

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

Journal Entries, Part 6 – Fourth Separation, First Residential Treatment Program, and Continuing Difficulties

May 27, 2002

I had this weird premonition as I was driving home from work on Friday that J. would be drinking and driving. He wasn't home when I got there, so I just sat and waited. It was obvious when he arrived that he had been drinking. I'M ABSOLUTELY FURIOUS!!! I wanted to scream and scream. I told him I wanted another legal separation. He got angry. I asked him to move out of the house in the next couple of days. I also told him it would not be a good idea for him to join us on the big trip. I know he's crushed, but I can't pretend things are OK in front of my family. When I was alone, I sobbed and sobbed. I'm still so angry I can hardly speak to him without wanting to scream. Yet in spite of all this we went to church together because it seemed like the right thing to do. I feel numb. Tomorrow I will talk to my attorney to ask him to work on the separation papers. What a mess. Please, God, guide our steps. I just don't know where we are headed. I will do my best to live by the recovery principle of "the next right step" and focus on that.

June 1, 2002

Yesterday I signed the separation papers. I called a friend today and told her I dread going home. Tonight, when I got there, J. was waiting for me. He told me he knew drinking and driving was wrong, and that hurting me and deceiving me was wrong. Then he started to cry, really cry, and tears were falling on the floor as he bent over and sobbed. I held him and tried to reassure him that I'm still here, even in these times. Please, God, help us.

June 2, 2002

We are not in good shape. J. was home when I got there, and had brought a special seasonal treat that he knows I love. He started cooking it, and I made a suggestion about how to prepare it. He got so sad, I tried to apologize, but the evening was ruined. Me and my big mouth. Why couldn't I have left well enough alone? I feel awful.

June 3, 2002

What a dreadful, dreadful time. I'm slightly less angry some of the time, but the feelings of betrayal, loss, and fury are right below the surface. J. has been packing up some of his things and will no longer sleep at the house, although he will come during the day to keep packing, and will also be going to spend time at his dad's. I can't sleep. At least work provides me with some stability. I went to church by myself today, and then went by the office to get some things done. I'm not sure when J. will be starting treatment – he has to wait until there's an opening. Please be with us, God.

June 6, 2002

More to deal with. I learned that someone in my family has been diagnosed with diabetes, and is not doing well at the moment; we hope there will be room in the hospital in the next day or two so intensive treatment can begin. The big family trip is off. This is a huge disappointment for everyone. I know on some level it is a relief for J. because he won't be missing the trip, although he's very concerned about my relative. It's all very sad.

I realized after work that I dread going home to our empty house, not wanting to face the loneliness yet again. I will have to learn how to deal with this, but right now I'm so depressed. I feel that J. has abandoned me, and I'm starting to wonder what it would be like to be with someone else. Someone I met through work has made it clear that he is interested in me. I have no intention of pursuing anything with "Mr. Opportunity," but it's extremely distressing to admit the thought and temptation are there. Fortunately, he lives a couple of hours away, so it's not convenient, thank goodness.

June 8, 2002

I am completely numb. I got home from work yesterday, and J. had left a note on my bedside table that he was continuing to move things out of the house. He had left a mug there, a special mug we had commissioned for our wedding. I picked it up and got a whiff of vodka. There was quite a bit in the mug. I am in shock. I am absolutely sick with worry, fear, anger, and dread. I wanted to throw up, scream, throw his things out the window or take a hammer and smash them. It feels like he took an axe and chopped off my arm. I called a friend and poured out my feelings. I thought about what I wanted to say to J. I waited until today to call him, and told him how angry I was, that he was jeopardizing people's lives with his actions, and that he should start treatment immediately – just go up there, stay in a motel, and wait for a bed. He hung up on me. A few days ago he is crying so hard that tears are falling on the floor, in guilt and remorse over drinking and driving, and now he's leaving vodka next to where I sleep. I called a couple of program friends, and they listened to my anguish. I went to my Al-Anon meeting today and talked and cried. HE BETRAYED MY TRUST AGAIN AND I CAN'T STAND IT!!!

June 10, 2002

One of my relatives called today and said they found a substitute place for our reunion trip, much closer to their home in case a trip to the hospital is needed. It will be nice to get away and spend time with people who love me, and think about other things besides how J. is or is not dealing with his disease.

I'm moving around in a daze. I don't know what to pray for. Maybe the best thing is to hope that I won't do or say something to J. that I will regret later. Dear God, please help me and please help J.

June 12, 2002

I'm feeling slightly better. I still can't sleep, but I'm continuing to exercise most days, and work provides a reason to get out of bed. I met my new counselor today, and she's really great. I poured out my anguish and confusion and she really listened. No one can tell me what to do, but it's good to have an experienced person to talk to. I mentioned Mr. Opportunity as well, and all the feelings this is bringing

up. Tomorrow I leave for my family reunion, without J. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone; they understand the circumstances and have not been asking a lot of questions, thank goodness. Thank you, God, for my family.

June 24, 2002

The trip to see my family was healing for the most part, and now I'm back home. There was one very frightening time during the trip when the despair just engulfed me and I truly wanted to die. We were parked at the top of a scenic bluff, and I knew if I got out of the car, I could jump off and be done with my life and all of the problems and grief. I really thought about it for a couple of minutes, imagined what it would feel like to be floating, and then how it would feel to hit the ground. Gradually, the desire passed and then I was back to my regular sadness and depression. I thought later about what this would do to my family – how I would feel if one of them committed suicide, and I realized I can't end my life on purpose without causing enormous pain to them. So I need to figure out how to keep going, somehow. I bought something for J. to bring back with me that I think he will like.

I met J. at church today. We had lunch afterwards and talked about our future. I gave him his present, but he didn't say much. His program starts tomorrow. He says he is now looking forward to starting the program because he hopes it will help him be well; before he said it felt like going to prison. Actually, I think it was the dread of starting treatment that triggered this last episode of drinking and driving although that's just a guess on my part. However, I do still wonder if he's really ready to put recovery first because his mind is still focused on finishing professional obligations, but it's out of my hands. He took care of some home chores, including getting a better system for the sump pump, so hopefully the basement won't flood again. I know J. is trying to take care of me by doing these things. My dreadful anger at him has faded at the moment, and now I'm just tremendously sad. But I've had no more strong thoughts about ending my life. I'm committed to seeing my new counselor on a regular basis.

Communicating will be difficult while J. is in treatment. There is one pay phone, and since everyone there wants to use it, calls have to be very short. Family weekend is in three weeks.

July 3, 2002

I've been talking to J. every couple of nights since he started this new program, but sometimes we can't connect. He says he's impressed with the program, and likes the people who are there with him. It would be so great if he really bonded with one or two people – it seems so difficult for him to make real friends, people to talk to. I've heard in Al-Anon meetings from people who are also in AA, and they say all the time that true recovery involves being able to open up to other people, that alcoholism is a disease of isolation. So far J. has not been able to find people to talk to. I've assured J. I will be coming to participate in the family weekend. He has given me a long list of things he wants me to get for him. I said OK.

Mr. Opportunity and I have been talking sometimes. He is funny and smart, and sometimes, he can be a good listener. However, he is very wrapped up with his own problems in his extremely chaotic and complicated personal life. He also struggles with addiction. Talk about going from the frying pan

into the fire. The irony is not lost on me. I know in my heart this would be a HUGE mistake, and so far, have resisted all inclinations to do more than talking.

July 6, 2002

J. says I sound distant when I'm on the phone, and it's bothering him. Distant??? Excuse me, but does he really expect me to say how much I miss him when he just betrayed my trust AGAIN and plunged a dagger into my heart and destroyed my hopes and dreams AGAIN??? And, he's given me another list of things he wants me to get for him. I'm starting to feel like a shopping service.

Mr. Opportunity and I talked about the possibility of him coming here so we can have dinner together. I'm thinking about it.

July 8, 2002

I was feeling very resentful and angry earlier this week. Whenever J. and I talk, it seems that all he wants is for me to do things for him – like sending him care packages with very specific requests for different kinds of snacks – not only for him, but for other people in the program – and it's a pain to get it and then ship it on top of everything else in my life – and it's not cheap either. Or he wants me to send him books. Plus, I'm having to pick up all the slack for looking out for Robin. I'm not hearing “thank you for all the work you are doing” but instead “now I need this, and send it right away.” I told him that I felt unappreciated and taken for granted when we talked. He apologized – at first it seemed very reluctantly, like he was thinking that the only thing he can focus on is his program, and everything else in life, including me, is secondary, and of course I should understand that. In other words, what right did I have to complain when he's working on getting better? Oh, I was angry. But then he wrote me a very nice letter and said he did appreciate everything I was doing, including continuing to stand by him. So I felt a little better, but I'm still angry and resentful.

What I'm realizing is that I need to articulate to J., in a way that is completely clear, all my feelings of betrayal, complete loss of trust, and anger over what's happened since I discovered the extent of his drinking. So I'm going to work on a letter to him this week and then bring it with me for the family weekend coming up.

It's not helping that my physical limitations are acting up so it's difficult to walk. I wish I could press a “fast forward” button for my life and see how things are going to turn out. Will J. truly embrace recovery? Can we make it? Will my various ailments improve so I have more energy? Who knows?

And then, there's Mr. Opportunity, ready, willing, and able to enter my life. Well, sort of able. He's certainly ready and willing, but there's too much upheaval for him in his own life to be truly “able.” He's made it very clear that he loves talking to me, thinks I have interesting things to say, and would love to spend more time with me. It is extremely flattering and affirming to be receiving attention like this from a man. I'm comparing it to what a plant feels like in a drought that all of a sudden gets a good drink of water. BUT I know I am playing with fire. After careful thought, I've decided a dinner as friends would be OK, one time, and that's it. I've made it clear it's only dinner. He's coming in a couple of days.

July 11, 2002

Mr. Opportunity and I had our dinner together. The attraction was certainly there, and I also realized that he is completely wrapped up in his own life turmoil and all I am is a little diversion. It also renewed my resolve that being together in person is a bad idea. It's a great distraction to talk to him, and it's fun – a whole lot more fun than thinking about how angry I am at J. and how much he has hurt me. But I did make it clear, again, after dinner that this was going to be our one and only get-together. Mr. O was surprised and disappointed when I said it. When we said good-bye, I briefly held his hand AND THAT WAS IT. I have no regrets.

July 15, 2002

I worked on the letter to J. all week, and didn't hold back one bit. I gave it to J. to read yesterday shortly after I arrived for the family weekend.

“Dear J.,

I am having tremendous difficulty letting go of the anger, betrayal, despair, and frustration that I feel since you resumed drinking, and then drinking and driving, in May. I hope that if I write down my feelings and convey them to you, then perhaps I will be able to let them go and make room for whatever the future holds for us.

I believe you do not truly understand the depth of my feelings because if you did you would be writing to tell me how bad you feel about hurting me over and over again. Perhaps this is an incorrect assumption, but it's what I believe. You need to understand how I feel, and I need to see that you do understand, before there is a hope that I can move on from these feelings of betrayal and anger.

To give you a different perspective and perhaps a better picture of my feelings, let's say you have had a mistress for years. Starting even before our marriage I suspected you were involved with someone else far more intensely than you were willing to admit. When I brought it up you agreed you needed to see her less often, that the relationship was not good for you, and I believed and trusted you and tried not to think about it. However, six years ago in 1996 I found clear evidence that yes indeed you were still not only spending time with your lover but were having sex with her. It was a horrible time in my life. I asked you to stop seeing her and you said you would, that you knew you needed to stop, but after a while I could tell you were still seeing her.

I started going to support groups, to try to understand what was happening. This went on for six months and then things came to a head in January of 1997 when a particularly flagrant encounter happened—I caught you in bed with her. You said you felt terrible about it and promised me you would stop, and you did for a while. You also said you would work on yourself because you said it was an addiction, not a real love. You told me you were going to figure out why you were still involved with your lover by going to counseling and attend meetings of support groups. You did for a while but then quit doing it. I told you if you saw her again, I would separate. I wasn't sure what else I could do or say. Things kind of muddled along for a while, but I was often extremely worried and afraid. It was a very unhappy time in

my life. At times I was filled with dread when I came, afraid I would find you and your lover together again in our house.

I started to suspect that you had resumed the affair in the fall of 1997 and then my worst fears were realized in February of 1998 when I found you in her arms again. I told you I wanted to separate, that your lover was not welcome in our marriage. You objected when I asked you to move out of the house. You said it felt like punishment, so even though you were the person who was having the affair, I said I would move out and I did. I said I needed to live apart to show you just how much it was bothering me that you were unfaithful, and I could think of no other way to convey this to you other than living apart.

Living apart also made it easier for me to get over my anger. You promised me you would stop seeing your lover and would work on yourself by going to counseling and attending support group meetings; you said they helped a lot. During the separation, we spent time together. I wanted to reassure you that I wasn't rejecting you, it was the fact that you had been unfaithful to me. It was expensive to live apart, but I felt I had to. After three months, when it seemed you were taking this seriously, I moved back into the house in the summer of 1998 because I trusted you to keep your promises. Things seemed fine for a while but then you stopped going to the support group meetings again. I brought it up and you'd go for a while but then you'd stop again. This went on for months, and it made me very nervous. You also were angry a lot of the time.

I started to suspect you had resumed the affair in the fall of 1999 and told you I was suspicious, but you became very angry and said it wasn't happening, so I backed off. However, I was living in fear again, afraid of coming home, afraid of what I'd find or what you'd be doing when my back was turned. I kept hoping things would work out, that you'd remember your promises to me to work harder, to make dealing with this addiction a priority in your life. But then I found you and your lover together again and so once again I looked for another place to live even though you were the one who had been unfaithful. It was very expensive to live somewhere else, but I made the financial sacrifice because I had to show you just how seriously I was taking this—that I could not tolerate you being unfaithful even though you had promised otherwise—and it was a way to get over my anger. We lived apart for six months, until the spring of 2000. During this separation we spent time together. I told you that if you were unfaithful again, I would seek a legal separation. You promised me you really understood why you had been unfaithful and would go to the support group meetings and continue in counseling, so I trusted you again that you would keep your promises and I agreed to would move back into the house.

We had been reunited for six weeks and were very happy. But then one night you came home with clear signs you had been with your lover again. I was devastated and asked you to move out of the house. I paid for the legal separation and also called the insurance company to divide our car insurance policies. It was very expensive to live in the house by myself but I did it because I wanted our marriage to continue. We spent our wedding anniversary apart. You said you were going to counseling and working on yourself to understand why you kept going back to your lover. Again, I felt like a widow—I was often sad and lonely but I believed God was asking me to stick with our marriage so I kept going. We had been living apart for about nine months when in the early spring of 2001 you said you really understood yourself now and would never go back to your lover, and you made more promises to me about

counseling and support groups. You said again that dealing with this problem was going to be the most important part of your life.

Once again, I trusted you to keep your promises. I moved back into the house in the spring of 2001 and we were happy for a while, but it wasn't long—just a couple of months—before you stopped going to counseling and the support group meetings. I became very afraid that you would start seeing your lover again. I pointed out to you that you had made promises to attend meetings and see a counselor to make sure you would stay away from your lover, and history had showed over and over you were sure to go back to your lover unless you did. You said OK, you would work on it and you would for a little while but then you'd quit again. This went on for the rest of 2001.

Once again, I was living in fear. I told you how I felt on our vacation in that fall, in tears, and you said OK you would work on it but even after that long conversation you still didn't follow through. We went to our counselor together in December of 2001 and he said if you could find the right medication for depression you would have the energy to work on being faithful, so I decided I would hang in there for a while longer. After some trial and error with different medications for a time it appeared you had found the right one for your depression and you did seem truly happy, but yet you still only went to counseling and the support group meetings once in a while. I was worried and anxious but kept hoping things would be different. Occasionally I would see a sign that you were deceiving me, that you had been seeing your lover again, and it was always a terrible feeling, one I had hoped I would never have again, but I was not completely positive because you are so very good at hiding things from me.

I was afraid of what might happen but kept hoping that you would be able to stop yourself from going back to your lover. Two months ago, however, I caught you with her, and you promised me you would go to a place where you could really focus on why you kept going back to your lover, but it would be after the big family vacation. You seemed to think you would be able to be faithful until then, and even though I had misgivings I said it was your decision on when you would start this special program. Three weeks later I had a premonition that you would see her again and waited in fear for you to get home, and I was right, you had been with your lover again. I just felt sick. When I was alone, I cried and cried and cried. It was another terrible blow. I asked you to move out of the house and you did. I went back to the attorney and had another legal separation drawn up, and called the insurance company again to say we were separating. We had a talk in the house after you moved out—I told you how upset I was this was happening again, and you were in tears—the tears were even falling on the floor—and you said you knew what you were doing was wrong. Six days later—six days—I came home to the house and found clear evidence that showed not only had you been with your lover again, you had used our very own bed.

I am telling you this to give you a picture of how the past six years have felt for me. You have broken promises to me over and over again. You have not been faithful to our wedding vows to love, honor and cherish. I have done my best to follow God's will. Once again, I feel like a widow. I have prayed and hoped and cried that things would be different so many times. And yet from my perspective there has been practically no acknowledgement from you that you have hurt me, over and over again. I have lost count of the promises you have made only to break them, the times you have deceived me about

your drinking. It's obvious now that you had started drinking some time before I found the wine bottle in May. I am physically ill at the thought of how many times you have lied to me.

The final blow was finding the mug with the vodka in it next to where I sleep, where you had been sitting to write me a note. I can't describe the shock, anger, betrayal, despair, worry, and fear I had that you would hurt yourself or someone else because you were now drinking and driving. It is as if you took an axe and chopped off my right hand, or took a knife and plunged it into my stomach over and over again. I hardly slept all night and was in agony the entire day after the discovery, unable to focus on anything else, terrified you would be drinking and driving and hurt yourself or someone else. It is a feeling I hope to God I never have again, and if I do, our marriage is over.

There have been things recently that have been upsetting. You didn't even give me a card for our wedding anniversary, the second one we would be apart because of your actions. It was almost two weeks before you said anything about the present I brought back for you from the family trip. I picked it out carefully, and thought it would remind you of happy times we've had. I have already told you that initially when you got here, I felt taken for granted and unappreciated. In spite of feeling hurt and angry, I went out of my way to immediately take care of the things you said you needed, and it felt like I had to beg you to say thank you, which you did eventually. It bothers me to have to ask you to appreciate what I do—it takes any joy out of the action.

Right now, I feel completely numb about our marriage. You have deceived me and betrayed my trust so many times that I feel emotionally spent—there is nothing left right now. The thought of putting myself at risk in our marriage anytime soon, to risk you chopping off yet another part of my body, is beyond imagining. I simply refuse to do it. You will have to show me for months and months and months that recovery is really and truly the most important thing in your life, and not just make promises because right now any promise you make would seem empty to me.

I realize it was not your intention to hurt me, that you haven't been hurting me on purpose, but that has been the result and so I am protecting myself from getting hurt again. If you feel I am distant it is because I am holding myself away so I won't get hurt yet again. I do not trust you now, and it will take time – who knows how long – to heal from all this hurt.

I must see that you understand how I feel – that you realize, and then are able to acknowledge to me – how much you have hurt me throughout our marriage. I am asking you to write me that you understand. I am also asking you to tell me you appreciate the fact that I am still here in the marriage, standing beside you.

I know, and am the first person to admit, that I am not perfect. I know there have been times when you have felt I have not adequately expressed my gratitude to you for the many good things you have done for me, and you were right. I hope we will be able to figure out how to live better without hurting each other, and perhaps our counselor can help us.

I hope and pray better days are ahead for us. I want us to have joy together. I continue to pray to God every day, to know God's will for me and then for the power to carry it out. I am still married to you and have no desire to end our marriage.

Love, your wife”

I read this letter out loud to J., and then handed it to him so he could re-read it. He thanked me for writing it, and said he was sorry for the pain he has caused. He said he has experienced a true transformation with his experience at this place. He said he sits in the front row of all the presentations, and gets there early – a complete change in behavior from arriving perpetually late. He says he wants for us to keep going, and will do whatever it takes.

He also said that now he is not experiencing the craving to drink. I wish I had asked him more questions about that. What is happening during this program that is helping so much, and how can he make it happen once he leaves in a week???

But in spite of all our difficulties, I was very glad to see him and spend time with him. We still have a marriage; I no longer daydream about being with someone else. I do not feel abandoned any longer. I have told Mr. Opportunity all this, and I hope I can remove myself emotionally from this fantasy relationship. Being friends, long distance, feels OK at the moment. But I know I need to be focusing on my marriage, now that there is hope. Thank you, God.

July 29, 2002

J. is back from his program. He’s staying at a motel right now, and continues to look for a place to live. On some level it is wonderful to see him and be with him. I know he wants to move back in, but I’m holding firm even though I’m tempted. We had a wonderful Friday night together, but I can’t waver. I’m still angry, and he has to prove to me that recovery is his Number One priority. He told me he will do his best to wrap up consulting, and then will be taking his dad on a trip this coming week, which means we will reschedule our appointment with our couples counselor for two weeks. I can feel my heart sinking again – where is recovery – but I’m trying not to worry.

August 12, 2002

J. came back from his trip last week, and came over to cook a wonderful dinner. I was at a workshop out-of-town this week, and we talked every day. He surprised me with a lovely card when I returned home. We met with our couples counselor two days ago, and he suggested an approach for us to feel more connected to each other. He said we could mutually decide on a question and then write letters to each other about that question. So our first letter will be about our thoughts and feelings of what we’d like to come out of these letters.

We took a trip to his dad’s this weekend. I’m sure it was a relief for his dad to see us getting along better.

August 13, 2002

The topic at the Al-Anon meeting today was acceptance and letting go. I sure need a lot of work on these issues. Mr. Opportunity and I are still talking, but that’s all. I must say, it continues to be a very

nice feeling to know that someone finds me attractive right now. However, during a recent phone call, we talked for a long time and he didn't ask me ONE question, not even, "So how are you doing?" I am realizing this is mostly a one-way friendship.

One of my relatives will be having a milestone birthday in three months, and I decided it would be appropriate and nice for J. and I to attend, so we made our reservations.

August 14, 2002 *(letter to J. for our assignment)*

"My darling husband,

I am very glad that we are going to give this technique a try, of mutually deciding on a question and then writing letters to each other. I want to feel closer to you, more emotionally connected, through knowing more about what you are thinking and feeling. Right now, I don't feel like I really know what's happening, and it has been months since I have felt like I knew what was truly on your mind and in your heart.

When we first got to know each other, we talked a lot—I guess that happens in any "new" romantic relationship, when every word that comes out of the lips of the beloved is relished and savored. We talk a lot less now. We are entering our 15th year of knowing one another, and it is very important to me that we stay in touch with where we both are in our lives. I don't like feeling so distant, that we are more like friends or roommates than husband and wife.

I know recovery is a lot of your "interior" life now. I would like to hear about your insights from your program. I would like to hear what you said during your "graduation" ceremony, and I also want to respect your privacy. So how can we make that happen?

I also don't want to fall into the pattern of only talking about recovery, because there is more to both our lives than that. What are your dreams for the future, for you and for us? We have so much in common. I don't want the emotions surrounding the separation to drive a permanent wedge between us, so the distance becomes a permanent emotional wall.

I want our marriage to continue, and I see this new approach as a way to help us. I was very glad you agreed to give it a try.

Love, your wife" *(There is no record of J.'s reaction to this letter, or any discussion we might have had.)*

August 22, 2002 *(letter to J. for our assignment)*

"My darling husband,

I have some conflicting emotions about this separation. I am relieved that you have found a great place to live—a happy, healing place. While I miss your presence at the house very much, living apart is easier in a way because I can truly let go of your recovery process (or at least, mostly let go) while you

figure out what you need to do. I'm not as anxious and worried about your recovery and I can focus on what I want to accomplish in my own life.

Living apart also enables me to heal from the hurt I experienced from when I realized you had started drinking, and then drinking and driving again, this past spring before you entered your 28-day program. It's like I can wipe the slate clean over the next months while we are living apart, so when (and I'm assuming it's a "when" and not "if") we resume our marriage, I will have been able to let go of those negative emotions and instead we can start over from a place of renewal and hope.

I do worry a little about how strong your commitment is to recovery and if it will last this time, but it's not something I'm obsessing over. I still enjoy your company, life is still sweeter when we are together, and we still have the same things in common we have always had. I do hope we can communicate more, on a regular basis. I want to feel connected to you on a deeper level, and I am assuming you want to feel the same towards me, too.

Love, your wife" (*There is no record of J.'s reaction to this letter, or any discussion we might have had.*)

August 28, 2002 (*letter to J. for our assignment*)

"My darling husband,

I was glad to hear you say in our counselor's office that you were open to the idea of trying the techniques in *Staying Sober: A Guide for Relapse Prevention*. I learned a lot from reading it. It was eye-opening for me to read the number of steps—37?—that led from being committed to recovery to feeling the only options were suicide, complete mental breakdown, or resuming drinking. There is so much about this disease that I don't understand and I would like to know more, especially if it can help you.

I would like to be a helpful partner in this process, not a bossy dictator or the recovery police. It will be even more important for us to be open and honest about our thoughts and feelings if this is going to truly be helpful to you. I wonder if it would be at all helpful to look at the list in the book and see if you can remember how you felt last winter and spring when things in your recovery were unraveling—only as a way to see if there are lessons for the future, not to point fingers or assign blame for the past.

You will need to tell me how I can be helpful. I don't want you to feel like I'm taking over. I liked the idea of the role play, where you would pretend not to want to see the evidence that recovery was in trouble. I would like us to have a written understanding that we both sign and commit to, where we will do *x* if *y* happens, such as make a joint appointment with our counselor or go talk to our minister, for example.

I so want for us to keep going as a couple, but I don't want you to feel like I'm taking over. My way of dealing with a crisis is to take action and that may not be the way you want to approach things. We are going to have to talk a lot about this all along the way, and not wait for things to build up. I liked the idea in the book of the twice-daily inventory – maybe we could have a short conversation each day

checking in with each other about our relationship. This is just a thought, though; I am of course open to your thoughts and ideas. I am proud of you and all your doing to be well.

Love, your wife” (*There is no record of J.’s reaction to this letter, or any discussion we might have had.*)

September 3, 2002

J. was really here for me this week. I had a horrible reaction to a medication I tried for the first time, and he was very helpful by bringing food over. He also went with me to an important medical appointment a few days ago, and was there to listen and take notes. I also trust J.’s instincts in reading a person. We both agreed this doctor was not only skilled in his specialty but also a good listener and a kind person. We can have confidence in what the doctor tells me, which is that surgery won’t help me at this time. What a relief to check that off the list. I still need to deal with my physical limitations every day, but J. was really there for me and that means a lot.

He went to visit his dad over the weekend, and called me to say his dad isn’t doing well. What a worry. He will stay with his dad until he feels his dad is stable, and then bring his dad back with him to stay at his place. I feel recovery will be on the back, back burner. God, please help us all.

September 9, 2002

No “mutual letters” this week. J. is back home. I’ve visited where he’s living now – it’s a summer cottage with no central heat. It’s absolutely lovely, but I wonder how he’ll manage when winter arrives. The price was right, though. J. told me he has gotten a P.O. Box, and will have his mail delivered there so I won’t have to worry about getting things to him.

I’m very concerned about J.’s state of mind – he came over last night and said he was very depressed about his dad, and didn’t want anything to eat. This is a huge concern for me. Not wanting to eat is a huge red flag. I see recovery is not on his mind right now because he’s so worried about his dad. I’m glad we’re not living together so I can’t monitor what he’s doing or not doing. But I come home to our empty house and I’m very sad, lonesome, and worried about the future.

September 16, 2002

J.’s dad has been visiting here this week and staying at the cottage with J.; I went over there twice for dinner, and on the surface we had a nice time. J. is frantic about his dad’s health, however, so there’s no room for recovery. This is terrible. More broken promises.

One thing that really worries me is that J. and his dad have major unfinished business to discuss, going back to childhood and all the trauma J. suffered growing up as a result of his mom’s mental illness. It makes me very sad to think that his dad never intervened to protect J. from his mom’s rages; I believe he failed J. terribly, even though everyone in the community thought the world of him. I think this is one of the reasons that J. is so depressed about his dad’s health, and his impending death. I fear that when his dad’s time on earth is through, and they haven’t had this discussion, that J. will go off the deep end. I can

see it unfolding, like a slow-motion train wreck, and there is absolutely nothing I can do. Please, God, help us to know how to move forward.

September 23, 2002

I met with my counselor, which was helpful. We talked about my continuing anger and frustration, and she said it occurs to her that one reason is that I continue to feel that J. does not respect me. He's not following through on his promises, once again. I felt better afterwards.

J. and I had a couple of communication misfires this week that were very distressing. We continue to argue about dinnertime – when he says he's coming over to make dinner, and I get home at 7, I'm hoping it will be ready but it usually isn't. I've told him that being in pain makes me tired so I want to go to bed on time, so I can get up early and exercise, which helps with the pain. In the past he has complained about that, we've discussed it, and I thought he understood. However, now he still doesn't seem to get it.

His dad is back at his own house. J. doesn't appear to be doing much for recovery, but I don't know for certain. My stomach tells me, based on his overall behavior, that it's not happening.

September 29, 2002

It's been a stressful time. J. hurt his back and it's really bothering him. He asked me to rub it and I did, but it's still an issue. We went to a work-related event out of town and were supposed to meet at a reception. Hours went by, and I kept wondering where he was. I started to get really worried. It was so odd. Then he showed up as everyone was leaving. He was annoyed that he had missed it – he said he took a nap and overslept. I didn't ask the obvious question – why didn't he set an alarm? It was all so weird. We got back home OK. I was so exhausted from not sleeping that I took naps both Saturday and Sunday.

October 7, 2002

J. came over to the house and cooked dinner for us, but he hardly ate anything. He also seemed tired. I told him I'm very sad and anxious about my job right now, and he listened and held me, and then cleaned the kitchen for me. It was so nice to feel his support. The love is still there, in spite of all the anger and worry.

Then he came over again on Thursday to cook for us and have a visit, but by the time dinner was done, it was so late I wasn't hungry because I'd been snacking. He wasn't hungry either, and seemed tired. I told him, again, how difficult it is for me to eat so late; I need my sleep, I need to get up early to exercise...same old discussion. He's heard it all before, very recently...and he got upset. It was a very sad evening. Why can't I reach him? I urged him to see a doctor about his lack of appetite and also his lack of energy. He said he'd think about it. The next day J. left to go pick up his dad again and bring him to stay at his place.

October 14, 2002

For a while, things were better. I went over to J.'s and had a couple of great meals with him and his dad. I notice, however, that J. isn't eating much at all, and I continue to worry about this. I urged him, again, to make an appointment to have this checked out. He took his dad back home. Then today we had another misfire about dinnertime. All this stress is really getting to me. I'm tired all the time. When I get really down, I can talk to Mr. Opportunity. I know all I have to do is say the word and he'd be available, and I'm not going to do it. But the fact that the possibility is there is like having my favorite dessert floating right there in front of me. Is this so bad?

October 21, 2002

Monday, we had an appointment with our couples counselor and I brought up the stress over dinnertime. J. had a realization during the appointment – he was given the responsibility to cook dinner at a young age (far too young, it seemed to me), and it was always stressful for him because it had to be ready at a certain time. Now that he's an adult and can do as he pleases, he hates having a schedule to meet and resents the fact that I keep bringing it up. I think this insight helped both of us. I just hope it will lead to changed behavior...

On Friday night we saw a movie together – it had a huge impact on both of us, and we talked about it afterwards. Our minds still connect – it was a great feeling.

I had the weirdest experience at church. I had the strongest feeling as I was sitting down in the pew, like a premonition, that very soon I would be in a hospital elevator, on my way to see someone I loved (it wasn't clear in the premonition who this person might be) and this person would be very, very sick, perhaps dying. I couldn't bring myself to tell J. about it, and the sadness from this experience cast a shadow over the entire day. Oh my goodness, it felt so real. I feel like I'm waiting for a shoe to drop. J. said he'd made an appointment to see a hematologist, thank goodness.

October 24, 2002

My premonition was not far off at all. On Monday J. had an appointment with the hematologist, and the test results are back. J. is severely anemic, and now they need to find out why. One possibility is internal bleeding in his stomach and another is colon cancer, which caused the death of a close relative, so it is part of his family history. The doctor recommends that he get a colonoscopy/endoscopy, but the first available appointment isn't until mid-December. This is a long time to wait, but it appears it's unavoidable. We're on the waiting list for a cancellation.

Yesterday J. said he was very distressed and felt like he was "going downhill fast." He also confessed he had avoided telling me that every day he felt like he was getting weaker and felt worse. He said he was so depressed it was an effort to make himself eat. After some thought and prayer, I invited him to move back into the house, with the understanding that recovery needed to continue. He promised he would continue to work on his recovery. He said I had a "black belt in Al-Anon." I'm not sure exactly what he means by that.

We made a plan to bring joy into our lives. I will take a day off work next week, and we will lie in the hammock at his place and watch leaves fall. There are horses nearby, and we will feed them apples. It sounds lovely.

Then to make matters worse, yesterday I reactivated an old injury, and now it's difficult and painful to walk any distance. I'm very depressed. Please, God, help us.

October 28, 2002

It's been very nice to wake up next to J. these past few mornings. In spite of everything, on a fundamental level we still get along, enjoy each other's company, have our common interests, and are attracted to one another...in other words, the things are still there that initially brought us together and led us to marriage. When I look at him, I see the man I love. J. said that because of his stomach issues, he can't eat things like nuts that are difficult to digest. We heard that Robin needs to have a medical procedure in December. Unless we get a cancellation sooner, J.'s procedure will be a few days later. It all feels like an avalanche. Please, God, guide our steps.

October 30, 2002

J. called me at work today and said he decided that he shouldn't go to the family celebration this coming week, because he feels we need to be on call in case a cancellation for his procedure comes up and he can be seen sooner. I told him that made sense, and I would stay with him. I could tell he was happy to hear that. On the one hand, it's a relief because I was thinking it would be incredibly difficult to be a plane ride away and then have to scramble to make a sudden appointment for the procedure. However, it is also a very big disappointment because I was really looking forward to celebrating a happy family event. I told everyone we weren't coming after all. I know my family is wondering what's going on, why couldn't I just come without him, but I feel J. really needs me right now.

November 3, 2002

I feel like I'm living in a very, very bad soap opera, except it's my real life. I've received another crushing blow. First, on Wednesday, when I got home from work, J. said he felt so terrible that he had taken two naps – he almost never takes naps, and two in one day is unheard of. He said he's sure he has cancer. Of course, I felt bad for him and did all I could to comfort him.

The next day, we were supposed to have a special dinner cooked by J. with Robin at our house. When I got home from work, I went to get Robin. When we arrived back at the house, I happened to see a small bottle of vodka sticking out of J.'s back pocket that he obviously thought he had concealed, and time absolutely stopped for me. I decided to wait to say something until after dinner. When I got back from taking Robin home, I confronted J. about what I'd seen. He looked at me, anguish all over his face, and then broke down and said he was in such deep despair about the possibility of cancer, that resuming drinking felt like his only way to cope. I asked him to move back to his place, and said our deal was off since he had resumed drinking. He agreed. I wasn't filled with anger, only overwhelming despair and anguish. I am moving around in a daze, waiting for the next blow to fall.

Yesterday was the day we had planned to coast in the hammock and feed the horses. I thought and prayed about it when I woke up, and decided it was still the right thing to do. I can see J.'s anguish – what good is punishing him going to do? And, it turned out to be very healing to be outside, see the leaves, hold each other while we experienced God's creation, and then feed the horses. I felt God's grace and was able to relax for a little while. What is going to happen next? Please, God, guide my steps. I can't see my way forward.

November 11, 2002

I haven't slept well all week, and I'm so tired. I'm trying to keep working and do my job, and it's difficult to focus. I went to my Al-Anon meeting on Monday, and when it was my turn to share, I talked about what had happened, and said I had found serenity just lying in the hammock.

I met with my counselor Wednesday, told her what had happened, and her response was, why am I not angry at J.? I was surprised to hear her say that. I answered, what good is that going to do? She was surprised at my answer. I said that this isn't like the time I found the vodka in the mug in our bedroom when I was consumed with rage. Now, I feel numb, defeated, and depressed. It's all too much. Basically, I'm just putting one foot in front of the other, doing my best not to think or feel – just survive.

On Friday, J. and I had a very sad chat about what's happening in his life and what's going to happen next, and then we drove to see his dad on our way to a special, long-planned event for J. I decided to go, in spite of J. resuming drinking, because it felt like the right thing to do. What is punishing him going to accomplish? We had a nice time at his dad's, then left for the event. When I woke up today, I was glad I had come, and that we had gotten through it. We tried to find a church service but struck out. As we were sitting in the car, I felt the urge to tell him how difficult this is – to live with the fact that he's drinking on a regular basis again, and the ever-present threat of drinking and driving remains. I told J. I'm losing hope that things can be different. The lease on the place he's living in now ends next May so there's no need to make any decisions at all until then. It was difficult to tell whether I was reaching him.

After that we found a place to eat, but as we were leaving, of all things, I re-sprained my ankle, and walking is now very painful. I am now back on crutches. I can't believe that there is one more thing I have to deal with. I'm so depressed. I pray for guidance. I hate what is happening, but I don't hate J. I still love him, and want him to be well so we can have the marriage I know God wants us to have. I can see his torment. I know he is a good, kind, caring, thoughtful person. Alcohol has hijacked his brain. What a dreadful, awful, mess. Please, God, help J. and help me.

November 18, 2002

I got some help for my ankle, and it's a little better. I don't need crutches now, but will only walk when necessary. I'm so tired. I told my boss that I feel like I'm brain dead. She knows about some of the things that are happening, and is sympathetic. J. and I were supposed to see our couples counselor together, but he said he wanted to go by himself and talk about what treatment options the counselor recommends. That was fine with me. I haven't heard yet what they discussed. Please, God, help me keep going.

November 25, 2002

J.'s dad called to say that one of J.'s uncles by marriage died suddenly of a heart attack. J. is crushed – he felt very close to this man. He left the next day to drive down for the visitation and memorial service. After he got back, J. said he had been thinking about how he wanted to be remembered after he died. He said he was afraid people would be thinking of him as an alcoholic – the exact words were “an old drunk.” I said recovery is always possible, but that it's up to him. I could see he was in deep despair, and I held his hands.

Robin is nervous and worried about her upcoming medical procedure in December. J. and I have tried to reassure her that the procedure itself is not complicated and the risk is small that something could go wrong.

Then on Saturday we started the trip to our annual family vacation spot with Robin and J.'s dad. I know some people are wondering why I would want to go, given that J. has resumed drinking, but I still enjoy his company, and this is a real vacation and healing experience for me. Please, God, help this be a good time for all of us.

December 2, 2002

We're back home. There were dreadful times and yet there were also some nice ones. J.'s dad fainted one time when he sat up too suddenly, J. rushed over to him and held him, and then he recovered. J. told me later he thought his dad was going to die in his arms. It was a terrible experience for J., and the next day I found him drinking. It was absolutely awful. I confronted him and told him I feel like I'm running out of words. He said he was trying and is meeting with his counselor to attempt to figure out the root cause of why he has this compulsion. I pray for guidance, and in the meantime, do my best to live my life.

J.'s procedure is coming up soon. I know he's worried. Please, God, be with us.

December 4, 2002

Robin had her medical procedure today; fortunately, it went well. I took time off work, and J. and I met at the day surgery waiting room. We are all relieved it's over. Because stairs are an issue now, Robin is going to stay at a local rest home for a few days, but one worry is checked off the list, thank goodness.

December 10, 2002

GREAT NEWS! J. had his procedure. There are no signs of cancer and no huge red flags of internal bleeding, so it appears the anemia is mostly a result of poor diet and perhaps some minor bleeding at times from gastritis. He will continue with taking the heavy-duty iron supplements, and the hope is the gastritis will subside in time. We are both so relieved – I hope this will give J. a new lease on life, and he will be motivated to seek recovery again. (*Warning sign – gastritis can be caused by long-term alcohol abuse.*)

December 18, 2002

J. said he had a very intense session with our couples counselor, but didn't share any details. That's fine with me – as long as he's going, it gives me hope for J.'s recovery.

December 27, 2002

We put up a Christmas tree a couple of weeks ago, both very happy to be celebrating the good news about J.'s procedure. Then we both started feeling sick. J. got better quickly, but I didn't. When it came time to go to J.'s dad for Christmas, I was too sick to travel. J. came over Christmas morning for a quick visit, then he and Robin left to see their relatives. I was alone all day, and felt very sorry for myself. I still do. Another Christmas spent apart, our marriage in limbo. How many more will there be like this? Please, God, help us move forward.

January 2, 2003

Oh boy, I don't know what to think or what to do. More anguish and despair. This was, without a doubt, my worst New Year's ever, and one of the worst nights of my life. The plan was that J. would come over after I got home from work, bring Chinese, and we would spend New Year's Eve together. I got home, and he wasn't waiting for me. I got very anxious, wondering what was happening. When he finally arrived, I was suspicious that he might have been drinking but wasn't sure at first. We ate a little, and then I was convinced he had been drinking. I told him that I wanted him to leave right then, and would call a cab. I drove his car to his place, and the cab followed me, then I took the cab back home. It was absolutely awful. I wanted to scream and cry. I called a relative and a friend, and tried to get to sleep. After a terrible night I got up the next day, feeling absolutely dreadful. I made more phone calls. I pulled myself together and, after praying about it, I decided to follow through with the plans for our New Year's Day dinner with J. and Robin. It was a very strained event. This awful disease is ruining my life, not just J.'s.

January 13, 2003

I was almost in a car wreck this week on my way into work, when a car came into my lane. Fortunately, I saw it coming and was able to swerve, but it was very scary. Of course, it made me think of drinking and driving. I had dinner with a friend from Al-Anon a couple of days later, and told her about my frustrations with J.'s relapses after treatment this summer. She sympathized, but had no advice. I notice I can't remember my dreams like I used to. This feels very weird – I've kept a dream journal for all of my adult life. So now there's no help or insights coming from that part of my brain in deciding what I should do next. J. and I have an appointment tomorrow with one of the ministers at our church. She has been open about her struggles with addiction, and understands what we're going through. It's a relief that we can meet with her. Please, God, help me see the next right step.

January 20, 2003

The difficult times continue. On Monday, the day we were supposed to meet with our minister, while I was exercising, I was injured by a careless person, and am back on crutches. What makes it worse

is that we had to cancel our appointment with our minister because I was in so much pain. But J. was right there for me. I was crying after it happened when I called him, and he went to our house right away to get my crutches and an ice bag and then came to the office to deliver them. He stayed for a while, sympathized me and did his best to comfort me. He said he would come over that evening with dinner, and he did. This is the man I married.

However, the very next night when he came over with dinner, it seemed like had had been drinking. I asked him, he said no, but I didn't believe him. I was, and am, incredibly sad. I don't know what to do. It snowed and was icy a couple of days later, and J. came over to shovel the walk and help me get to my car safely because I'm still on crutches. Again, the man I married showed up for me. IF HE CAN DO IT SOME OF THE TIME, WHY CAN'T HE DO IT ALL OF THE TIME?

When he brought dinner over that night, he was sober. He said I seemed sad, and I said yes, I was very sad, and very worried. He tried to help relieve the pain from my injury, cleaned up the kitchen, and left. I've been working on a letter to him to explain what I'm thinking and feeling. This feels like the next right step. Please, God, help me find the right words to reach him. This is my first draft:

"My dearest husband,

I have been turning things over and over in my mind the past couple of weeks. Most of the time I am filled with despair, fearing more and more the next step for me is to move out of the house, find a place that is closer to work, and make my home there. I am sick with dread, never knowing what kind of shape you will be in when I see you. I believe you lied to me this past Tuesday evening when you said you hadn't been drinking. I am feeling more and more there is nothing left for me in our marriage, no hope things can be different. New Year's Eve was one of the worst nights of my life. You drove to our house from the cottage, were very drunk, and I decided I didn't want to "celebrate" with you or be with you because of your behavior. So I chose to end our time together immediately and ordered a cab, have the cab driver drive you back to the cottage while I drove your car, then have the driver take me back home. This was a turning point for me in the progression of your disease, and Tuesday evening only confirms my worst fears. What if you had been pulled over on New Year's and charged with a DUI? What if your license had been revoked – what would do when it was time to visit your dad, hours away? What if you had been in an accident and hurt yourself, your daughter, or someone else?

When you are sober it is heaven to see you, hold you, spend time with you, but yet I fear it can be snatched away from me at any moment. Yesterday I was reading something that reminded me of all the places we were intending to travel together, and the fun we would have exploring them together. I started sobbing and sobbing because I am so afraid it will never happen. All I want is for us to be together, and yet I fear that we won't be.

When we met I was so happy to have found you – who seemed as excited about me as I was about you, who had the same interests, liked to do the same things, made me laugh...I could go on and on about all of the things we share. And yet I am so afraid it is disappearing. Can you imagine – we found our soul mates in each other – and yet we may not be able to grow old together.

I worry that our marriage has no future. We are already separated, so that consequence of your drinking and driving has taken place. I told you six and one-half years ago I would be here for you if you dedicated yourself to recovery. I know you have made an effort, but based on what I have seen in the past two months, recovery seems as far away as ever. I had been hoping you would leave no stone unturned, that if treatment didn't work you would try something else and just keep on going but this is not what I see.

I am praying every day for God's will for me, and if I must I am prepared to move out of the house and start dividing our things. I must preserve myself, my sanity, and my integrity.

Love, always love, your wife"

January 27, 2003

I re-wrote my letter, and gave it to him. We didn't talk about it.

"Dearest J.,

It was very sad for me to be watching the weather and not be experiencing it with you. I am writing this letter because I don't know how to reach you otherwise. Honey, I am so afraid that our marriage is coming to an end. I don't want that, but I fear that is what is happening. Tonight, I cried while I was lying in bed as I was looking at travel magazines. I was thinking about how much fun you and I could be having going to these places, just having a complete blast because we are together, and crying because right now it seems completely impossible.

I still marvel at how well-suited we are for each other. We like the same things, like to spend our time in the same way, laugh at the same things...I could go on and on. And yet I am afraid it will all be ending soon.

When you were here 10 days ago and I asked if you had been drinking and you said no, I didn't believe you and I still don't. How sad is that? I am steeling myself to move out of our house in a few months to be closer to where I work, and am starting to look for a place there. I haven't worked out all the details in my mind, but it seems that is my next step. I told you a long time ago that I would stand by you as long as you made working on recovery your top priority, and I don't see that happening now.

I know you have made efforts for recovery in the past, but in the last couple of months you have been drinking, and drinking and driving, and yet it seems like this is not a big deal to you. As I write these words, I know I have written them in the past. I refuse to keep saying the same things over and over again while the outcome stays the same – no action on your part.

The hope that I had this summer after you completed treatment has gone, and at this moment I hold out very little hope the future will be different. You continue to drink and drive and put your life, Robin's, and many other people's lives at risk. I refuse to participate in this. For decades in my life, I have suffered too much pain from car wrecks to stand by and watch you do that to yourself or another person.

I know you want things to be different, but I do not see you leaving no stone unturned in your search for recovery. To me, it still seems like something you do when it's convenient. I have become very tired in the last couple of months, tired of waiting for things to be different, and I feel the need to now take action for myself for the rest of my life.

I never imagined I would actually be writing these words, but here I am. I have prayed every day and night to know God's will for me, and I will continue to do that. I look around at our house and all the time and energy we have invested in it and I am crying that it appears we won't be growing old in it together. I so want things to be different, for our future to be different, but I look at what has happened just in the past month and I am starting to let go of the dreams I had for us.

Love, your wife"

February 3, 2003

I went out of town for a work trip, returned, and J. came with dinner. It was heaven to hold him and be with him, and yet I know the disease of addiction has taken over his life and I am powerless to fix this. I quickly became very sad, and he sensed what was happening. Please, God, help J.

February 10, 2003

J. says he realizes he needs to work harder on recovery. He says he is going to meetings on a regular basis, and seeing our couples counselor. We'll see what happens. Robin's health issues are continuing – a new, long-term, problem has developed that is not easily addressed. Life never stops.

March 5, 2003

Robin was admitted to the hospital after a visit to the doctor showed her health issue had gotten worse. I'm taking care of everything because J. is spending time with his dad. I've been doing a lot of thinking and praying about what comes next when J.'s lease expires in May. I'm working on another letter to him.

March 9, 2003; another letter I'm going to give J.

"My husband,

I have been praying and thinking a great deal about what happens in May when your lease at the cottage ends. I told you when I asked you to move out of the house last year that I would need to see months and months of recovery, and that I didn't want to have any misgivings that you were dedicated to this path. I do have misgivings because I have not seen an extended time of recovery. At the moment we are only 10 weeks from New Year's Eve, one of the worst nights of my life – and you went right on drinking after that. This came after drinking in November and during our family vacation. I know you are making an effort but I do not feel confident you are able to stay sober when something goes wrong in your life. Alcohol continues to be your main coping mechanism.

I need to have peace where I live and I need to take care of myself. I also love you and I know you want to be free of the effects of this cunning, baffling, and powerful disease. I have had more insights into what it must have been like for you as a father when Robin was growing up, and then all the frustrations and disappointments with helping to raise Luke. I continue to be amazed at the obstacles you have had in your life and yet how you have been able to hang on to your innate sweet, positive, funny, kind, generous, thoughtful, spiritual, and selfless nature.

I want us to resume our married life, but in my heart, I believe May is not the time. I am willing to keep living in our house and not move away so we can see each other more easily. I want us to work on our marriage and ourselves so we know and understand ourselves and one another better. I want us to keep seeing each other as we have been. I am still here, we are still married, and I want us to move forward.

All my love, always, your wife”

March 10, 2003

When I read this letter to J. yesterday, it did not go well. He was angry. However, I’m not sorry I wrote it. I need to stand up for myself and speak my truth. As they say in the program, progress not perfection. I am making progress.

March 16, 2003

I started a book that was written by someone struggling to understand a relative’s addiction. It was really great, even if it was very depressing, and gave me lots to think about. I’m reminded again that I am powerless over the choices J. is making, and must focus on my own life. Please, God, guide my steps.

Today J. finished a huge home improvement project that he has been working on for a long time – a big closet for me. I was very touched, and complimented him several times on how much storage space I now have. J.’s dad is coming for a visit next weekend.

March 24, 2003

It was a tough weekend. J. was angry at me a lot of the time, and I was sad. J.’s dad is moving very slowly. I don’t think he has a whole lot more time left on earth. J. was drinking tonight.

March 30, 2003

I had a dream last night I was going backwards. After church, J. and I talked about what’s next for us. I’m so sad.

April 28, 2003

J. said he talked to the people he’s renting from. They love having him as a tenant, and they are happy to switch to month-to-month renting for the time being. That takes the pressure off making a decision about our long-term future.

May 25, 2003

I've been spending a lot of time thinking and praying about our living situation. I told J. I've decided that he can move back into the house, and I will look for a place closer to where I work. He was sad but I believe this is my next right step. We're planning on going to a family wedding in August. Please, God, be with us.

June 2, 2003

We met with our couple's counselor today. During the session, I urged J. to have a conversation with his dad about their unfinished business. I continue to believe that unless this happens, his dad's death will result in J. becoming completely undone. The counselor had a suggestion for how J. could open the door to have this conversation. I know he won't do it, but I've done what I can at this point. I'm very sad. I told him I will start looking for a place to live. Nothing is changing with J. I love him, I want our marriage to work, and it's out of my hands. I am powerless, but I'm not helpless. I can act for myself, and do what I need to do to take care of myself. Later this week, J. is going to visit Luke, who is in prison. Why is life so unfair?

June 7, 2003

J. got back from visiting Luke. Of course, he's sad, and feels like a failure. No matter how hard I try to comfort him, and reassure him that he did everything he possibly could to help Luke, that it is not his fault that Luke makes dreadful choices, J. goes down into the deep pit of despair and isolation. He said Luke is mad that he's not coming to visit more often, but the prison is a long way away. It's not like this is Luke's first time in prison. I told J. he is doing all he can by being here for his dad and Robin, and he has no reason to feel guilty. But my words don't reach him.

June 30, 2003

J. and I went to church together, and then he invited me over for dinner in the evening. As usual, the food was great, but he was very sad. I wondered if he was drinking. We met with our couple's counselor today, and I asked J. about it during the session. He said yes, he had been drinking. I'm in despair. I'm looking at roommate ads – no leases this time, no end dates. I need something open-ended.

July 13, 2003

The week didn't start out well. J. invited me to his cottage for dinner, and I went over there after work. I could see he'd been drinking, and asked him. At first, he denied it, then he said yes. I told him I loved him, and then I turned around and left. I feel like he's just giving up any thought of recovery.

I answered a roommate ad, and met the people – a married couple who travel regularly, and need someone to look after their animals. I'm very excited – I like them a lot. I think this will work out great.

J.'s dad continues to decline. He's visiting now, and a couple of days ago had another episode where he fainted going for a walk near J.'s cottage. J. was distraught. I could hear the anguish in his voice and all I could do was sympathize. J. can't seem to accept that his father is close to the end of his

life. I fear what will happen after his dad dies. The kind, thoughtful, gentle, caring man I married is in agony and there's nothing I can do to change that. But then, J. told me today he knows he needs help, and has signed up for an intensive out-patient program that lasts for 8 weeks. He says he will start soon. I'm relieved, but we'll see what happens.

July 24, 2003

Over the past week, I've been packing up things at my house and moving them to my new home. The house has a very positive feel to it, and my housemates are lovely. J. has been helping me move the boxes and get organized. He surprised me with a bookcase he had made to fit on top of my desk. He said he knows how much I like to be organized, and this was his way of helping. I was very touched, and started to cry.

He told me the intensive out-patient program begins in early August. He said he realizes that he must make a total commitment and doesn't want to miss any of the sessions. He wants to cancel plans to attend the family wedding. I told him I thought he was being wise, and everyone will understand. He has moved back into our house.

I have told Mr. Opportunity that I think we should stop talking to each other. I realize it's not a good idea. I need to focus completely on my life as it is. I wonder how difficult it is going to be to end our conversations. It was a boost to my spirits to look forward to talking to him, but it's time to stop.

August 24, 2003

J. isn't talking about how the intensive outpatient program is going, so I'm not asking questions. I keep going to my meetings and praying for God's will. The family wedding was lovely. It was very weird to be there without J. At times I feel like I'm on the outside of a room, looking in at happy people living normal lives, and I wonder when I get to be happy. I'm struggling to keep going. I keep telling myself, one day at a time. I miss talking to Mr. O, but I know it's better not to.

September 14, 2003

OH NO! When J. was mowing the lawn at our house yesterday, he fell and badly injured his ankle. I missed several frantic phone calls and messages because I'd left the ringer off by mistake. The last one was that he called 911 that night because his ankle felt so awful, he went to the hospital, and was going to have surgery this morning. I rushed to get there as fast as possible. When I arrived, the surgery was over – he has a plate and screws in his leg to stabilize the ankle. It was a shock to see him in the hospital bed. I wonder what this will do to his state of mind. He hates being sick, and can't stand not doing what he wants to do. I am an eye witness to the fact that he is a terrible patient. The physical therapist came by in the afternoon to show him exercises to do, and how to use the crutches. I could tell he wasn't paying careful attention. When I got to our house after visiting hours were over, absolutely shot and ready to collapse, I was shocked to see that every single dish and pan that we have was dirty – things were stacked up everywhere. It must have been a couple of weeks since he did the dishes. It took me hours to wash everything. What a mess. It feels like he is just falling apart. I called a friend and sobbed and sobbed. I'm in despair.

September 21, 2003

All my worst fears about this recuperation have come true. I took the week off work so I could help J. When the surgeon made his rounds, I asked him what kind of recovery J. was going to have – he said it would be three months before J. could walk normally, assuming he did his exercises and followed instructions about not putting too much weight on the ankle before it had healed properly. Another instruction was to wear very stable shoes – hiking boots would be best – so his ankle would get lots of support. Fortunately, J. already has hiking boots. J. got more lessons in exercises and crutches, then was discharged to a rehab facility for a couple of days.

I took him to the last two of his intensive outpatient classes since he can't drive for a while. They had a "graduation" ceremony, and J. seemed happy to be there. He spent another day at the rehab facility and practiced going up and down stairs on crutches but wasn't doing it right. I tried to gently tell him he needed to change his approach, and he got mad at me. I brought him home Thursday. He was putting far too much weight on his ankle, according to what the surgeon and physical therapists had said. I tried to tell him he needs to really use his crutches properly and support more of his weight on them, and again he got mad at me.

Friday night was the end. I gave Robin a ride after work, and when I got home, there was J. on the stairs, no crutches in sight. I lost it and started screaming at him. I told him he could permanently damage his ankle for the rest of his life. He just looked at me, as if I were out of my mind. I was absolutely livid. He is ruining his life, and this affects me and Robin. It's like he believes nothing bad can happen to him.

I woke up very early because I couldn't sleep. I decided he was on his own – he was going to do what he was going to do, and there was no point in me hanging around. I told him I was leaving, and that he had choices to make. I arranged the house as best I could for him, packed up my things, and left. I went back to my place, made a lot of phone calls to my family and friends, and cried and cried. Please God, help J. and me.

September 22, 2003

I went to my meeting today and shared my latest agony. Then I heard something that made me laugh – the Steps in Al-Anon help prevent suicide, and the Traditions help prevent homicide. Also, we gain control by losing the illusion that we have control. I sure do not have control right now.

September 23, 2003

J. called me yesterday and said he was afraid he might have re-fractured his ankle, because it was hurting a lot. I told him I was sorry to hear it. I did not offer to come and take him to have it x-rayed. He can call a cab. Today he called me and said the ankle was still OK. I told him I was glad to hear it. I'm doing my best to detach with love. This is his journey, not mine. He is not interested in hearing about my experiences with recovery from surgery and insights on healing from injuries.

I talked to a friend in Al-Anon about the irrational behavior of completely ignoring important medical instructions, such as not putting too much weight on his ankle right now, and wearing hiking boots. She commented that a brain that has been swimming in alcohol for decades is not going to work properly, and that the capacity for rational thought has decreased. It was helpful to hear, but also depressing. Please, God, take care of J.

October 5, 2003

I've been standing back from being as involved in J.'s life. My phone calls are very brief – all I ask is, how are you doing, and that's it. He called today to say he was too tired for church, so we didn't meet. However, I did drive there for dinner and picked up Robin. J. was cooking and stood a long time, then said his ankle hurt. Well, what does he expect??? He also won't wear hiking boots when he leaves the house – he says they "look silly." I can't believe that he is more worried about how he looks than how his ankle is healing. I suspect he'd been drinking. I gave no advice, and only said I was sure it was frustrating to not be able to do the things he wants to do. When I drove away, I prayed for him. This is in God's hands, not mine.

October 6, 2003

We met with our couples counselor. It was a very sad time. J. refuses to go back on a medication the counselor says could be helpful. J. says he doesn't like the way it makes him feel when he took it before. Dear God, please help us.

October 7, 2003

The addictions specialist I have worked with before called me – he also directs the intensive outpatient program J. was recently involved in. The program is over now, but J. is back to drinking on a regular basis – he says it is the only way he can cope with the pain and limitations with his ankle, and watching his dad decline. The specialist and I talked about J.'s choices. He reminded me that with long-term use of alcohol, there can be brain damage, especially to the decision-making part of the brain. He said J. had really shown an interest in the intensive outpatient program up until the time it ended, right when he hurt his ankle, but now he's back to square one. He said he thinks what J. needs is longer-term residential treatment. I agreed. The specialist told me he is associated with a facility that is really great, with wonderful staff and a terrific program. He said he thinks it would be a good fit for J. But I know J. has to want to do it, plus right now it's out of our financial reach. The specialist said to keep him posted on how things are going. I'm very sad. It's hard to know what to pray for.

October 12, 2003

After spending most of the weekend apart, I came by today to our house to see J. for a visit and rub his ankle. He talks about how much it hurts, but yet won't use the crutches so he is still putting too much weight on it. He still refuses to wear hiking boots when he leaves the house. I said nothing.

October 13, 2003

I can't believe it – more things to cope with! J. called me to say he had tripped on the steps and fell forward – he really banged up his face and now it is all bandaged up. Of course, I wonder if this was from drinking. I didn't ask. Fortunately, he did not hurt his ankle. I just can't believe it. Please, God, help us.

October 16, 2003

I brought food over to J., courtesy of my co-workers who chipped in to get a gift card from a great restaurant – it's enough nourishing food for several meals. When I saw J. and the injuries to his face, I got very upset. I told him that I feel he is slipping away from me, from life, now that he is drinking again on a regular basis.

October 19, 2003

We went to visit J.'s dad this weekend. When I arrived at our house to start the trip, all I could think of was how good it felt to be with J. All the things that drew us together are still here, in spite of everything. We also went to a special event while we were at his dad's. That was a lot of fun, and J. was glad to be involved and see old friends. He got lots of sympathy for his ankle and the injuries to his face. His dad seems very tired, and is getting short of breath. The “two good years” the cardiologist talked about have ended. I'm thinking it won't be long now. I don't think J. wants to acknowledge this.

November 2, 2003

J. said he was ready to “rededicate himself to AA.” I heard the words, but won't get my hopes up at this point.

November 4, 2003

J. drove to get his dad and bring him back to our house. He called me twice at work to say his dad is very tired, and J. is extremely worried about him. He asked me to come there for dinner, and I said yes, but that I would drive back to my place afterwards. J. is distraught.

November 9, 2003

I fear the end is near for J.'s dad. We were all supposed to meet at church today, but J. called me to say his dad was too weak to get dressed. I brought dinner over later, and J. was in a lot of pain from his ankle. His dad hardly ate a thing. It was a very sad dinner but at least J. was not drinking.

November 23, 2003

It has been a tumultuous and incredibly difficult time. J.'s dad passed away peacefully a few days ago. His heart just gave out. J. took his dad back home so he could be admitted to the hospital near where he lives, then shortly after that called me and asked me to come right away, and I did. When his dad and I were alone in his hospital room for a bit, he said he knew J. was not at peace with his death, and I agreed. I held his dad's hand and thanked him for all he had done for us, and for me. There was no

opportunity for the conversation I hoped J. and his dad could have, about any regrets regarding J.'s growing up. Fortunately, we were both with his dad at the very end, and that was a comfort.

We worked on the funeral arrangements with members of his family and the ministers at his dad's church. I drove back to my place with one of J.'s relatives; I confided in her why we were separated. I picked up some clothes, then we went to get Robin, then we turned around and drove back to J.'s dad's. It was a very long day – I was so glad I had company. J. told me he had also called someone in his AA group for support. I was so relieved to hear that. We got through the visitation, and the service was lovely. But the next day disaster struck. J. and Robin and the car were gone when I woke up, and when they returned, I could tell J. had been drinking. He said they had been to visit his dad's grave. My blood ran cold. I asked him if he'd been drinking and he said no, but it was obvious that he had been. He went upstairs to sleep for hours. I prayed all day about what to do.

So now here we are. When I woke up the next day, a key had turned in a lock in my mind. I told J. I knew he had been drinking and driving the previous morning with Robin in the car, and that we were facing a crossroads, that I was thinking about my next steps and options. I think he heard me. I will call the addictions specialist and work out a plan. I am now ready for divorce if J. doesn't take serious action, such as long-term treatment. I feel I'm on firm ground. I've been waiting for God's direction, and I believe with all my heart that I have it now. I've called relatives and friends for support.