

### Response 3 - Addiction

My childhood from the outside looked perfect. Beautiful family, 4 healthy kids, parents that were not only good looking but by the standards of the day, the early 1960's, we were much like the TV shows of the time. I am the oldest and right from the start assumed the attributes of the hero in what I didn't know then was an alcoholic family. It wasn't until my high school years that I started to see more and started to feel more. But I would tell you now that none of it felt unmanageable. Every kid I knew had one or more parents that drank, and the hardest part was that it was all normalized and the education at the time was minimal, at least in my experience. In my early 20's with my dad's alcoholism and his reveal of an affair in full swing I ask him to leave our home. The chaos and anger between my mom and dad was full blown and yet there was never violence, just a deep sadness of what could have been. I moved out of my house at 21 and while I always brought home money to help my mom, since now not only was dad an alcoholic, he was also a deadbeat who disappeared and sent no child support, I was unable to offer her emotional support because I just wanted to have a 20 something life free of difficult emotions.

Denial was thick, the secrets of childhood with the many times I heard all the things I was NOT to say to avoid shame of the family, had built a strong foundation that I was not really even aware of. I always knew things. I was that child/person who paid attention, who could read other people's body language and that gave me the ability to help before even the person knew they wanted or needed help. I was a leader and often friends and colleagues looked to me for direction. But inside I felt like I was never enough. I felt like if they really knew me then the game would be up. This sense of who I saw as Karen led me to be often judgmental of myself as well as of those around me. This was my continued practice of control and a strengthening of my ego, which I now see as Edging God Out and denying the goodness of who I was created to be. I was careful not to speak these thoughts but nevertheless thoughts have very powerful energy which I began to learn over my lifetime. If I am really honest about it I often saw myself as better than others.

I joke today that "if others would just read the script that I wrote for them then there would be no problem". Committing those words to paper shows me just how afraid of life I was. I felt responsible for all things and many of them were what the culture would say are admirable. I was a rule follower, lived with good values, took care of my body/mind, became educated, was a good employee, found a hard working partner and had 2 beautiful children, truly believing in my heart of hearts, that the years of therapy I had gone to had broken the alcohol addiction cycle for my offspring. Back in my 30's and 40's I had the energy of youth to maintain this tight vigilant facade of control. Then at 52 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. WHAT?? Are you sure you have the right patient? I take care of this body. I have 2

children 14 and 10 who need me. How could this be? And just like that I did once again what felt familiar, I took control. I even handled cancer. I only allowed emotions to surface in the 15 minute pity party in the shower each morning and I kept trying to shield my family from the true fear that was part of every breath. Part of the feelings that surfaced were anger and resentment. I was angry at my body for betraying me, angry at God for this path of recovery I was to have to submit to. Looking at this experience now through the lense of SA non recovery I am able to see how much control I displayed. Control over all that I could, except the dam fact that cancer had become part of my story. Several years after my treatments ended I began to realize just how angry I was with my body. A body that had carried me across the finish line of the iron man triathlon. A body that had helped me bring 2 beautiful children into the world and looking at it now, a body that I exerted extreme control over with regard to weight and fitness but never much acceptance.

I had this false sense and narrow view of being so certain that I would never marry an alcoholic that I ended up missing the bigger picture of addiction. Sexaholism in my case was very nuanced, the story I told myself was that every other part of our marriage was so good, it was just the sex that was the achilles heel. I tried to convince myself that I didn't need a close emotional connection with my husband, I had that with others, mostly my woman mentors. Prayer group, book club and like minded people I had met along the way in meditation teacher trainings. All of this dishonesty with myself left me with a deep sadness and a decrease in the vitality I once had for life. I had only known a childhood of addiction so how was it that I thought I could possibly recognize what healthy relationships looked like. I did not even realize how little I truly trusted my own gut. There had been patterns that had been set long before I met my partner. Things like not being able to speak my truth, not even being sure what my truth was. Patterns of doing things I did not want to do but that I knew would please someone else. Always trying to keep the peace. I felt like most things asked of me I had to do based on an obligation and the need to achieve.

There were many signs of addiction throughout my marriage but they were buried in the denial that I had engaged in as a child. I was always playing the game of survivor. The theme of that reality show is- out play, out wit and out last. That was a strategy that I deployed in the nicest and sneakiest way in most areas of my life, and yet looking back I see the energy toll it took on me. Always trying to anticipate what others would do. I never realized how exhausting that learned behavior was. I often would check with many people for their opinion of what I should do before making any big decisions. I also see how most of my adult life I lived with resentment and anger that was always under the surface. I had this attitude that my way was the best way and if you didn't agree I would often internally set forth a plan to control the situation to the outcome I felt was best for all. That attitude built a lot of resentment in me, because after all there is really no-one who wants to be controlled by

someone else. My fear ran the show and that control was about creating scenarios that made me like I was achieving which ultimately made me feel wanted and safe. The unmanageability of that thinking while not apparent to me then, is crystal clear to me now. Living with sexaholism has turned on the light and I will never not know what I now know. I lost friends because of my husband, and since the day of his disclosure I have felt isolated and unable to connect with some of my closest friends. I guess this is shame? Or simply the fact that I know that this particular addiction is so traumatic that revealing this part of my world to some people I love would only increase the risk of more trauma to me. I would end up having to take care of, explain, and help them to feel better about my circumstances. All demanding way too much energy for a body, mind and spirit that feels like it has been kicked to the curb.

So while my cognitive mind knows the cause of my patterns and behaviors, my body still holds the score card and feels, often quicker than I am aware of, the insecurity of possibly being disapproved of. The pulling away of being criticized and the terror of someones silence and withholding of their feelings. What was set in motion during my childhood with an avoidant alcoholic father and an overwhelmed codependent mother was reinforced by the culture of the time and supported by the catholic school system that I was immersed in for 12 years. Just follow the rules, deny yourself, don't be too curious, too big, too needy, too messy, too real. Sexaholism taught me to avoid focusing on my own needs, my needs to be heard, my need to be deeply loved for who I am, to be respected just because I exist. It continued the addiction model I developed in childhood and taught me to look outside myself, to get my needs met by other people.

So what have I come to learn in the 6 months I have been in Sanon? I have come to know that I have no control over most of life. I can't predict outcomes, I can't ask others to bend to my will. That for me to be happy I have to accept that some moments will feel shitty and also know that nothing lasts forever, even the grief that the uncertainty of life constantly gets to offer up to me. The nature of life is not personal and only when I believe that these events are about "I, me or mine" do I suffer. In admitting this powerlessness I must surrender my will, my fear of abandonment, my need to be liked. If I can let go and truly let life offer me abundance I will change. I will see things with fresh eyes. I will feel ALL my emotions and allow all parts of me to be present. I will stop living in denial. I will be quick to see my judgmental thoughts and be able to discern and say what I truly think and feel with kindness and compassion but most of all with honesty. I will be able to use my speech wisely, to breathe and allow my heart to become undefended knowing that today with the help and belonging to a fellowship and a willingness to surrender to a power greater than myself, that I can and will choose to practice recovery for myself and for the greater good of my family

and all those I come in contact with in my life. I don't know how my story ends, but I do know without a doubt that it will end with love.