

## Improved self-image turned my life around

At 19, my self-concept was incredibly skewed. I thought I had to be someone who could handle anything, who had seen everything, and whose inherent coolness oozed from every pore.

I obsessed about my friends, my abusive alcoholic boyfriend, and how to maintain my façade of coolness in any and every possible situation. I needed to control others' perceptions of me in order to feel okay. But my mentally-rehearsed laughter and smiles rang hollow. I continued to feel like an imposter, unable to escape from deceiving the world.

While it would be easy to blame my distorted perceptions on my young age, the truth is that I continued to react to the effects of growing up in an alcoholic home.

I pursued my college career like everything else, doing well at first and obsessing about other people, all the while trying to push myself to fit a mold I would never fit. My grades suffered. I couldn't pass my basic requirements, and I began to think I was incapable of pursuing a higher education. I dropped out of school after failing several classes.

I found myself working five part-time jobs, only three of which paid me. I was broke, depressed, and anxious. I didn't know how to drop the "mask." I couldn't slow down for fear that I would never come out of the negative emotions I had been running from. By the time I was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown, I was too afraid to leave the house.

Emotionally crippled and fearful, I dragged myself to the rooms of Al-Anon and began to work the program. Shortly thereafter, the woman who became my Sponsor moved to the area. I knew she was the one for me because she annoyed me with her proactive attitude and acceptance.

With a little serenity and sanity under my belt, I began attending college again. This time I took fewer classes and focused on subjects I enjoyed. I began to see that I could do well. I could focus on myself by working my program, doing the next right thing, and taking small steps toward improving my own life. My GPA shot up and my self-esteem increased as I learned to trust myself to finish my studies "One Day at a Time."

As my Higher Power guided me, I began to realize that my earlier failures were not due to stupidity or laziness. They were simply a manifestation of growing up in an alcoholic environment.

Last week I graduated with honors, with my bachelor's degree in a subject I truly love. Because I enjoy it so much, I've decided to attend graduate school and pursue a career in this field. While this field is generally stereotyped as "un-cool," I love it—and that's all that matters.

By Nancy W., Tennessee  
*The Forum*, June 2008

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