

Dear Children

by Stephanie Abbott



“Sooner or later we must give up all hope of a better yesterday.” Ashley Brilliant wrote that, but I wish I had, because it says so perfectly what I want to write to you.

I have such sorrow that we, your parents, failed you. When you were growing up, one of us was alcoholic and the other was trying to change that fact. Most of what we did, thought, and felt was influenced by the disease. We loved you and wanted you to have a happy childhood, but what was “wrong” with us made that impossible.

As the disease progressed, we made more efforts to keep our family life free of pain for you. We failed, but not because we didn’t care enough. We simply did not understand. We didn’t want any of what was happening to be true, so we lied to you and to ourselves. You grew up with a law of silence because we hoped if we didn’t talk about it, you wouldn’t know what was happening. But the terror continued, as did our hopes that no one would notice our problems.

I feel so sad that you grew up unable to trust easily, wary of people and situations. I know now that we could not give you what we ourselves did not possess: a feeling of safety. The preoccupation with the addiction drained our energies and left us unable to focus on you. Yet still we loved you deeply - I’m not sure you knew that.

You say you have a problem with feelings: having them, respecting them, showing them. Yes. Our family survived liked that. There seemed to be no options to numbness. At least, no options that we thought we could live with. *But I remember loving you.*

This is the part of your heritage, to our painful regret. But there is more to our history than that; there is our slow recovery as a family. Each of you has your own story. Jennifer James wrote: “Pain is a great teacher, but most of us would rather learn some other way. We think that happiness comes from a perfect childhood and avoiding mistakes. We don’t like that patched up feeling that comes with each survival. We would like to be seamless, with no patches. Cherish your hard-won depth and understanding. Some pain is required for the journey. Patches bring strength, whether

on our knee or in our hearts.”

There are patches in my heart from our suffering, most particularly for yours, but I believe in our strength too.

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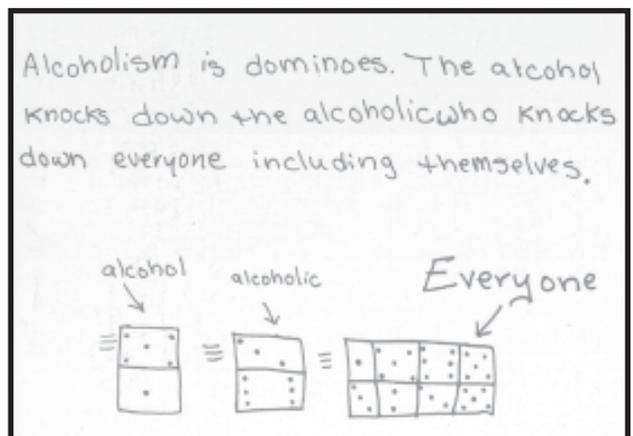
Ashley Brilliant is right about yesterday. The past is fixed and

we can’t forget it, or perhaps, forgive it. What we can do is accept it, and separate from it, until the grief loses its power over today.

My hope and joy are that, as we continue to make better days, they are turning into months and years. They will be the new past that will feel good to remember. Today will become a better yesterday.

This Comment was first published in Alcoholism & Addiction magazine in 1981, in a regular column called Family Forum. Stephanie Abbott, MA, specializes in family aspects of addiction, teaches at Marymount University in Arlington, VA, and is editor of the NETWORK.

Kids Korner



Source: *My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has a Disease*, by Claudia Black.