

Stories of recovery  
from addiction:

# *astronomical changes*



**I t started around the time Catherine got married. She moved to Glasgow and suddenly gave up all her old friends. I didn't see very much of her, but when I did, she had gone physically and mentally down hill. I would get phone calls in the middle of the night, saying 'I've got separated from my friends, can you come and get me?' Later she would call from her house, depressed and suicidal. This got more and more frequent.**

I was very reluctant to say anything to Catherine, as I didn't want to stick a label on her just because there had been one on my father and brother who both had alcohol problems. So I tried to talk to her, but she just kept saying 'nothing's wrong'. But her physical degeneration proved to me that something was. She lost all pride in her personal appearance and in her house. She turned her back on the family and would only come to us if she needed something.

My initial reaction was a very selfish one. I felt, oh here we go again; I could just keep it quiet and see how she gets on. I'll keep it from my mum because I don't want her upset. So I put a lid on it. That went on for about a year until I couldn't do it anymore. Catherine came out with a lot of sob stories. I said, 'You're my sister and I love you.

If you're in trouble I'll help you, but I don't want to be part of your lifestyle. Don't phone me unless you're in the hospital'. I had to distance myself.

I attended Al-Anon and Al-Ateen when my dad was in recovery. Their philosophy has remained with me. I discovered that it was ok to say 'I love you but I'm not putting up with that behaviour'. From my experience with Al-Anon I realised I shouldn't cover up the problem.

I had a phone call at 5.30 am from a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit saying they had my sister there and could I come immediately. Catherine had either fallen, jumped, or was pushed from a second story window. She had broken her back, broken a heel and smashed ligaments in the other foot. She also had a head injury. It was touch and go whether she would pull through.

I coped by going into my super-efficient facilitating role. I emotionally detached and thought, well, there's a job to be done here. At the time I really just wanted to cry and hug her and be frightened, but I didn't allow myself to be affected. I had too much business to attend to. I went up every day to wash and brush her hair. I made sure her house was sorted, that she had clothes, money, and cakes.

I organised a Rota for visitors. Then we had a huge argument in the hospital. She told me that I was uncaring. For me that was the straw that broke the camel's back. I got quite emotional for a while. I didn't have a lot of support but I had my husband. I didn't want to talk about it with my friends. I was embarrassed because I thought she'd tried to kill herself.

The accident was the turning point for Catherine. She was a dirty, smelly, shrunken old woman against the white hospital bed. She vowed that she wouldn't drink again. I didn't believe her but went along with it. To her absolute credit she hasn't had another drink since. However, stopping drinking is only the first part of a very difficult journey. It takes many years to get the emotions sorted out, to get the relationships back, and for the mistrust and hurt to go away. It's affected our relationship. There's a bond that's gone which will be very difficult to repair. I think it can be repaired, but it has to be nurtured and talked about, so we can move on.

Over the past 6 years the changes have been astronomical. Catherine has worked very hard to get through it. I am so proud of her. She has a very nice life. She is with someone she cares about, she lives in a nice house, she's secure, has no debts, she's intelligent. Her physical health has improved dramatically. She is more content than she's ever been and she's a much nicer person, and of course that makes me a happier person.

*I went up every day to wash and brush her hair, made sure her house was sorted*

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Thank you to the participants who were kind  
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