

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

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

As I was driving home from work one evening in the summer of 2002, I had a premonition J. would be drinking and driving. I was right. His car was gone when I arrived, and I just sat in our house, waiting for him. When he got home, it was obvious he had been drinking. I was so angry and I felt betrayed. I immediately told him I would get another legal separation. He was very angry. I asked him to move out of the house in the next couple of days, and I also told him it would not be a good idea for him to join us on the big family trip. He was crushed. I continued to feel my way forward, deciding moment by moment, day by day, what made sense. We went to church together a couple of days later. J. started staying in a motel but still came by the house to move more of his things out of the house. One night when I got home, he was waiting for me and in tears said he knew drinking and driving was wrong. I reassured him that I was still here.

One of my family members became ill, and we had to change our plans for the big family trip and instead decided on a different place closer to a hospital. Shortly afterwards, I had a meltdown when I discovered a mug next to my side of the bed that I knew I hadn't put there. I sniffed it, and realized there was a lot of vodka in it. The next day I called J., and in my anger and frustration, I started screaming at him. He hung up on me. I started seeing a new counselor. A temptation came up to get involved with someone else, "Mr. Opportunity," but I knew it would be a huge mistake with tremendous consequences, and so was able to resist it. We did call each other, however, and it was a nice feeling to know that someone found me attractive. Eventually, I realized the emotional connection was not a good idea and I told him we needed to stop communicating completely.

I went on the big family trip without J. At one point during the trip, the despair just engulfed me. We were parked next to a scenic bluff and I truly wanted to jump off and die. After a while, the urge passed, but it scared me. I returned from the trip, and went to church with J. His 28-day program started the next day. He said he was now looking forward to it. He did go, we wrote to each other daily, and we talked briefly by pay phone every few days. My feelings of anger, betrayal, and resentment from the drinking and driving and many broken promises exploded in me. I wrote him a letter and poured out my feelings, comparing his addiction to having an affair throughout our marriage, and told him he had not honored our marriage vows to love, honor, and cherish. I said I felt numb about our marriage. I held nothing back. I brought it to the family program. When I arrived, he seemed truly dedicated to recovery. I read him the letter, and he listened. He said he was sorry for the pain he had caused. He also said he had no cravings to drink. It felt like we still had a marriage, and I was hopeful. J. finished the program, went back to his consulting work, spent time with his dad, and found a permanent place to live. Our couples counselor gave us a new "homework" assignment to use as a way to communicate better. We started doing it. I heard of a great book, *Staying Sober: A Guide for Relapse Prevention*, and we agreed we would both read it and talk about it.

J.'s dad took another turn for the worse, and as a result, so did J.'s depression. Once again, there was no room in his life for recovery. Then, he reinjured his back. Over time, I noticed J. wasn't eating much. He said he wasn't hungry and seemed extremely depressed. This was a big worry. I urged him to see a doctor, and after a while, he did. The tests showed he was severely anemic, but the cause wasn't immediately obvious. J. was afraid it was cancer, which ran in the family, and he finally confessed to me he worried he was dying. I was so concerned for his mental state that I invited him to move back into the house for a while, with the understanding that he would work on recovery. He said he would. For a week, we were back together and it felt good. Then I caught J. drinking and confronted him. He said he was so worried about having cancer that drinking was the only way he could cope. I told him our deal was off and he had to move back out of the house. I was in the depths of despair. I told him I was losing hope that things could be different. But a few days later I could feel the love between us remained, in spite of alcohol hijacking his brain. He had his procedure in December, and there were no signs of cancer or other huge issues, so the anemia could be a result of poor diet and/or gastritis. We were so relieved.

New Year's of 2003 was awful – J. was drinking and when I realized it, I ended our evening together. Three weeks later, I got injured and J. was there for me. But I suspected he was drinking on a regular basis again. I wrote him another letter, and said I was afraid our marriage was coming to an end. A couple of weeks later he assured me he was taking recovery more seriously, was going to meetings regularly and meeting with his counselor. I wrote him another letter and told him I did not want us to resume living together when his lease was up in May, because I didn't see enough time in dedicated recovery – that alcohol was still his main coping mechanism. I also assured him I was still here, and hoped we could move forward. He was very angry after I read it to him.

After more thought and prayer, I told J. I would move out of our house to a place closer to my job, and he could move back into the house. His dad continued to go downhill, and at a joint session with our couples counselor, I urged him to have a conversation with his dad about their unfinished business from the suffering he endured in his childhood from his mother; his dad had done nothing to protect him from her dreadful rages. The counselor had a great suggestion on how to open the conversation, but I was not hopeful J. would be able to do it. Instead, I could foresee the disaster unfolding once his dad died. I knew that J. would completely fall apart, and I also knew this was out of my hands, that there was absolutely nothing I could do.

J. went to see his nephew, Luke, in prison, and came home extremely depressed. I visited him at the cottage, and he was drinking. I left. I found a great place in July with a married couple who travelled at times and had animals that needed looking after. There was no lease, and no definite time this opportunity would end. It felt like an answer to my prayer. J. helped me move in, and made an additional very loving gesture. I knew he was trying to be supportive. He moved back into our house. J. became more and more distraught as his dad grew weaker. Finally, J. said he realized he needed more help and signed up for an intensive out-patient program that met twice a week for eight weeks. He wanted to make a total commitment and not miss any of the sessions. Then, towards the end of the program, he fell and broke his ankle while he was mowing our lawn. He had surgery, and received hardware to stabilize the bones. I took time off work to be with him, and then moved into the house to help him. But he didn't want to follow any of the medical advice he received so the ankle would heal properly: to use crutches

and not put too much weight on the ankle, and to wear hiking boots. I took him to his last two outpatient sessions. When he still refused to wear the boots and use crutches, even though he was weeping with pain, I left the house in anger, resentment, and frustration. I talked to a program friend who said that a brain that has been swimming in alcohol for years can lose the capacity for rational thought. It was so depressing.

J. went back to drinking on a regular basis, saying it was the only way he could cope with the pain from his ankle, and watching his dad decline. All the strides J. made in the intensive outpatient program vanished. Then he fell, and banged up his face. I went over to see him, and was very upset to see the damage. I told him I felt he was slipping away from me. I took him to see his dad and attend a special event. It was great to be together, but I could see the end was near for his dad. J. said he was ready to rededicate himself to AA. I wasn't hopeful this would happen.

A couple of weeks later, his dad died in the hospital in 2003 in his hometown. J. and I were with him. I drove back to get Robin. We arranged the memorial service, and it went as well as it could, given the circumstances. But the next day, when I woke up, J. and Robin and the car were gone. When they returned at 10 a.m., J. was already drunk. He said they had gone to visit his dad's grave. I asked him if he had been drinking, and he said no, but I knew for certain he had been. I could feel something inside me shift. I was now ready for an ultimatum.