

My grandfathers were both alcoholics. My father was an alcoholic who died of an overdose when he was 32. My son is an alcoholic. I have lost years of my life worrying about him; he's been incarcerated, homeless, dropped out of high school, has lost jobs and friends, and now, at 34, is having alcohol-related health problems. But addiction also affects those in the family who are not addicted. The disease has torn my family apart.

I have worked very hard to rebuild relationships, although I am still estranged from or have tense relations with family members who do not wish to acknowledge or talk about anything being wrong in the family. The good news is that there are a lot of things you can do to cope. Alanon is a free program for families and friends of alcoholics/addicts that I have found helpful.

I practice meditation, so I can appreciate the present instead of mulling over the past or worrying about the future. I've been fortunate to have good health insurance that paid for CBT and EMDR, two newer types of psychotherapy. Self care is super important--getting enough sleep, exercise, a healthy diet, strong social connections, and for me, getting out into the natural world as often as possible. Despite my traumatic childhood and the ongoing challenges of living with alcoholics, I have managed to gain an advanced education, do interesting work, travel all over the world, and have a large circle of friends who are my extended family. Life is Good.

My mother has been an alcoholic ever since I can remember. Growing up, this was astronomical. She and my father divorced when I was four years old, and everything after that was seemingly a slew of unreliable and abandoning actions.

I grew up with my single father, who certainly painted her out to be what he saw her as: a loser, a deadbeat, a *drunk*. As an eleven-year-old child patiently waiting for your mother to show up to one of your dance recitals, you do not even remotely understand what she is going through. As a result of this, I painted her the exact same way my father did. For years I denied her of a relationship and felt nothing but animosity whenever I thought of her. I was bitter and hateful and had to seek a counselor for my depression. Though I was unable to see it at the time, she struggled with her own depression in ways that I could not comprehend. She endured abusive relationships, turned to alcohol as she had always done and even developed an addiction to meth.

As a child, I despised her for this.

When I grew older, however, something changed. She remarried a man that was great and seemed to find a piece of calamity in her life. Did she get sober? No, but as I grew older I began to see my mother differently. Rather than viewing her as only an alcoholic, I viewed her as a human being.

Since I've graduated high school, my mother has made a tremendous effort and I could never thank her enough for it. I withdrew myself from a spot of bitterness and hatred and actually started to enjoy the time I spent with her. We actually have a lot in common: a passion for reading, sarcastic sense of humor, similar tastes in music.

Despite the fact that my mother's alcoholism never changed, my attitude towards it did.

Children's perceptions are, of course, different, and I will never refer to myself as anything but the adult child of an alcoholic. But I am the adult child of an alcoholic who can sit down with my alcoholic mother and have a beautiful, heartfelt conversation. I understand the bitterness that some people go through, but life is too short for that. Our relationship is unique, of course, but is also beautiful in so many ways.

My father was a big drinker his whole life. He would come home drunk quite often. When we heard his car door we would all run and hide from him. We would be sitting there watching TV and then....bang we heard the door and we would all jump up and run upstairs. My poor Mother had to stay and deal with him. She would have to get him something to eat. We never knew what time he was coming home. We had one car and when my mother would use the car he would get angry. We would come home to a mess. He would tip over the dining room table, throw things around, call everyone looking for her. Then start a big fight with her when she got home. Most of the time she didn't even ask to use the car because he was such a jerk about it.

At my sister Connie's wedding my Dad got so drunk that 3 or 4 guys had to carry him out of the church basement. HOW embarrassing. He would never let my Mother drive. Sometimes he would be so drunk he couldn't stand up but he wouldn't let anyone else drive. I remember coming home from my cousin's wedding one night. My Dad was way too drunk to be driving. My sister Mary and I put our coats over our heads and sat on the back floor of the car and prayed we would get home ok.

He spent a lot of money on drinking. He would run a tab at local bars and then when he got paid he would pay them off so he could keep drinking throughout the week. We went without groceries, school clothes; our utilities would get shut off. He drove an old car even though he made good money. He always rented a house because he had terrible credit so he couldn't buy one.

My mother was never married. She has four children, two girls and two boys, with three different fathers. After she kicked out my youngest brother's father, she didn't date for a while; which was nice because she always dates the wrong guys, the ones that treat her like dirt. By the time she did start dating again I was almost seventeen and my older sister had just moved out. Just after my eighteenth birthday we moved in with her boyfriend of four months. This was a big step for my family as we had been living in the same apartment for fifteen years. Her boyfriend would drink heavily everyday and they fought often. He was always very aggressive and angry when he drank and a terrible influence on my younger brothers.

I moved to Minnesota after that first summer but visited often. A week before my sisters wedding, I was scrambling to finishing making the programs. My mother had spent the entire day cooking dinner for her boyfriend. He had spent the day getting drunk off the vodka he hid in the garage. For some reason he really wanted me to eat with them. I had eaten a late lunch and was rather determined to finish the programs. He began to get frustrated with me; I mean, how dare I refuse to eat dinner like we were a loving, functional family. My mom argued with him, saying that I was an adult and I wasn't hungry. When I didn't respond to him screaming at me from the other room he quickly became enraged. My mother kept telling him just to enjoy the meal. I refused to sit down and eat with an angry drunk who was yelling at me.

His rage drove him to slam his fist onto his plate full of food, causing it to shatter and sending food across the living room. My mom grabbed an empty beer can and threw it at him as he headed for the back door. He chased her into the living room, grabbed her by her face and pushed her up against the wall. Then he released her and went out to the garage. She fell to the floor, crying. I ran out to check on her, not knowing what had happened. I attempted to comfort her but she pushed passed me. My brother had just walked in the back door and she locked it behind him. My brother and I cleaned up the shattered ceramic plate while our mother scrambled to clean up the wedding programs, apparently her boyfriend was known for destroying absolutely everything.

I was standing in the kitchen when I saw him walking up the back porch, I could hear my brother behind me. When her boyfriend realized the door was locked he grabbed the grill brush and punched it through the back window. He then reached his arm in and attempted to unlock the door, his arm was too short. My brother yelled at him, only provoking him even more. My mother ran into the kitchen and screamed in terror, then ran back to the other room. I yelled at my brother to leave, repeatedly. There was glass and blood everywhere. The next thing I know we are all running to my mother's van, her boyfriend fumbling to get the back gate open.

While backing out of the driveway, my brother rolled down his window and yells at my mother's boyfriend. That only angers him even more. He called us freaks and rubbed his bloody arm all over the windshield and the passenger's side of the van. Then we were speeding down the street and pulling into the nearest gas station. I was mortified. My arms shook and my tears were hard to stop. My mother called the cops and after we spoke with them they picked up her boyfriend in an ambulance. We returned to a home full of broken glass and blood. Apparently, he had tried to drive himself to the hospital but drove into the mailbox instead. I spent the following five hours cleaning up glass and blood. My mother's boyfriend moved back into the house just four days later.

I had a very unique life as a child. My parents divorced and I spent most of my younger years with my father. We lived in North Carolina. He was a commercial fisherman/drywall man so I spent a lot of time on construction sites and out on the boat as a very young child. However as I began to mature, I wanted to go live with my mom. My father agreed to let me go since that was my wish. My mother was remarried and they lived in Georgia, so I moved to be with them. For the first year things were wonderful. I loved being there with my mom and her new husband. No more jobsites or boats; I could actually have a normal life as a child.

Then my stepdad started drinking in the evenings after work. As a child I really didn't notice or pay much mind to it, and I didn't realize that as his behavior started to change. Or that is was due to the alcohol abuse during that time period. He began to get mean; every little thing set him off. At first he just yelled and cursed at us a lot. Insults became something of a regular thing. Then it got physical; he started pushing my sister and I around. He was more physically abusive with my sister than he was with me, as she was a bit younger. I can remember watching him snatch her off the couch once and sling her across the room, her head slamming into the coffee table in the middle of the room.

She needed stitches but my mom was too afraid to take her to the hospital because of what they might do. This went on for sometime. It was like a rollercoaster at our house; you never knew what would send him ranting on. Then he started to open up to me it seemed and wanted to spend time with me. I welcomed the change, it was like all of a sudden I was special to him again. We spent time sorting baseball cards and other collectible things, something he always liked doing. He had a special room for all of his stuff and my sister and I were never allowed in there, but now he was letting me go in there with him.

My mom would sit out in the living room and watch TV until she fell asleep and he would let me stay up late with him. Then things started happening, as a child they scared me but he wasn't screaming at me and pushing me around since I spent time with him. He started touching me in ways that scared me and confused me at my age. The combination of the fear of making him mad and the fact that he was being nice again

made me just deal with it. I was 12 years old when this was going on. No one ever educated me on good touches and bad touches and that what was happening to me wasn't my fault.

I didn't go to my mom or my dad because I was afraid of hurting my mom. I look back and it amazes me how such a wonderful man could be like that under the influence of alcohol. I know there are other things that contribute to the things that he did. I remember having a conversation with him, he actually apologized for the thing he did to me, and said that he was ashamed of them and that he would have never done them if he had not been drinking at the time when they occurred. Whether or he would have done them sober, I do not know but I know he did not change until the drinking started.

My ex-husband is also an alcoholic. We met when we were young and of course most young college-aged people like to drink and this was not out of the ordinary for him. Four months after we met he was shot in the face and head with a shotgun. This sent him over the edge. He began drinking everyday. I always made excuses for him because of the accident. And it is why I put up with him for so long. He became abusive. Even when I was pregnant he would hit me, push me, and force me to have sex with him, if I did not want to then he would hit my face. When I was nine months pregnant he put a pillow over my head and would not let me breath. But again I made an excuse for him and never told anyone about it.

He would leave for days at a time and I would not know where he was. He would come back drunk and spit in my face and slap it. Again, making excuses, I would not tell anyone and it just went on for a couple of years. Finally, he got DUI's and I got a restraining order on him. He had to go to rehab and AA classes because of his DUI's, he never would have done it just for me. After his legal troubles the physical abuse stopped. He drank less often but still drank some. Even to this day he will get drunk and threaten to kill himself or something stupid. Alcoholism runs in his family, and he shows no real signs of ever completely stopping. All I can do is hope that he does not do anything stupid in front of our children and hope our children learn form him not to be an alcoholic.

Terry Harris could light up a room! He was intelligent, kind and really funny. People were naturally drawn to him. He was outrageous, he was talented, he lived on the edge, and was always ready to party. He was my brother and I loved him very much. I've tried to figure out what went so terribly wrong with his life. Our childhood was horrible. It was full of violence, hatred and alcohol always alcohol. All my siblings reacted differently to situation, Terry started drinking and doing drugs by the time he was 13. It was his escape. I believe that he was also Bi-polar. Our parents would have never noticed that he was ill or would they care.

Our parents were more concerned about drinking, fighting and making us miserable. I have 4 siblings. The oldest Dan is an alcoholic. Terry the second oldest was an alcoholic and a drug addict. Kenneth the next in line abuses prescription medication, he is a drug addict, Kelly is currently sober but struggles with addiction as well. I am the youngest and the only girl. I am the only one that has not had alcohol and drug problems. I don't know why, but I am thankful I have never struggled with the DEMON.

Terry was killed on May 13th, 1980, we buried him on May 17th and I graduated on the 18th. He was drunk and driving a stolen motorcycle in a rainstorm. Terry hit a light pole at a high rate of speed. He broke almost every bone in his body, he spine was severed, he had \$1.37 in his pocket. I loved him. I loved him very much. And I miss him very much. He was lost, he was so very lost.

Well the night it happened, I was the last person in my family to talk to my sister Amanda, at like 11pm and we were talking about the girl I liked, Alex, and I promised my sister that I would quit being such a wimp and ask her if she would like to start dating me.

So she left to go hang out with her friends (which I still regret and blame myself for not telling her to just stay home) and I went to bed. I remember waking up at 7am to get ready for school and it just felt like a normal day except I was nervous about Alex. Right when we were about to leave, we received a call but I didn't get to it in time. I checked where the call was from and it said the Omaha Sheriffs Office.

So I told my dad and he got mad that I didn't answer it. Then he called back and I didn't hear the conversation but I could tell something was wrong by the look on his face and then he said, "Is she ok?" and at that moment I started to freak out. Then he got off the phone and said in a very unsettled tone that Amanda had been in a car accident at about 3am and is currently at Creighton Medical Center in the ICU.

Once I heard that my throat instantly went into my chest and I felt like a almost couldn't breathe. I was so confused and when we got in the car my dad apologized for being mad at me. So My dad, my brother and my mom and I all drove up to the hospital. When we got there and were put in a waiting room. Eventually my older brother and his girlfriend showed up and we told them what was going on.

Finally after an hour or two of not knowing if she was ok, the surgeon came down and told us that she had been hit by a drunk driver. Her friends that were in the car were drunk so my sister was the D&D. The passengers were one was her best friend and her best friend's boyfriend. They too were in surgery in the ICU.

The doctor said that she was unresponsive and had broken both legs, had a puncture wound in her right thigh, a few broken fingers in her left hand, and she had indication of a trauma to her head. After hearing all that I immediately thought how this kind of shit never happens to anyone in our family, and that when she gets out she will

have to be in a wheelchair and undergo physical therapy. So I was prepared for things to be hard for her for a while.

Once the doctor was done we were moved to a new waiting room where my grandma (whose husband died two days earlier) was waiting and bawling all alone, she asked us what we knew and we all just talked for an hour or so. Then more of my extended family showed up, as well as my sister's friends' parents and we all talked about what had happened and what they told us and how ridiculous it was that they weren't telling us everything.

She was laying there with a breathing machine and all sorts of other ones attached to her. After that they finally told us that her brain had been inactive since they brought her to the hospital and that if she didn't become responsive soon she would be pronounced dead and if she did, there was no guarantee she wouldn't be mentally handicapped. I remember my mom and my aunt and grandma begging her to wake up, all hoping by some miracle she would hear their voices and be ok. I sat next to her for a while holding her hand in an attempt to do the same. But no matter what we did.. nothing.

My parents wanted to call all of our other relatives and let them know what happened, so my uncle said he would take my younger brother and I back to our house to get our address book and some blankets and pillows so we could stay the night at the hospital. We took the quietest and longest car ride of my life back to my house and got things ready, after an hour we went back.

When we got there my grandma saw us and burst into tears and said "You need to go to Amanda's room and talk to your parents." She was hysterical and I remember my brother and I walking down a hallway that seemed to never end. Finally we took a left into another hallway that lead to her room. I saw hundreds of people from our school; her friends and my friends and they were all crying and looking at us....

We went into her room and my mom was crying like I've never seen before. They told me that at 4:30pm she was officially reported as dead.... at that moment everything seemed to stop and get quiet. I couldn't hear anyone crying or anything, I just remember looking at her laying there and trying to grasp the fact that I will never talk to her again or see her or anything. I looked at my brother and I gave him a hug and told him I love him so much. My sister was an organ donor and the doctor said that her heart, kidneys, and liver each would go to a different person and she would save their lives, which made me feel a little better but I still just wanted my sister, my best friend back. All her friends came up to us and hugged us and told us they were there for us and eventually went into her room to say goodbye... but I couldn't do it, it didn't feel right. I just sat outside the room by the door with my brother until almost everyone left.

Then I see Alex... she walked in from the hallway and looked over at my sister's room, tears were in her eyes. At that moment I remembered my promise and started crying.... so I went up to her and gave her a big hug for a long while and she stayed with me until the hospital closed. Then we both went into her room and I said my final goodbyes to my sister. Which is something I can't even explain the feeling.... It's something no one should have to experience.

A few days later I had my grandpa's funeral and then the next day it was Amanda's, and everyone that was ever her friend or even knew her was there, even her kindergarten teacher. My brothers and I made a slide show of all her old pictures and ours and put her favorite songs in it. It was nice but hard and especially hearing my dad say that he wished he could have walked her down the aisle.... that hurt me the most because I never even thought about that.

After that I have never felt the same, I'm not nearly as outgoing as I used to be, I don't care about things as much, I have a very nullified emotional reaction to anything except anything that has to do with my sister. It's been 2 years since that day and it feels like it's only been a few days, it hasn't gotten any easier and every now and then I remember a story involving her and I stop for a moment and think about how she has

missed out on so much of our lives. I'll never be able to tell her about college or anything like that and sometimes I just breakdown and cry for an hour or so thinking about her. This experience has changed a lot of people's lives. I don't feel the same about anything, but I keep going forward because it's all that I can do but it's hard when you are stuck in the past. I appreciate you asking me to do this for Amanda.