

# Bonded by Pathology, Naked to the World

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Twelve-step programs have benefited me immensely. At the same time, I have been made painfully aware that people bonded by pathology are a community in process. The initial sense of safety by joining with others who have a common experience base is a warm and fuzzy one. The reality is that people in process play off one another as much in meetings as in the rest of life.



It is my experience that recovery is not in the meetings. It is in working the steps each day of our lives. I devoted myself to working the steps and honoring the traditions. The outcome for me was a much more productive life rooted in feelings with more appropriate expression. And, there were surprises along the way.

Near the end of my third marriage, the interactions between my wife and me spilled over into various twelve-step communities. We were a highly visible couple and my wife was a frequent speaker in many parts of the country. We had program meetings and social events on the property that we jointly leased.

For a while, life seemed like Camelot. People still talk about one particular summer of meetings and events that appeared magical. As reality crept into a crumbling relationship born of bonding in pathology, people started to choose sides with their projected mom or dad.

I realized how bizarre things had gotten when I received a phone call from my wife who was in New York City with a client. In the conversation she repeated to me verbatim what I had said just hours before in a twelve-step meeting. For anyone not familiar with these meetings, the content of everyone's sharing is to be held in strictest confidence.

In dismay, as I completed the conversation, I called someone that I was sponsoring. He listened as I spoke of how violated I felt with someone reporting to my wife what I said at meetings. He didn't say much.

Three days later, he called me to make amends and to state that he was the one who had reported what I said in the meeting. He added that he'd been in bed for three days since paralyzed by guilt over his actions. I was not feeling safe I meetings.

I started an all men's meeting on the premise that men would be more open than in mixed meetings. The content was different and the meeting attracted a solid following. After a time, I stopped serving as secretary and a close friend began his service as the secretary. Information continued to reach my wife.

Sometime later, the new secretary of the men's meeting came to me to make amends for sharing my meeting conversations with my wife. He somehow reasoned that his behavior would help the marriage. I saw it differently. Now it seemed that there surely were no safe places for me to talk.

The first man said that she told him she was suicidal and he felt he could help settle her down by telling her my state of mind. Later he said that he was aligning with her as he aligned with his mother against his father. I knew how terribly bright and manipulative my wife could be and none of these people were a match for her when it came to reading and activating pathology to her advantage.

The second man worshipped the ground she walked upon and would sit on the floor mesmerized by how surgically she could dissect a recovery issue and name people's feeling states. People reported to me that she told them they had to choose between us. They were not allowed, under her terms, to be friends to both of us.

Then came the ultimate violation. It totally disregarded all of the traditions and practices that have been so helpful to so many. It shocked some into seeing the game. For me, it left me completely naked and in full view of all who chose to judge me.

One night, upon returning from a business trip, I went to my mailbox. I recognized the handwriting of my wife on an envelope. I opened it. At first I couldn't believe it. Then I was forced to sit down and try to take in what was in front of me.

She had taken my second, utterly complete, Fourth Step inventory from my personal files, freely scribbled comments and questions upon it and mailed it to me. No, this couldn't be. A nationally known lecturer on values and twelve-step programs with fourteen years recovery surely would not do this. It got worse.

For readers of this who do not know what a Fourth Step inventory is, it's a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves, rigorously hones, and in writing. One purpose is to put all of one's baggage on paper to get it outside and then to admit it to another person, one's self, and God. It is a supreme letting go process. It was perverted in this case for personal gain.

How would you feel if all of your secrets were in writing and someone took them, copied them, and made them available for your peers to read? No diary writer was ever more violated by parent or lover. What a chance to learn humility.

Within a day I was told that she passed out copies of my Fourth Step to those in her inner circle. I asked one why he had read it. The answer didn't satisfy me. As I entered meeting rooms, people walked away and those who used to hug me, turned away.

I was angry and determined that I would not be driven out of the twelve-step meetings because one person had dramatically put personality before principle. I announced in my sharing that I had every right to be in these meetings and that I would not be driven out. I had not violated a singly tradition. Others had violated me and the most sacred tenets of confidentiality.

Until this happened to me, I had no idea of just how embarrassed I could be. And for a person that thrived on looking good and doing things right, this was particularly painful and humbling.

Those who participated drifted out of my life permanently. Most never made amends to me. A long time later, my then ex-wife sent me a written amend.

When I think or feel that I couldn't possibly stand something happening to me, I recall this experience and smile. I've had more threatening physical events in my life, but this ranks near the top of my emotional threats. In the end, I was greatly empowered by not only surviving the attack, but also by holding my own space without a counterattack.

Everything in my life of which I was ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, etc. had been put on public display. And, I didn't die. In fact, I was given a cleansing with the power of a conversion moment. There was nothing left to hide, protect or avoid. What a load off my mind, body and spirit.

Do I recommend this to you? No! Did it turn out to be magical for me? Yes! It isn't always an enemy who puts you in the pot. It isn't always a friend who gets you out. This time, rather than being boiled alive as some intended, I was boiled to life.

God has a wonderful sense of humor. I can hear the cosmic giggle.