

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

Journal Summary Part 5 – Third Separation and Reunification

Within a couple of days of the latest episode of drinking and driving, I asked J. to move out of the house this time; it was now late spring, 2000. I also told him I would get a legal separation. He was stunned, although I had told him in a letter four months earlier that I would be doing this if he were to drink and drive again. He was so angry. He told me he would look for a cheaper place an hour away. I panicked, wondering how we would share responsibility for looking after his daughter, Robin. Fortunately, he changed his mind and found an affordable place very close to our house. We met with our couples counselor and agreed we would still see each other whenever we want, talk to each other every day, spend time together, and there would be no dating of other people. We signed the separation papers. I started giving Robin rides home from work, to minimize the chance that J. would drink and drive again with her in the car. J. swore we would be together next July 4th, that he was really working on his recovery now. My old, self-destructive coping mechanisms to deal with my sadness and loneliness – overeating and staying up too late – continued.

J. hurt his back, and I worried that the pain and limited mobility would affect his dedication to recovery. As time went on, J. stopped going to counseling, and quit talking about going to meetings and what he was learning. I did what I could to urge him to deal with the trauma and pain from his past, which I believed was the root cause of his drinking.

J. retired from his job, and I was hopeful that he would use the extra time to work on recovery. But just a few months later he started thinking about taking on a supposedly part-time consulting opportunity. I worried that he would throw himself into this completely and once again, recovery would take a back seat.

It was a terrible blow when my counselor died suddenly. We really connected, and she had wonderful insights. I continued to struggle with worry, sadness and fear. I told my Al-Anon group that I believed my epitaph would now read, “She worried a lot, and she was afraid a lot, and then she died.”

J. eagerly accepted the consulting job. Part-time work grew to be full-time work. We spent more time together over the weekends, however, and J. started sleeping over more often. It was heaven to be with him; the love was still there. Over time, he seemed to be more engaged with recovery, and I decided it would be OK for him to move back into the house 11 months after our separation started, in late spring, 2001.

My sponsor told me she and her husband would be moving several hours away, and we agreed to stay in touch as best we can. My side of the family planned a big reunion trip for the following summer, and everyone was excited.

Shortly after J. moved back, we found out that Luke, his troubled nephew, was back in jail because he had been caught stealing. This plunged J. into a deep depression, and he stopped going to meetings. The unreasonable episodes of anger at me started back up again. I became very worried about

recovery. The consulting work became J.'s highest priority. His dad's health took a serious turn for the worse, and he had surgery to receive a pacemaker, but it was obvious the end of his life was getting closer. J. became more depressed. Then right after that, Robin experienced a health crisis. J. spent more time with his dad, continued the consulting work, and efforts towards recovery stopped. As the months wore on, things got worse. I suspected J. was drinking one night, but didn't say anything.

I met with the addictions specialist I had consulted before, who confirmed what I already knew, that J. was not practicing recovery, and he said that I had options. However, I was not ready for another separation. J., his dad, Robin, and I went on our annual family vacation and although we had a great time, it was obvious J.'s dad's health was continuing to decline. I shared with J. that I was feeling sad, angry, and resentful that I was in the same emotional place as I was two years ago, that recovery seemed as far away now as it did back then. He promised he would make it a higher priority. However, when we got back from our vacation, nothing changed. I wrote a letter, outlining my concerns, that I shared when we met with our couples counselor. I did my best to stand up for myself. The counselor suggested that J. try more medications to deal with his life-long depression, in the hopes that this would help him be able to focus on recovery. I said OK.

We kept going. But over the holidays J.'s depression got worse when Luke's sentencing was determined, and J. looked at the official website where all his charges through the years were listed. It was a long list. J. was devastated. J. tried different medications for depression, but the side effects bothered him. Then, in the spring of 2002, it seemed he had found the right medication. One morning he said he had received a message from God that he needed to refocus his priorities, and work on recovery. The exciting trip was coming up. I was hopeful.

Just a month later, I discovered he had been drinking but since he wasn't driving at the time, I confronted him and asked him what he was going to do. After a few days, he said he was ready for a 28-day residential program, and would start after the family trip. I prayed about it, and felt like God was asking me to hang in there. He found a place for treatment that was more affordable than most, went to visit, decided he would go when a place opened up, and asked if I would come to the family weekend. I assured him I would. Then a couple of days later, I found that J. had been drinking and driving again.