

SURVIVING AN ALCOHOLIC PARENT

There are many personal stories of life-shattering addictions and the difficult path to recovery with all the associated challenges in reconstructing a life that had changed forever. These are all heart-rending insights to personal suffering.

When does that reversal take place? How does it begin? How does a person's revelation come about?

After many years of hesitation, I finally decided to compile this article on my personal experience with an alcoholic father. It was a difficult experience with an associated pain of memories.

There is nothing in this story that will benefit the Reader but perhaps it may assist those who may be "flirting" with a drug that may lead to addiction. Be aware that not only is there may a personal injury but the family you love will be seriously affected and suffer greatly.

I was the youngest of four children and all my siblings were affected in one fashion or another that influenced our future families as well as, psychologically and unknowingly, we imparted some part of our youth issues into an impact on our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren as well as our lifelong partner.

My father was the eldest of my grandfather's second family of seven (7) children. I never met him my grandfather, but his history was a serious alcohol dependency as was his father before him. All had a strong work ethic, but the limited recreation seemed to center on consumption of alcohol when work was not possible in the fields in their agrarian occupation and that was an opportunity to relax and the home-brewed Vodka "Harelevka" would flow. Consumption was drink after drink until intoxication which was the Slavic style.



This photograph was taken in 1956 on our family farm in Pelly Saskatchewan. My Poppa is on the left holding the only grand daughter, Patricia. As this demonstrates his natural love of children. The rest from left to right are my mother, brother Russel his wife Tillie, Lawrence's wife Mabel, brother Lawrence, Sister Mary holding Russel and Tillie's son Allan, Mary's husband John Khadekin and myself. I was

leaving with my brother's and their families to British Columbia.

It was interesting that my loving grandmother, Auxuta, possessed Brewmaster skills in addition to her excellent cooking ability. When my father and his four (4) brothers would come off the fields and wash up in the Baunya, in preparation to join their friends, she would provide a bottle of spirits (so that they did not need to spend money on "store bought" alcohol. Perhaps this contributed to their future addiction.

Alcohol is a drug and addictive as are all other drugs and thus partaking in their use is dangerous and the results disastrous.

Far back into my childhood, I enjoyed my father's love as did our family but unfortunately, his overindulgence caused him to become a different person since his use of alcohol was to get drunk and not necessarily a recreational beverage.

I recall that his arrival at home started with a box of Cracker Jack for each of us siblings which was much appreciated as treats in those days were not affordable nor common. There was always the search for the small prize within the box, which in those times were a HUGE find.

My "Poppa" (as we called him) would place me on his knees and play with me even though he was inebriated. Meanwhile there would be the disappointed discussion of my mother who was trying hard to keep the family clothed and fed and was unable to appreciate his expense on alcohol which the family could ill afford. They would be arguing, and my mother would start crying to which action he would get irritated as he felt that he had not really done anything wrong. The exchange became "rough" and soon I was crying on his knees in sympathy to my mother. His response to me was that I should not cry which just made a bad situation worse and I would leave his knees to go to comfort my mother.

There were times when I could not stop crying. This condition would follow me to bed, and I would cry myself to sleep.

There would be times when we would go to town and my Poppa would be somewhere with his drinking buddies and my mother would obviously be concerned as to how we would get home. She would send me to find him and ask him to come and go home. Of course, I know now that if he was ready to go home, he would have come on his own, so his response was essentially, "go away and don't bother me" because his interest at that time was to have another drink. Alcohol had taken over his sense of responsibility and his loved ones.

It reminded me of that cultural Russian song "Poppa, oh, Poppa Please Come Home with Me". (лала мой лала иди хж дома) in Russian. I learned and used to sing it many times. Unfortunately, my father was unable to leave his drinking friends no matter what method his family would attempt to try and persuade him otherwise.

The public teasing started when our family moved to Pelly from Veregin when I was in Grade two (2). Children in the 1940s through 1950s would call out "Drunk's son, Drunk's son". I knew it was true and I did not react physically but emotionally, I cried inside, and I was subsequently embarrassed at school and in public. I would shy away from any group gathering.

Whenever my Poppa would need to go to town, I would pray that he would not consume alcohol as I associated that with my mother's sadness as well as unrest in the home. I would try and convince myself that, he would come home sober. This never happened and I would be disappointed. As time went on, I stopped praying and along with that action, my mental attitude became negative although I still loved my Poppa.

During the week, the family would follow the strong work ethic of our parents. My brothers and I learned how to operate all the farm equipment as well as all the chores that included caring for all farm

animals and poultry. We were able to deal with climate changes and the various sicknesses that confronted our mixed farm animals.

Our strong love for the family unit continued to hold us together despite the financial crises. We somehow felt responsible for the situation (this is not uncommon with children) and would sacrifice attending school so that we could assist in advancing the farm by participating in “breaking” the bush covered farm and all the work associated with that. I personally averaged 120 days of school attendance out of the required 200-day school year. My brothers did the same. In my instance, I was fortunate that my absorption of Science and Mathematics was easier than my family and still managed a ‘B’ average.

We were taught honesty and to help our neighbours when asked on a volunteer basis and never expect to be paid except perhaps, assistance in return. We became accustomed to this characteristic. This was my Poppa as well but unfortunately; he had the downfall of the addiction that interfered in his ability to farm successfully from a financial perspective.

Our mother spent her time in cautioning us about alcohol and pointed out what effect it had on our family. She made us promise that we should be aware of alcohol being an addiction.

My teachers became my mentors and my educated brother-in-law, all encouraged me to carry on to grade 12 even though the home life became increasingly tenuous after all three (3) of my siblings left the home place and there was more responsibility on myself.

I was fortunate that my two (2) brothers became self-taught Carpenters and had organized a construction company in the Kootenays. After my grade 10 school year, I would “catch” a ride with someone going to BC and work all summer which provided funds for clothes, school expenses and then I saved money for a bus trip to return to BC the next summer. This was the way I was able to partially fund my university education.

When I returned to the farm for Thanksgiving weekend in 1958, my father asked me to assist him in liquidating the farm assets as he did not have the health to carry on. I noticed the alcohol glaze in his eyes, and I immediately reacted negatively and refused. It was an unfair request as the process of liquidation would require a considerable amount of time and not acceptable for university courses. From his standpoint, he thought it was the same as when I attended high school. After all my father was totally illiterate which may have contributed to his difficulty in successful farming.

He passed away two (2) weeks later and that is the subject of my blog writing “I had a dream last night”.

In conclusion, there is not more I can add to this story except other than the fact that I was fortunate to have a hardy pioneer mother to encourage me and a loving family to assist me in achieving my education. I did post my life story in my blog under “My Journey Through a Life of Opportunity”.

Yes, I was able to enjoy a great life and my Legacy is my surviving family.

Thank you all.

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