

Grapevine Online Exclusive

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Web Exclusive: A Family Trip Remembered

A sober man looks back at an early intervention by his mother during his teenage years

She cornered me in a campground in Utah. This was during the middle of a two-week family trip. I had decided to not drink or do anything else during those two weeks in order to prove that I did not have a problem with alcohol. I was sixteen at the time and it was my mom who had cornered me.



"When she had me cornered in that campground, she let me know that she knew what I had been doing."

During that time of my life I made a point of avoiding any time alone with my mom, though that is difficult during a family vacation in a large RV. My mom had just enough Al-Anon under her belt to be dangerous, or at least dangerous to my plans to continue drinking. When she had me cornered in that campground and it was just the two of us, she let me know that she knew what I had been doing.

She begged me to stop drinking and everything else. I was not ready to admit that I had a problem. I was doing okay and I certainly didn't have a problem with alcohol, or so I thought at the time. That I was not about to go to prison was part of my defense. I can thank my brother, who was 18 years old at that time for setting that bar so low.

My mom started crying. Looking back, I now have a lot of sympathy for my mom then: one son in jail, waiting to hear how long he was going to prison for, and me, her youngest son, also being lost to her to alcohol. At that time, however, the tears were just a signal for me to get away. All I could feel was my own discontent, all I could think about was me, and all I wanted was a drink.

By the time we got back home, I had made it through that two weeks with just one beer—but one beer doesn't count, does it? I decided I had proven that I did not have a problem with alcohol. Within a few hours of being back, I was off with my drinking buddies doing shots of tequila.

It took some more drinking for me to hit my bottom. I drank my way out of college and out of a job. I ended up in an outpatient treatment program. Because I was seventeen, they required my parents to go through the program as well. Perhaps the first thing I was grateful for in sobriety was that they went in a week after me. The treatment center gave me an introduction to alcoholism as a disease, introduced me to the Twelve Steps, and urged me to go to AA meetings on the weekends.

I started going to meetings on the weekends and continued to go to meetings after I got out of treatment. My obsession with alcohol and the desire to drink stayed with me for some months but slowly it got easier not to drink, one day at a time. I worked the Steps knowing that if something didn't change, I was going to drink, and if I drank again, I was going to get drunk.

My relationship with my parents was not fixed in treatment. Instead, it took time for me to see to the error in my claim about my drinking that "I'm not hurting anyone." It took time for them to trust me again. I learned to jettison my expectations for them to be a certain way or for them to do certain things that I wanted. I had a sponsor work with me on focusing on what I was bringing to my relationship with my parents rather than on what I was getting out of that relationship. At first it was not easy nor was it always smooth. In time, I was able to accept their love and love them in return.

I've been sober over twenty-six years now, but recently I've been thinking a lot about that confrontation back in that campground in Utah. My mother passed away a little over a month ago. I am so grateful to AA for giving me the tools to develop a good relationship with my mom. Now I remember many years of laughter and love with my mom as well as the tough times. I'll miss my mom but she will live on in my thoughts and in my heart.

-- Andrew W.
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