

A Story from A Child of God

It's a privilege to share some thoughts with you on this wonderful day --- Easter.

Easter is about light after darkness, awakening after dormancy, life after death.

Like most people, my life has included times of joy, great light, and abundant opportunity, but also times of darkness, bewilderment and loss.

I was fortunate to grow up in a stable, loving home --- on a farm in Nebraska --- as an active member of Frieden's Evangelical and Reformed Church. (The merger with the Congregational Church occurred in 1957, the year I graduated from High School.) Values of hard work, responsibility, honesty, caring for others, and faith in God were "givens".

I was the oldest of five --- all of my sisters and I became nurses --- and my brother married a nurse. Care-giving was part of our DNA, I guess. We had a large extended family and it seemed there was always some older relative who was sick or needed some help --- and we all grew up helping --- it was just expected.

We also were taught the value of education and of an inclusive acceptance of others. Grandma lived in town and it was always a treat to go stay overnight and sleep on the old featherbed mattress. Although she had only a 5th grade education, she was a life-long learner. She never saw a cross-word puzzle she couldn't work and she wrote poetry when she wasn't making quilts or baking cinnamon rolls. When I was about 8, I remember her telling me that "There's nobody in this world who's so smart that you can't teach him/her something, and there's nobody in this world who's so dumb that you can't learn something from him/her."

As I said, I did what was expected --- for a girl of my era --- so after nursing school, I married and had two wonderful children. We lived first in Omaha, NE where my husband completed medical training. Then we moved to Hays, Kansas where the children went through elementary and high school. During much of that time I worked as a nursing instructor. My marriage ended while in Kansas and after both children had finished high school, I moved to Denver to pursue my career and further my education.

While I lived in Kansas, I was an active member of the Presbyterian Church, was very involved with the Hays Arts Council, was leader for a large 4-H Club and enjoyed many friendships that still endure. I joined First Plymouth when I moved to Denver in 1985.

I enrolled in the University of Colorado School of Nursing PhD Program which I completed in 1991. That led to the unique and very fulfilling opportunity to become Director of the Caring Center, an Outpatient Center for HIV/AIDS Patients. The many wonderful experiences of working with people who were dying too young and with a

wonderful staff of colleagues would fill a book. Following that, I served as Coordinator for the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, also a grant-funded project of national significance. Both positions afforded me many opportunities to travel and represent the University and the Caring Philosophy of the School of Nursing to a variety of audiences. I loved it and I did it well.

But --- eventually the grant funding ran out --- I left the University and held a position with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless for three years, acting as Respite Care Coordinator with my office at the Samaritan House Shelter.

By this time, another factor was assuming a large place in my life --- called alcoholism. I found that I was leading an exhausting “double life” --- still trying so hard to keep up appearances, but living an increasingly isolated, guilt-filled secret life.

While my wonderful family continued to love me and pray for my recovery --- including my two children and their families, I knew everyone’s patience was wearing very thin.

My awakening came on Easter Sunday four years ago. I had planned to attend church, but realized I felt too badly and didn’t have the energy to try to put on that face one more time. I spent much of the day in prayer, reciting again and again the familiar Serenity Prayer. As I listened to the words, I believed I understood what “serenity” meant, and I believed I had a certain amount of “wisdom”, but it suddenly dawned on me that I totally lacked “courage”! (I was scared to death to quit drinking!) So I prayed for COURAGE. And, as the prayer begins, “God grant me the serenity, courage, and wisdom” it’s just that. A grant is a gift. And that day I received the gift of courage. I haven’t had a drink since.

The first Christmas I was sober, someone gave me an amaryllis bulb. (Today we’re seeing Easter lilies, beautiful flowers that also emerge from bulbs.) When I unwrapped the packaging on the amaryllis, it was discovered that the seal had been broken and some moisture had gotten inside. So the bulb had “done what it was supposed to do” --- it had forced a tiny stalk and even a blossom, which had withered for lack of proper care. It lacked nourishment or light.

This little anecdote serves as a parable for how I think about my recovery from alcoholism.

I believe that God has a purpose for me and that during the years of my active alcoholism I was not doing “what I was meant to do”. Because I knew that I was intelligent, basically caring and responsible, I spent years of denial about the seriousness of my drinking. I led a double life as I achieved many worthwhile goals --- which were acknowledged by academic degrees, numerous honors, and considerable sense of personal accomplishment. What was missing was peace, happiness and joy. Deep inside, I considered myself a sham. I was the amaryllis trying to blossom, but in darkness and without support.

Of course, the proper care of an amaryllis bulb includes fertile soil and nourishment, daily water, and steady light. The *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* is the fertile soil necessary for my sobriety and continued growth. Working with a dedicated sponsor, and now having sponsees to mentor through the steps keeps me humble, honest and grateful. Regular attendance at meetings and connections with scores of new-found friends also on the journey of recovery keeps me happy, inspired, and interested. This is the daily water. And “applying the principles of the program to all my affairs” becomes the steady light I need to be reminded that God is everywhere.

I believe it was God’s grace that answered my prayers on that Easter morning four years ago. I was able to emerge from the darkness of the life I’d been living.

I give living thanks for the light.

(Easter Sunday, 2010)