

# I CAN'T DO LIFE

One Woman's Escape from the Grip of Addiction



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To my Heavenly Father. For without Him,  
none of this would have been possible.  
And to my husband and children for all their love and support.



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# PROLOGUE

I felt sick to my stomach. *I'm a hypocrite. How am I going to explain this to the women at my meeting? They will never trust me again.* Tears streamed down my face. *I can't do it anymore.* The pain I was feeling was too deep. *Will there ever be an end to this?*

On the way home from a woman's house where I had told her, "Drinking is not the answer," I had stopped at the liquor store, bought a six pack of beer, went home and got drunk.

*How can I talk to others about drinking when I am still doing it? How could I have relapsed again? My friends and family are probably at their wits' end. How much more can they take?*

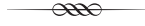
I knew I couldn't go on much longer like this. *What will it take for me to finally change?*

Then it came to me.

*Everyone would be so much better off without me.*

*This is it.* I had made my decision.

I went out to the garage and got in my car and started it after making sure the garage door was shut.



In a life fueled by alcohol and drugs, this was just one of the many insane decisions I made.

Nothing about recovery is easy; it's all a process. I already knew how to take the easy way out.

I wish I could say that on a certain day, of a certain year, at a specific time I had a spiritual awakening and my whole life changed.

For me, it didn't work that way. I had to work at it.

And when I slipped, I had to work at it harder. I just didn't give up. And God didn't give up on me.

Over time, it got easier, because of God. He showed me the decent, loving person deep down inside me who wanted recovery and a relationship with Him.

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# ONE

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## FUNCTIONING IN DYSFUNCTION

I grew up the youngest of three girls in a dysfunctional home with alcoholic parents.

It seemed to me as a child that my parents fought all the time. It didn't matter if we were in public or if we had company over, they'd fight. When they'd yell at each other, my sisters and I stayed well out of the way for fear they would take it out on us, because that is what they did.

They loved to call us "stupid" or say, "You're no good." Mom would say, "Why did I ever have children?" Sometimes it was, "How could I have had such stupid kids?" We were constantly walking on eggshells around them.

Mom and Dad both worked a lot and we didn't see much of them. When we were up, they were sleeping, and they left for work before we got home from school.

My mom was married once before and had my sisters Jeannie and Sara. When her husband left her, she needed someone to

help her with the house and to babysit as my sisters were only one and three years old.

Irene was hired as a live-in nanny, and stayed on after my mom met my dad and they got married, living with us until she died. She was a big part of our lives and really the only constant since my parents were either always at work or out. Irene was also the only constant emotionally.

Kind and loving, she treated us as if we were her own kids. She got us up on time for school, cooked our meals, and was always there for us. Irene was married at one time in her life but did not have kids of her own. It is ironic and sad that she lost her husband to alcoholism only to move in with a family of alcoholics.

My sister Jeannie was five years older than I and Sara was four years older. Jeannie was the apple of Mom's eye. She was quiet, shy, and a good big sister. She would make a special sweet candy for us with different colors, and flavors like almond, vanilla, and mint. While it was in the freezer to set, I'd keep asking her, "Is it ready yet?"

Sara was born with learning disabilities. Mom's first husband had beaten her in the stomach and that caused her to go into labor at six months. Even though Sara should have been excused for a lot of her mistakes, it was just the opposite. My parents took a lot of their anger and frustration out on her. I always felt so bad for her when they would scream at her and heap on the abuse.

When I was around twelve or so, we were spending our first night in the new house our parents had built. Our parents had gone out for the evening, leaving us girls alone.

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Sara wanted to make some popcorn. Back then, we didn't have microwaves or popcorn makers, so she made the popcorn in a pan on the stove with oil. When Sara walked away from the pan momentarily, it caught fire. Jeannie acted fast and ran next door to get baking soda to put the fire out, but not before the stove, the range hood, and the walls were ruined.

That night I woke up to my parents screaming at Sara at the top of their lungs after they had returned home.

Another time, when they caught Sara smoking, Mom made her eat two whole cigarettes. She came home from school very sick that day. Mom probably wasn't aware of the dangers of nicotine poisoning back then.



This was how everything was handled in our home. Mom was worse than Dad. If she got mad, she didn't hold it in. She would say some horribly mean things to us and often humiliate us in public. Her yelling always turned into humiliation and I would feel two inches high.

I'd get so angry at her, but all I could do was cry. I wasn't allowed to talk back or even to tell her how I felt. If I had an emotion other than happy, I was told I'd better keep it to myself. She even got mad if we showed too much happiness.

The result was, I had no self-esteem. But I sure could put on a happy face. I tried to make a joke out of all my misfortunes, which sometimes worked.



Life in our family wasn't all bad, but that made the difficult times even harder.

Mom was a good cook and would make us comfort foods such as meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, and roast beef. There is something about the smell of meatloaf and the skin on the baked potatoes that reminds me of home and takes me back to when I was a child.

Some of the good memories are of holidays that Mom always tried to make special. Even with all the dysfunction in the house, Christmas was a magical time for me growing up. Mom would bake her heart out for weeks before Christmas and plan a huge meal. She was always happy when she was cooking and would sing and dance around in the kitchen. We looked forward to the days she set aside for baking as we loved helping.

On Christmas Eve, my sisters and I participated in the Christmas program at church and afterwards there was open house at home. Family and friends would crowd in and there was a ton of food.

We always had certain traditional foods for the holidays. I loved the way our house would smell at Christmas, except for the lutefisk. Lutefisk is a traditional Scandinavian dish of cod fish soaked in lye. It really stunk. My mom cooked hers in cream and always served it on Christmas Eve. We didn't mind because she didn't make us eat it—she'd also serve ham and scalloped potatoes. Because we lived in the Midwest, we almost always



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had snow, so it really felt like Christmas should. Mom enjoyed entertaining and would decorate the whole house festively.

There would sometimes be thirty to forty people in our house at one time. I loved having everyone over and getting to see my cousins. Some of the company would stay late into the night and the adults took this opportunity to drink a lot. As much as I loved having a lot of people around, I always felt like my parents' friends were more important to them than we were.

On Christmas morning, we would get up early, as most kids do. Even though my parents were a little hungover, they always got up right away. We would open presents, which there were a lot of, but unfortunately, most of them were clothes. Then my mom would cook breakfast and we would go to our grandmother's house for Christmas Day.



We learned not to express an opinion when Mom took us school shopping. She only bought us what she liked anyway; it didn't matter if we liked it or not. I just wanted to wear what the other girls were wearing, but we were better off keeping our thoughts to ourselves.

One year she had some outfits made by a seamstress for us girls. For me, her choice was a plaid pantsuit out of orange, brown, gold itchy material. It had a long top that was like an A-line dress, only shorter, and pants out of the same exact material. I absolutely hated it. I wanted clothes that were popular and store bought, like the other girls wore.

Every now and then when Mom thought about it, she would yell at me “Wear that outfit I had made for you.” I’d put it on, but after leaving the house, I’d slip off the pants and wear the top as a dress. I was happy to show my legs off and thought the top was cute enough.

Once when I was nine or ten, I bought a dress I absolutely loved at a garage sale for ten cents. It was pink crepe with black velvet dots and a thick black velvet sash with ruffles on the sleeves and hem. Even though I had a lot of other clothes, I wore it constantly to Sunday school. When I would spend time on weekends at the house of friends of my parents who had a daughter a little younger than me, I always brought that dress with me to wear to church. They teased me, in a nice way, saying, “Kathy, you picked out a dress your mom actually likes.”



Dad didn’t get involved with us most of the time, unless we made him mad. Then, we really had to watch out. He was very strict about curfew. One night when I was about thirteen and I got home late, he was out looking for me. I was scared to death, as I knew if he was out looking for me, then he was really, really, mad. I went to my room and sat there waiting for him to get home. I started shaking and my stomach got all knotted up, knowing what was to come.

When he got home, he came into my room and started yelling at me. Then he hit me in the face so hard blood spattered on my bedroom wall. Afterwards, all he said was, “Now clean

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up your wall.” After that, the incident was never talked about, and he didn’t apologize. There were never any apologies. That was how everything was handled in our house.

At the time, I thought my childhood was normal. I always wanted to be older than I was so I could do all the things my sisters and the adults in my life could do. I wanted to drink and party. I hated being a kid; I couldn’t grow up fast enough.

