The phone rings. My brother is upstairs with one of his friends, and I am sitting in our den with my best friends, watching a movie. It’s pretty late, probably around 10:30 or 11. I know we are not supposed to be awake, but my parents aren’t home, so we stay up anyways. The phone keeps ringing, and when I finally realize my brother isn’t going to answer it, I do. It’s my mom. She has been crying. She explains to me that, for the 3rd time, my dad has been pulled over for drinking and driving, and he is in jail. I’m not sure what to say to her, but I would have to say that’s when I started to see who my parents really were, as an adult, not as mom and dad.

Both of my parent’s families have battled with alcoholism. My mother’s mom still does today, and my father’s mother died from a mixture of being overweight and alcohol. Both my mother and father have it as well. So it’s naturally in my genes. In studies, it has been shown that “children of alcoholics demonstrate a three-to-four-time increased risk of developing the disorder. Twin studies strongly suggest a powerful genetic link. Generally, it seems that alcoholism is caused by 40% genetic factors and the remaining 60% by factors we don’t understand” (http://www.robertperkinson.com/alcoholism_statistics.htm). I have heard my mom say, “I told myself growing up that I would never put my children what I have gone though. Growing up with an alcoholic in the family is so challenging and hard, and I never wanted that for my children.” To hear her say that and then be told that it’s a disease is so hard to comprehend. To someone who has lived with it all their lives and witnessed all
the things I have, I still don’t see how it can be called a “disease.” Being one of the most common drugs being abused, “about one in ten Americans currently has an alcohol problem. Alcoholism generally develops slowly over a person’s lifetime. Alcoholism is not caused by psychological problems; it is a primary disease. It can begin at any age, and it often occurs in individuals who have little psychosocial pathology” (http://www.robertperkinson.com/alcoholism_statistics.htm). The key term in this quote deals with psychosocial pathology, which means is a study of how children with certain behavioral characteristics develop these behaviors, due to their environment around them. The social environment for children in alcoholic families is constant, heavy, and hard to cope with, and since the guardians of the children are relying on the substance, wouldn’t it make sense if the children did so too to deal with reality? For someone to choose a drink over their entire lives, their families, jobs, friends, to be an actual human being and enjoy life, however, is just too hard for me to grasp. My parents have missed points in my life that I am particularly proud of due to their drinking and miss vital times in their life together as well because of alcohol. I understand there are things that go along with being an alcoholic, for example, a reason behind the drinking. For my dad, it started to get really bad when his mother died. My mom has said he did drink when we were very little, but not to the extent he does now. I don’t really remember his mother dying, so I don’t really have an idea of when he did begin to get worse until he hit rock bottom in my eyes. Rock bottom for my dad was when he got his third D.U.I in one year.

In the state in Virginia, you are not allowed to get more than 3 DUI’s in a year. The law states, based on your prior offenses, “A second conviction within 10 years of a prior offense, there is a mandatory 10 day jail sentence (and 3 months for a third
offense). For a second conviction within 5 years of a prior offense, there is a mandatory 20-day jail sentence (and six months for a third offense). Fourth offenses within 10 years of a prior conviction are subject to a mandatory one-year in jail”

(http://virginiadui.poweradvocates.com/faq.html). The severity of his B.A.C’s and the frequentness of his D.U.Is pushed the judge to sentence him to a year of work-release jail.

On the website http://www.gdcada.org/statistics/alcohol.htm, there is a chart with weights, number of drinks, and how many one can have based on their weight to get them fully intoxicated. The legal number for my dad’s weight is three, which makes him impaired, and I know for a fact his limit is not three drinks. When he got arrested, he lost his job with a company he had been with for almost 20 years. My mom’s brother was his boss, which added more strain to our family once he had to fire him. I don’t remember how he got his new job, but before he had to go to jail, he was able to get a position at a company called Acme Mechanical, that thankfully allowed him to be in a work release program from jail for the year he was imprisoned. During this time, we rarely saw him. I have a vague memory of sitting in the back of my mom’s grey Oldsmobile, with the roof’s fabric starting to bubble due to hot summers and the age of the car hanging down over my head in the back seat. The windows were those measly ones that barely went half way down to try to protect children from putting their parts out the window. I was told to stay in the back seat and not to get out, and I watched my mom go to a strange car I’d never seen before and wait for my dad to get out. At the time I wasn’t sure why he wasn’t driving himself, but I waved, not being seen, as he walked into a bleak, everyday looking building. It didn’t look like a jail, that was for sure.
After his year in work release jail, his father made his first and only attempt to help his son out. Before my dad went to jail, he unwillingly went to AA meetings here and there. If my dad did actually go to a meeting, he would go to a bar afterwards. Other times, he would just skip all together. Stories like this are slowly creeping out of family member’s mouths, I guess since they think I am old enough now to know the truth. After jail though, my grandfather felt placing him in a facility away from his family and limited circle of friends would do some good. He spent close to $10,000 for this rehab facility named Father Michaels, and the only time I got to see him was when we dropped him off and when we picked him up. Letters were allowed, but no visitations or phone calls. This was the real deal. It was a place like on that show Intervention, if you’ve ever seen it. Anyways, he was supposed to stay for I think six months, but didn’t even make it three. Saying he felt “cured” and determined to stop drinking, he came home. He probably gave it a good three more months of sobriety, and then started sneaking in and hiding the alcohol in our house. Even today he is in denial of his problem, telling us “I don’t drink”, making excuses for how he acts. We know though.

I guess I don’t really know the extent of damage I have in my life right now because of my parents. I know there are struggles I battle with internally, in my relationships with my parents, friends and boyfriend. I bring frustrations and worries from my family into our lives, fear that those around me may say the promises my parents one said about their adulthood, and only to let me down. I only hope one day I can be content, trust those I do have soberly in my life, and not be afraid of trust and reliance on others. I am also, thankfully, extremely close to my older brother. Him and I are 11 months apart and have experienced the same hardships together. We try very hard
to give each other the support and love we need and at times don’t receive from our parents. I love my extended family, but their judgmental eye is always there. Their anger towards my father only makes us feel unintentional embarrassment and sorrow. I know in the next few years I will have difficult things to struggle with that deal with my father’s and mother’s health, and I hope those close to me right now who have gotten me this far can continue to be with me. I also know there are support systems out there through Alcoholics Anonymous, like the pamphlet entitled “Is There An Alcoholic In Your Life?” offered on their site, http://www.aa.org/lang/en/catalog.cfm?origpage=281&product=22. The brief caption at the bottom says it “Explains the A.A program as it affects anyone close to an alcoholic – spouse, family member or friend.” All I can do is keep my chin up, my head held high, and continue to finish school and build a life that I know I have worked extremely hard for.
Bibliography


