

Grapevine Online Exclusive

Published June 2014.

"Forgive me, Pats!"

The death of his wife made him look back on the amends he had made in the past

"Go back to the woods where you came from." That's what my wife said to me before she filed for divorce in 1974. She was right. And I did. Six months later, I found sobriety in remote Minnesota. I've been sober ever since, well over 38 years, thanks to AA.

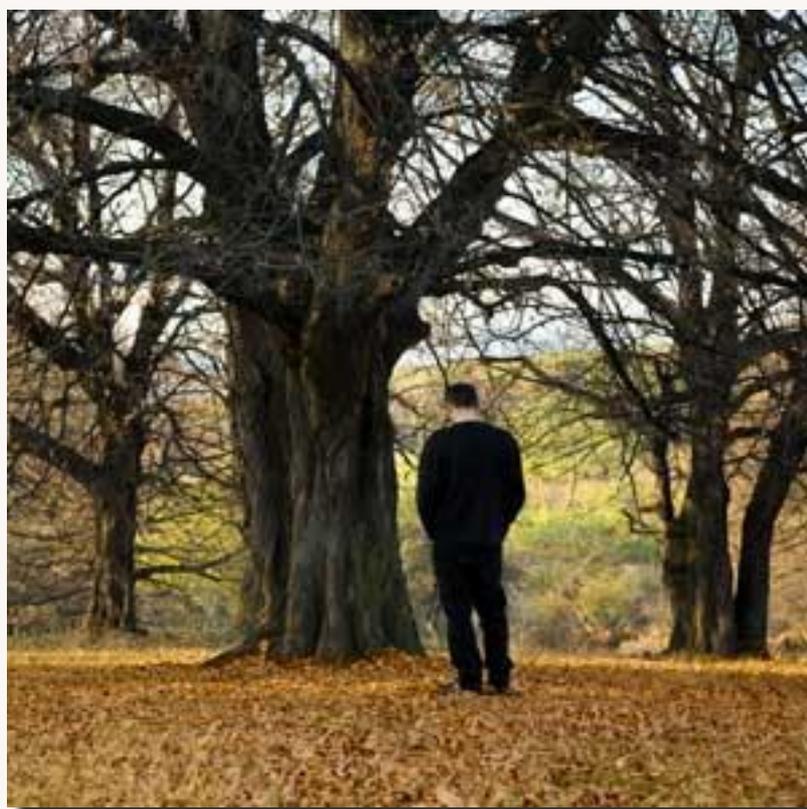
My plan of course was to get sober and return to the family, but my plan never happened. The family survived and grew into good health—in spite of me and my absence. I

maintained close contact with my wife and children, though we did not live under the same roof. Over the ensuing years, my children grew up, got married and had children of their own.

Recently, my wife became ill and in the spring of 2013, she died. We all knew it was coming and yet it seemed so sudden. She was gone.

I had always dealt with death as an integral part of life, and now it seemed I was handling this with the rock-solid strength of 38 years' sobriety.

One morning, a few days after she died, I awoke feeling warm all over and I was convinced that her spirit had paid me a visit in the wee hours.



But six more days passed and I began to experience some certain discomfort. My nights were filled with restlessness and the days with inexplicable anxiety. Something was eating at me inside. I reviewed the previous 38 years. Had I been incomplete in my Step 9 amends with my wife? Was there now something left undone?

Then, the guilt set in. Regardless and in spite of my 38 years sober, I had sabotaged our marriage, undermined it with irresponsibility as a husband, father and human being. All my wife had ever wanted was to be a normal wife and mother. I had taken that opportunity from her.

My blood pressure jumped 30 points, and my blood sugar as much. The doctor told me that grief could cause this.

"Grief!" I challenged back. "I've never grieved in my life."

And I had not. If this was grief, I had never before experienced it. I took the matter up with my sponsor, and we looked at my early Step work with amends—or lack thereof. We convinced each other that my original amends were performed in a healthy fashion.

But yet, my feelings of guilt persisted.

Next, I tried "cutting the bond," convinced that I might still be clinging to my wife. I gathered up all the old pictures, walked into the woods and had a ritual fire. When it was over, I returned to my apartment.

I felt some relief, but something was still eating at me. I consulted others who had experienced grief. An older woman remarked that she was still taking medication for grief and had been for 15 years. A younger man commented that he still suffered after the death of his mother two years before. I discussed the situation with a sister who had lost a son, a husband and a grandson: "Deal with it!" was her remedy. I didn't want to "deal" with it. I wanted to be rid of it.

I began another reassessment of the past 38 years. One thing that remained on my mind was the fact that my wife had never once commented to me that she was glad I was sober. I had always accepted that on the face of it. No one ever required her to be glad I was sober. I never asked forgiveness because in my sobriety I never found it necessary to be forgiven. Forgiveness played no part in my getting sober and maintaining that sobriety.

Could this be it? Had I hit on something? In the program, it was never

deemed necessary that I be forgiven, and I never expected it from anyone, not even a Higher Power. I had asked that my character defects and shortcomings be removed, but it was never an aspect of the program that the HP had to remove my defects and shortcomings; only that I ask that they be removed. Had this been my failure? A simple failure to ask forgiveness?

I went over it thoroughly in my mind. Indeed, I had never once asked my wife to forgive me. It never seemed important to me, but it might have been important to her. Was she (or her spirit) driving me nuts over this?

"Keep it simple, stupid!" I put it to the test, and made a simple ritual out of it. I went into quiet meditation, summoned up her spirit and blurted out, "Forgive me, Pats."

After a spell, a great calm came over me, and in due course my blood pressure and blood sugar dropped back to within normal limits, the anxiety disappeared from mind, and most beneficial at age 79, I became willing to be forgiven – even if never forgiven.

-- Boyd R.
Aurora, Minnesota

This is a preview. To view the full article, use the link below to begin a free 7-day trial!

Try GV's 7 Day Free Trial

SAMPLE ARTICLE

SAMPLE AUDIO

[Login](#) or [click here](#) to subscribe.

Related Items:

Pearl and the Pigeon

At the time, she couldn't see how these two women in an old pickup truck would help her find her way home

Our Mutual Friend

With no AA meeting in prison, he had resigned himself to sharing his Fourth Step via the mail

What's the Problem?

For this AA, drinking was definitely the problem

Ocean of Sobriety

She wanted to live life to the fullest, not drink it away