to be alone. Align myself with God's will. Pray for the will of God as opposed to a specific outcome. I can pray that my loved one will choose the "right" path, and I can pray to God to help me accept it if the person chooses differently from what I would have chosen for them. I can pray for willingness. We know that God is watching out for others, so we can relax our control. It is God's will for us to be happy, joyous, and free.

In the evening

J. called me at work this afternoon to say he was going to go camping tonight. What can I say – no, I don't want you to go because you should be working on your recovery program instead? I have to let go.

I am doing all I can to live by a sermon I heard at church several years ago – What are God's four answers to our prayers?

- Yes.
- No.
- Not yet.
- It's up to you.

The minister giving the sermon listed examples in the Bible of all the responses. It was very helpful. So far, I'm not sure what the answer is to my prayer for J. to embrace recovery.

November 3, 1997

We had a truly special get-away weekend. This is why we fell in love and got married! So why can't the joy of being together keep going and going?

November 5, 1997

I heard something really interesting at the Al-Anon meeting. During the group share, I said I realized something as I was saying the Serenity Prayer – that one of the things that I couldn't change was the past. Another member said during her share that although we can't change the past, we can change our relationship to the past. That was so helpful! I've been thinking about this a lot.

November 7, 1997

We went to a conference together out of town. J. went on an outing and had a wonderful time. He was so happy and wanted to tell me all about it. It was just great to be together. We were able to spend some time out in nature, which we both love, and where we both feel closer to God. How can it be that we see-saw between wonderful times and dreadful times? He told me that he has decided to send Luke

some money for the wedding. I was afraid to ask him how much. I hope it wasn't a lot. We know he has used drugs in the past – is it a good idea to give him cash?

I think how difficult it is for me to hold fast when J. is angry – it is AGONY – and yet I need to learn how to do this.

November 13, 1997

It's 3:30 in the morning. I can't sleep. I'm writing this in the bathroom. My mind is racing, and my stomach is in knots. I need to write this down so hopefully I can go back to sleep.

What happened Friday night and all weekend is not acceptable. I had to stay late at work to meet a deadline for a big event next week that I'm responsible for, and I called J. to let him know. But when I got home, I could tell he was very angry. When I asked him about it, he said no, he wasn't. He was still upset Saturday morning, and continued to say that he wasn't. Then things seemed to get better, we had some pleasant times, and finally on Monday morning he said he was angry over the weekend because I was so late coming home Friday and he was sure this was happening because I was interested in someone else. Once again, I feel as if I got punished when I had done nothing wrong. It's not fair. The focus of J.'s anger became my behavior, and I had done nothing wrong. This has happened many times – I can't remember how many. And after his storm passes, each time he promises it won't happen again. But it does. I don't believe those promises.

We had an agreement – I would stand by J. if he sought treatment, which meant going through an outpatient program, getting a sponsor, and going to meetings regularly. He is not living up to that agreement, and this is not OK. I believe that as long as J. is not working on recovery and making it his highest priority, that I will continue to get blamed for what is going wrong in his life – for the sadness and anger he feels. Instead of the focus being directed to what is wrong inside himself, I become the focus. I get blamed, and it is not fair and I don't like it and I am not going to continue to let it happen. J. is not working the program, and I am suffering as a result, and I am not going to put up with it. Right now, it seems like there are no consequences for J. not keeping our agreement. There are consequences. Things are not fine between us, and I need to tell him that.

Why didn't he ask me on Friday if he had a concern about something? We have had this misunderstanding about his jealousy enough times, and now he needs to take responsibility for his actions and work on finding out why he suspects me of something. Why is that easier than asking me a question? And promising it won't happen again is not realistic. I want to hear a concrete plan about what he is going to do next time it happens. Will he call his sponsor, call his counselor, go to a meeting – what will happen so I am not the recipient of all the rage and bitterness he feels. He has a right to those feelings, but my behavior is not the cause.

I feel I am not being honest with myself or with J. if I don't confront him – that we just set aside what happened Friday and shrug it off – oh, just a misunderstanding – no harm done – instead of saying this is not acceptable, and figuring out what to do next time when it is easier to suspect me instead of asking a question. That seems to be the “default” in J.'s brain – suspect me, blame me – and it is not OK.

Dream after I went back to sleep; I believe this is a message from God.

J. and I are in our house. Someone I know in real life that I don't like and is very aggressive, B., says it belongs to him. We don't want to give it up because we've worked so hard on it. Then there is a bear in the woods being chased by hunting dogs, but the bear eludes the dogs and now it's chasing us. I say we need to go into the basement to get away from the bear, and we do, except that the basement is open – the foundation walls don't extend down around us so we're in an open pit and you can see grass around. I say we must stand our ground now with the bear and not run away again because if we do, it will catch us and kill us. J. is looking at the flowers he has planted instead of worrying about the bear, and then the bear arrives. J. stands in front of me and has a garden hose and starts shooting water at the bear, but I know that's not enough. I call out to B. to get a gun. He brings us a long pair of big scissors, like shears, and slowly sticks them into the bear so it begins to bleed. I don't know if this is going to be enough and I worry whether the bear will die or just be angry. I yell out, "We need a gun! We need a gun!"

I wake up, and I can feel my heart pounding. I'm so frightened. I told J. about the dream. I said I wonder if the bear represents the addiction, and that we're not doing enough. He got very angry and left the house. I am very sad.

Later in the day

I talked to my sponsor. She said sometimes the model has to fall apart before it can be put back together. I can ask myself the questions, is it true/kind/necessary, when I am confronting J. about his behavior. She reminded me that I'm being kind to myself when I stand up for myself. I am caring for myself – I'm not being selfish. She said I can say to him, "I feel like you are shaming me for my feelings. I'm not going to participate when you are trying to make me feel ashamed. It feels like you are beating me up verbally. When my feelings aren't honored, I'm going to remove myself."

November 14, 1997

We had a productive session with our couples counselor today after work, then J. left again to go camping for one night. He says it helps him feel connected to God. (*I did not write down what we talked about in the session.*)

November 20, 1997

We had a very nice weekend together, then we got more sad news yesterday about Luke. It appears that Luke spent all the money J. sent him on drugs. I am assuming the wedding is off. Whenever a new crisis with Luke unfolds, I immediately worry more about J.'s recovery program. I see him getting depressed and angry and what kind of support system does he have in place??? None that I can see! He never talks about his sponsor, he goes to very few meetings, and there don't seem to be program friends he can count on. Should I separate or not? I am so worried. My sponsor says I need to continue working the Steps and focus on my own recovery program.

November 21, 1997

I had lunch with a trusted Al-Anon friend today, and I talked about my anguish over separating. She said that I will know what to do about it, that I don't need to agonize now about when is the right time – I will just know. If I truly am praying for God's will for me, it will be obvious what I need to do. Her words were very comforting.

November 24, 1997

J. has been in and out of a bad mood all weekend. I woke him up from a nap by mistake, and he was very angry. I felt so bad.

November 26, 1997

Things are getting weirder and weirder with Luke. "Debbie" called J. yesterday to tell him that they did get married. Why? He spent their money on drugs, and she still wanted to get married? Today, the day before Thanksgiving, when J. got home from work, there was a message from Luke saying he wants to come visit us over the weekend so we can meet Debbie and maybe one of the children. They are living not far from J.'s dad. This message makes me very angry. I do not want Luke to disrupt our plans. J.'s dad is driving over and staying a couple of days, and Robin is coming over.

I talked to my sponsor, and she had some helpful thoughts:

- When I'm meddling in others' lives, it means I'm not working on my own life.
- Ask myself if I'm acting as God would have me act.
- There's a gift with each Step.
- I can't just jump to Step 2 - I need to stay with the pain of Step 1 and the hopeless feeling it brings up. I need to think about how take care of my child within.

Thanksgiving Day, 1997

What a fiasco. We had a great day planned and it started out OK. We got up early to start cooking. J.'s dad and Robin arrived. We had invited friends over for a special meal and were going to play board games afterwards. When we were planning it all, I was really excited. Then, right as we were getting ready to eat, we received a most unwelcome collect phone call from Luke. He decided to make the hours-long drive on the spur of the moment TODAY instead of the weekend, and was now about an hour away, along with Debbie and one of her children. We went ahead and had our meal, but all the fun just vanished. Everyone could tell we were very upset. So now all our friends have left, and Luke will be here any minute. I have escaped into the bathroom to write this because I can't scream out loud. I'm so angry. J. didn't even consult me to see how I felt. He just said "OK, sure, come along" and that was that. J. could have said to Luke that he would need to come a few hours later, so we could have at least had more time with our friends. I want to bar our front door, yell, shout, and wail. I have escaped into the bathroom to write this because I can't scream out loud.

Later

Debbie does seem very nice. I think she was embarrassed that they showed up with so little advance notice. Luke and J. went outside to talk privately, but J. didn't tell me what they talked about. Luke and Debbie and her youngest son have left to drive back home. We are planning a picnic for tomorrow with J.'s dad and Robin. I wish J. had someone to talk to besides me. I think of how helpful my sponsor has been lately. I don't understand why J. seems to have made so little effort to work with his sponsor. He never talks about it.

November 30, 1997

More dreadful news! J.'s dad left yesterday afternoon to drive home, and when he called us that night to say he had arrived, he said his house had been broken into. Some cash and checks were missing, but the house was not destroyed, thank goodness. J.'s dad was very sad. We all suspect Luke, because he knew that J.'s dad would still be with us, and he had spent a lot of time in that house so he knew where things were. So J. and I got up early this morning to drive to visit J.'s dad, and keep him company. It turned out to be a nice day, in spite of the circumstances. They showed me some of the local sights I hadn't seen, we went to an antique store and I got an ingenious book holder, we looked through old family photo albums, did a craft project together, and then we had to drive back. Fortunately, J.'s dad has other family in the area, support from his church, and many friends. He seemed in better spirits by the time we left, but I'm sure he would have preferred that we stay.

December 2, 1997

We had a Step discussion at the Al-Anon meeting – the 12th Step. Helpful things I heard: Carry the message, not the mess; meditation is a gift I give myself; there's a gift with each Step; ask for help and avoid resentment.

J. is heartbroken about the break-in at his dad's. We are so angry at Luke. J. has endured so much sadness in his life, more than enough for several lifetimes. He devoted an incredible amount of time and energy, years of his life, trying to help raise Luke. This feels like a dreadful betrayal.

December 8, 1997

J. decided he would go camping alone again this weekend. He said he really needed to clear his head about what happened with Luke. I went to the visitation for the death of someone I care about who had been sick. When J. came back today, we did a fun project together. He seems to be doing OK. One of my Al-Anon friends asked me a few days ago if I worried that J. was going camping by himself so he could drink without me knowing. I was very taken aback. This had not occurred to me. He seems OK when he comes home. Now there is something else for me to worry about.

I'm in a lot of pain from the accident on our vacation, and I'm going to see a doctor.

December 11, 1997

We went to a lovely event together last night, just terrific, and when we got home, there were NINE messages on our answering machine from a correctional facility a few hours away regarding Luke. Talk about a dreadful end to an evening. J. called them back today. It's all very confusing. The agony continues. *(I did not make a note about the details.)*

December 15, 1997

J. had a meeting with our couples counselor by himself on Thursday. I'm glad he went, after all that's been happening with Luke. J. went camping again by himself this weekend. When he got back at lunchtime, we had a nice time together. But the weekend was difficult for me while he was gone. I keep myself busy, but I miss him and I'm lonely at times. I'm going to tell him. He fell while he was camping and his back and shoulder are hurting.

December 17, 1997

I saw the doctor – he took X-rays of my ankle but didn't see anything that jumped out at him, so he gave me a brace to wear. However, after one hour I was in agony, so I took it off. I will have to look for other solutions to walk better and be in less pain.

December 18, 1997

I talked to my sponsor. She had more helpful thoughts.

- Two important motivations for behavior are love and fear. Wanting to control is fear-based.
- I'm very focused on having J.'s approval, even when he disagrees with what I'm doing. He can't give me his approval when he doesn't like what I'm doing.
- I allow his anger to manipulate me, and this affects how I take care of myself.
- If I feel secure in my own motivation, I don't need to feel defensive. I can say, "I love you, and I need to do this" – I can be present to myself, and not abandon myself.
- For a successful relationship, there needs to be space between the path of each person. I need to retain my own integrity, and honor the other person's.
- I need to find a better way to get my needs met without trampling on him.

December 19, 1997

I told J. last night that I feel lonesome when he goes camping by himself. We didn't come to any resolution, but at least I spoke up. We were supposed to meet with our couples counselor this afternoon, but he had to cancel. I was very disappointed.

I met with my counselor today. She helped me organize my thoughts and find the right words to say.

- I'm not going to just sit here – I need to know J. is committed to getting well. I know the break-in at his dad's and our suspicion that it was Luke has been a terrible blow.

- I want J. to have his own program and support system outside of me. He told me he isn't connecting with his sponsor and they have come to a parting of the ways. So will he look for another sponsor?
- I want to know what his plan is to deal with his bad moods.
- I can ask him again how I can be supportive. How can we find new ways to nourish each other?
- I can say, "What makes it so difficult for us to talk about money? I want to understand why this is so hard for you. What is a goal for us to work towards saving – a percentage of our income?"

I felt better after our session, and I called J. at work to tell him I was feeling more centered and that he should go camping tonight, if that's what he feels he needs to do to cope with the extra stress from work and the worry over the break-in. He asked was I sure, and I said yes, so he said he would plan on going.

December 22, 1997

It was an odd weekend. On the surface, most of the time, things were OK. But underneath I could sense a very dark cloud surrounding J. I am very worried about him. He got back from camping Friday morning and he said he was glad he went; he went on to work and he seemed OK. He made another great dinner for us that night. We had a lovely evening together and reconnected. We started talking about how to decorate the house for the holidays. J. said he had decided not to go camping again on Saturday because his back and shoulder were bothering him more now from when he fell a week ago. When he woke up yesterday, he was very grumpy because he was in pain, but we managed to have some pleasant times doing chores and starting the decorations. He made another wonderful dinner. But I can see that he is very sad and worried, and there's nothing I can say or do that "fixes" his anguish. I am powerless. It is up to him. I can support him, I can love him, I can hold him, but the black hole inside him is beyond my reach to heal. Oh God, please guide my steps. Help us to keep going. I so want to believe everything is going to be OK, and yet I am very afraid.

December 23, 1997

I think we had the biggest laugh ever at today's Al-Anon meeting. Two men showed up for their first time. We started going around the circle, speaking for the three-minute shares as it came to be our turn. It felt very positive. Then it was the turn of one of the new men, and he said how impressed he was with the discussion. He said someone in another 12-Step fellowship had urged him to try an Al-Anon meeting, and he said he had been reluctant to go because he figured it was going to be "a bunch of wimpy, crying women" who were there only to complain about the alcoholics in their lives. All of us at the meeting just burst out laughing. It was so great!

December 24, 1997

J. and I have three days off for Christmas. I had a dream that woke me up this morning, that I could see into the future, and I could see that J. was in trouble. It felt like a message from God, so I decided to share the dream with J. I told him how worried I was about him, that I can see he's upset about the break-in and Luke and it's dragging him down. I said he needs a support system besides me, like a

sponsor, and the fellowship at the meetings. He got very angry and walked away. We avoided each other for the rest of the morning. I called my sponsor and we talked for a minute. At lunch, J. said he wasn't hungry so I ate by myself. It was tense for the rest of the day. I am very sad. What a way to celebrate Christmas. But I had to say something.

December 29, 1997

We managed to make it through Christmas, but there wasn't a lot of joy. J. and I picked up Robin for the drive to J.'s dad. I felt the tension in the car, and finally couldn't stand it anymore. I asked J. to pull over and when he did, I said let's get out. I told him as clearly as I could that I am concerned for him because I love him, and I can see that he is very unhappy. I said something needs to change in his life because it is affecting my life and our marriage as well. I told him again that I love him, and all I want is for us to keep going and for him to find joy. He didn't say anything, but we held each other for a minute and then we kept on driving. It got a little better. We had a nice time as a family, and drove back the day after Christmas. J. told me when he got home that he had decided to go camping the next day. I said OK. I went to work the next morning, and watched videos that night by myself. He came back from camping and said it had been good for him to go. I said I was glad to hear it, and didn't say anything else. We reconnected, but I feel like I'm waiting for a shoe to drop. Or maybe a bomb.

December 30, 1997, helpful thoughts from the meeting

- Breathing connects us with God.
- Life's reality and truth only happens in the present moment. Worrying about the past or projecting into the future keeps us from being in the present.
- Doing what we don't want to do keeps our soul growing.
- Service work takes us out of ourselves.
- Asking God for help is like getting a matching grant – God can make help available, but we need to make the effort to do things. It's a partnership.
- God is grinding away parts of me that aren't working when I'm going through difficult times.
- "The past is history, the future is a mystery, but today is a gift – that's why we call it the present."

January 3, 1998

J. and I met for dinner and a movie; he seemed preoccupied. When we got home, he said he would rather have gone camping by himself. That makes me very sad. I need to let go and let God.

January 6, 1998 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting

Step 1

- When you're driving on ice, don't slam on the brakes
- Think about what I don't have power over. My job is to not pick up the "isms" connected with alcohol.
- Surrender to God only.

January 8, 1998

When I got home from work the other day, I rounded the corner and J.'s car wasn't there. I immediately panicked – was he drinking and driving? My stomach was in knots until he came home and I could see that he hadn't been drinking. This is so difficult.

January 17, 1998

I couple of days ago I wasn't feeling well so I stayed home from work. J. came home for lunch, and seemed like the man I married. We connected and then he went back to work. I coasted in the afternoon. Then when he came home for dinner, he seemed upset at me and said he didn't want to be around me because I "seem so sad all the time." He said he felt like going back to work rather than be around me. It was so odd. I tried to explain that I wasn't sad, I just didn't feel well. After a little while he seemed to calm down and we had dinner, but my stomach was in knots all evening. And of course, I was sad.

January 20, 1998

I finally brought up my worries about his lack of dedication to recovery today. I reminded him of my three principles: that I would seek God's will for me, I will not be an enabler, and I will take care of myself. It did not go well at all. He got so very, very angry. I am so very sad. Where are we headed? At least I said something – baby steps. Please help us, God.

January 22, 1998

I told my counselor that J. and I had another disagreement over money yesterday. She said that the longer people stay in a relationship, the more core issues show up, so we can work on them and then let them go. It seems like money is a core issue for us.

I talked about the continuing difficulties J. and I have in communicating. She talked about how we might approach the sore subject of our "agreement" about how he would deal with his anger. Possible words to say to him: "I'd like us to share where we are with how things are going. Please do not put me in the role of being the Sgt. Major or your mother."

She also talked about how to discuss these issues without going into the same old script. She said I could talk about my feelings about the discussion, for example, "I notice you got tense because you frowned when I brought up money, and I got nervous when I saw you get tense." I don't need to react to crazy or sick behavior.

I have reactivated an old injury and now I am walking with crutches. When does life get easier? I want to live one day at a time, but it's so difficult.

January 25, 1998

I decided to bring up the subject of J.'s anger with him. I felt the push to say something, so I did. It went better than I feared. He agreed that it was a huge issue with him, related to his past, and that he

needed to work on it. It felt good to be honest and connect. Then a little while later he said he had decided he needed to go camping, so he packed up his things and left, but it felt OK.

February 4, 1998

Things seem a bit better. We went to a special concert a few days ago, and that meant a lot to both of us. We also met with our couples counselor and it went better than the last session two weeks ago. I feel more hopeful and closer to J., thank goodness.