

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

Journal Entries, Part 3 – First Separation and Reunification

February 11, 1998

The bomb dropped. A couple of nights ago, I was home before J., and observed him coming home drunk after giving a ride to Robin, who is not in a position to know when it's safe to be in the car. Just like my friend said when we talked in November, I immediately knew in my entire being that I must separate. I told him at the time that I could see he had been drinking and driving. He didn't deny it. I have reached out to many friends and family to get support. When we got up the next morning, J. was conciliatory, saying he would rededicate himself to recovery and start back with going to meetings, but I am convinced that I simply cannot let this go again. I'm now struggling with what to say to J. when we have the conversation about us separating as a result of his actions.

February 13, 1998

J. is so angry with me, furious that I'm talking about separating. When I brought it up last night, he stormed off to sleep by himself, and he was still angry this morning. I woke up with my heart pounding. Here we are, the day before Valentine's Day, always a big day for us, and a very special trip planned afterwards that we have been looking forward to for ages.

I met with my counselor, and she had some suggestions for possible words about the separation:

- "There isn't any easy way to do this; this is not a decision I wanted to make. This conversation and the drinking and driving terrify me. I love and trust you, but not the disease. I don't know when the disease will take over, or when drinking will distort your judgment."
- "Continuing on as if it didn't happen isn't working for me. I refuse to do it anymore. I'm not shutting the door on our marriage – this decision to separate is about your behavior."
- "We made an agreement in 1996 when I first fully realized that you were an alcoholic, that I would take care of myself and that you needed to figure out how to take care of yourself. I told you then that if you were drinking and driving that I would separate. I'm following through with what I said then. I'm not against you, but I'm acting for myself."
- "I want peace in my home and I can't have it the way things are now. I can't live with the disease."

After the appointment, I went shopping for flowers, the candy he likes, and made a Valentine's card. Please, God, help us get through this.

February 18, 1998

What a roller coaster. We made it through Valentine's and the next couple of days without a blow-up; we took turns cooking and avoided painful topics of conversation. I baked his favorite special cake for him, and he appreciated it. Then we got ready for our special trip and concert. That turned out to be just great, in spite of everything, and once again, the man I married was present and we had a wonderful time together. The love is still here between us.

Then we came back home and had a long, very difficult session with our couples counselor. I said again that I will separate, and J. got very angry and wanted to know what purpose it would serve, for example, how will I know that he's taking recovery seriously if we're not living together? I said, with his permission, I'd talk to his sponsor, and he didn't like that. *(This was a bad idea on my part – the relationship between a sponsee and sponsor is not my business.)*

I said I was doing it for myself, not to him. I remembered some of the words my counselor had suggested, and managed to say them, but it was very tense. How am I going to survive this?

February 19, 1998

I woke up again with my heart pounding. I still feel, with every particle of my being, that I must follow through with the consequence of separation if he drinks and drives. I feel I would be condoning his behavior if I don't. That next time, if he were faced with the choice of whether to drink and drive, he would feel it really isn't all that bad to do it. If we separate, he would have that memory of separation next time.

If we're not together, he can decide for himself how much he wants recovery. I need to know how much he wants it for himself and how much he's doing it for me. I have learned enough at the Al-Anon meetings to know that if he's only working on it to keep me, it will never work. J. agreed that we would meet with the minister at our church.

February 20, 1998

J. was so tender this morning when we got up. I called my sponsor and said I wondered if I was doing the right thing in moving forward with a separation. She just listened, and then suggested I check in with my body, ask myself about separating or staying, and see how I feel. So I did that, and I could feel the despair inside myself when I considered staying, and I wanted to throw up. I guess that answers that question. I met with the same attorney I met with last year, to discuss a separation. She asked me again how long I was thinking about, and I said three months. She said she still recommends at least six months, because she believes three months is not long enough for J. to truly change his thinking and behavior. I listened to her, but I don't think I could handle six months apart. *(The attorney was right in this case – three months was not long enough.)*

After dinner, J. asked me to reconsider the separation and I said no. He got very angry, and proceeded to throw out the rest of the cake I had baked for us earlier. It was awful. I am so sad. I left the house and sat in my car to collect myself. The next day, I called my sponsor. She said I needed to be prepared, that this would probably happen a lot as I proceed with the separation. She said J. would try everything to get me to change my mind. She said something that really struck me – if I don't follow through with the separation, I could be abandoning myself. I hadn't truly heard those words used that way before, but it helped me look at my choices in a new way. God, please help me keep going. I am so very, very sad and discouraged.

February 21, 1998

I had an interesting experience today while I was shopping for groceries. I believe God was giving me a message through another person. I saw a man I recognized from the Al-Anon meeting who has only recently been attending. We talked for a little while. He asked me how I was doing, and I said I was having a terrible time dealing with my anxiety over the separation. He said he wished there had been a strong woman like me in his life earlier – maybe his recovery would be further along now, maybe he would have spent fewer years in denial if his partner had set a boundary, like I’m doing now. We exchanged hugs. I feel more settled in my mind about what I’m doing. This helped so much. Thank you, God.

February 22, 1998

I had several very intense, vivid dreams last night. In the first dream, J. and I are living in an old apartment building with lovely architecture. I see part of the paint has chipped off, exposing previous coats of paint, and I think maybe it won’t be too difficult to scrape off the old paint to make it look better. So, I start working and the paint comes off easily, but what it reveals is that the wood is mangled and broken in pieces and held together with tape. I realize it would take new wood to fix it right, it would be expensive, and the only reason the wood looked good was because the paint was hiding the flaws and holding everything together.

In the second dream, J’s car has been left outside in the middle of the street – we did that. I can’t understand why we didn’t park it in the parking lot – why had we left it in the street? The trunk is open and some of the doors. There is a crowd of people standing around – the car has been hit since we left it there. I walk up and the people start asking me why we had left it in the street and I don’t know what to say.

I woke up feeling like everything in our marriage is a fake or a failure. It was terrible. The message seems very clear. Strong, decisive action is needed, not just new paint.

February 23, 1998

J. decided he would go camping by himself, but he didn’t leave in a huff. We talked about what’s next but didn’t come to any firm decisions. I am relieved just not to be completely and totally miserable.

February 24, 1998

The Al-Anon meeting was about making decisions, imagine that. There were lots of helpful comments.

- Decision-making is a process, not an event.
- If a person has a sense of desperation that time is running out, then it is probably NOT the time to make a decision. Ask yourself what you are afraid of.
- There are no wrong decisions – either way, you will learn something.
- Decision are usually not irrevocable – you can change your mind.
- It’s seldom that there is “the only” right thing – it could be a series of right decisions, or “the next right step for right now,” and then you figure out what to do next after that.

- Why am I in agony? I'm afraid of making the wrong decision, and I'm already projecting the result, that it will be bad.
- I'm afraid of how this decision will affect J.; instead, I need to be thinking about myself, and the effect of his drinking and driving on me.
- Making a decision is a skill; it gets easier with practice.
- Think of a decision I later regret as an unfortunate decision, rather than a wrong decision. I can only do what I think is the right thing at the time.
- Ask God to "make a decision possible or block it" if I don't know what to do.
- Ask for clarity; God doesn't speak in code.

Also during the meeting, I got to hear what others are going through, and that helps put my problems in perspective. Thank you, God.

February 25, 1998

Tonight is not going well. J. and I met with the minister who married us and although I thought it was helpful, J. said he felt our minister was patronizing. For one thing, our minister said that as a citizen he felt drinking and driving was absolutely not acceptable. I said that I felt my trust was betrayed and that I felt violated and needed the separation as a time to heal. J. asked if embarrassment was part of the "punishment" of separation – that people would know about it. I said no, it wasn't, and it hit me all of a sudden that I was willing to think about me moving out instead of him. I didn't say anything during our meeting, however; I remembered what my sponsor said about "wait three days."

After we were finished talking, I suggested we pray, so we all held hands. I noticed J. looked like he was crying. When we got home, we ate dinner in total silence. I decided to let him alone, and let him feel his feelings. Then he asked me how long I'd been thinking about a separation – I said only in the past two weeks, since when he was drinking and driving. He said he didn't believe me. I said it was true, and he said again he still didn't believe me. He asked would I have wanted a separation if he hadn't been driving – I said probably not – but he still didn't believe me. He left to give Robin a ride, so I called my sponsor while he was gone. I feel he's at the emotional place where he was last week when he dumped the cake I made for him in the trash. My sponsor said again he was probably going to try all sorts of maneuvers to get me to change my mind. I think of him as a wounded child, lashing out the only way he knows. Please God, help me to know the next right thing; help me to discern your will; help my wishes and desires that come from ego to recede so I can know your will for me. Help me to see. Help me to support J.

February 26, 1998

I woke up before the alarm with my heart pounding. I'm so tired. J. was so angry – he said he doesn't want to go to our church anymore, that clearly the minister "has chosen sides, and he's picked you." He said not to call him at work because he didn't want to talk to me. I called my sponsor and a couple of program friends for support. I went to the women's evening Al-Anon meeting before I drove home, and called the house to tell J. I would be later than usual coming home. There was no answer. When I got home, the house was dark and J. was gone. I ate by myself. He came home later and was still

angry. He started eating, and I sat down with him to keep him company. He said, “Why are you looking at me?” It was awful. Please, God, help me keep going.

February 27, 1998

I talked with one of my relatives today about what has been happening, but after a little while I could tell it was too difficult for this person to hear the details. We have always been close, but this is a journey I am going to have to make without them knowing everything. It feels like another loss.

I met with my counselor. Once again, she had extremely helpful insights, as well as suggestions for what to say about the separation.

- Possible words to say to J.: When you make the choice to drink, I get stuck in the role of being the bad guy and I don't like it. I know you are not doing this to hurt me, but it is hurtful and we both lose. We have a strong commitment to each other. I need to heal from the impact alcoholism has had on my life.
- I can talk about the impact alcoholism has had on me: the worry, fear, and anger I feel; “Inside I'm falling apart.”
- I know the hurt I have experienced from you drinking and driving was not intentional. However, it has hurt me deeply and I must take care of myself. I am not willing to continue on in our marriage as if nothing has happened. Please respect my need for this separation.
- Both of us have been hurt by alcoholism and both of us need to heal. I need to deal with my emotions, and learn how to trust myself again.
- It is time to deal with the impact of your choice to drink. I need space to heal, and I'm asking that you respect that.
- I want to find the marriage we had before. It will be easier to do that if we separate.
- This separation is not an indication of indifference to you – I am protecting myself and other people.
- I want to join you in the recovery process, not monitor your behavior. I would like for you to share what you are discovering, without me having to ask.
- The feeling of “us” has changed – you have broken our marriage contract. My trust has been betrayed. It's up to you to mend the contract if you want an “us” again. There is no relationship if there is no trust. In the past, when you have broken the contract, I've readjusted and let things slide. I can't do that this time. There can be no adjustment. You crossed a line and broke our contract, and I can't go forward. What do you want to do about our contract?
- What can I do to support your healing?
- Is there a different way I can ask you questions so we don't go to this unhappy place?
- I'm not sure how I feel – let me think about it.
- I'd like us to be able to have honest conversations more often. In the past, it has always been difficult for us to say something at the time, so by the time one of us is ready to say something, it's already “big” and therefore more difficult to discuss – it has more of a charge.
- Please share with me things I may not be aware of that I'm doing that bother you.
- Help me understand – what do you want from me and from our relationship.

Something for me to think about - what if J. agrees to something he can't hold up?

When I got home, J. had cooked a very special meal and said he was very sorry for what he had said yesterday. I managed to speak up for myself and said that his words had been very hurtful. It was a tense evening, but it feels better than it did last night.

March 1, 1998

I have come to a decision. I have decided that I am ready to move out, and I told J. I felt relieved, and I knew I had said the right thing for me. I don't have to go through the ugly and painful process of forcing him to do something that he doesn't want to do. I can have control over the situation by moving out myself. I felt so much better, and I could tell J. was very surprised when he heard me say it. Paying for two places will be a stretch, but we should be able to manage if we are careful.

We also agreed that we wouldn't be dating other people during the separation, we would call each other every day, go to church together, and spend time together when we wanted to.

March 3, 1998

I've reinjured myself, and am back on crutches. Oh, this is so hard. Everything is so much more challenging – getting to work, doing the simplest things. And now I'm looking for a place to live. Please help me, God. And please help J.

Helpful thoughts heard at the Al-Anon meeting:

- I can believe that God can have something in mind for me better than I could ever imagine.
- Keep a "God log" to remember what happened with God's help.
- To anchor ourselves in the present instead of allowing our thoughts and fears to take over, focus on the five senses – look up at the sky and check out the clouds, hear the birds, feel the wind on our faces, feel our feet on the ground, take a deep breath and notice what smells there are.

March 5, 1998

God, help me to be true to your will for me each day, holding fast to your love. Help J. and me to find our way towards each other again.

March 6, 1998

In my spiritual life, I want to focus on being reconciled to God, which is what our minister said last night at the service. Don't focus on pride in successfully "giving up" something or guilt in not keeping our promise. Instead, focus on what is keeping me from being close to God. The first thing that pops into my mind is fear – fear of what God expects of me that I won't want to do, fear of the things I've done in the past that I'm ashamed of. I'm sure there are others. So please God, help me to be free from fear. Help me to let go and let you do your work.

March 7, 1998

I believe God is guiding me towards proceeding with the separation soon. I'm going to move back into the apartment building where I was living before we got married; I know the owners and they are willing to rent a unit to me on a short-time basis for three months, but it won't be ready for several weeks. It is very close to where I work, so it is really convenient. No more commute to work. In the meantime, I will have to live with J. under very stressful circumstances. He went to an AA meeting early this morning. God, please help me to say the right words at the right time, with love and compassion.

March 8, 1998

Today, J. went back to the early morning AA meeting. We talked about the separation afterwards, and he was very angry. He said again that I'm making all the rules. He said he was going to do some things on his own that he wanted to do, and then left. I was very sad, and called my sponsor. I tried to keep going with things and trust in God. J. came back later and we talked more about our future. It is so tense right now.

Please, God, help me to know your will each day and then do it. Remove my ego from my actions so my thoughts and actions reflect your will for me. Please remove fear from my mind and heart so love will guide me. Guide my steps and words so I can walk in your ways.

March 9, 1998

J. and I watched a movie that made me yearn to make contact with him and I don't know how. I've been flipping back and forth about the separation all day – am I doing the right things for the right reason? I don't know now. My stomach is knots and I wonder. Please guide my steps.

March 11, 1998

I woke up this morning, heart pounding, stomach in knots. I held J. when he woke up, and the words came to me. I said I didn't want him to think I wanted to be apart or was looking forward to it in any way. It felt like the right thing to do and I have been easier in my mind today. Yesterday was tough – I cried with my sponsor after the Al-Anon meeting, and she held my hand. I said I was afraid of the future, of being alone in the apartment, of us heading down different roads, of never being together again. Once I named the fear it seemed less overpowering. And now I continue to move forward one day at a time, hoping I am doing God's will. Today was a big day - please guide my steps.

March 12, 1998

I had a long talk with a close friend who knows what's happening. At this moment, I feel settled in my mind about separating and living apart. Please guide my steps, God, so that I do your will, and act out of love and not fear.

March 13, 1998

I saw my counselor. I'm dreading the next "difficult" conversation with J. – how are we going to communicate during our time apart, and what are we doing to do about getting increased insurance. When will it get easier for me to stand up for myself? My counselor said it will happen when I'm alone in the apartment. She also said that when I'm living alone, I may come to realize just how angry I am over things that happened when J. was drinking. God, please guide my steps.

March 16, 1998

We drove to J.'s dad's house yesterday, and came back today. It feels like a "normal" day, yet it isn't. J. talked about going on a trip to attend his college reunion, obviously without me, and I felt horribly excluded. I wanted to tell him I wanted to go, and then I wondered if that was my fear, my ego acting and not God's will. So I pray for guidance and will wait to bring it up.

March 17, 1998

I think this is the worst St. Patrick's Day I've had in my life. I talked to my sponsor after the Al-Anon meeting and decided I'd talk to J. about going with him to his reunion, if it was OK with him. I foolishly believed he'd be happy. When I got home tonight after work and told him I'd like to go to his reunion, he got angry and we started arguing again. He accused me of trying to manipulate his life after I move out, that I was treating him like a puppet, among other things. It was awful. I started crying and left the house to get take-out. I called my sponsor, but my stomach is churning and I'm angry and bitter myself. Now I'm afraid if I move out, he'll change the locks and smash things I care about. My sponsor said I don't trust him, and I don't, not when he's angry and vindictive. My mind is spinning – do I call my attorney and move ahead with a legal separation, or ask J. to buy me out of the house? Why have things changed in my mind so much in the past few hours? I felt like I knew my path this morning – is fear taking over? Is God giving me a picture of what J.'s heart is like right now, so full of anger that I want to scream? God, please help me know the next step. Please guide my mind towards your will for me, and us. Help me to act with kindness, compassion, and reason.

March 18, 1998

I talked to my sponsor again today about my fears of moving out – now I'm wondering if perhaps I should wait until I've gathered more information. My stomach is in knots – how can I last that long? I dread coming home – what kind of mood will I find? I tried to bridge the gap tonight – I don't know if I did. And then I made the cooking mistake of chopping up the baby bok choy special lettuce and boy was he mad. Turns out I should have left it whole, because that's the way he likes to cook it. I don't know if my response was the best: "I don't enjoy ruining what you had planned to cook." Eventually he got over it, but I still felt guilty. It is distressing to realize that for him, my feelings are not as important as having a perfect meal. I don't know if it's possible to bridge this gap between us. Please God, help me to know what is my part to do.

March 19, 1998

I can hear the birds singing outside – it's cool and drizzly. This would have been a happy day if things were different – we would be planning our trip to his reunion in a week. But J. is going without me and it feels like revenge. I slept a little better last night and as I went through my morning routine, I thought about standing up for myself. Then J. asked me if I were reconsidering my decision to separate and I told him I think about it every day and check in with myself and it still seemed like the right thing to do. He said he would continue on with his plans to go without me, and it felt like a door closing. I felt OK about my decision in that moment, and I still do. I remember the dream from a few months ago about having to stand my ground in front of a bear, that if I ran away it would catch me and kill me and my only hope was to stand my ground, make a lot of noise, and hopefully get a gun. I am standing my ground with J. as best I can. He was drinking and driving with Robin in the car and it seems like he is blaming me for our current crisis. Please God, guide my steps and direct my will. But sometimes I wish I could die.

March 20, 1998

I met with my counselor and talked about the latest difficulties. She reminded me that under stress, we regress – and this holds true for J. as much as me. That helped. I told her that yesterday morning I wished I were dead. We talked about my childhood self who goes to that place, when my mother said she wished she were dead, and I was sure it was my fault, and I wondered what horrible thing I had done to make her feel like that. My counselor asked me what I do to feel better. I told her I pet cats and dogs, call people, cry, re-read favorite books, and hang out in my hammock on the porch.

We also talked about how I could have better conversations with J. For instance, I can talk about how J. is talking, rather than the actual words he is saying, and the affect that has on me. I can say some or all of these things: “Your voice is getting louder. You seem angry. It seems like you just got defensive. When your tone of voice changes, it triggers a response in me. How do we stop triggering each other? We seem to be stuck in patterns of hurting each other. I'd like to change that, and it might be awkward as we try different ways to communicate.” This would be a way to make contact with J. but in a way that might defuse the situation.

Other possible things to say: “I need to learn to stop walking on eggshells when we're together and I see that you're angry. I need to learn to stand up for myself – this is part of what this separation is about.” Also, “I worry about you because I love you. I want us to continue to work on our relationship while we are living apart. I want us to figure out together how to do this.”

The apartment is almost ready for me to move in. I started packing tonight and ironed some of J.'s clothes for his reunion trip. It now seems more definite that I'm leaving. I'm looking forward to it in some ways and in others I'm not.

I was very relieved yesterday when J. called me at work and said he wanted to talk this evening about his reunion trip. We met before the church service, in the church where we got married. It was a good conversation. He seemed calm and rational, not bitter, angry, and vindictive. It scares me when

he's like that. I told him I was happy for him, that he was going. Please God, continue to guide me each day. Help me to walk through my fear.

March 21, 1998

I got the key for the apartment, and took measurements for curtains. J. left for his trip. It's difficult to believe this is all really happening. Three years ago at this time, I was planning for our wedding – and here I am now, working on this separation. My ankle aches all the time, and it's difficult to walk without crutches.

March 22, 1998

It is a gorgeous spring day – a favorite tree is in full bloom, the birds are singing, it's warm, and it's also my last “normal” weekend at the house for some time. I went out to lunch with a friend, and I felt so sad thinking about what is about to happen. She just listened and didn't try to give me a lot of advice. I visited another friend, and she helped me sew curtains for the apartment with material she already had. I'm fortunate to have kind and understanding friends.

March 23, 1998

I spent most of the weekend packing and organizing and getting ready. J. has now returned from his reunion trip. What an odd time for us– my things are out in boxes and laid out on chairs. He looked sad as he surveyed them. We still haven't talked about how we're going to handle being apart. I don't think he'll get angry again like before but I don't know. Please God, help me to see – help me to know your will for me every day. Please guide our steps so we draw closer to you.

March 24, 1998

J. and I talked this morning, and I will move out tomorrow. He agreed to help me. During dinner, he told me a little bit about his reunion trip, and then we talked about communicating during the separation. I emphasized that I want us to talk every day. He was quiet.

I told the group at the Al-Anon meeting that I feel like I've stepped out of the boat that he and I have been in together, and now it's up to him to figure out where he wants to go. I said I feel very sad that we will not be together, but I still believe I'm doing the right thing. I also heard some helpful comments:

- J.'s anger has nothing to do with me.
- Keep the image in my mind that God is holding both our hands. Breathe in God's love, breathe out fear and anger. Stay in the present moment. Talk to someone supportive each day.
- Remember that fear is a feeling; it's not going to hurt me.

My sponsor and I talked, and she had some helpful suggestions of possible things to say to J.:

- “The way you're behaving scares me. I don't deserve irrational anger – I have the right to be treated better.
- What is your idea of helping our marriage?

- I hear you say you don't have a voice – I want you to feel you have a voice.
- Have we agreed that our goal is to move things along? What do you think would move things along?"

March 25, 1998

I am now moved into the apartment where I'll be living for the next three months. The move went fast – J. was very helpful. I brought enough dishes for the two of us, bought take-out, and we had an OK dinner together before he left. He was angry and bitter this morning – he said he didn't want to go back to his counselor. He said he had offered to meet with him as "part of the package" for me to stay and now he no longer wanted to go. I felt sick when I heard these words. My stomach is in knots – I am very worried about how he will do on his own, without me as a buffer, comforter, and distraction, and not be drinking. But I believe I must let him go so he can find his own way. I've stepped out of the boat, and now he has to sail it on his own.

We agreed that we will talk every day, we will see each other as we wish, we will remain as a married couple – no dating. Please guide my steps each day, God. Thank you for all the support from my friends, sponsor, counselor, my Al-Anon group, and all the people in AA and Al-Anon who have gone before.

March 26, 1998, early morning

I didn't sleep well last night – I woke up before the alarm with my stomach in knots, and then I heard the trash trucks very early; this is urban living. It is going to take a while to get used to my changed circumstances. Plus, I'm feeling frantic about J. I am so worried about him. This is one of my nightmares – that we can't talk to each other and he'll lose trust in me in the meantime. Please God, guide my steps today.

March 26, evening

I've now been here for 24 hours. It has been a long day. All I can think is that I made it through one day – and how many more will there be like this, alone, living apart, being afraid of what J. is or isn't doing? Will I look back in June and be glad that I did this, or will I be thinking about more time apart or a legal separation? I can't fast forward the movie – all I can do is live one day at a time. Please God, guide my steps. Thank you for my sponsor and my family. Help me to know your will for me, and help me support J., however that needs to be. He didn't call back this evening – I'm assuming it was on purpose to hurt me, but that may not be the case, and I have to let him have his reaction, whatever that is. God, help me to trust that you are looking out for him, too.

I heard some helpful things today at the Al-Anon meeting – that I'm not going backwards, but forwards in a different direction. I can sit with a feeling – it goes beyond just saying words. I can hold a space for whatever might come. God is inviting us to have the best life and wants us to set aside the burdens of the past so we can be joyful. When I heard that, I thought about joy – wouldn't that be nice?

March 27, 1998

Thank you, God – today was a better day – I slept better, and felt proud of myself for following through with the separation. A family member called me at work and said I need to tell my parents about the separation, now that it has started. Then after work I heard wonderful music at a concert some friends invited me to. The lead musician was funny and full of great energy – it was obvious that he loved life. God, please help me to love life – I want joy and gladness. Please guide my steps, and thank you for your help.

I met with my counselor today; she had helpful things to say. She said I could think about what is J.'s business and what's mine. I need to remember that his recovery is his business. How he accomplishes sobriety is his business. I can say "It sounds like you're angry. Is there anything you need from me?" I could be reflecting back – "That touched me/That had a big impact on me." I can talk about what I'm thinking when he does something: "When you moved like that, I assumed you were mad at me and were going to stay away from me all day." In other words, I make up stories in my head and I need to share them with him. I can ask him if he would be willing to join me in dealing with this. J. and I need to explore new ways of making contact with each other. I can tell him that I'm constantly in fear of his anger, and I don't want to live like that anymore. We can each share our journey. Part of my journey is standing up for myself. During the separation I can learn a new way of taking care of myself. *(It was never easy to say these words.)*

March 28, 1998

J. and I had dinner together tonight at a restaurant near where I'm living. It was wonderful to see him and hold him. We had a nice time. Then when I got back to the apartment, I called my parents and told them about the separation and why it was happening, but not about the drinking and driving. They were sad, and fortunately did not press for a lot of details.

March 29, 1998

Today was a good day. I met with my sponsor to continue the steps, and enjoyed myself doing errands. It felt like I was single again. I didn't have to worry about what J. was doing for his recovery – although my stomach is still in knots. I still have a long way to go. Thank you for today, God.

March 30, 1998

J. called, and we made a plan to see each other today even though I'm feeling like I might be coming down with a cold. When we got together, we didn't talk about he was or how I was doing – we stayed on easy topics. My stomach is still in knots. Help me focus on what is important, God. Please guide my thoughts, feelings, and actions. Help us both to find our way towards you each day.

March 31, 1998

It was cold today – I was very tired, paying for my childish behavior of staying up too late and reading. I have to learn to balance feeling happy and relieved with being sensible. I also need to learn to eat better – I ate way too much at dinner and had too much sugar. This will be an effort. How can I

nourish my soul besides through food? I talked to a friend after the Al-Anon meeting, and told her how anxious I was. God, please guide my steps each day – bring me closer to you.

Helpful things I heard at the meeting today:

- When my heart is filled with gratitude, there isn't room for anything else. I can't will it – I need to ask God for it. Gratitude can help us get into the present moment; being in the present moment helps limit fear and worry.
- Talking to people in the program helps bring peace and serenity.
- When I pray, I can give everything to God, and then ask God to give me back what he wants us to look at.
- I can't make myself peaceful and serene. Peace is already in me; I can get connected to it by removing what's blocking me. Serenity is mine for the asking.

April 1, 1998

J. called me tonight – I was very glad. I hope we make it through this – it reminds me of something I read, along the lines of, “when you reach the end, you change; having changed you pass through.” I want us to pass through. God, bring me closer to you each day. I pray for peace. My ankle is doing better and I can walk without crutches. However, to escape from my feelings of loneliness, I find that I am turning to eating when I'm not hungry, and staying up too late reading. The next day I wake up and I'm tired and mad at myself. This isn't good.

April 2, 1998

I was feeling happy today because I could go for a walk and my ankle felt OK. J. called to say he was feeling low, that work today was very stressful for him. I know this makes him vulnerable to drinking as a way to cope. So we made a plan to meet after work, had dinner together, and saw an interesting movie. I want him to be happy; I want to be able to make him happy, and I know that is not something I can do. As the program so wisely puts it, I am powerless. This makes me sad. One day at a time.

April 4, 1998

J. called to say he wanted to get ready to go camping, so we're not going to meet this evening to exercise together. I was very disappointed and sad. When will he take recovery seriously so we can be together?

April 6, 1998

I spent time with J. today – he's back home after camping so I baked something special and went to see him at our house. It was the first time I've been back since moving out. Although it was great to be together, and we connected, it was also really weird. He made a great dinner for us, and as I was getting ready to leave, he said “When are you going to come back home?” I was proud of my response – I said, “That's up to you and how dedicated you are to your recovery.” He didn't say anything.

I felt sad as I was driving away. But now that I'm back at the apartment I'm feeling anxious. We haven't had a serious conversation yet about what is happening between us and I'm upset. Is he doing anything about his inappropriate anger? Is he still committed to sobriety? I haven't heard anything. I don't want to move back and walk on eggshells again, but I'm afraid that's what might happen unless I act. I'm also still afraid of his anger, what he'll say or do. So how do we have this conversation? God, please guide my steps.

April 7, 1998

I met with my sponsor, and she suggested that I start the 4th step with a look at my resentments with J., so that is where I'll begin. First of all, he lied to me all the time when we were dating and then during our engagement and the beginning of our marriage by hiding his alcoholism. How many arguments and misunderstandings did we have, how many sessions did I schedule with my counselor, how many tears did I shed and hours did I spend feeling confused or sad or depressed, trying to figure out what I had said or done wrong to cause the argument, when in reality the cause was his drinking? How much time did I spend in torment or anxiety, and how much money did I pay for counseling to help with my feelings, when it had nothing to do with me? How much extra garbage, baggage, confusion, fear, worry, and anxiety did I take on because he had been drinking? Just thinking about it and writing it down makes me angry.

I am also resentful because, in my opinion, he has not truly embraced recovery – he is reluctant about it from what I can tell. He goes to meetings sporadically, and doesn't talk about getting a sponsor. From my perspective, J. was only eager to work on his recovery when he wanted me to stay in the house, and once he realized I was going to follow through with the separation, then the eagerness vanished. So is that saying that he only is interested in recovery to placate me, that it really isn't important in his life, and any interest he does have will wane soon?

This really bugs me because I have had to live through painful recuperations from surgery while I was living alone, and no one was there to tell me how proud they were that I was following instructions and doing what I was supposed to do. I had to do it on my own, by myself – why can't he?

What really makes me angry is that when I finally brought up my worries of his lack of dedication to recovery in January, he got very, very angry. It was as if he was furious that I DARED to bring this up – after we had reached the earlier agreement about what he would be doing, and then one by one all the things dropped away and I let it all go and said nothing for months.

I am sitting with my stomach in knots and I feel like I'm heading down the same road again and I feel precious little love and no cherishing and our marriage is in serious trouble and he isn't interested in working on it. When I moved out two weeks ago and he said he didn't want to meet with his counselor, that really made me angry. And then later J. said he was going to write down his angry feelings in a letter and maybe he'd show it to me – but I am willing to bet a lot of money he hasn't written the letter and won't follow through.

So here I am again waiting for him to do something that I don't think he really wants to do. I am tired of being the outlet/excuse/target of his anger. I've already had that experience and I don't want to live through it again.

I'm feeling excluded from the process of his recovery and I don't like it. I don't like being the target of his anger. I don't like living in fear, avoiding the landmines, walking on eggshells. Being in our house yesterday brought it home to me – I don't want to live there and go through it all again. I want us to have a new pattern of communicating, where I can say what's on my mind and not worry about an explosion – that I can trust that J. will handle his anger himself. Right now, I feel my trust was betrayed in the past and I don't see things changing so I have a reasonable certainty that it won't happen again.

My bottom line to move back into the house and resume our marriage:

- J. is committed – body, mind and spirit – to recovery, and will do whatever it takes to achieve it.
- J. is committed to dealing with his anger so I am not the target.

I feel at times that J. should have more gratitude for what I'm doing – that I'm standing by him, that I moved out of the house so he wouldn't have to. I would like to feel appreciated and cherished. I want to feel like amends have started, and I don't. And why does he rarely return my phone calls?

Why is my stomach in knots now as I'm writing this? I think it's because I realize that nothing has changed. I'm still afraid to talk to J. about what's on my mind because I'm afraid of his anger, I don't trust his sobriety, and I don't think he's doing anything about his anger. Where does that leave me?

So God, I give these resentments to you. Please help me know what to let go of, and which ones I need to do something with. Please guide my will and my life today.

My sponsor tells me to ask for what I need. I don't have to justify my resentment. It shows that I'm not getting my needs met. I can think of resentments as a voice tugging at my arm, asking me to listen. I can examine my resentment and see what it's telling me.

April 8, 1998

I had a great talk with my sponsor. She helped me articulate what I've been thinking. What is my motivation in the separation? It's to take care of myself in a healthy way. I am entitled to my feelings. I don't want to be manipulated. When J. and I have a mutual agreement, then his behavior is our business. We can talk about changing the contract, we can ask for clarification, we can check it out if we have questions. Don't second-guess what the person says – check it out.

- There has been an erosion of trust between J. and me. He promised to put recovery first, and I don't see the behavior that shows that's what he's doing.
- A relationship where fear is present prevents intimacy; it puts walls up; it puts us in a "survival" state.
- I need to share where I am with J.
- I can ask J. what he needs from me.
- When I'm feeling needy, I should ask myself what I haven't done for myself.

- A helpful thought from the meeting: recovery is getting our “true self” back – it’s not creating a new self.

April 9, 1998, in the morning

I’ve been thinking about what happens next with J. When I was exercising a few days ago I was thinking about what it would be like to live apart permanently. I was feeling resentful, and started wondering if he was hurting me on purpose by saying he’d rather pack for camping than exercise together. Then I thought that God would help me with this if I asked, so I prayed.

My sponsor was so helpful as I struggle to articulate my thoughts and feelings. I wrote down some things to say when I’m ready.

“You’ve given me no information about your progress. At one point, you had mentioned writing me a letter. The next move is up to you. I’m thinking about what I need to feel safe in this relationship. I can’t put myself in the position of being afraid any longer. I absorbed your irrational anger in the past and took it, but it’s no longer something I’m willing to tolerate. I don’t want to live in fear. It’s OK for you to say to me ‘I’m angry’ and go away and vent, but it is not OK to blame me for things that have nothing to do with me and to be verbally abusive. I’d like you to share any progress you’ve made in this direction. I’m as anxious as you are for us to get back together, but the ball is in your court.”

I can say:

- “This is how I feel when X happens.” I’m taking responsibility for my feelings, not shaming or blaming J. for how I feel.
- “Are you agreeing to something you can’t hold up, just to placate me and manipulate me?”
- “When you don’t return my phone call, this is how I feel.” I can’t change his behavior, but I can take responsibility for communicating.

I need to be thinking about what I want for myself in my marriage.

The drinking is a symptom of his hurt from the past. I can do something about the effect it’s having on me, but I can’t do anything about the effect it’s had on him.

This separation is not punishment for him – rather, I’m taking care of myself.

My pattern is to look at J.’s face and decide what he’s thinking or feeling without checking it out with him, and I need to change this. I can ask, “Are you angry with me?”

April 9, in the evening

My sponsor helped me so much today with my resentments with J. She helped me figure out what I needed to say to him when we got together today: that I want us to live together again, too, but I need reassurance that he understands why he was drinking and that he has many contingency plans for the times when he wants to drink, and that he’s working on his anger so I don’t become the target. I told him I didn’t want to live in fear; that I know he suffered terribly from his mother’s anger growing up; that my

mother's anger also left scars for me so we both experienced the effects of it in our childhoods; that I can't do anything about his anger but I can take care of myself.

I said it was OK for him to get angry – as our couples counselor said, anger is “problem-solving.” He could say he was angry and then do something to deal with it: take a walk, make a phone call, write it down, whatever. I'm not telling him how to deal with it. But it is not OK for him to take it out on me. I said I lived in fear of his anger last fall and I'm not going to do it anymore. I said I love him, I knew he loves me, I'm glad to see him, we have a lot to look forward to, and I want us to be together. He thanked me for the reminder on what he needs to do for us to live together. I said I was ready to hear anything he wanted to share with me about his progress, that at one point he had mentioned writing a letter to me, and I was happy to read it if he wanted to show it to me. After we talked, I could enjoy our dinner and it was OK. I decided I'd wait to discuss why he doesn't return my phone calls and what we're going to do about car insurance. Thank you, God, for the gift of my sponsor in my life – it is a blessing beyond words. Also thank you for my family, friends, the meetings, and for my own recovery. Help me to be well enough to help someone else in the future.

April 12, 1998

I spent time with J. over the weekend out of town at a special event. It was fun to be together, but sad as well because I was thinking and wondering if in June, I'll be looking for another place to live, since I only have the apartment for three months. I thought about telling him this but decided not to and instead talk to my sponsor or my counselor. I wavered about spending an upcoming weekend together to go visit his dad with Robin, but said yes when J. brought it up, and I hope it was the right thing. I hope I can find another way to cope with my sadness besides constantly eating, especially at night. God, please guide my steps today.

April 14, 1998

There was a great topic at the Al-Anon meeting – how do we keep the focus on ourselves, and when or how do we know that we've lost it? One way is to question our motives – are we tailoring our response to meet the expectations of the other person, or are we truly honest? I'm OK right now – it's when I think about the past or project into the future that worry and fear take over. Humility is the awareness of the need to take direction from God, because I barely know what's best for myself, let alone others.

Other helpful thoughts from the meeting:

- I need to say “no” to things that stand between me and God – I don't want to lose that connection.
- If I interfere with someone else's life, then I'm getting in the way of their relationship with God.
- Resentments have to do with the past; fear/worry relates to the future. If I can stay in the present, then resentments and fear will not be constantly in my mind.

I said that my epitaph is going to read, “She worried a lot, and then she died.” Everybody laughed – that helped.

I would like to know how many changes I need from J. to move back into our house. I am placing this in God's hands, but even asking the question puts my stomach in knots. I would like to spend more time with God and being open to God's presence. I am still finding it difficult to do that, even now when I'm living alone. Please guide my steps and my will.

April 15, 1998

I had a short but nice chat with J. tonight – he was happy his work meeting had gone well. I had dinner with a friend who has been through her own very sad childhood. I tried to listen and say encouraging things and not give advice, just be supportive. God, please guide my steps today.

April 17, 1998

I met with my counselor. She reflected back to me that I'm on a roller coaster of disappointment, grief, anxiety, and fear. She said I may have tried to step out of the roller coaster he was on when we separated, but now it seems I'm running alongside it, still following his every up and down. It was a very helpful image, and it seems very true. To avoid this, I can check in with myself and acknowledge what I'm feeling, then tell J.

- I can tell J. that I miss being with him, but I don't miss living in fear.
- I can tell him that I want to practice checking in with him. I can say to him "I'm feeling happy" and he can ask me about it or not. This would be a way of studying how we talk to each other – can we catch ourselves in patterns of behavior that we'd like to change? I don't want to keep making up stories in my head about what he's thinking and feeling and I don't want him to be doing the same with me. To get us started, she recommends a book on communication that we could read together and discuss. (*I don't recall the name of the book.*)
- I can tell J. his anger is too much for me.

April 20, 1998

It's been a quiet evening spent by myself, after having been with J., his dad, and Robin for the weekend. We had a really nice time being together, and J. and I connected. He told me another very sad story from his growing up, and I held him. I am starting to realize there was probably a sad story every day. I can't reach back in time and change anything for him, much as I would like to. After J. dropped me off at my apartment on his way to our house, I looked around and decided I didn't want to be by myself in these rooms so I went for a walk around the neighborhood. I managed to make it through the evening without being too sad, although this does feel odd. I had originally thought I'd write more of my autobiography tonight as part of my 4th step but it seemed too difficult to tackle right now, so I read instead.

I thought I'd bring up a couple of things that I talked about with my counselor with J. at some point this weekend, but no time seemed right, so I didn't. On the list was asking him if the e-mails I send and phone calls I make bug him or please him; how did he feel about reading the book together my counselor recommended for us on communication, and practicing checking in. I did tell him I wanted us to go together to see his counselor this week – I think he was disappointed when I said that but I let it

pass. I still have such a long way to go to speak what's on mind, and not worrying about what someone else's reaction may or may not be.

God, please guide my steps today and tomorrow – help me to follow your path, do your work in the world, and heal from the past. Help me to live one day at a time.

April 22, 1998

J. and I had a fun outing after work. We didn't talk about anything serious, just enjoyed each other's company. He called me at the apartment to make sure I had gotten back safely. It felt really nice.

April 23, 1998

I talked to my sponsor. She said a good question I could ask myself is whether a behavior is serving me.

April 24, 1998

Today I am feeling so very sad. J. and I argued/had a misunderstanding and we haven't communicated in person since. He's angry and feeling sorry for himself, and so am I. He called to say he didn't feel well and wanted to cancel our appointment with his counselor (*who is also who we see for couples counseling*). He said he hadn't slept well because he was trying to get off a sleeping medication. I said I was sorry to hear he wasn't feeling well and was disappointed we were missing the appointment. But he heard something in my voice that he interpreted as me not believing him and went down that road. It got ugly quickly, and he hung up. I called back but he didn't answer, so I left a message reassuring him that I do believe that he wasn't feeling well and that's why he cancelled the appointment, and I was just disappointed we wouldn't be going. But his voice-mail this morning was full of whining/self-pity: "I went back on the sleeping medication – I don't want to inconvenience anyone." Oh brother – it felt like a barb at me, that I inconvenience him all the time.

I called my sponsor and we talked about it. She suggested I say, "I'm glad you're taking care of yourself" if he brings it up again. I cried some and felt very sorry for myself and caught myself in a sick thought. I thought that if I got cancer then J. would appreciate me and want to do things for me. Gosh, I have a whole lot more work to do. I am feeling resentful of J. and I believe that I care about getting well more than he does, because I go to meetings/call my sponsor/write in my journal/go to counseling/have a support system in place...oh brother.

Who could have predicted just 48 hours ago we were filled with tender thoughts of each other. How can things get so bad so fast? And what is my part that I can work on? My stomach is in knots and it seems like peace is a long way away.

April 26, 1998

It got a little better yesterday. I didn't sleep well and I was very sad when I got up. I met with my sponsor and tried to work through my feelings. I called J. at work and left a message – no return call. I started to worry and called again after lunch. He finally called back and we decided we would continue

with our plans to get together that evening. We did something fun, and then he came back to the apartment and stayed over. It was really nice to wake up next to him this morning. We had a long talk about our latest miscommunication, and made some progress. We talked a little about our relationship with God. He said he had prayed very hard as a child to make his mother well, and God didn't do anything. All I could do was hold him. He drove back home so he could go camping, and I had dinner with a friend from Al-Anon. I stayed up very late watching a movie. Why is it so difficult to get to bed on time so I'm not tired the next day?

April 27, 1998

J. called this morning and said he had decided not to go camping after all, but suggested we do something fun together. So we got outdoors and had an absolutely wonderful time. This is something that drew us together – enjoying God's creation and being happy in that. Why can't we have times like this more often?

April 28, 1998

The Al-Anon meeting today was about detachment. It's possible to have compassion for another person, and shift the focus from "it's all about me" to someone else's life. It's also possible to step back from the situation – what's happening to someone else – while still caring for them.

I also heard something else that made a lot of sense. I realize I'm so enmeshed in J.'s life and moods that if he's happy, then I'm OK, and if he's having a bad day, then I find myself sinking down. It's as if I can't have my own feelings separate from him and what he's going through.

This is related to the recovery concept of each person walking side-by-side down a street together – and each person is responsible for their side of the street. We can share our lives, but I'm not living his life, and he's not living my life. We are each responsible for our own life. I can see the truth of this in my mind, but how can I live it when I'm filled with worry and fear? And, my ankle is acting up so I have to be really careful with what I'm doing. I keep saying to myself, one day at a time.

April 29, 1998

I had a great talk with my sponsor and got some new and helpful insights. I want J. to be making changes because he wants to, out of love, not fear, and not be full of resentment. My sponsor and I also talked about ways to talk to J. I can say that he seems very defensive and angry, and that it worries me because we can't have a discussion when he's in this place. We still have great times together. But we had an agreement that he would tell me at the time when something is bothering him, rather than not say anything so the anger gets backed up. He tries to pretend he's not angry, and then I pick up the lie when I shrink from saying something myself because my fear gets in the way. This is an old pattern between us, and it doesn't seem to be changing. This is not good for our future together and the success of our marriage. A healthy relationship based on trust is impossible for us if this doesn't change because there's no honesty or truth. I know I have my own work to do.

From my perspective, J. is making it look like he's doing the work to get me stay in the marriage, but this isn't what's happening. This is a relationship based on fear of abandonment more times than it's based on love. He can mask his anger in politeness, but the anger is still there. My sponsor calls this "placating." He makes promises he can't hold up, in the hope of manipulating me into doing something he wants me to do – move back into the house again. Maybe he even means the promises at the time – who knows?

An Al-Anon friend suggested it might be easier to have compassion towards J. if I picture him as a little boy, so I'm doing that now. I'm holding him, giving him love, tenderness, and comfort in the midst of his fear and pain, rather than being filled with anger and resentment. I can do this. God, please guide my steps.

April 30, 1998

We met at church this evening, he came over to the apartment for dinner, we went to the bookstore and we each got the book my counselor recommended on communication, and we connected. It was a really nice. I am feeling more hopeful that we can make it.

May 4, 1998

I have six weeks left in the apartment. J. and I got together two nights ago and we had a great time. He stayed over, and we had a conversation in the morning about anger. He said he knows it's an issue, and will try harder to work on it. We had an outing with Robin before J. left to go camping. It was good to feel like a family. But today, I had another mishap with my ankle and it's very sore. I met a program friend for brunch and cried about my fears. I talked to J. and he had a wonderful time camping. I feel so conflicted about the future. Please, God, guide my steps.

May 6, 1998

It has been an odd day. I feel like my heart is getting cracked open, that old ways of thinking are changing, that I'm getting a spring cleaning. I've been imagining that I have two children with me – J. as a little boy and me as a little girl – and they are playing together. Each day I tell them what we're going to do that day, or sometimes they tell me, and then I let them go. I check in with them and see how they're doing – they're always having a good time. It sounds silly but it seems like the right thing to do. I went to church by myself, and cried afterwards – just sobbed and sobbed – and a woman I didn't know held my hand.

May 8, 1998

I saw J. for dinner tonight. His counselor got sick so his appointment was cancelled – again, more time goes by. It was so good to see him – I wanted to hold him close to me. I told him I missed him – he seems surprised when I say it, as if he's thinking, "If she misses me so much, why doesn't she move back?" I was angry when I thought about it later. He still doesn't get it, why I left. Does he need to in order for us to be together?

May 9, 1998

J. called me and said he had arranged his next appointment with his counselor, but it won't be until the end of the month. I got very depressed when I heard this. More time is going by and I don't see a lot of dedication to recovery. I called a friend from Al-Anon, and also one of the ministers at our church. J. and I will be getting together in a little while. No one can tell me what to do. All I can do is pray and wait for God's guidance.

May 11, 1998

I managed to be brave enough to bring up with J. my disappointment and worry over the delayed appointment yesterday morning, and it went OK. We also talked a little bit about the book we are reading together, and then talked about dates to visit my family later this year. It feels like we are moving forward. J. left to go camping, I had an outing with my friends and then today when J. and I talked I found out he had decided not to go camping after all. It seemed a little odd. What is he doing when he doesn't go? Once again, I found solace in food and ate way too much for dinner. I called a family member but this person finds it difficult to not get emotionally involved so I had to withhold a lot of details. Oh, this is so challenging.

May 15, 1998

I met with my counselor and told her I was feeling "more settled" in my heart and am leaning more towards moving back in mid-June since it feels like J. and I are moving forward. But I am still eating too much and staying up too late.

May 18, 1998

I met with my sponsor a few days ago and we worked on the third step. J. and I spent more time together and we talked more about the book on communication. But we had different ideas on what is "my" business and what is "his" business and had to stop. Once again, J. said he was going camping, I spent time by myself, and then I found out he didn't go after all. He said he was doing well, though. Is it my business how he spends his time?

May 26, 1998

I'm feeling very proud of myself as I write this. I was feeling incredibly anxious in the car with J. on the way back yesterday from visiting his dad, and told J. I was worried because I had to decide about my date to move out of the apartment. I didn't word it quite right and he talked about how his feelings were hurt. Even though the rest of the evening went OK on the surface, I woke up early this morning and was miserable, still worried about yesterday's conversation and money and moving back in general. I tried to forget about my anxiety but couldn't. J. and I spent time on the porch reading the paper. I felt I had to make a connection with my feelings and I started to tell him about a very painful memory from childhood that was triggered by the sermon at church, where the minister brought up choosing sides for a team, and what it felt like to be different and left out. As I shared my memory with J. I started crying, and I could tell he was listening carefully to me and was kind and compassionate and caring – in other words,

the man I married. It meant a lot to me that he was present with me. This helped me feel confident about my decision to move back to the house in three weeks. Please, God, guide our steps.

May 29, 1998

I met with my sponsor to talk more about “what is my business.” I am finding this very challenging, and it makes me anxious. I so want to control the outcome, and guess what, the outcome is not in my control! I have started to clean things in the apartment so there won’t be much to do when it’s time to move out.

May 31, 1998

J. and I talked this morning – I told him how healing it was to share my very sad childhood memory with him. We had another communication breakthrough – he said “I’m anxious” this morning. He said his session with his counselor was the most helpful he’s ever had. Dear God, please help me to lose my ego. Help me to be willing – whatever it is that is needed.

I have volunteered to work on a huge project for my job that will take more than a year to prepare for, and also involve extra meetings. When I told J. about it, I was surprised that he was not more supportive.

June 2, 1998

The Al-Anon meeting was about the sixth step – we are ready to have God remove our character defects. We are ready for the birth of something new. We don’t need to ask why, but rather how. This is a step of acceptance – we act as if the defect is not there.

I heard something incredibly distressing after the meeting. One of the members, who is also in AA, told me that stopping drinking is easy, compared to changing your thinking. He says in order to stop drinking and truly embrace recovery, an alcoholic must change his/her thoughts. At first, I was stunned at his words, and then got so depressed – if J. is having such a difficult time stopping drinking, then how will he ever be able to change his thoughts? I wish I had asked him more questions, such as how do you change your thinking, but I was in such turmoil at the time that I didn’t think about it. I will look for him at a future meeting.

June 8, 1998

Yesterday was a wonderful day by myself – I did a craft project, cooked healthy food, and watched a fun movie. It was so nice – calm and peaceful. I’ve started exercising again, but in the morning this time – I may try to do that more often. God, as I get ready to move back to the house, help me to hold onto my “self” and continue to strive for serenity. Help me to do your work in the world, lose my ego, and think of others first.

June 9, 1998

Great Al-Anon meeting today. It is possible to be in constant prayer and mindfulness – every moment can be a prayer. I can be in constant contact with God. I don't need to push sadness or bad things away. The loss of serenity and gratitude can be the reflection of our distance from ourselves.

I packed up more things in the apartment. I am looking forward to moving back, and at the same time I'm nervous.

June 11, 1998

I am very worried this morning about moving back into our house. I wish I had exercised this morning; maybe the anxiety would be out of my system. Instead I'm running on a mental treadmill. My worries are: will J. and I do better or will we fall into old, destructive patterns of not communicating? Will he be committed to recovery and dealing with his anger?

- I heard some helpful thoughts at the meeting: by paying attention to what I can do in the here and now, I can have positive thoughts. I can make myself available to make the world a better place. When I'm scared and needy, then I'm not available. I want to make myself available to God and those around me.
- My feelings are part of me but are not who I really am.
- Saying "this is not OK" is taking care of myself.
- The reality is that I can only control my attitude – not J.'s behavior.
- I can tell J. that I hope we can share our feelings and create space for the next part of our lives.

This is a good time to think of the slogans: easy does it; one day at a time.

June 12, 1998

Tonight is my last night here in the apartment sleeping alone. I'm almost all packed, and about to start my life back up as part of a couple. We had a great session with our couples' counselor about a way to share our feelings to create a bridge between us. We each write a paragraph answering the same question – "What are my feelings about _____?" The counselor calls it a "WAMFA" letter. The focus is to bring an understanding of each other through answering the question. The steps are:

1. Each person writes alone.
2. We get back together and exchange letters, reading them apart but in the same room.
3. We focus on our reaction to what the other person said: "As I read your letter, this is my response/reaction..."
4. Together, we choose which letter to concentrate on, to go deeper. We could say, "Tell me more about this." We can talk about the feeling – what is it like? Does it have a color? Does it remind us of a different time or experience? The person asking the question tries to get as close to that feeling as possible. We pick a length of time to discuss – 10 minutes is ample time. This is a way for us to connect.

We practiced with, “What are my feelings about me moving back into the house?” I said I was anxious, apprehensive, happy, and scared. We took turns describing what it felt like. It was really helpful to have this discussion, and it will be a good exercise for us to use in the future. It will be an adjustment to live together again. It will be more difficult for me to be detached from how J. is doing with his recovery. God, please guide my steps today and every day.

June 16, 1998

I have started commuting to work again. When I got home, J. was working in our yard, and wanted me to keep him company until he was finished. It was really nice to be together again. We ate dinner on our porch. Thank you, God.

June 25, 1998

We are back from our getaway trip to celebrate our reunion as a couple. We had a fabulous time, and I was so glad we got married and are now back together. It was heaven to wake up together, plan our day, eat great food, do fun things, connect, and just enjoy life without any communication misfires. This is why I wanted to marry J.!!! Then, tonight we had a misfire. I started playing a special CD without waiting for J., and he said he was sad, that I should have known he wanted me to wait until we could listen to it together. My stomach is in knots again, 48 hours after three days of bliss. This is so difficult.

June 26, 1998

This morning when I woke up, I felt sad and anxious about the future. I tried to talk to J. about it but it didn't go too well – I should have worded my anxieties differently but it came out OK at the end. I'll try writing down my fears to see if that helps:

- I won't have enough time for recovery now that my commute is longer.
- I'll worry too much about J. and lose the focus on myself.
- J. won't stay committed to recovery.
- I'm worried about our finances, and it is still a very sensitive topic for us.

June 29, 1998

Things are going great! I'm so happy, so proud of both of us. J. is reading a book on anger and doing some writing. I don't feel like I'm stuck where I was in the past. I'm exercising on a regular basis first thing in the morning, and that really helps my mood. I'm doing my job and also doing other things that I believe are important, that help give my life meaning and purpose. I was able to tell one of my relatives that J. and I are doing well, and that was reassuring for her to hear. Thank you, God, for all of these blessings. I'm very grateful. Now that we're back together in our house, I hope we can make some progress on the rest of the house renovations. We have talked before about creating a space upstairs for each of us to have an office, and my office could be the spare bedroom. It will take time, money, and effort, but it would really be nice.

July 4, 1998

We had a sad argument about how to spend the day today. When will we do better about talking about things where we disagree? Also, I was hoping we would do a WAMFA letter at least weekly, but it's not happening. When I brought it up a couple of days ago, J. said he was tired and didn't feel like it.

July 5, 1998

J. is still grouchy from yesterday. I hate this. I don't want to be walking on eggshells again, but that's what it feels like.

July 8, 1998

We have had a very tough evening. First, J. barked at me tonight over cooking dinner. He wants me to cook sometimes, which I can understand. So why didn't he tell me this when it was first bugging him? He always seemed happy to cook! Instead, he waits and fumes, getting angrier and more resentful, maybe hoping I will notice, instead of just saying something like "I want us to take turns cooking." Is that so hard??? Of course, to acknowledge my part, I could have been checking in with him frequently, asking him if he wanted me to cook. But oh dear, it seems like we're going backwards. And then, to make everything worse, Luke called and J. was very sad. I don't believe J. has ever come to terms with the break-in at his dad's over Thanksgiving last year, and the betrayal he feels that the person he helped raise could turn out to be so troubled. J. said he didn't want to talk about the phone call, so we didn't. God, please guide our steps.

July 12, 1998

I am extremely proud of myself today because last night I stood up for myself. A couple of nights ago when J. was working late, there was a phone call for him from some financial firm. This wasn't the first time he'd gotten calls like this and I was getting annoyed and more curious. I asked why they were calling and when I said I was his wife they told me – he owed several hundred dollars in overdue credit card charges. I was very surprised, because he earns a good salary. I wrote down the name and phone number of the firm and gave it to him when he got home, but didn't feel comfortable telling him that I knew he owed money. I guess he picked up on the fact that something was bothering me. When he said a little while later that I seemed grouchy, I told him I was in pain from my old injury, which was true. He was still upset the next morning about the fact that I was "grouchy and irritable" the night before. When I asked what he wanted to do in the evening, he said "Let's just do whatever you want" in a snippy tone. I was very proud of myself when I said that I was taken aback by his statement. So that felt good. Progress, not perfection, as they say in the program.

All day yesterday I was thinking about how to handle the credit card news, feeling like I had to say something sooner rather than later, agonizing over exactly when to do it, and wondering what words to use. This affects me! This is my business, too! Why aren't we living within our means? What is this money being spent on? Is this an old debt from when he was drinking and he wasn't saving any money, but that's been more than a year ago! It's also clearer now why setting a budget or having any kind of

discussion of dividing up our paychecks is so emotionally charged. No wonder – he was afraid he'd have to share how he spends his money.

My sponsor wasn't available, nor were other program friends. I called my minister and she suggested saying "help me understand this" which felt right. So, after dinner I pushed ahead even when I was afraid of what his reaction would be. I said I'd heard the news and was worried and afraid – that we had access to the home equity loan but he hadn't used it. I also said I wondered if this was because it meant I'd know about the debt, so he preferred keeping it a secret. I focused on saying "I feel." I said we didn't need to talk about it then if he'd rather not and he said he didn't, so I let him have his space and I needed mine, too. I called my sponsor this morning to tell her about it. I figure this is a topic for our couples' counselor.

July 14, 1998

We went camping together for the first time in ages. For the most part, the fear about the money stayed in the background, and we had a wonderful time outside. I'm so glad we share a love of nature. I just wish we could communicate better. Later, I told him that I felt sad that we couldn't talk about the money, that it wasn't a whole lot, why not just take out a home equity loan and take care of it right away, and he got angry and stormed off. When will things get easier for us?

July 15, 1998

My heart is pounding as I write this. This morning J. and I talked about what we would talk to our couples' counselor about during our session tonight. I said I wanted to talk about what happened last week with the credit card debt discovery. As we talked, I mentioned the feeling was like when I found the two empty vodka bottles hidden in the trash. He got angry and we didn't part on very good terms. I said I felt deceived – he said he didn't like the use of that word – I said that's what it felt like. He said that wasn't his intention and that he was sorry.

Where is trust in this relationship? How can I talk about my feelings and he not take it as an insult against him? What is his business and what is our business?

I'm also feeling sad because I read a letter from someone who has a marriage I envy. Where is the marriage I hoped for, that seemed like it had been brought back to life on our getaway trip just three weeks ago?

July 17, 1998

We talked with our couples' counselor about money and this latest turn of events. He asked us to think about what money means to each of us. It's not a black and white issue. He asked us to think and talk about what we've done well and what needs improving, and what we need help with.

Then I met with my counselor today. She said money is not the most important thing, that life is. Money is a gift from God. J. and I need to talk about what place we want money to have in our lives. She suggested I do an inventory of my fears, resentments, and anger.

July 21, 1998

We went camping again, and it was great to be outside. We talked about doing WAMFA letters on a regular basis, and agreed that we would give it a try in a couple of days, using some of our counselor's ideas. I asked him how much money he owed, and I was stunned when he said he didn't know – he said he would have to add it up, and it would take a while. I asked him if he could just give me an estimate – he said no, that there was more than one credit card involved, so it was complicated. Once again, I was stunned. So I'm beginning to wonder how much it might be. This is very scary.

July 23, 1998

I couldn't sleep, so this morning I told J. I was worried about the money. We talked for a while but he got angry. Then later, when we were supposed to do the WAMFA, he said he couldn't face it. I am very sad.

July 26, 1998

I can't see my way clear on how we're going to solve this. J. hasn't been honest with me and that hurts. He also doesn't trust me – he said he was afraid to say anything because he worried about me telling my friends. I don't know what to do, what to say, how to react. I feel numb. Who is this person I married? Who is the real J.? God, please help me with this challenge. I don't know what to do. Please guide my steps and help me cope with these feelings. Help me to know what to think. J.'s dad arrives this afternoon for a visit. I hope I can hold it together while he is here.

It is now evening. J. and I started to do a WAMFA letter about the money. It's a baby step, but better than nothing.

July 27, 1998

I woke up with my stomach in knots, cold and hard. I'm so tired but I can't sleep anymore. My mind is going in ten different directions: my anger at J. for getting himself into this mess and deceiving me about this before we were married, worry about what's going to happen, if he'll be able to discipline himself, what I'll need to do with our bank to take out a home equity loan, if we'll be able to borrow enough, will our house be safe...the worry and sad thoughts are an avalanche. I'm trying to let go of my ego and think and pray for knowledge of what is God's will for me and the power to carry that out. So God, please help me today. J.'s dad arrived yesterday, and we managed to have a nice time with him and Robin.

It's now evening. I feel sick to my stomach about this debt. I don't know what to think, or feel, or do. I just feel sick. But somehow, in spite of everything, J. and I talked this morning, and we agreed that he would move forward and add up the bills in the next few days. He said he still wasn't comfortable with trying to pay it all off at once. I didn't push him, and let it go. We were able to connect. Then we had a picnic with his dad and Robin, and now J. and his dad are off on their own. I have called a program friend and my sponsor, and am trying to cope. God, please help us.

July 28, 1998

At the Al-Anon meeting I talked about something that made sense to me, the four “p’s” that are involved with establishing new behavior: persistence, patience, practice, and prayer. We also talked about detachment – we can put God in the space between us and the alcoholics in our lives. I talked to my sponsor. She said transparency is the basis for love and trust, and our marriage is not transparent now. I love him and I am disappointed in his behavior. He has control over his behavior if he chooses. When I got home, J. said he was still adding up the bills, and asked if we could postpone our discussion for another day. I felt OK about it, and agreed.

July 30, 1998

When I woke up yesterday, I felt better. I cooked dinner, and J. kept working on the figures. We agreed we would do a second WAMFA letter about our feelings about money in general, and it went OK.

July 31, 1998

We met with our couples’ counselor. He talked about expanding our capacity to tolerate our differences. He said we need to figure out how we are going to handle the debt, and in order to do that, we need to reconcile our different approaches to money. He suggested that we each draw up a chart with three columns, labeled “mine, yours, ours” and start thinking of things in our lives to put into the columns. He said it is possible to build up “ours” in a caring way; that the ideas of what’s “mine” and what’s “yours” can change.

He also said this could be an opportunity to enrich our knowledge of each other. We can share how money was handled in our households growing up.

August 1, 1998

I talked to my sponsor. She said this is real relationship work, to work towards transparency. How can we achieve this goal? I can acknowledge to J. that I understand it’s difficult for him to admit to things he doesn’t feel good about. She helped me articulate that I thought the financial affairs in our marriage were one way, in other words, no major debt, and they’re not. I am very sad.

August 2, 1998

J. has told me about the extent of the debt. Before he told me the amount, he made me swear not to tell anyone at all how much it was, including my sponsor. I said I promised. We sat on the sofa together and I just sat and waited, not saying anything, until he talked. It took him over an hour to get the words out. A friend had suggested that we hold each other’s feet while we sat together, so that’s what we did. I could tell he was in agony while we sat in silence. He spent hours this morning going through all of the bills to finish adding it up. He said he was surprised himself how much it was. I am in shock. I can’t believe it’s so much money, more than I had imagined in my wildest dreams. I don’t understand how it happened. I am so very sad and disappointed and worried about how he will pay this off. He said he didn’t want to take out such a big home equity loan. I said again it would be faster to pay off the debt

if we did, that the high interest rates were making things much worse. He said he would think about it. Then we tried to have normal day, we connected, and kept going.

August 3, 1998

A breakthrough. J. has agreed to paying off the debt in a lump sum with a home equity loan, and we will talk later about a budget so he can make the payments. I told him I hope he can pay it off as soon as possible, rather than just pay the minimum amount, and he said he would think about it. Thank you, God.

August 4, 1998

The meeting topic was Step 8, being willing to make amends. Resentments came up. I heard someone say that they don't want to be chained to the people they resent for the rest of their life, which is what resentment will do. I also heard that hanging onto resentment is like drinking poison myself and expecting the other person to die.

August 5, 1998

I am abiding by the letter and spirit of J.'s request not to tell anyone about how big the debt is. I've mentioned a "new thing on my plate" but that's it, and now I'm looking at it, trying to let it sink in without melodrama, but it's difficult. I am excited to be seeing my family for a week, and then J. will join us, and then we will have time exploring on our own. We planned this trip months ago, and now it's here, and so much has changed. But J. and I agreed that we wouldn't talk about the debt on the trip. He did say it was a very nice feeling to write all the checks to all the credit card companies, and be done with that worry.

August 18, 1998

I was feeling very sad last night, and then had a happy dream where I'd been helping fix up old homes for people to live in and my heart was light – things are fine, they will be fine. My focus is to live my life, fulfill my dreams of helping others, and that is how I will be happy and be able to look back on my life with joy, pride and satisfaction.

August 24, 1998

We are back from our trip and had a wonderful time being together. We explored places neither one of us had been too, and it was a lot of fun doing things we both love. This is why I wanted to marry J.! I do believe J. feels lighter, now that he doesn't have all the monthly bills from the credit card companies to worry about – just the one payment for the home equity loan. I hope we can come to an agreement about a budget so he can pay it off as soon as possible. However, he hurt his back again picking up a suitcase. This is a worry. He hasn't been doing his back exercises, so it hasn't been getting stronger. I have done my best to avoid reminding him, but this is what happens when you don't do the exercises! He got good medical advice, got physical therapy, learned some exercises to help his back heal, but he never does them. You aren't going to heal completely unless you commit to the exercises! I speak from experience! But he doesn't want to hear it.

August 25, 1998

It was good to be back at work, but my anxiety level got worse and worse throughout the day. I keep telling myself, one day at a time, let go and let God but it is so difficult right now.

August 27, 1998

I keep waking up feeling sad and anxious about the money. I've been exercising longer, hoping it will help, but it's not. I feel the depression creeping back, and this is a worry. I talked to my sponsor about our lack of progress coming to an understanding about a budget. This is so difficult. She had some suggestions of things I can say to J.:

- What does "transparency" mean to you?
- Has our agreement changed?
- I'm anxious when information isn't being shared – it brings up my fear.
- When it seems like you are getting defensive, then it feels like you are going back to old behavior.
- I'm trying to stay on my side of the street, and deal with my fears. Fear brings up a desire to control everything and manage it.
- I can see that when I ask a question, it could seem to you that I'm being critical – I'm not. What I'm trying to have is transparency in our marriage.

August 28, 1998

I woke up very early and could not go back to sleep, so I got up after a while and headed to exercise. I could feel the depression accelerating. It was scary. I went to a meeting. I decided I should go back on the anti-depressants and got a same-day sick appointment. I do not want to fall into the pit of despair again. I have been there and I recognize the signs. J. was working on the laundry when I got home; I told him about going back on the medication. He said he was sorry and he held me. It felt good.

Heard at the meeting; we talked about trust:

- What is my part? A person can't totally let go and do nothing; you need to do your part.
- It is necessary to give up the illusion of being in control of other people, places, or things – no one can control those things – we can only control ourselves.
- We can be in a partnership with God to heal things; between the two of us we can fix this; it is an opportunity for me to be healed more.
- There is no problem that does not also hold a gift for us.

August 31, 1998

We finally talked more about the debt, and J. said he can't commit now to a firm payment plan, other than paying the monthly minimum. He said we could talk more in a few days. I am sad.

September 4, 1998

I can't believe it. I was rear-ended, again, by someone not paying attention, and my neck is messed up AGAIN! I can't believe it. At least the person who hit me has insurance, and agreed it was her fault. I went to the emergency room for X-rays, and J. met me there. It appears there is not major additional damage to my neck, but it will probably be a long recuperation. The idea of having to go through all that pain and rehab for months and months again is so overwhelming. I am so very depressed. It takes forever to settle these things. I can't believe I have to do it all again.

September 6, 1998

My neck hurts a lot. We aren't going camping. I got a massage, but I'm in a lot of pain. I asked J. if we could talk more about finances like we had agreed, and he said no. I'm very disappointed.

September 8, 1998

I have set up appointments to see an orthopedist, will go to physical therapy and also will go back to my chiropractor. I talked to the insurance company, and they said they will not pay any bills until a final settlement. I will have to keep very careful records of what I spend, and also copies of all my time sheets to show the hours I'm taking off work for medical appointments. I hate this! And I talked to J. about my disappointment that we couldn't talk about finances like we had agreed, and he got very defensive and angry. We are supposed to go together to a conference related to work in a couple of days – I hope we can get back in synch before then.

September 14, 1998

We had a great time at the conference, learned a lot, got to spend some time outdoors and saw a part of the state I'm not familiar with. But my neck continues to hurt a lot, especially when I'm typing at work. We got back home and over the weekend J. said he wanted to go camping. His back is doing better, but he's still not doing any of the exercises. We agreed to talk more about finances before he left, and made some progress. He cooked a nice lunch, with leftovers for me for dinner, and then he left. I did what I could to entertain myself, but I am struggling with sadness. When does life get easier???

September 21, 1998

We went camping. J. did most of the work loading and unloading – I made sure I only carried things that were very light. It was lovely. We went for a walk together, ate great food, and looked at the stars. Then when it was time to go, J. hurt his back again loading the car so I had to finish, and hurt my neck carrying things that were too heavy. Boy, was I resentful! When we got back home, I told him that because of his refusal to take care of himself and do the exercises, as a result now I am suffering. He was very angry. Tough. Somehow, we got through it and moved on. But I am still angry and resentful.

September 22, 1998

J. took off work today because he's in so much pain, and will try to see an orthopedist. I am doing all I can to keep my mouth shut and not tell him what to do.

September 25, 1998

J. is still having a lot of trouble with his back, and it's very frustrating to see him not take care of it, and then to be angry when it hurts. When I try to point out that something he's doing might make it worse, he gets angry with me. He still isn't doing his exercises. Of course, anything related to recovery is nowhere in sight. I hate this! I met with my counselor, and we talked about things I could say:

- It's your body. You're going to make the decision you're going to make; I have to accept that.
- How can we be with each other when we're afraid? Can we find a gentler way to be with each other?

September 28, 1998

J. got very angry with me today because I voiced my fear that he might make his back worse if he carried something too heavy, and he said I was "bossing him around." I feel very sad. I am trying to be helpful! Yuck! This is so hard!

October 5, 1998

Things have been a bit better. J. said his back was hurting less, so he went camping for one night. When he came back, we were able to connect and do some pleasant home projects. He made a great dinner. The love is still there.

October 6, 1998 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- If you have a pattern of harming someone, change your behavior first, then apologize – it will mean more.
- Think of setting a boundary as a building a bridge, not a wall.
- When I say to someone, "You need to do this," that means fear is coming up in me.
- I'm going to be OK no matter what.

When I got home from work, it was really good to see J. That in and of itself was reassuring. I just wish my neck didn't hurt so much.

October 9, 1998

We saw our couples counselor, and talked about how to deal with our own internal garbage and anxiety. Our counselor is a terrific person, and I really like him. But J. is always on his best behavior during the sessions. It's afterwards that is so difficult for us. It doesn't seem like the insights make it past the parking lot as we are leaving, so the behavior doesn't change.

October 13, 1998

We had a very nice weekend, with no misunderstandings. It felt good to be together.

I heard some helpful thoughts at the Al-Anon meeting:

- You go where you look – if you’re going down a river in a canoe, and you look at the rocks you want to avoid, you will hit the rocks – you need to look and steer to where you want to go.
- I am my own full-time job.
- The 4th Step involves flushing out what is blocking me from serenity. I’ve been sitting in a dirty diaper, and this is my chance to clean it out.

October 31, 1998

I had an appointment with my orthopedist so he could check my neck. He is concerned that healing is so slow, and isn’t sure what to do next. I’ve been getting regular physical therapy treatments as well as seeing a chiropractor, but I’m still in a lot of pain. I called J. to tell him what the doctor said, and he was sympathetic. He is going camping for one night without me, but it feels OK. His back is better, even though he doesn’t do the exercises, whereas I am very faithful about mine, and they’re not helping much, at least not yet. We are going to one of our favorite places in a couple of days. I’m looking forward to it.

November 5, 1998

Oh, I am sad. After a great time at our special place, just a couple of days later we are now back to J.’s anger that leads to sad misunderstandings, bitterness, and sarcasm. What was the dreadful event that triggered the deluge? What terrible, awful thing did I do wrong? Dare I say it? Leftovers!!! I wish I could laugh, but we are way beyond that. When J. gets in this place, I can’t seem to reach him, and then he drags me down with him. This is so difficult. God, please help us.

November 6, 1998

When it rains, it pours. Another very stressful, sad encounter – this time, at the restaurant when J. was angry at me for being “too friendly” to the waiter. I am so sad. What is going to happen to us? J. says he is going to go camping. I hope it helps.

November 10, 1998 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- I have a thriving industry between my ears – one-half of my brain is manufacturing garbage, and the other half is buying it.
- It’s difficult to laugh at yourself when you feel like a victim.
- My relationship with God has changed.
- It’s not up to me to choose someone else’s path.
- The 10th step means we need to be “caught up” with life – don’t leave unfinished business.

November 12, 1998

We have had some better days, thank goodness. J. is working hard on building a bookcase that will help us be better organized. The house will look a lot tidier when it is finished.

November 13, 1998

I met with my counselor. She reminded me that it's OK to take up space in the world. She said that it is possible that pain from J.'s past can come up to the surface and overwhelm him, now that he feels safer.

November 21, 1998

It has been an emotional roller coaster this week. I saw a colleague and caught up on his life. It made me very sad. He's bought a house, they are expecting a baby, and he and his wife are in a birthing class – this is the life I wanted for myself growing up. Then someone in my family called to invite me to a surprise milestone birthday party for another relative, and I felt this rush of negative energy – grief, sadness, regret, self-pity...and I cried most of the day. When I got home, I told J. what had happened, and said I was sad because I had hoped to have children and it hadn't worked out for me. I didn't say it also involved our marriage, because it has been far more challenging than I had bargained for – and it's not over yet. So I was on the pity wagon big time. I have prayed to God to change my heart and see my challenges in a different way. Dear God, please soften my heart, help me release my ego, my insistence on having it my way, so I can do the work you have given me to do.

November 24, 1998 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Don't believe everything you think.
- Acceptance is part of surrender.
- Check your motivation.
- Our attitude is more important than "things," such as money.
- Let go of holding on – imagine suction cups.
- Stand on a step until you're ready for the next one.
- Rather than a "good day" or a "bad day" it's a "God day" or a "not God day."
- The disease of isolation goes along with the disease of addiction.

When I heard this, I immediately thought of J. I believe I am about his only friend.

December 4, 1998

We had a very nice family vacation together – J. and I along with J.'s dad and Robin. We visited our usual favorite spots, the weather cooperated, J. and I connected. I feel better.

December 7, 1998

The good feelings have departed. J. was very defensive once we started talking about the debt today. I am sad. Dealing with money is an important part of our marriage! I don't know how much to push. God, please help us.

December 18, 1998

I decided to go to an open AA meeting. I heard some amazing stories, and I'm very glad I went. J. is dealing with a cunning, baffling, and powerful disease. I wonder if he can make it. I don't detect the

“fire in the belly” that some of the people there seem to have. You have to want recovery with your whole being; it has to be THE most important thing in your life. It doesn’t seem to be for J., yet. Did I do the right thing by moving back???

December 31, 1998

Here we are, at the end of the year – and what a year! I am proud of myself for keeping to my boundary of separating if J. was drinking and driving, but I am worried that he is spending so little time on recovery. The discovery of the debt was dreadful, but we got through it. He says it is a relief not to be worried about it all the time – he called it flipping through his Rolodex of worries when he couldn’t sleep – money, work, Luke...he said he would just go from one to the next. All I can say is, I hope there are not more major dreadful surprises. In spite of everything, the love is still there. God, please guide our steps. And please, help heal my neck. I hope all the physical therapy appointments I’m going to will help.

January 21, 1999

We had a lovely time together at one of our favorite places during a short get-away weekend. We saw some beautiful scenes in nature, and had a great visit with one of J.’s friends from high school and his wife, whom I like a lot. She is in recovery herself. I am feeling more hopeful that J. can find his way forward.

February 15, 1999

We had a lovely, very special outing that I will remember as one of the highlights of our marriage in years to come. We clicked completely all weekend. I am so happy. This is the man I married – full of life, fun, so caring, creative, and great company. It was delightful. Thank you, God, for bringing us together.

February 16, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Work on downsizing a fear-based ego.
- An acronym for ego is “Easing God Out.”
- Speak my truth and let it be what it is.
- In the middle of a discussion, I can turn it over to God. I can ask to have an open heart and open mind – the other person can have insights just as much as I can.
- My ego wants to control, and believes it has the answer, but it doesn’t.
- Getting our own way might not be the best way.
- I can work towards letting go of fear, and trusting instead – trusting that it will work out.
- There is an acronym for “ego” – Easing God Out.
- God wants us to be in relationships.
- We need to accept defeat and then we can turn it over to God.
- I also heard the term “higher self,” which sounds like the person God wants us to be, that we want to be as well, when we are not consumed with fear. I will think more about what this means to me.

However, I got a very nasty jolt when I inquired about the man who was so kind and helpful, telling me that stopping drinking is the easy part of recovery. I haven't seen him in a while – it turns out he has died! I was going to see if he had any more thoughts to share with me. I am very sad.

February 17, 1999

I am on a roller coaster and I am getting severe whiplash. J. and I were doing so great, and then WHAM! The angry, bitter, sarcastic person J. can be appears, and I don't know what happened! Where did this come from? What can I do? How can I protect myself from getting dragged down into the pit with him? I DON'T UNDERSTAND!!! Why is this happening??? Did I make a mistake by moving back into the house? Where is recovery? It feels like a lot of broken promises and I feel sick.

February 18, 1999

I told J. I was demoralized from his behavior towards me. I am so sad. We are supposed to leave for a work-related trip for me, and I am dreading this. Plus, I feel like I'm getting sick. This is so difficult.

February 23, 1999

We got through the trip, but I was sad most of the time. J.'s dad is coming for a visit in a few days. I enjoy his dad, and Robin loves being with him, but J. and I are not in a good place and I'm anxious. I don't want to pretend that things are great. This is so difficult. God, please help us.

March 5, 1999

I am very sad. Our boss at work retired, and someone else I like and respect in the office was promoted. He started his first day by interviewing all of us individually – great idea – to check in to see if we had any concerns. But he told me today that because I'm taking a lot of sick leave to go to physical therapy due to my various injuries, many of my colleagues are resentful and believe that I'm not doing my share of the work. Evidently, no one spoke up about this when our former boss was in charge. I am stunned and demoralized. I get the feeling I will have to work very hard for a long time to get out of this hole. I really feel bad. This was a surprise. I am also angry because people who haven't been in constant pain do not truly understand how debilitating it can be. I have been doing my best, and evidently it is not good enough. Yuck. And to top it off, J. was not very comforting when I told him about it. It was a crummy day.

March 8, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- When we are bored, it means we are not moving towards what we want. It means we're not accepting where we are.
- If we're not happy, the temptation is to look outside ourselves; then we lose touch with our higher power.
- Our brains are hard-wired for crisis – “boredom” leads to being restless, irritable, and discontented.
- Over time, we can create the space to decide whether we are going to get involved in a situation.

- We can create the space to deal with loneliness. We can ask ourselves, “What can I do to make my heart sing today?”
- If I step out of the moment, then I step out of gratitude and lose joy.

March 13, 1999

J. went camping without me. Things are stable at the moment. Sometimes I feel like I’m going through the motions in this marriage, treading water, hoping J. will truly embrace recovery, and then we can be truly happy. Please, God, help us.

March 18, 1999

Stuff like this DRIVES ME NUTS!!! How many times have J. and I talked about the importance of speaking up when something is bothering him! I cannot read his mind! If he is upset about something I’m doing or not doing, JUST TELL ME!!! I thought we were having an ordinary evening, and as we were going to bed, he says, “How could you not see that I’m depressed?” Well, I’m tired, I’m in pain, I’m doing my best and I’m not perfect. He could have said to me, “I’m having a tough time and could you please hold me” or any other number of things. Oh, this marriage is so challenging and I’m so tired.

March 19, 1999

I woke up early this morning with my heart pounding and my stomach in knots. J. was still cranky and bitter about last night. Later, he said he would go camping without me. I went to an Al-Anon meeting. Two things I heard in the meeting struck me:

- Humility means doing God’s will, not your own.
- We need to be emotionally self-supporting.

At least it was a lovely day and I went for a little walk. Please, God, help us. Help me keep going.

March 22, 1999

Somehow, we managed to connect after J. came back from camping and had some pleasant moments. I did some baking. But after a difficult day at work that involved a lot of driving, my neck is hurting and I am very sad. So I’m resorting to my usual coping mechanisms – I eat too much and I stay up too late watching silly things on TV to distract me from my difficulties.

April 5, 1999

I went to an Al-Anon meeting and heard interesting things to think about. In AA, you learn “the same person will drink again” – in other words, in order to stop drinking, a person must change. In Al-Anon, the same person will obsess, worry, try to control, and try to manage. My thinking, my beliefs must change, with God’s help. I can’t do this by myself. I will gain compassion and be able to forgive myself. I will have a different relationship with God/my higher power and will be able to be with myself.

I always feel better after going to a meeting. But I am very sad today. My neck is hurting a lot, and all the treatments I’m getting and money I’m spending aren’t helping that much. J. was sympathetic

and tried to help by massaging it. I wish he would help himself by going to meetings and finding a sponsor. Where are we headed?

April 15, 1999

Oh no – more bad news! J. was in a car accident a few days ago that was not his fault – the driver who hit him admitted it was her fault, but J. hit his face somehow and it has been very sore. He had a CT scan today and it came back negative, so that is a relief, but he is very tired. Plus, the insurance company has totaled his car so he is driving a replacement rental car and has to look for another car. I know all of this will be another setback for pursuing recovery. God, please help us!!!

April 26, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Joy is not the same as being happy. When I step out of gratitude, the moment, or minding my own business, then I am getting away from joy.
- The key to joy is wanting what you already have.
- Some acronyms for fear: Feelings Evaporate And Return; Future Events Already Ruined

May 30, 1999

J. went camping without me yesterday, which felt OK. I understand he needs to be outside, and since I'd been feeling sick earlier in the week I didn't want to go. He's not going to meetings, and I wonder what's happening with his recovery. I feel so unsettled. I keep feeling like we're drifting.

June 6, 1999

J. went camping without me again. He seemed very grumpy in the evening, and tense the next morning, so I told him he was "off duty" and should spend his weekend how he wants to. So off he went, I was OK by myself, and he came back in a better frame of mind. But recovery is nowhere in sight. The disagreements and misunderstandings over trivial things continue, the bad moods, and the feeling like he's taking things out on me when he's in a bad mood. I'm tired of this. Please, God, help us.

June 7, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Our disease punches holes in us, and then our defects of character fill those holes. As we work the Steps and begin to heal, now the holes are empty, and God can move through these holes, or strengthen us around the holes that remain.
- We can think of defects of character as defense mechanisms and learned responses that are not serving us anymore.
- There is a difference between wanting character defects removed and being ready for God/higher power to remove them; fear gets in the way.
- Surrender means accepting where we are now. I can surrender something to God. It's possible to be afraid of who I will be if I let something go.
- Surrender gives us a little space for God enter; it can give us a choice in how we act. Surrender leads to freedom.

- Who am I if I'm not my defects?
- We don't earn the 7th Step – we receive it, with grace.
- Removing defects of character is like removing what isn't me.

June 12, 1999

J. went camping last night without me. Today I had an MRI to see what's happening with my neck. J. came back later today, and seemed more like himself. He's still not going to meetings. Where is recovery?

We have made a plan to visit my family in August, and J. has decided that he will go on a solo camping trip beforehand. It will be a very big adventure for him, and he's excited.

June 15, 1999

I reinjured my ankle at work, and it's not doing well. I can't believe I have more pain to deal with.

June 20, 1999

We went to visit J.'s dad with Robin. Friday night, when I came home after work, J. became angry with me when I said I was tired and wasn't up to packing for the trip then, but I that would do it in the morning. I don't understand why he gets like this. He was better Saturday morning but it cast a shadow for a while. I think he's nervous about an upcoming special event next month that he has been working on for some time. I understand this is a very big deal for him, but it still shouldn't be an excuse to take it out on me.

June 24, 1999

What an absolutely dreadful evening last night. We went to a special event together, and for a little while things were fine. Then J. caught sight of a man that a few years ago triggered one of our worst misunderstandings ever, right before our wedding, related to jealousy. I haven't seen this man since, but he was at this event. J. was so angry, as if I had planned to meet him there. It was ridiculous, but I couldn't reach him. We left the event and went to the movies, but it was obvious he couldn't let it go. We got home and he was still upset. Finally, this afternoon, after I had called him twice at work and went by his office to assure J. that he is the man I love, the mood finally shifted. It was exhausting, though.

I went to see my orthopedist about the MRI test results – he said there's nothing surgical that will improve my pain. In a way this is a big disappointment, but I know from experience that surgery doesn't always make things better. I just have to keep going and hope all the treatments I'm getting will eventually kick in. God, please help me.

June 27, 1999

We are doing better now, thank goodness, but all the misunderstandings take a toll on me. Where is recovery?

June 28, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- What is the difference between being a care-taker and a care-giver or -offerer? This is also related to the difference between rescuing behavior and compassion. Care-taking implies an expectation of getting something in return. However, we're not (or shouldn't be) the savior for anyone. We also need to examine our motives for "giving."
- The more I let go of trying to control other people, the more I find myself. When we are enmeshed with others, we feel lost when we're not caught up with their lives.
- We can make the assumption that if someone knew better, he/she'd do better, but that may not be the case. Instead, consider if he/she could do better, he/she would do better.

This last observation triggered something in me related to the intense dream I had a few years ago, about doing our best – as long as we do our best, we don't need to worry. It occurred to me that really, when you get down to it, everyone is doing their best at any given moment. We can certainly wish it were better, but it is their best right then.

July 4, 1999

More ups and downs. We had another argument about bedtime. I have told J. several times that going to bed "late," which for me is after 10, doesn't work well for me, especially when I'm in pain. He was not sympathetic, and said, "You are always trying to make me change." That hurt. The next day, he went camping by himself since my ankle is still hurting. I hope camping is helping him. He told me being out in nature is where he does his best recovery work.

This is the third anniversary of discovering the empty vodka bottles hidden in the trash. I wonder sometimes if we are any further along the path of recovery than we were then. The renovations to the house are at a standstill. There is no progress anywhere I look. I am so discouraged and sad.

July 12, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- "I'm not in charge but I sure should be."
- What would a great life look like? For me, it would be work, service to others, having time for artistic expression, trying new things, spending time out in nature, and being with family and friends.
- Being fully human means that we are going to make mistakes. One time recently when I was upset with a mistake I made, my sponsor said to think of it instead as having new information. That was extremely helpful.
- The greatest gift I can give someone else is a healthy me.
- It came up again: If a person could do better, then they would do better.

August 1, 1999

A few days ago, the special event J. has been working on for ages took place and it went well, but afterwards J. went to sit out in his car in the backyard for quite a while. I thought he needed his alone

time, so I didn't try to go out there. He seemed OK when he came back into the house. Looking back, I believe the experience triggered a relapse, and he was drinking in the car so I wouldn't see him.

But I did catch him drinking last week at the house, and confronted him. We followed through with our plans to go camping together that weekend, and I felt very sad. We talked about what had happened, and he said the special event brought up a lot of feelings for him. He said he would try to work harder on recovery, and made an appointment to see his counselor. I called my sponsor. She listened. No one can tell me what to do. Somehow, I have to figure out what feels right. I change my mind every hour. Stay? Go? Make him go? My stomach is in knots all the time.

Then this weekend I brought up recovery. I told J. I was feeling very sad. I asked whether it would be helpful to see our couples counselor together. He was irritated and said in a sarcastic tone, "Everything is always my fault, isn't it. You cry half the time we're there, and talk about all your personal problems. It's a waste of time to go there with you." I felt like he had punched me. Then, J.'s dad arrived for a visit that we had planned a few weeks ago, and I had to pretend that everything was OK. It was so challenging to smile and try to act like things were fine in front of him and Robin. Then J. and I had another misunderstanding about washing the dishes. I am back to constantly worrying about whether I will see his car in its usual place when I come home from work, and if it's not there, if he's been drinking and driving. God, please help us.

August 3, 1999

I can't believe I'm facing the choices I've had to face AGAIN. I thought if I wrote this down it would help me know what to say to J. Although he hasn't been drinking and driving – at least, to my knowledge – all the signs are there that it could happen at any time. Do I want to keep living here and wait for the shoe to drop, or do I go ahead and separate now? So I wrote a letter I could give him when I'm ready.

"I'm sad for you that you have the disease of alcoholism. I'm sad for me that I have to face the decision of continuing living together or separating. I'm sad for us – will we be living apart or walking side by side?

I don't want to come home and not know what I'm going to face when I open the door. If the man I married isn't there, then it's not home and I don't want to live here. I want peace and security where I live, and I don't have that now.

I want to feel that you are fully committed to sobriety. You have made strides, but alcohol has re-entered your life more than once. It's time for a new approach. I need to feel you are concerned and will do whatever it takes to stay in recovery, and right now I don't feel that.

You have deceived me by drinking again, and that is terribly painful. Once again, I am worried about whether there is alcohol stashed in the house, and whether you will drink and drive again. I won't live like this.

Are you committed heart and soul to sobriety? If not, then I will separate. I want to be excited about our future together, where we want to travel, what your life will be like once you are no longer working full-time, and not be waiting for the next episode of drinking.

I'm worried that so far, the only action you've taken since you've started drinking again is talking to your counselor – as if drinking again isn't that big a deal, that you successfully deceived me for who knows how long, so it's not that bad.

I feel like I've been kicked in the stomach – you have hurt me and you don't seem at all concerned about this. Instead you get angry when I say I'm sad and worried.

I'm sad you feel the need to drink, and I can't do anything about it. I am powerless over your behavior. This hurts me. Your dishonesty hurts me.

My motivation for saying these things is that I want you to be well so you are able to be the kind, creative, passionate, intelligent man with an amazing sense of humor that I fell in love with, whom I have everything in common with, and whose company I prefer above all others. I want to save our marriage.” *(I never gave this letter to J. because I was too afraid of what he would say.)*

August 9, 1999

I've been thinking about the concept of God asking us to do something – perhaps that means God will also give us the desire to do it. I've also been thinking about wanting to do something vs. liking doing it. I listened to an Al-Anon tape and the speaker made this distinction – it was so helpful! I can want to do something, because I believe God is asking me, or I believe it's important to do, but not enjoy it. Perhaps over time, I will enjoy doing it, or at least tolerate it better. And I can pray for the willingness to do something that at the moment seems completely unappealing.

I'm in the process of submitting all the documents for the insurance settlement related to the car wreck last year. It's a lot of work, but it will be good when it's done.

I heard at the Al-Anon meeting that acceptance is the key towards changing our heart. It is the middle word in the important phrase, “Awareness, acceptance, action.”

August 11, 1999

I took J. to the airport for his big solo camping adventure. It will last almost a week. There is a degree of danger involved – he could certainly get injured – but he is sure everything is going to be fine and says he will be careful and not take unnecessary risks. He will be out of cell phone reach for part of the time. It was difficult to say goodbye. God, please keep him safe.

August 19, 1999

I left today to see my family, and meet up with J. He arrived at my relative's house, and was thrilled with the big adventure. It was so wonderful to be with him again, and see him so happy. This is the man I married! When this man is present, there's no question that I want to be married to him, want

him to be well, and will do whatever I need to do help him, even if it means living by my boundary and separating when necessary. But when that other person rises to the surface, it's a different story. Why can't J. always be the man I wanted to marry so very much?

September 1, 1999

We are back home. We had a great visit with my family, plus did sight-seeing on our own. It was a really great trip. Every day was a nice day. We didn't talk about the drinking. We seem to have fewer misunderstandings when we are traveling – why is that?

September 9, 1999

What a dreadful evening! J. and I had a terrible communication misfire. He had to work late and accused me of not being happy to see him, that my questions about whether he was going camping makes him feel cornered. Then he got angry again when I turned out the lights to go to sleep when he wasn't ready, and slept upstairs. I feel sick.

September 12, 1999

Somehow, we made it through the next few days, and managed to reconnect. It is exhausting not knowing which J. is going to show up at any given time. But we have something really fun to look forward to in a couple of weeks, the special concert we've been planning to attend for quite a while, and I'm excited.

September 13, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- When the pain of the familiar is greater than the fear of the unfamiliar, then a shift can happen. When we're comfortable, then we don't need to change; change can take more time.
- Our self-esteem can be tied up into a certain outcome.
- The hole in my soul can't be filled with outside things.
- When I'm in pain, it's because I'm not in acceptance. I need to accept that I'm not in control, and let go, and then the pain will be less.

September 20, 1999 Helpful thoughts from the Al-Anon meeting:

- Believing I'm in control of other people, places, and things is an illusion; it gives me a false sense of security. It is better to accept that I can't control things outside of myself.
- How can I be supportive without enabling?
- Do I realize that I'm not in charge?

September 26, 1999

The huge work project I've been working on for more than a year took place, and for the most part it went well. But when I came home after it was all over, J. had decided to go camping without me. Later he said he didn't want to hear me talk about my project. Boy, that really hurt. I felt so sad. Things

between us got better as time went on, but still I'm very disappointed. This project was a really big deal for me, and he was not supportive. I will say it again – I am very sad.

September 29, 1999

Our misunderstandings and misfires seem to be happening more frequently. J. seems to be grumpy more often. I feel like I'm walking on eggshells most of the time, and I hate it. The littlest things seem to set him off. I'm looking forward to our special concert in a few nights – it should be a treat.