

She tells me a story about when they lived in North Carolina on a houseboat. "As long as I can remember I knew he drank. I remember he was angry and got really mad at times, but I did not connect it to the drinking. I think the first time I realized he had a problem I was in first or second grade. We were vacationing on our house boat and he was over on someone else's boat drinking. Grandma took us with her to try and find him. When he was getting off of the other boat, he fell in the water because he was so drunk. Grandma had to carry him to the van to take him home. Kat and I were so scared. He sat in the back of the van crying and rambling. We both sat beside him crying too; we just did not understand. Grandma was silent, she did not say a word. She just drove us home. It was then I started to connect the drinking to his behaviors. Thereafter, I lived in fear each time he drank heavily, we just never knew where it would take us. Now that I am older, I can remember always feeling sorry for my daddy and being so angry at my mom. She was always yelling at him, and clearly, he had a problem. It was not until now I realize the pain she had to carry. It breaks my heart to think about it."

As I read over this story, my heart breaks and my eyes begin to well with tears. I have to step away from my laptop to process the words I have just read. This didn't sound anything like the man I knew, and I can only imagine the pain and fear my mom, aunt, and grandma were feeling. My grandpa was a proud man, and through this story, I'm beginning to realize why he never wanted to share these struggles. As his granddaughter, knowing the person he will become, I don't see it as something to be ashamed of.

I ask about his recovery and if he went to AA because I never thought he went. I'm surprised to learn that he did.

According to my mom, my grandpa went to AA several times. She tells me about how his sponsors were more like close family and how she even called them aunt and uncle. He fell in and out of drinking several times. It was worse in North Carolina because his sponsor lived in Ohio. My mom writes, "He never went to AA there, which was my high school days. I honestly could have cared less what he did, I had so much anger toward him. North Carolina was his bottom, that is why he ran us all back to Ohio. He continued to drink until I graduated, but he did not seem as bad. He seemed to have more peace on Ohio. When you were born, he stopped and never picked up a drink again. As Kiona saved all us when he passed, I think you saved us all back then. Everything turned around then, we all started to heal. And life as we know it began. There truly is something to be said for new birth."

It's at this point when I have to close my laptop completely. I allow myself a moment to sob and the tears don't quite stop as I begin to type again. I've carried so much guilt since his passing that I can't tell if her sentiment makes me feel better or worse. I wasn't around nearly as much as I should've been due to my own stupid situation my younger self had found its way into, and I still haven't forgiven myself for it. Kiona is my now adopted cousin whom my aunt began to foster right after my grandpa passed. She brought so much healing and light to the darkest time in our family's story that I almost don't feel like the comparison is fair because of my own insecurity.

When I finally manage to pull myself together, I ask her how long he was sober.

"Grandpa was sober as long as you have been alive; he stopped then." She continues on to say, "He was at peace; he was less angry and more loving. He drank because he did not love himself. He always seemed to have that battle raging in him. That battle lessened over those sober years. It's funny, they drink to cover the pain, but in the long run, it just intensifies it. Makes it worse."

I never realized that I shared this struggle with my grandpa. For years, I've carried this same battle, hating myself for lost time and opportunities due to poor decisions. To be honest, my battle might have been easier if I knew someone so close to me understood it. But as someone who understand that battle, I know how hard it is to admit that to just yourself, let alone anyone else.