

# Estrangement: Addiction



Estranged from friends. Estranged from the workforce. Estranged from Life

The estrangement that accompanies addictions and led to my husband David's death.

In sharing a personal story I hope to bring some honour and dignity to this human experience and possibly open up compassion.

My husband had a long battle with Alcoholism but a re-encounter with street drugs finally took his life while he was in England helping to arrange his own father's funeral.

He was a great person who happened to have the disease of addiction. His version was very intense like the rest of his life and nature, not a mediocre miss able life or person. He was big, so his disease was big. And despite the pain and suffering it grew him and shaped him to have more compassion for others, and to discard the social values that govern many lives and create false feelings of superiority and separation. He was an adventurer and took risks. He learned to accept the results of his actions but kept the belief that his life was somewhat charmed. And it was for most of the time until it ran out.

He made me laugh much more than he made me cry. He gave me more comfort and security than insecurity. He made me think, he gave me ideas, he taught me a lot about myself. He gave me love like I have never known, a depth and closeness few have.

## **Treatment**

When David started out in treatment back in 1988. There were two approaches and quite separate at the time, the clinical approach or AA. Being young, urban, well educated professionals we fancied the 'clinical' approach. A bit of science and intellect appealed a lot more than that 'God stuff' in old fashioned AA. We were arrogant and innocent, believing that this was a curable problem.

David attended a treatment centre and I was in the spouse group. It was very discouraging, deadly serious and a sense of hopelessness saturated the stories shared. No one talked about cure or success. One night driving home alone from the group on a winding highway down into the city, it hit me that this would never be over..there was no cure! No matter what we did this was our life. I could only escape if I divorced which was not an option in my mind at the time. With a thud I felt estranged from any prospect of a normal healthy married life.

Another meeting and this time in the ladies washroom quite a few women were laughing and joking around—not at all like the women in my group. Turned out they were attending an AA meeting in the same institution and I was attracted as they seemed to still be capable of having a hell of a lot of Fun. Must find out more I thought, hmm we may have misjudged what AA was all about...and David agreed to try this alternative .

Shortly afterwards David and I went out to a meeting from a list we'd got hold of. As we approached the church address there was a sign on the road side saying "You are no Longer Alone'. How that touched my heart and brought tears. A sign of Help and hope.

AA as many people know is a fellowship and a forum where one can anonymously declare one's status as an Alcoholic and the community offers to share strength and hope. The foundation for recovery is the 12 step programme which was said to be channeled by one of the founders who wrote it a very short space of time. As if he was connecting with his Higher Self, his Higher Power, prescribing a model that would help the 'dis-ease' underpinning addiction. A radical idea, way ahead of its time as only now people are slowly beginning to realize that beneath physical disease are emotional blocks, stuck energy sometimes due to trauma. One of the key steps to recovery is to surrender to that Higher Power, God of your own understanding. We were both happy with this approach as it wasn't the religious model we'd feared. Anyway

now that the clinical model offered little to no hope and was a downer emotionally, clearly not the way forward. We both felt optimistic about this alternative, more spiritual approach.

It was a great help for quite a while, David at AA, me at Alanon. We found a new community of friends and I even enjoyed alcohol free parties -which surprised me as I'd had a life firmly linking drinks and fun and I liked the way alcohol helped me to relax. I was shocked to be laughing and joking easily at the AA parties.

Another idea integral to AA is to have a sponsor and so David did.

Seems to me that's when the rosy glow left.

Sponsors are fellow alcoholics with several years of sobriety whose role is to help those new in the programme. Unfortunately they are regular folk without training so the quality is very variable and some seemed very judgmental—My opinion.

David did not have an easy time trying to live without alcohol—I mean the biochemical effect of withdrawal is terrible. He'd been in several grim De-tox centres, thoroughly ill for days, back then there was no medication to help ease the withdrawal and not to this day...from what I understand.

There's no question that David had a severe version of the disease and went to several rehabs in North America. Nothing stuck. So back to AA.

He got 1 year of sobriety but that came into dispute...had he in fact lied and had a relapse? So it went on, getting therapy from some men who seemed to me to be very righteous, lacking in compassion, with the ego of little tin Gods. I was fiercely defensive of David and especially after his sudden death, it turned to fury and anger at his sponsors.

At the same time the man they judged and estranged wrote this:

### Remember

#### **Let me remember;**

That I escaped into a false, anaesthetic high,  
That can only see as far as the next bend,  
That I cannot filter out the suffering of awareness.

#### **Let me remember;**

The spiritual connection and unity with all animals,  
The beauty of nature and its continuous renewal,  
The reflection of small children in older faces.

#### **Let me remember;**

To seek the wisdom to know my values and to know my beliefs,

To search for the release from the oppression of my self-centredness,  
To let go of my excessive carefulness and let my spirit guide me.

**Let me remember;**

Willingness, humility and honesty are the pathways to trust,  
Gratitude for precious friendships is the pathway to growth,  
Inner feelings well listened to are the pathways to nourishment of the  
soul.

**Let me remember;**

As I establish peace within  
I can be a friend to myself.

David Bowring Oct 1991

**David Bowring 1950-1994**

When someone is ostracised after being judged as a failure, a misfit in society, it takes a human being to the edge of emotional pain, depression and disassociation. I noticed close to David's death that nothing was a turn on for him anymore. None of the things he'd previously found pleasure in worked. 'Anhedonia' is the technical term.

After his death I challenged one of the sponsors about being judgmental; rather than defending himself he said "I loved him too." That statement quenched and shifted my anger to empathy for him feeling loss, and may be failure at his inability to help. So I felt forgiveness—'for giving of love and understanding.' We operate in a culture that tends to reduce things to right and wrong, especially with the patriarchal influence to be rigid and right. In some ways we buy into this conditioning to protect our own vulnerability. Our protective ego often uses self righteousness to shield the vulnerable heart. When we can open our hearts we become able to sit with someone and be in the silence, without judgment. In empathy.

*"I've seen the needle and the damage done*

*A little part of it in everyone.* Neil Young. Harvest album 1972.

We all have someone we need to forgive. It's possible to bring them into our energy field in meditation and forgive them and oneself. It's tremendously powerful and can create a bridge from estrangement to empathy and love. Try this Forgiveness meditation.

**Forgiveness Meditation**



<https://youtu.be/evBrelap-FA>

### **Spiritual Reflection**

After David died I became very interested in Soul Journeys to help me make sense of life. Addiction is one of the harshest journeys along with Abandonment, Betrayal, Persecution, Abuse. Robin Norwood wrote a book, " Why me, Why this, Why now?". This book explored journeys and concluded that Addiction was an attempt by big souls for an accelerated return to the divine as they have to find help inside themselves unlike other disease where there is external treatment.