



Plan B— A Woman's Perspective

“Hi, I am ____, and I am an alcoholic.” I never planned on uttering those words in my lifetime. However, that is exactly what I do on a daily basis. Alcoholism is my shadow companion that pushed me to accept a Plan B for my life. To share how I made it to Plan B in my life, I offer a little background.

I was raised in a rural area of the Deep South where being a “big fish in a little pond” was pretty easy. Taking my first drink of alcohol at age 14, I absolutely loved the way it made me feel. It was like being hugged from the inside out. The alcohol made me feel powerful, smart and pretty. Therefore, I drank as much as I could, when I could, throughout high school. I did not entertain other drugs and admonished those who did.

Numerous colleges dotted the landscape of my post-high school education. My choice of college was driven by its proximity to the beach, not its academic rigor. College was an extended party. My junior year of college, I had a roommate who had been watching “Phil Donahue” and told me she thought I was a weekend alcoholic. Oddly enough, at that time, the weekend began on Wednesday night and lasted until Sunday about the time “60 Minutes” came on television. For some

reason, that show began the week for me. So, I did not drink Sunday night, Monday night or Tuesday night. But when I did, the game was on.

I moved to Birmingham when I was almost 20 to finish college. My sister and her family lived about 40 miles outside Birmingham. I did not know a single person upon my entry to life in the “big city.” Therefore, I set out to make friends. I went to the only place I knew to make friends—bars, parties at the apartment complex I lived in and any other party to which I could get an invitation.

Upon completing college, I believed things would change. A new woman would emerge who was secure, mature and successful. I would marry, have two children, celebrate a 50th wedding anniversary while living in my two homes, one with a picket fence and one at the lake, gently gliding my way to retirement with complete integrity. This was Plan A.

Fast forward to more drinking. I met my first husband at a party. He was intoxicated and so was I. We were off to the races drinking and partying. The next thing I knew, Plan A needed revision. I was married and pregnant and NOT in that order. Yet, I still thought when my

child was born, I would feel secure and loved. Tiny fingers cradled inside my hand and a heart filled with love for my son failed to erase the restlessness, irritation and discontent inside. Still searching and married with a two-year-old son, I began law school.

Feeling completely inferior to those around me, my excessive drinking continued. I justified my behavior by rationalizing that I deserved the release I felt from the alcohol. Having more to prove than the other students, drinking made me feel as though I could accomplish that goal.

Once again, Plan A needed further tweaking. I was going to slow down when I got a real job practicing law. Fortunate to land a job at a mid-size law firm, I thought I had “arrived.” I loved the people, the area of law I practiced, the opportunities provided me and the chance to meet the clients of other lawyers in the firm. However, there was one nagging downside—billing, working and client development monthly reports that compared each associate. Feeling terribly insecure, yet driven to win, I wanted to out-bill, out-work and out-client develop the other associates.

I gave the firm my all and in the

process lost my marriage. Although consistently receiving accolades for my work, I persisted in my drinking. I kept telling myself “real alcoholics have a morning drink. I’m not an alcoholic, I only drink at night and on weekends.” When I was in a crowd, I could turn *it* on (whatever “*it*” might be); but when I was alone, I could barely move. A couple of partners at the law firm mentioned they thought I was an alcoholic—the nerve of them! I was a single mom working to be a partner at the firm, maintaining a home and friendships with what energy I had left. The stress and my lifestyle took its toll on a pre-existing health problem. Not long after what I considered to be a vicious rumor surfaced, I left the firm to become a solo practitioner. Again, Plan A had to be modified.

Although blessed along the way with wonderful friends and contacts from my time in Birmingham, the tragedy was I only envied them. Everyone around me seemed so organized, happy and successful while I lead a dual life. My soul was empty and I felt dead inside. My health continued to deteriorate. Medical procedures became necessary and painkillers were prescribed. The pain-killers became my best friend and my confidant. Quietly and discretely, my security, power and energy came from a pill instead of a bottle.

I lived for that pill for a while. I stopped paying my bills, and stopped returning friends’ and clients’ phone calls. Plan A was derailed but I was at a loss as to how to fix the problem. I tried to quit the pills on my own and failed miserably in controlling my obsession. In July 2006, I wrote a suicide note to my son and the man with whom I had been in a three-year relationship. I planned the date to take my life.

Locked inside my bedroom one evening, my son, other members of my family and several of my best friends gathered at my home for an intervention. Completely caught off guard, I thought, “How did they know? Who had they told? Was I ruined in the legal community?” Plan A was crumbling. My intervention was not as pleasant as the ones seen on television. Resisting their love and concern for me, I called the police to have them removed from my home. With a remnant of the intervention group still

in my home, I sat alone amidst the darkness and despair of my life. I gave up. Plan A was dead. I called the man I had been dating and agreed to check into the rehabilitation facility recommended to my intervention team.

Now, two years later, Plan B has replaced Plan A. Sober from alcohol and pills, I do not take mood-altering medication. The relationships I have are the best I’ve ever known. There is wonderful, positive support in my life. The legal community has affirmed my journey to recovery. Through the forbearance of the Alabama State Bar, I returned to practice law but not without a deep sense of shame and guilt. However, each day by the grace of God, great sponsorship and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I put one foot in front of the other and practice law. My colleagues in the practice of law are remarkable. They could have derided me but, instead, offered me kindness and a helping hand. I stood cry-

ing before judges in whose courtrooms I had practiced law and said, “I am sorry for my actions.” Instead of hearing words of condemnation, I felt warmth of true love and friendship.

Until the intervention, I was always pressing to arrive at a specific destination. Now, I daily enjoy the journey of life. The road of “in recovery” is marked by attending AA meetings, working with four sponsees and following my sponsor’s recommendations. Thank you, God, for second chances and new beginnings for the gift of daily sobriety and serenity, solid supportive friendships and the unwavering love of my son and my boyfriend.

My wholeness and authentic self reside in Plan B, yet I must acknowledge the journey called Plan A. It took living Plan A to give me a heart filled with gratitude and unshakeable desire to appreciate and celebrate Plan B. ▲▼▲

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