

I shrunk down in the back row of the crowded church basement. I stared at the styrofoam cup I was clutching with a mix of defeat, despair and horror. I didn't even drink coffee but my uncomfortableness required any sort of buffer. I made a quick and covert assessment of the group: working professionals, people I recognized from TV, and others who clearly lived on the street. The boulder in my throat warned me not to speak with anyone. *Did I really belong here?* It was all too surreal - being here at my 2nd lunch hour AA meeting. It took every strength not to bolt and tell myself I'd made a mistake.

Just a few days earlier I had been carrying on as usual - single mom of a 2 year old, taking him to daycare, going to work. Often depressed or feeling rough - but I was functioning. The only real issue - was a new and niggling intrusive voice that had recently gotten louder. It was saying: 'Lisa - how can you continue to drink the way you enjoy, but at the same time not expose your son to the conditions *you* grew up with *yourself*? Remember the painful wedge booze put between you and *your* mom?' My dilemma grew and disturbed my blissful state of denial. Denial of my dependence - no - addiction - to my trusty reliable friend alcohol.

I honestly don't know what it was about that particular Thursday morning's hangover -- but taking the steps to get me to this room full of sober drunks - was terrifying.

The shame of my plight remained deeply rooted and I didn't dare tell a soul. I looked at addiction through the judgmental eyes of someone who didn't

understand it, and I shrunk - hiding in my low self-worth. Due to the stigma I kept silent about my sobriety for years.

Eventually I realized I had no choice that day but to ask for legitimate help. I needed to do the inner work of self-healing. If not for summoning the courage to push through that discomfort, I wouldn't have emerged as the person I was meant to be. And - I had the epiphany - I'm not defined by this - I just don't drink anymore!! There's no shame in that.

With time I slowly worked through my depression and anxiety and I didn't need to cling to a cup of coffee anymore. Staying committed in AA led me to the capability and confidence to inspire and give hope to newcomers and at the same time see evidence of my own growth.

What I've learned since those early days 15 years ago, is that doing extremely scary and hard things yield the biggest results. Stepping out of our comfort zone means we're brave enough to witness the ways we've been denying our greatness. Doing things we've never done before requires massive courage and vulnerability. Those two teach us that it's not just about getting to the amazing end result - it's actually more about who we become in the process.

It's our nature to be expansive.

Remembering our connection to the Universe and who we truly are, we can transcend the gravitational pull of our ego - and reach for that infinite source - our personal power to do really hard and scary things.

And we will be tested, where we get to the brink of saying 'what if we give up?'

But - recalling our past triumphs, we can draw upon the power of our higher self and say 'what if we keep going?'