

Family Afterward

Since joining OA and finding recovery, I can see the damage I have done when I see a family living in my former life. When I am on the outside looking in, I can see the hurt and harm family members have experienced—the fear and rejection. When I was living in my addiction, my family had to learn to tiptoe around me because they didn't want the consequences of upsetting me. The look in their eyes would say, "How is she today?" "When will she get mad or sad?" "Will she blame me for what is going on in her life?"

My family felt like they had to take emotional care of me, or they would think, "I have to get out of here. I can't take anymore." When I was on a mission, they knew peace would not exist until I was done.

In recovery we live in "The Family Afterward" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., Chapter Nine, pp. 122–135). We remember how it was living with us when we were not abstinent versus abstinent, and self-centered versus God-centered. We remember what it was like to live with us when we sought to make others do our will versus seeking to know and do God's will.

A friend in recovery shared that her father was waiting for her to exhibit one of the negative behaviors she used to do as a teenager. She is now 30. The people around us still live in our old lives. Just think what we must have been like when people still expect us to blast them 15 years later!

What is it like living with me today? Would I want to be around me 24/7? Yes, most of the time. When I find myself saying things in my old way, I am aware of it. I often catch myself before I say those things. For example, I wanted to give my opinion the other day. I heard God say, "Don't do it," and I kept my mouth shut. I've discovered God's way always works for the best. My fight against doing his will has lessened. I live a God-centered instead of self-centered life. I am now in harmony with God, others and myself. That means I am no longer out there by myself, looking out for only myself and not caring about others. I am no longer demanding that people do it my way.

When we recover, our actions reflect the Big Book. Principles guide our lives. We have the map to harmony, and we reflect on peace and love. We are no longer tornadoes destroying people in our paths. How many husbands ask with hope, "Are you going to a meeting?" It must be tough living with us if they hope we attend a meeting just so we get out of the house and get centered again. When self is running wild, husbands want us to get help. But they take their lives into their own hands by suggesting we "go to a meeting." Thank God they see the difference a meeting makes. For today, I will seek to know and do God's will for my life.

-- Reprinted from *Lifeline* magazine

Ripple Effect

Admitting my powerlessness over food and putting the food on the scale have been like tossing a pebble in a pond, causing a ripple effect on my life and the lives of those around me.

My home is now a different place. Because of my food plan, the whole family is eating healthier. The first time I steamed string beans for myself, I was shocked that everyone else devoured them! It is still a pleasant surprise when they consider things like artichokes and hearts of palm, instead of processed food, as treats.

Much less yelling and blaming goes on. We look to move forward and find a solution, not wallow in negativity and righteous indignation. Having been through Steps Eight and Nine several times, I've learned that making amends is different than saying, "I'm sorry."

If I am truly sorry, I will have to act in a different way. Now I pause before I say or do things, so I do not have to be sorry for my actions or words.

My husband has often commented that when I deal with situations in a calm and straightforward manner instead of with anger and sarcasm that turns discussions into fights, it impresses him. My children feel loved and respected when I am willing to admit I was wrong. They have also become more confident in expressing their feelings, knowing I love all of them, "good and bad" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 76). For me the words of the Big Book, "Our behavior will convince them more than our words" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 83), have become a mantra for setting the tone of the household and treating others with respect.

Without sugar and wheat in my diet, I am much less moody and have more energy. My family enjoys quiet moments together instead of placating ourselves with a whirlwind of activity and material goods. The OA service model has taught me to be grateful for the ability to lead a life of "sane and happy usefulness" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. 130). Things like housework and laundry can be done with an open heart, and my family receives them the same way.

When I first came to program, my family was concerned about the time I spent dealing with my food, going to meetings and making phone calls. Now we see that taking time to ensure a strong program and recovery allows me more time to be fully present for them. And it doesn't hurt that everyone knows the Serenity Prayer by heart!

-- Reprinted from *Lifeline* magazine