



# What My Mother Could Not Teach Me

By  
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As darkness fell, I knew I needed to return home. My father waited on the steps. His questions about my absence hung in the air. I became angry. A torrent of pent up emotion was unleashed and I attacked him with wicked words, cursing him, reprimanding him, blaming him for the destruction of my family. I hissed and shouted and screamed until finally! My claws retracted and I receded back into silence, tears dripping down my pink cheeks.

He sighed. That was when he told me about my mother's abusive childhood, her struggle with depression, and her alcoholic fits. I was shocked. I had no inclination that my mother acted the way she did because of alcohol. I believed her actions were due to her feelings of betrayal from my father's supposed unfaithfulness. So my father was not to blame after all. My world had just been shaken. I could once again love my father without guilt.

From then on, I knew there was a choice that had to be made. I could accept that my father had left my hometown and the remnants of our family behind, or I could continue to live in this noxious atmosphere I had created. I was aware that in order to be happy, I would have to let go of my previous life. This meant accepting that my mother was wrong and my hometown, a rural village located off the road system, could not offer me everything that my new life could.

The price I have paid for better opportunities is devalued through the generalization that all natives are alcoholics. I am eighteen. I am an Alaska native. I am not an alcoholic. I come from a history of alcoholism and abuse. My mother and father did the best they could. Although life is a cycle, the cycle can be broken. The generalization is correct, but it does not apply to me. I am proud to be an Alaska native. I am breaking the cycle. 🚫

## ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Emily Alice Brockman is a recent high school graduate from Alaska. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.

A classmate once made a wise crack about how alcoholic native Alaskans drink Listerine. People snickered. It had never occurred to me that an entire race could be characterized into one box: drunkards. I had never felt cheap about my native Alaskan culture. The realization felt like a slap and I burned with shame. It's not funny that my mother got nightly beatings from her drunken father. It's not funny that, due to this, she has low self-value and a history of bulimia. It's not funny that she turned to the bottle to drown her sorrows and tore her family apart.

The first time I saw my mother drunk I was five years old. It was late. The door slammed. All the lights in the house were out. I heard someone lumber up the stairs. My door knob buckled and my mother stumbled in, a sour smell on her breath. At first she was angry. She screamed and slurred and shook my small shoulders. My fear was white hot. It locked my throat and forced streams of tears. When she realized I was crying, she began to cry as well. She repeated my name over and over, apologies falling from her lips. We cried ourselves to sleep. When I awoke the next morning, she was gone.

At first, my father had attempted to shield us from my mother's fits,

hopeful that she would break out of her reprieve. He made excuses for her, loved her, and tried to console her. The final straw was drawn when my father returned from work to find my mother passed out in the yard and my two year old sister wailing in gravel next to her. My parents were getting a divorce.

At six years old, I waited for love to work its magic and fix my broken family. As time went on nothing changed. I realized that my family would not have a happy ending. My mother blamed the divorce on my father. Shortly after their separation, my father started a new family. Any hope that the previous one could be salvaged dissipated and I felt my father was to blame. I hated him for it.

I struggled with depression for a long time. I was thirteen when I stood in our kitchen, a paring knife gleaming in my hand. I needed something tangible to feel, something sharper than the ache in my chest. My hand began to tremble. I pressed the edge to my wrist. The blade burned and the shock cleared my head for an instant. Fear forced the knife to drop from my hand. I had internalized everything and the emotions were nurtured into a mass of self-destruction. The reality of what I was doing hit me and all I could do was run.