

BELIEFS

I thought I should have more time because in 80 years I have had more beliefs than most people, but the Worship Committee said ten minutes is what you get.

In 1971 my husband died at age 45 and left me with four young children – that was really five if I include me. I was very sorry for myself and them. For several years I used alcohol to ease the pain and quiet the fear. Some very good friends, one of whom was the Governor of the state, who was also my boss, confronted me and said that they thought I should go to treatment at Hazelden. I had a list of reasons why that wouldn't be necessary – I couldn't afford it, I didn't need it, who would take care of my children, and a few others I can't recall. I had almost convinced them, when the Gov looked me straight in the eye and said, "We have the votes!" One of my friends drove me to the treatment center. I was very angry! I wrote all their names down and figured I'd get them when I got out of the place.

When I did get out, one guy said, "You were the meanest red-headed woman I have ever seen."

Three weeks later, my life was different. I looked better, I felt better and a political friend who had some years of sobriety was taking me to my first AA meeting.

I remember clearly at one point my counselor at Hazelden approached me and said a shocking thing: "When are you going to stop dragging that dead husband around and bury him?" In those days, they forced you to look at yourself in harsh ways. They spoke plainly, roughly. I needed this. I felt so sorry for myself – but he was right: I did not need people to sympathize with me.

I walked up on the hill behind the building, and (metaphorically), I buried David on that hill. Even now, when I tell friends this story, they are horrified, but it was very important.

The AA philosophy is based on twelve steps. They have heavily influenced the way I think and believe. Before you blame AA for me, I try to live in accordance with the program and it has helped to keep me sober for 36 years.

I returned to thank my counselor and Hazelden for saving my life. He said, "*NO*. We gave you the tools. You saved your own life."

My children and I managed to grow up together. I think becoming an adult is important. They have opted for different roads although my oldest son married a wonderful woman who attends WBUUC with me.

I was raised to be a Roman Catholic but it never really took for me. I like the rituals, the music, the holy smoke and the costumes, but I never really thought of the church as a program for living – that took a bunch of drunks in a Protestant church basement. I left the church, but I am a religious person. One of my favorite passages comes from Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll:

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said, “One can’t believe impossible things.”

“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age I always did it for a half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!”

I believe in a higher power but I don’t sweat what or who it is. I don’t pray for things – whatever or whoever is running or not running the universe is better at it than I am. (I didn’t even pray for the Twins this week.) Sometimes I think of making a list of all the things I have learned and done since David died and most of it I wouldn’t have volunteered for, but I have a good life with good friends and family. Love is the most important belief. As my daughter says, “Whatever gets you through the night.”

As one ages, one sees with love people (parents, siblings) you used to blame and criticize. When you’re 80 years old, you don’t have time to be mad or hold grudges. Love is the spirit of this church – that’s the thing. I joined this church in 1961 with David and our children. It’s a different church, and I’m a different person than I was in 1961.

I think of David still with great sadness. He missed so much – his children, grandchildren, computers (which he would have loved)... He missed so much – and I am here. I was lucky enough to stumble through.

I love this quote from Robert Bly:

Each of us deserves to be forgiven, if only for our persistence in keeping one’s small boat afloat, when so many have gone down in the storm.