



IDAA Recovery Story

Navigating Addiction, Codependence, and Redemption Through Twelve-Step Recovery

By: Nathan P.

"The Family Disease" is worthy of scrutiny. Oversimplified, it is addiction and codependence (co-addiction). They are not opposed to each other but are parallel, synergistic, shaped the same, same pattern of constantly increasing intensity and frequency of destructive misbehavior and life-threatening illness. Addiction and codependence tend to morph back and forth with each other. They are contagious.

Yes, I drank a lot (now a retired grand champion), and my profound codependency (a common part of being a clinician) has SAVED MY LIFE (for our maladaptations seemed to serve a good purpose, began at least for a short while as coping mechanisms). My arrogant self, the perfectionistic martyr, tried to answer the phone on the first ring around the clock for it might be a patient or a nurse calling. And I tried not to slur. What a burden. But I couldn't drink myself into a blackout if I was going to answer the phone, and I couldn't drive too drunk and get away with it. So, yeah, I walked my self-imposed tight-rope, but I wasn't in control, I was just half-heartedly attempting to comply with my own irrational minimal standards.

My father was a raging alcoholic doctor and I swore I would never be that--but of course I was. He was a solo-practice radiologist (who ever heard of such?). He could not get along with other persons (symptom: isolation). Against my will I was that way too. Two of my three brothers were alcoholic addicts and chain smokers (the third a psychiatrist, of all things). I smoked until I came into recovery, my father died of his second lung cancer, and both those younger brothers have suffered lung cancer. My mother never admitted my father's addiction until after he died. When I pointed out she had already paid for her seat in an Alanon meeting she said she knew that but she was too old to start in recovery. I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting abruptly when my pain became unsurvivable.

I felt ashamed that I was the only addicted doctor in the world, an addictionologist drinking a quart a night. That conviction changed radically when I walked into a banquet-room at an IDAA convention with 1500 others of us. Our recovery program includes and helps everyone in the family from age six on with programs and meetings for children, teens, twenties, Alanon, alcoholics, addicts, and a spectrum of sub-groups.

So, my grandchildren are still alive, but not all my parents, siblings, spouses or children. My progress may be partial only, but I am alive and sober today. It's real life. Our stories are all quite different until we take our masks off, and then we can hear that all our stories are the same. My goal in life now is to be a garden variety alcoholic (addict to the ethanol molecule, misfit among misfits as a human being, profoundly ill but recovering codependent martyr). My religion is Judaism. My spiritual practice is Twelve Step recovery.