



The Most Precious Gift

By Caitlin Adele Young

MOST PARENTS hope that their children can be raised in stable and sane environments. It is never a parent's intention to make their child feel unsafe, insecure, trapped, or alone in their own home. Despite the fact that parents try their hardest to maintain stability within a home, life does not always allow that to happen. Often, alcohol or drugs create barriers. Whether mom is a wine drinker or dad is a tequila slammer, children frequently feel the pressure of living with an alcoholic parent. For me, I felt as if I was constantly walking on eggshells and felt incredibly uncomfortable in my own home as I was growing up with my dad and his wife. No amount of alcohol could drown my dad's past and keep the voices at bay, and unfortunately, the only way he could attempt to forget about his troubled past was by unleashing his fury on the only people who loved him unconditionally.

For years my dad refused to believe he had a problem with alcohol, but it was apparent to everyone that he was drinking when he attempted to plant a vineyard in our backyard. My family doesn't live in California. We live in Colorado, where it snows. A lot. As he became more infatuated with wine, my family and I began to realize that his life was unmanageable.

He was unable to maintain a conversation with me, let alone anyone, without arguing with me or telling me I was wrong. He was the stranger in my home who I knew nothing about. My dad was violent, narcissistic, and brutal. He was the classic example of a raging alcoholic and there was nothing that we could do to convince him to stop. One night when I feared for my personal safety and the police came to my house, the threat of losing custody became a reality for my dad. The courts forced him to get treatment. He was reluctant to go, but he went with hesitance. On November 11th, he checked in and 30 days later came back a different person.

It was weird to see my dad come home and try to go back to living a normal life; a life without alcohol. When he came home and sat down with a cup of hot tea, I couldn't help but stare at him. For so many years I had hated and resented him, but here he was trying to make himself better, and I still hated him. I hated who he was, hated all that he had done to me and hated how he had nearly destroyed my family. As he sat there smiling with new light in his eyes, I was replaying all of the memories. I was replaying him screaming at me in front of my friends, harassing me at work, throwing an alarm clock through the

drywall in my room, turning my entire life upside down while I sat there helpless and watched. He sat in our living room drinking his tea, hoping that I would forgive him with ease, and hoping that his family still loved him.

It wasn't until he had been sober for over a year and survived a brutal divorce that he and I became close. It took a great amount of time for my family to heal and to start living again. Not everyone was supportive of my attempts to repair our shattered relationship; but I tried because I knew that if the situation was reversed, I would seek forgiveness too. Only after group therapy and months of us getting to know each other again during Sunday breakfast, did I begin to see the changes in my dad. They were truly astonishing. I still cannot believe he is the same person.

I now attend AA meetings regularly with my dad and I get to hear hundreds of people share their stories about their experience, strength, and hope. The AA program is one that is based on attraction, not promotion. I was attracted to the program without even realizing it; and I can thank my dad for having the courage to overcome obstacles that looked treacherous. I cannot imagine what my life would be like if he wasn't so actively a part of it. To think that I once hated my best friend is unfathomable. My dad is the one person that I know I can count on and the one who will always comfort me when I'm having a bad day. I have learned to keep an attitude of gratitude because being grateful for each day that I get to spend with my dad is the most precious gift that God could have given me. I have been granted a new life, a new family, and have found new hope. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Caitlin Adele Young is a high school senior from Colorado. Alert Magazine congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We also encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.