

Awakening at 3:00 A.M.

I just started talking; about the six-year-old boy that stood frozen in the hallway, as my dad was beating my mom; about my nine year old sister Peggy who was hitting my dad with a flyswatter trying to get him to stop; while my two year old sister was sitting on the floor screaming and crying. It's amazing how these things imprint on your mind and can be recalled as if they happened yesterday.

27 years later: it was 1:00 AM and I was talking to my counselor John Foster at the alcohol and drug treatment center, where I was enrolled in a 28 day residential program for my alcoholism. Since 11:00 PM I had talked around the edges of the bad stuff; but not directly about the horrible things that were done to me and that I had done to others. I looked into John's eyes; I saw empathy, love, safety and trust. I decided to tell him everything.

For years, I carried shame and guilt, the awful burden that I didn't stop my dad from beating my mom. Logic would say I had no control over that. I was six years old. However, many of the reactions and the decisions I made thereafter were influenced by that event.

I always believed that my dad beat all of us kids. It wasn't until just a few years ago that my sisters told me that only my mom and I were the targets of my dad's rage and violence. He didn't beat them. Crap, now I had to work through that (what was wrong with me that I was singled out)? Today I'm 95% over all of it.

Until I graduated from Marine Corps boot camp I was terrified every time an adult male either raised his voice or started to take off his belt. The belt is what my dad usually used to beat me. Marine Corps boot camp is very tough. I made it through boot camp by knowing I would be able to kick his ass.

I promised my mom that I would never become like him. I told her that again and again.

Then I took a drink at about age 15 or 16. And, the cycle began and the legacy continued.

Not only did I become like my dad; in many ways I was worse than him. I didn't beat my kids or my wife, but they were afraid of me. I didn't understand as a six-year-old or even as a young adult that my dad and I were in the grip of alcoholism. Alcoholism is a strange disease. It's the only disease that tells you that you don't have it. Alcoholism is a progressive disease. Once we become addicted it gets worse; never better.

I told John Foster about the path of destruction that I caused in practically every relationship I had, up until I came in to that treatment center a week and a half prior. I told him about the horrible things that were done to me and that I had done to others. I was 33 years old. We talked a total of four hours.

John and I hugged; he told me that it was going to be okay. I asked him if he would say that again, he said, "Bill it's going to be okay." I desperately needed to hear that. I needed to believe in that thread of hope it gave me, that I could become the man I wanted to be and not the man I had been.

John said "I'll see you at breakfast." It was 3:00AM, in the middle of winter; it was so cold the snow popped under my feet as I stepped out of the lodge to walk back to my cabin. Suddenly I flashed back to the 12-year-old innocent boy walking out of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Bethel, Connecticut after going to confession on a beautiful spring Saturday afternoon. That was the first and last time I told the priest everything.

I had no recollection of the day at St. Mary's until that very moment. I remember stepping out of the church and looking up. The spring leaves were a deep vibrant green, and there was a warm caressing air that blew by. I noticed flowers I'd never seen before. Everything seemed to move in slow motion. I felt clean inside.

21 years later, I had the exact same feeling, because I told John everything; all the good, all the bad that had been done to me and that I had done to others. Once again, I was clean inside.

Thus started a journey that has given me a life that is indescribably wonderful. I've discovered over the years that the process of becoming a better human being is not in always searching outside of me to determine what it is I want, what I want to achieve, and how I can overcome the next obstacle.

I thought that something big was supposed to happen to make my life okay. I was supposed to build a huge enterprise or become the leader of the biggest business in my world. Or, I should be sought after as a great speaker; and to be pursued because of my wisdom and strength and all of that silliness.

Instead, I had to go through a process of uncovering, discovering and discarding everything that I'm not. What's left is who I am and who I am is enough. The 12-year-old boy that came out of confessional is enough. I was a 33-year-old man, who for the first time as an adult knew how he wanted to live.

I was told there was a long period of rebuilding ahead. I learned how to become a good son, a good husband, a good father, a good friend, a good employee, and eventually a good employer.

I found my niche in helping other people, both in and outside of business. I simply did for them, what was done for me.

We all come here with very wonderful gifts, and the challenge is to not let the gifts get tainted, tarnished or destroyed by outside forces or inside thinking that skews my outlook on life.

I have had and continue to have wonderful business successes. I've been the keynote speaker at conventions, both in and outside of business. I became the fastest growing franchise in a rental car company. I was the keynote speaker at their national convention.

But the most important stuff for me is the one-on-one with people or in groups where other people experience with me what I experienced with John Foster. They look in my eyes. They know it's safe to get their souls back. We walk the path together, to a life that they couldn't have even asked for; because they didn't know it existed.

The majority of the people I've worked with have lives of freedom and wonder, of giving and receiving. In addition, yes, lives of success, based on a firm foundation and the ability to reinvent oneself everyday.

Once you have the freedom to choose, the horizon is limitless.

Today there are times I say "I don't know." In my old life I would never say that. But I do know this: this is the best life that I've ever had. It's truly the only good life I've ever known.

There is no one I would rather be than me.



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