

CHAPTER 3: THE BEGINNING

Liza at Open AA meeting

My name is Liza and I am a very grateful, recovering alcoholic and addict. To be “recovering” means I once was powerless over alcohol and drugs. It is in that painful, unmanageable life that my story begins. Recovering means that one moment, one hour, one day at a time, I remain substance free. I will share the struggles, the hardships, the shame and guilt, and the eventual sobriety, recovery, and gratitude. Today, the pain swells in my throat. My tears are for my son, Charlie, who has relapsed. I am trying to be strong.

I am starting with my family history, because it certainly has a lot to do with how I perceived the world and how I perceived myself. I did not have a bad childhood. I had a father who worked a lot and I admired him very much.



My mother, however, had a very limited capacity to love, show love, or receive love. So, as a child growing up, the way I was disciplined was shame, verbal abuse, and lots of criticism.

This affected my belief system. I thought there was something wrong with me. I thought that I was unlovable. I ended up searching most of my life for someone who could love me or change the way I felt about myself, not realizing it was my responsibility.

I learned to be very independent at an early age because all of my needs were shamed in my childhood. I started working as a carhop at 12 years old so I would not have to ask for help. Asking for help was difficult throughout my life. When I needed help, I felt shame.

The concept of surrender in recovery from addiction was difficult for me. Later, turning my life over to a higher power was extremely difficult, but proved to be life-saving. Now I find myself living powerless over my son's addiction. Life has come full circle and I am experiencing firsthand the pain my mother had to cope with over my addiction.

My life did not become unmanageable overnight. In high school I succeeded and I had a lot of friends. I dated in relationships with either an alcoholic or a male that I felt I needed to take care of. That is how I found my worth, by taking care of people. I felt like I had no value. In high school for the first time I experienced what alcohol could do for me.

An older person bought us some beer. The taste was awful, so I held my nose and drank four cans. I remember feeling this did something for me. I felt very confident.

I felt my inhibitions leave.

I liked the way it made me feel. It did something to me that my sisters never experienced. My sisters are not alcoholics.

I also experimented with smoking pot and taking acid. All things that kids back in the '70s experimented with, I tried.

My mom had a hippie for a daughter. I have an alcohol and opioid addict war hero for a son. He is suffering with the grace of a higher power; this power has done for me throughout my entire life what I cannot do for myself. I am very worried for my son. That son, Charlie, is missing.

I met my future husband in a hippie circle. I really looked up to him. I admired him. To be with him; I gave up my needs, wants, and desires. I was very happy in my job, but he wanted to live in California, so off we went. We stayed there for a while, then traveled around, then got married.

After that, we moved to North Carolina, which is where my first son, Robert Aaron Redon, was born. There was not a lot of alcohol or drug activity during that time. I did not drink or use drugs while I was pregnant. We then moved to Lawrence, Kansas, but eventually ended up in Hermosa Beach, California, where I worked in San Pedro for a while.

These moves were always about what my husband needed and wanted.

Wherever he was happy, I told him, I would be happy. I tried to believe it myself. He had a very negative view of the world. Making him happy became a mission.

While living in California our relationship turned abusive. I began walking on eggshells with my husband. I felt the same stress growing up with my mother.

Whatever I tried to do was never good enough.



I believed if I tried hard enough or wanted it bad enough, I could make a person happy. I could change them or make them love me.

I was unloveable. My core belief was a thinking error.

After the first episode of domestic violence, we moved back to Kansas.

My husband moved us out in the country. Domestic abuse flourishes with seclusion and isolation.

I was happy to be closer to my sister and parents.

Charlie Adam Redon was born here. Charlie who now finds himself powerless over the same addictions that once plagued me. Charlie is my second child.

“Charlie has been missing now for four weeks,” Liza said, as she paused her story. Her eyes moistened, as she collected herself. Then she continued.

Now back in Kansas, the domestic violence, which had been mostly verbal, escalated to physical abuse.

I just hung in there, living in fear; believing something’s going to be different. I always went to work and put on the front that everything was okay. I talked to no one.

I felt so much shame due to someone else’s behavior. I was so embarrassed. I protected him.

People were starting to notice though. The abuse had become increasingly more difficult to hide. I was working at a law office. I would come to work with stories; that I was at a ballgame and a ball had hit me. I was so humiliated. I did not want to tell anybody. Back then people did not talk about those things openly. You did not hear about safe-houses or

anything like that.

I was not doing a lot of drinking or drugs. I was just going to work, coming home, and trying to make everything okay. I never could. I moved out two or three times, but I always went back with the promise from him that things would change.

Unfortunately things did change, but not for the better. The violence grew worse.

I came home from work one night and everything that I owned was completely destroyed. I had nowhere to go and nothing to my name. I left everything behind, even my car.

A beautiful lady named Nicole took me and the boys into her home. To deal with all that pain and grief, we started going out on Wednesday nights to drink. I always drank differently than everyone else. I could not have just one beer. I would drink until I was so intoxicated that I could not even stand up. It was during this time that my husband started stalking me.

John would break into my home. If I was out with friends he would wait for me in the parking lot.

One night, he broke into the house and attacked Nicole and me. He left before the police came.

John always ran.

To avoid putting my friend in danger, I made the decision to leave Nicole's home. I got my own apartment.

My husband, John, would constantly torment me by breaking into my apartment. John terrified me. The police would come. I always refused to press charges; out of wanting to protect him, and fear that the violence would get even worse.

One night the police were called to my apartment. When they arrived, they found me unconscious.

The officer told me that if I did not press charges, they would. The officer confronted John that he had to be out of Bourbon County by April or he would go to jail. So he moved to Pittsburg, Kansas.

There is a purpose to everything. This happens in everyone's recovery story. As their lives become unmanageable, the emotional part of this illness gathers intensity. Choices are made. Once you make a decision, it is like jumping into the river's fast current: you flow onto the next event.

You will see this in not just my story, but in everyone's story of the progressive flow of addiction.

A short time later, I also moved to Pittsburg. In a thinking error again, I believed that leaving the past friends and problems behind and relocating to Pittsburg would serve as a sort of geographical cure, making everything okay.

Pride and memory had a fight and pride always wins.

For a period of time, there was no violence.

I took a job at a bar. Drinking every weekend, I often stayed out to early morning hours.

One night John came and he got violent at the bar. The next night, he would not let me leave to go to work. I called the police.

The officers made John leave my home and two days later he moved back to California. While John was in California, he continued calling me.

I had so much pain and guilt and it increasingly took more and more alcohol to take the pain away.

I realize today how unavailable and selfish I was with my children, only thinking about my own pain and my own needs.

There is a promise in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous that says, "We will not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it."

The other promises have come true: "That we will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us. The fear of economic insecurity will leave us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." Those promises have all come true. The regrets that I have are for hurting people along the way, though not knowing at the time how much.

Recovery has given me some insight into that as well, recognizing how my boys dealt with their pain. Robert masked his through achievement and Charlie with substance abuse.

My husband, still living in California, started sending me cocaine and methamphetamine through the mail.

I started selling to people I had met in Pittsburg.

I could not stand to be alone. The only way I could get rid of the loneliness, the guilt, and the shame was to drink and do more drugs.

Robert and Charlie needed me. I could not be the mother they needed. I dealt with my pain the only way I knew how: more drugs and drinking.

I got to know the circle in Pittsburg that was involved with drugs. I drank heavy. Every night when I got off work, I was surrounded by people who were my "using" friends.



I avoided my family. I was so ashamed of what I had become.

I could not stop what I was doing.

Addiction is that way.

CHAPTER 4: THE STRUGGLE

Liza

My life kept getting worse and worse. I tried to go back to college.

I tried to find something about me that I could feel good about. There seemed to be no one who cared. Being of no value was devastating, the emotional pain severe.

The alcohol and drugs I was using to mask the pain were slowly bringing the bottom up.

I found it increasingly difficult to function with everything that was going on at my house. The drug culture friends were running in and out all hours of the day and night. It was exhausting.

My precious children were living in a world of chaos and risk. My shame was only deepened by my denial of any problems. I reasoned that I had always been able to pay my bills

and take care of myself, so everything was fine. I even had a car.

The only people who did not see my dysfunction were those I did drugs with. Robert and Charlie were collateral damage.

Shame is reflected on the faces of children you love and in the actions of family members that hang onto hope that something, anything, will touch your life and stop the madness of progressive addiction. Certainly, I feel that is where my mom and dad were.

Looking back now, I realize I was deaf and blind to my boys. I was an awful parent.

My husband and I got divorced, and I found myself in a new relationship with someone who drank as much as I did. I did not hang out with anyone who did not drink or use drugs. I did not want them questioning me. If they did, I kicked them out of my circle. No sober everyday people were allowed.

The whole time I was with this new boyfriend, Steven, I compared myself to him and thought, "I am not that bad." He was further progressed than I was, because he would get up in the morning and drink. Not me; I waited until night. Steven was unemployed. I worked in the bar every day. Comparing myself to him, I felt better.

One night, Steven wrecked my car and I became very upset with him. I gave him an ultimatum. He either had to go to treatment or he had to get out of my life.

I reasoned that if I could quit drinking for two weeks, then that would prove I did not have a problem.

Steven was the one with the problem. Towards the end of Steven's treatment, I would go to family day to visit him, reeking of leftover alcohol. The counselor would tell me,

“You need to look at your problem.”

And I thought, “My problem?” I got really angry with my boyfriend and asked if he had been talking about me at the treatment center.

When Steven left treatment, he tried to stay sober. He had a sponsor and was doing what he was supposed to do, but I continued drinking and using. I remember thinking, “I cannot wait until he goes to an AA meeting.” I started hiding and sneaking alcohol and drugs. I was not fooling him one bit.

I went to my first AA meeting on New Year’s Eve with Steven. I remember thinking, “This is a great place for these people.”

Still, I did not see how progressed my own disease had become. Denial is a powerful symptom of addiction. Denial tells you that you can quit anytime you want.

All along the way, I continued to believe that my two-week period of sobriety was proof that I did not have a problem. I continued to drink.

The selfish part of me was hoping that Steven would join me in drinking again.

I came home one day and he was acting very strange. The next morning when I woke up, he was drunk and high. After five months Steven had relapsed.

My children were home, so we all went out driving around Pittsburg and then cruised around in the country. He continued to drink and became violent. As I was driving down the road, he took his fist and cracked the windshield.

I told him our relationship was over. I would not live with the abuse and the terror a second time.

Steven packed up his things and moved out of my life, which accelerated his downward spiral; one that I was pow-

erless to stop.

Even though our relationship was over, we had the same circle of friends, and we occasionally ran into each other. A few times, in moments of weakness, Steven would spend the night. I think that gave him false hope that we would resume our relationship.

This on-again, off-again relationship went on for several months, until I got involved with a man that my sister introduced me to. She apologizes to this day for that.

Immediately we had an attraction, an animal magnetism.

I remember thinking, "This guy has a car and a job!"

People I dated often lacked both.

Our relationship was exciting and electrifying and we dated for a really short time before we were married.

This second husband's name was Travis.

Travis had just gotten out of prison before we met and he was on probation.

Early on, we started doing drugs together and things got really bad. Not any physical abuse but awful, horrible emotional abuse.

During that time, there was a lot of infidelity on his part, which was very painful to me.

I felt shamed.

Guilt is a feeling that I did something wrong and I can do something about it, but shame is a feeling that there is something wrong with me, that I am flawed and defective.

The shame was disabling and I was only able to dissolve that feeling by more drinking and drugs.



Two months after I married Travis, Steven's parents knocked on my door. Steven had killed himself.

After the shock wore off, the guilt set in. This was all my fault. Why had I kept up a relationship with Steven, giving him false hope? The choices in our lives affect others.

I believed if I had quit drinking he would not have relapsed. His death was entirely my fault.

My shame and Steven's parents' comments sent me the same message.

The deep pain, shame, and grief turned me into an emotional wreck.

Trying to deal with the death of Steven and my cheating husband, Travis, I started drinking more and doing more and more drugs to numb the emotional pain.

I began partying every single night. I was putting Robert and Charlie in dangerous situations and hurting my family members.

My mom and dad were so worried about me. They even came to Pittsburg to intervene. I remember thinking, "What do they think is so bad? I have a job, I pay my bills. It is not that bad. Why do they think it is so bad?"

I was okay, but that is what denial is all about.

Then, the hammer came down. Things got worse. Ironically, not for me though. I lived on Denial Street in a filthy apartment near Walmart.

Travis' parole officer told him he had to go to treatment. Travis refused, unless I went with him. I was afraid that he

would end up in jail if I did not go to treatment too.

That is how crazy my thinking was.

I went, but not for myself. I went to treatment to take care of him.

In my mind, I was NOT an addict.

My life full of tragedies, I kept my hands in front of my eyes, never contemplating the cost of addiction in my life.

I was driving through life in the dark with the headlights off... John's abuse, Steven's suicide, Travis' infidelities — all horrible events that I never equated to my own addiction.

I was okay, I did not have a problem.

I went to treatment with Travis because he needed to go.

In true addict fashion, I was already thinking about getting my first drink just as soon as we got out.

CHAPTER 5: ROCK BOTTOM

Liza

The first week I was in treatment, I slept a lot. I got up and went to therapy group. Travis had been sleeping with other women at the treatment center, so they asked him to leave. Unit staff wanted me to stay.

I told them I am not staying, I only came for him.

I started packing my stuff and told Travis that I was leaving with him. He told me he had a ride and I needed to find my own.

I quickly packed, then ran to the entrance in a panic. I was hurrying so he would not leave me.

I got down to the end of the stairs at the front of the treatment center just in time to see him drive off with his girlfriend.

He left me standing there. I cried my eyes out as all the

pain, abandonment, and rejection swept through me. I was without even a quarter to call anyone. I collapsed and prayed. Finally, I borrowed a quarter, called a friend, and went home.

I think now about how co-dependent I was. Anyone who says this is not a feeling disease is in denial and they have not progressed enough. It is such an emotionally painful illness.

I had finally hit my rock-bottom. Left standing outside of the treatment center, watching my husband drive away with his girlfriend, I felt so empty and alone.

I went home and cried myself to sleep, with a Bible across my heart.

I was exhausted, broken and lonely, with a heavy burden of hurt. A deep hurt that turned to anger then resentment. My disappointment all turned inward, pointing directly back at me.

I had finally become the rejected, abandoned, worthless person that I had always pitied and was so afraid of becoming. Emotionally, I was dead.

I had no concept of the disease I suffered with or the hope that recovery would bring.

My self-sufficiency had turned into insufficiency.

I did not even have any money for groceries. I dug around the house, in sofa cushions and under furniture, scavenging for quarters to buy some food. Then I walked to Walmart in a snow storm to get some.

As I was walking back, I sank to my knees in despair. The tears had long since dried up.



Thoughts started swirling through my head. “I have always had a car. I have always been able to take care of myself. Now look at me, I have gone as low as one can go.”

I saw no way out of the mess that was my life. I was at a place of surrender. I am so fortunate that I did not die.

Too hungry, too lonely, too tired... and totally powerless over my addiction, I had no more to give. I had no more hope and no more desire to keep going.

I was done.

In that quiet moment, on my knees in fresh fallen snow, I realized that I must surrender in order to reclaim my life.

In that profound silence, as I surrendered everything, I had a realization of a higher power.

You do not know how much you need spiritual clarity until that is all you have.

There is another promise in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous that reads, “No matter how far down the scale you have gone, you will see how your experience can benefit others, and I pray that you receive this gift at this open meeting tonight.”

I began to think about what I had learned in Sunday School. I had seeds planted because my grandparents were very faithful Christians.

They had taken me to church throughout my childhood

and I had watched them pray and serve the Lord. I always knew that God was there, but I felt like there was something wrong with me and that I was unlovable.

It was a time in my life that I was so far down that the only place I could look was up. I did have the belief that my life had changed, so I called my little sister who is also a faithful Christian, and I let her into my life. She came to my house and prayed with me. She loved me and accepted me.

She accepted me.

My family was concerned for me, so she called my dad and they prayed for me too.

She said that when she was praying, she had a vision. "I saw you in deep waters and you were being tossed back and forth through the waters." She continued, "I saw the hand of God reach down from Heaven and pull you out of that water and He set you on a rock."

"You were standing on the rock and I told Dad you were going to be okay."

We all knew that it was my illness of addiction I was drowning in.

I reflected on my sister's vision, and slowly my life began to change.

The first steps of Alcoholics Anonymous came to life as I surrendered.

My parents did not know that I had left treatment until my sister told them. They showed up at my house and Dad tried to talk me into going back. I told him I would be okay without that.

My father brought out my son Charlie and asked him, "Would you like for your mama to go back to treatment?" Charlie said that he would. I realized then that was one thing

that I never paid attention to, what the boys wanted or needed. It was then that I made the decision to go back.

My fallen war hero who helped save me, my Charlie.

“I told you that you had a problem. You have always had a problem!” my mother angrily shouted from across the table.

I saw my dad nudge her under the table. He told my Mom that they were going to take care of my boys while I was in treatment. I could tell she did not really want to. I understand now that she had no perception of what to do next.

I went back to treatment the very next day.

This time, I went for myself.