



One Day At a Time

By Shelby Smith

ALCOHOLISM is in my blood. It is a disease that has affected my life in a powerful way that I have to deal with for some time and will always have to deal with. As I've gotten older, I've learned to accept the genetic factors of this disease and to understand the power it holds within families. Unfortunately, this realization has come because of consequences of decisions that were made before I was ever born. Even in his years of sobriety, my father has paid the ultimate price of his addiction. As my father's daughter, so have I.

My father began his drinking and drug use as a high school student in the early 1970s. Sex, drugs, and rock n roll was the theme to live by back then. Dad married his first wife shortly after high school. He was a full-blown drug addict and alcoholic by then. My half-brother was born in the late 1970s. According to dad, his marriage was dysfunctional. He was unable to hold down a job, was an irritable father, and a lousy husband—all because he spent most of his time drunk.

The divorce was nasty. He couldn't pay the child support because he couldn't hold down a job. He ran from job to job because of the garnishment

of his wages. I guess in modern terms he would be considered a dead beat dad. Eventually, his ex-wife remarried and her new husband wanted to adopt my brother. This meant my father could stop running because he would no longer be responsible for child support payments. However, it also meant my father would have no rights or ties with my brother who was only around two years old. Dad's story is that he was still using and although he knew the consequences of his decision, he felt it was in his son's best interest to give him a stable family with reliable parents and other siblings who would all share the last name.

When I heard his story for the first time, I was very young—pre-teen, in fact. I could not fathom it all because the man he described to me is not my father. By the time my mom and dad married, my dad had been sober for five years. Today, he has celebrated 25 years of sobriety by following the steps of AA. The man I knew then and continue to love today is simply not the same man he was when he was drinking. This is the power addiction has over a person. Addiction completely changes a person's attitude, abilities, goals, and priorities. It also causes re-

sentment, anger, disbelief, grief, and regret—for the addict and the addict's family.

In 1996 my brother died of an alcohol overdose. He had grown up to be a fine young man and was in his senior year of high school. He had never drunk before and decided the weekend before his 18th birthday he would give it a try. When he passed out after an all-night binge, his buddies left him to sleep it off. He never woke up. Through their grieving, the community where he lived built a memorial for him at his favorite recreational park. One day I was at that park with my grandpa, uncle, and cousin. Not knowing that dad and mom hadn't told me about my brother yet, my grandpa showed me the memorial and said, "This was your brother." Obviously my reaction was one of disbelief. I had a brother? I was so angry that my dad had not told me himself; that he robbed me of my brother—a brother I will never know and never get to know. My dad blamed himself for the accident because of the alcoholism coming from his genes. He felt if he had been an involved parent, he could have at least taught his son the risks of the disease. His decision from years ago came back to haunt him that day—every day.

Now that I am older, I see how my dad deals with his addiction every day of his life. He works hard to stay sober and to provide for my family. He is an amazing man; my hero, in fact. I often wonder what my life would be like with an older brother. I regret he never had the chance to meet the man I call daddy. Because of his addictions, my father has paid the ultimate price—the loss of a child. As a family, we deal with addiction, one day at a time. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Shelby Smith is a high school senior from Oregon. 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.