

Response 1 - Addiction

So very interesting how first I completely procrastinated on this writing and then until just this morning right before I was about to start my meditation and then go out to sit with the community that I often practice with at 10 am today did I have this flash of insight that today was this time with all of you - then when I got on my computer to start the writing my computer was not cooperating- the cursor wouldn't move - it was freezing - hmmm all very interesting and so here I am typing in my phone and wondering what all these things are pointing to- So with a big sigh let me begin: My dad married my mom when he was 24 - both his parents were "drinkers". I never remember being aware that my parents knew that both my grandparents were full blown Alcoholics-

In my eyes my dad was my hero- he was good looking , tall, thin , Irish freckled skin , with a smile that warmed my heart. Early memories of him were happy. He went to work every day in Manhattan. He was a sales person in the textile industry. We had a beautiful new home in Farmingdale which at the time was still like moving out to farm country- I was born and spent the first 3 years of my life somewhere in Queens.

So my early memories of him were of love and positivity. In fact I distinctly remember how much more nurturing he felt to me, especially when I was sick, then my mom did. He eventually became my swim coach and the one whom my brother and sisters and I would love to play With in the pool. We would laugh and climb all over him and he would throw us high in the air. There was a time I remember up at Lake George, a place we would visit every summer, where I must have had some difficulty swimming, because I remember him scooping me up out of the water. The protector, the one who in my child mind would always be there.

In my teens things started to change drastically. His alcoholism had progressed. BUT my naive view was that my mom was such a bitch that of course he wanted to drink. He would be shaking in the mornings, drinking and hiding beer bottles in the basement, but still every day got on the LIRR and went to work where he would have his martini lunches with customers and drink in the train car bars that existed in those days.

In my early 20's just before I moved out of the house I asked him to leave. I am the oldest of 4, and there is an 8 year span between me and my youngest sister. This was the beginning of the end, literally and figuratively. He left, and unbeknownst to me moved in with the woman he was having an affair with - his secretary. She later became his 2nd wife and was a truly codependent accomplice as his disease escalated to unimaginable proportions.

For about 2 or 3 years I remember that my mom was in such a rage that she would have me drive to meet him for his child support money. Funny how in writing this today I can see this as only a very faded memory. I know I drove west, I remember always hating having to do it, but I can't even feel or see him and I together- where exactly did we meet?, did we talk?, how long was I with him?, it is almost a total black out in my mind. And then one day the money stopped completely and he vanished.

So there we were a raging woman with four kids still living in our fairytale childhood home. By now I was working as a respiratory therapist and so some of my salary was given to my mom to support the house we had so happily moved into when I was 3.

Not long after dad leaving, my younger brother (18 months younger than me) and I moved out. He joined the Navy and shortly after I moved into an apartment in Sayville. For both of us this was I guess a matter of self preservation. As I write this I see from a recovery point of view that I want to make amends to my sisters for leaving them at this critical time and yet had I not there would have been nothing left of me. Consequently my mom had to sell the house and move with my sisters to an apartment. I remember sitting on the stoop of my childhood home and crying, feeling the loss of the place, the only home I had ever known, feeling the loss of all I had hoped my life would hold. It had always been a fantasy, I just had never been able to see That.

The anger and ultimate disdain for my father began when I was about 16 and I did what I suppose most kids of that age might do - I became totally immersed in my school / friend life. I spent HS in an all girls catholic academy (because they had a swim team and I wanted to swim) and remember wishing that it had still been the boarding school that it had once been back in the 50's. I wanted to run away because the hate that I witnessed in my mom was starting to build in me.

For much of my twenties I was self absorbed and did not do much delving into these feelings. I was seriously dating a guy I had met in my junior year of HS when we were both lifeguards at the local pool. We had fun, smoked a lot of pot and while I worked in the hospital every day I spent most of every evening trying to forget about my family drama, the suffering I saw in my work, and the fact that dad was now out of the picture. I left this 10 year relationship when I was 27.

When I was 29 and dating Joe my father resurfaced. A phone call from his wife and him asking me for money to help. He was still drinking. By this time I was in therapy and had good friends who were long time AA folks. As I expected they told me to stay away and they would offer him help in taking him to a meeting. He eventually ended up in a one year treatment program up in Saranac Lake and then a halfway house after that.

I kept him very much at a distance for the next several years and then finally allowed myself to try to trust him again. He began to come to my home and we had periodic visits, until one day in a conversation on the phone I heard a change in his attitude. He was trying to tell me what to do- being the father he was not capable of being and now I was married and had my daughter. I remember asking him if he was attending AA meetings. He told me that basically he was better than the people in the rooms. Red flags went off and it was the beginning of the true end.

My daughter was about 8 months old when Joe and I took her to a brunch at his apartment where he was now living with a new woman. During that brunch he had a mimosa and as I sat there and witnessed this action, I knew that for me this was over, completely and forever. I said goodbye to him for that final time knowing I would never see him again. My heart closed and the key was thrown away. And so for the next 29 years I cut him out of my life. He made attempts through letters to make his amends but nothing ever landed for me. My heart had become frozen. I was too afraid to try again. I had nothing left.

Maintaining relationships in so many other areas of life, and now having had my son allowed me to justify why this decision was the best one for me. As the kids grew I did let them know that they had another grandfather and that if they ever wanted to meet him I would make that happen for them. Both declined and said that my mom's 2nd husband and their pop pop was the only grandpa they needed.

My dad died about 2 years ago in his 90's. Ironically my mom was the one who told us. She had been checking the obituaries for years and had found his. While she spent most of her life hating him, and expected us kids to do so as well, at the end she had softened and was concerned that he would die alone. It is a sad story - addiction is so very powerful- my dad lost it all, knowing his children as adults, ever meeting his 6 grandchildren, ever hearing the words of forgiveness that my mom came to. I realize that my father and my story informed much of how I operate in the world today.

The cage I built around my heart was an attempt to keep me from getting hurt by him or anyone Else. It walls me off and stunts my ability to have relationships where I can stand firmly in a grounding of trust in myself. The small child inside me still moves to protect, but

in doing that I see that I also cannot receive all the love that flows toward me. So what I work toward and turn over in this moment is the past. Each moment whether or not I can remember them, informed the story of Jane. Today I work toward seeing that story more clearly and then letting it go, knowing that for had I not lived it I would not be the person I am right now.