

# Stories from the Forum magazine: December 2009

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## A son moves past the anger of his childhood

When I was a boy, before my father drank himself out of his business and his marriage, he was the one you wanted to remove a splinter. "Get Dad to take it out," my brother advised me when I was crying over the sliver in my finger. "It won't even hurt." Amazingly, he was right. My father told me to close my eyes and look away, made some corny jokes in a silly voice, and then it was over. "Done," he told me.

Later on, in my twenties, a friend who understood my problem told me, "This stuff about your father, this stuff you've buried—you're going to have to deal with it someday." I had no idea what she meant. I didn't think I had buried anything. I had lived through my childhood and moved on. What was I supposed to deal with?

My wife urged me to find an Al-Anon meeting. She knew my background. She saw my unhappiness. But I think the 45 minute tantrum I threw when she criticized my driving may have influenced her advice.

When I studied *From Survival to Recovery* (B-21), I identified with the general characteristics the writers put forth: a tendency to either keep people at bay or drop all boundaries; to expect to do things right the first time or not do them at all; to insulate oneself from risk but ignore self-destructive behavior. But what especially struck me was each person's decision to change.

The idea that the anger and melancholy that had been a part of my life for as long as I could remember might not be my true self struck me. What if I were to give it a shot? What would I do if I found out that it hadn't been cloudy all my life, but that some of those windows just needed to be washed?

I was grateful I had a fledgling program when, for the first time in my adult life, I received a birthday letter from my father. He had moved into a house with a garden, and grew some cucumbers. He was starting to eat them now, and they tasted good. He signed the letter, "Happy Birthday. Love, Dad."

I started to cry, choked back the tears, and convulsed harder. The stories I'd been hearing of him for years from my sisters were that he would call them for a ride, and then borrow money from them and from a nine-year old grandson. He lived on beer and pain relievers. He entered a recovery program one weekend and called them up the next for help finding his car. I did not trust this man to be in my life. Thanks to my program, I was able to respond in a caring fashion.

Later his landlord found him passed out, dead drunk, and called the hospital, where he died. It will probably always hurt to think about him drinking himself to death in an empty home. But even if I'm sad that he never found his way to recovery, I'm grateful to my Higher Power for having allowed me to receive his last gesture of love, and respond in a loving way.

While I would have rather learned this lesson another way, the readings, prayers, and meetings that helped me get through that painful period illustrated to me that I'd found a second family in Al-Anon, and why I wanted to be there to pass the program on to the next person who needs it.

By Tom C., South Carolina  
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