

Step "6A"

It started out as a normal evening. Some adult family members, including my sister and me, were playing cards in the dining room at the farm home where we had grown up. By 8 p.m., our four children under 3 years old were asleep. My father had gone to bed as usual and had gotten up several times to get a drink as was his habit. On this evening, we didn't pay much attention even though, as children, we had lived in fear of him. Many times, we were so terrified that we had hidden from him in the top of the closet or in the bam. Sometimes, we had even barricaded the door to our bedroom, so he couldn't make good on his threat to kill us.

This time, when he headed back toward the house from the bam, he was pointing a rifle at the house while yelling that he was going to shoot everyone. Back in 1960, in a small town, there was no sheriff or 911 for us to call. The closest neighbor was a mile away. Quickly, we turned out the lights in the house so he couldn't see us. We also tried to get to the phone to call for help. In the midst of the panic, my 2-year-old son Willie woke up and headed straight outside for his grandpa who was easily visible standing under the yard light. Terrible fear gripped my heart. Before we could grab Willie, he walked to my dad and held up his arms. Suddenly, my father put down the gun and picked up Willie.

The incident was over, but I was still shaken. At that time, I had been in Al-Anon for six years. I attended the Wednesday meeting and related the traumatic experience to an old-timer named Lucille. I told her that my sister and I wondered if maybe our daddy should be committed. Back then, there were no drug rehabs, and hospitals didn't really have an answer either. My sister and I knew we were the decision-makers, as our mother was deceased. We knew our father didn't need a mental institution, but that was the only help available if an alcoholic was unwilling to go to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sweet little Lucille just looked at me and said, "Have you ever tried loving him like that little child?" No, of course not! And, what's more, I didn't want to love him. In fact, I always hated my father because of all the fear and turmoil that I had lived through. Now, her words stung deeply. I had never seen my father sober. I had no good times to remember. But, I really had no one else to talk to about it. I was 20 years old, and Lucille was nearly 60 then. I certainly couldn't tell her that I didn't even want to love my father.

I wrestled with the idea for about a week. I finally decided it wouldn't hurt to ask God to make me "willing to be willing" to love my father. That meant the hatred and lack of forgiveness had to go. God can do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Twenty years of hatred were replaced with love. That was 48 years ago and the step I call "6A" worked for me then and still works for me today. My father died from alcoholism four years after the rifle incident. I never saw him sober a day of my life.