

Spread Your Wings

*to those people who did not get to know the joy
of childhood and adolescence*

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From the author

For a few years I have been an academic employee at the University of Economics in Katowice and an academic priest for the community connected with this school. In that time I have had possibilities, either at the university or at academic pastoral groups, to meet students, lecturers or administration workers of 'my' academy. Common prayers, dialogues and undertaken activities have let me discover how wonderful those people were with a great personal sensitivity and many layers of goodness in their hearts. At the same time, I noticed that lots of them, students especially, showed sadness, strong fears and deep anxiety associated with very low self-esteem or even with total lack of it. Some of them were brave enough to conquer their fears, shame and break a long-lasting silence and, sometimes for the first time, introduce their family situations to 'a stranger'. In dramatic utterances made by those young people, often full of pain and tears, I have discovered that their today's difficulties, fears, lack of self-confidence and resorting to loneliness have roots in their families and their parents' attitude towards them.

I could not be indifferent to that 'sea of suffering' and began to look for methods to assist 'my' hurt scholars. I took care of intensive education in this field on my own. I did realise that a lot of so-called dysfunctional Polish families do not provide for basic functions and tasks appropriate for their children. I became aware that this causes negative effects in adulthood to children who are from such families. The literature on this subject describes such people as adult children of dysfunctional families (ACoDF). My further education, along with long retreat conversations with academic youth coming from families with alcoholic problems, let me discover that there is a huge group of people described as adult children of alcoholics (ACA). Those people, in a particular way, experienced dysfunction of their families on the grounds of a parent or both parents' overusing alcohol or being addicted to it. I was able to notice that students who experienced a large dysfunction in their families, which was not connected with an alcoholic problem but with a parent's mental illness, for example, or his/her death, or emotional or legal divorce, violence or permanent emotional or physical absence, felt similar as their peers from families with alcoholic problems. The knowledge I obtained emboldened me to organise a year therapy for ACoDF and ACA students in chaplaincy 'Zawodzie' in Katowice in 2001. Annual therapeutic activities are still organised, and it is an honour for me to take spiritual care of therapeutic groups.

A possibility to meet so many wonderful young people – adult children from dysfunctional families – and watch their everyday efforts intensified my talks about them within the academic community. During the course of those talks, a low awareness of the academic community was apparent regarding students and workers, and adult children from dysfunctional families. I decided, therefore, to inform the academic community widely about this problem in a clear and concise way. I demonstrate possible solutions to help those in need and suggest ways to counteract all dysfunctions of the family. Encouraged by my students and friends, I took up a challenge to write this book together with them. I am aware I am not a specialist in the field covered by this book, but I have had courage to take this task on because of all the adult children of dysfunctional families who placed confidence in me and supported me in my life. Thanks must be paid to all who undertook the task over my book *pro publico bono*, particularly its advisor Prof. Ewa Syrek, PhD. at the Pedagogy and Psychology Department of the Silesian University in Katowice. I hope it will be a support to those who would like to read it and that it will bring them a glimmer of hope.

Fr. Grzegorz Polok

Introduction

Among the many problems concerning the contemporary family, the issue of increasingly common intake of alcohol or alcoholism by one or both parents¹ seems to be particularly important. The significant consequence of such behaviour is a growing number of adult children of alcoholics (ACA). ACA can be defined as a grown-up person raised in an alcoholic family; and, as a result, they often experience difficulties in their lives which are ingrained in experiences taken from such a family². Available estimates show that ACA comprise about 40% of the adult Polish population³. This data, combine with the growing yearly intake of alcohol in Poland⁴, presents a contemporary challenge and considerable theoretical and practical attention has to be devoted to this problem.

It seems that this issue should be taken on by a broadly-defined academic community such as higher education institutions, research institutes, various student organisations, university societies and university chaplaincy centres respectively. Taking into account the role played by higher education institutions in the contemporary reality of our country, it can be argued that high expectations form an integral part of their realisation of the mission and activities undertaken for the benefit of society. Among obligations which should be realised by the academic community, obligations for the common good seem to have priority⁵. First and foremost the family provides a common good for our society. The family forms an intrinsic mirror of society, and changes within the family are invariably factors of cultural and institutional development of a country or continent. Watching carefully the dynamics of changes taking place in a family, taking initiatives and researches, contributing to strengthen it, to fulfill its fundamental tasks are crucial obligations for academic community⁶. It has to be admitted that, in

1 The State for the Prevention of Alcohol-Related Problems estimates that nearly 4 million children in Poland live in families where parents overuse alcohol and about 1.5 million are the children of alcoholics. M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 25.

2 T.L. Cermak i J. Rutzky (1998): *Czas uzdrowić swoje życie*, Warszawa: PARPA, p. 7-13.

3 M. Kucińska: Dorosłe Dzieci alkoholików, www.kiosk.onet.pl/charaktery/, 11.05.2008.

4 An average Pole, according to the report of Health Ministry in 2013, was supposed to drink nearly 10 litre (9,7 litre) of pure spirit (half of this amount included beer). It has been the highest level of alcohol intake for years (Polish people drank less in the time of PPR). www.kobieta.onet.pl/zdrowie/zycie-i-zdrowie/polacy-pija-coraz-wiecej-niepokoja-ycy-raport-ministerstwa-zdrowia, 03.01.2015.

5 Surveys on representative and nationwide groups of people over 18, carried out in December 2002, showed that higher education institutes are perceived as those which work the most for the good of society. *Postawy wobec społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu*, www.ipsos.pl, 13.06.2009, s. 8.

6 Jan Paweł II (2004): *Rodzina w Europie*, 25.06.2004 – To the participants of the European Academic Teachers Symposium, www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_II, 25.05.2007.

that perspective, the academic community should undertake intensive, specific and informative, educational and organisational activities, which can contribute to the creation of places across the whole country, where adult children of alcoholics will find psychological and practical support. This way the academic community will show their attitude of concern towards the Polish family and evidence of activities for the common good. The crisis faced by the Polish family is currently more visible and makes the group of students, who are destined as being ACA, grow in number in proportion of other dysfunctions witnessed in Polish families. It is important for the academic community to discern this fact within its institution as students suffering from ACA are coming to universities to gain knowledge. They must be allowed to develop in the whole educational system without help. The Law of Higher Education obliges universities to such actions and explicitly points that all academic lecturers have obligations not only to educate, but to bring up as well. It seems to be important due to one more reason. The time of studying is an especial period in students' lives.

Particularly from the point of upbringing and educating the time spent by a student at university can be considered the most valuable and demanding period as it forms a time when there is a continuous development of their personality which, in the future, might impact upon the fulfillment of crucial social, professional, citizenship and family tasks. At this stage of a student's development, the higher education institution becomes a fundamental part of their life where apart from gaining knowledge they shape their personality, habits, attitudes, convictions and behaviour⁷. Hence, it is so important to ensure professional assistance for students from dysfunctional families who have specific psychic scars, assistance helping them to develop full personality amongst the group of scholars.

This seems to be particularly important as it can be expected that a certain group of adult children of alcoholics will start to overuse alcohol⁸, some of them will develop relationship with addicted people, and others will avoid thinking about events which happened in childhood. Unfortunately, according to surveys undertaken, nearly half of ACA will not decide to establish a permanent, legal relationship, and a lot of contracted marriages (about 1/3) will end in divorce.

7 I. Kowalewski: *Zaburzenia emocjonalne studentów krakowskich uczelni wyższych w aspekcie bezpieczeństwa*, www.21.edu.pl, 10.07.2009.

8 The probability that children of alcoholics will also become addicted is four times larger when compared with children from non-alcoholic background and in the case of grandkids, the probability increases to one in three. B.T. Woronowicz (1998): *Alkoholizm jest chorobą*, Warszawa: PARPA, p. 17.

Piotr (24 years old): These types of statistics made me reluctant to take care of my problems. In the beginning it was demotivating. I thought to myself that if those numbers were so shocking and pessimistic, I did not have many chances for a better life. However, after deep consideration I came to conclusion that if some of those people have succeeded, so I would have a chance too. Besides, I couldn't take advantage of the possibility I had to undergo therapy. Frequently, others do not get such a chance.

Julia (24): In difficult situations I had to cope somehow. I was very responsible, I took on more duties, helped a lot at home, anything to sustain peace and it worked. I never had problems at school or university, I was a very good pupil and student. I was active socially and it seemed to be all right. But I was attracted to boys with problems, some with ACA as well, I had relationships with many of them. As I lacked feelings, I was looking for them almost everywhere. When it seemed that I found what I had needed, sooner or later I broke up because I thought that there was something which disturbed me. The boys didn't meet my criteria and I don't know why it went on that way.

This tendency might arise from the fact that adult children of alcoholics try not to trust anybody when they develop a close relationship, their inner identity built by their dysfunctional upbringing tells them what they should be like and they are not. In general, adult children of alcoholics are not able to build intimacy in relationships with others because unmet emotions and desires of childhood appear in their adulthood. In a close relationship with other person, ACA cannot speak about themselves and their needs which can cause a lack of compromise between both their and their partners' needs. Adult children of alcoholics haven't learnt how to listen and speak to communicate effectively with another person. That is why, the closer relationship created by ACA with another person is, the more difficult for them to contact with "the other" and the great expectations that all occurred difficulties will be solved by 'the other' person. ACA's inability to express what they really feel often leads to understatement, especially with close people, and, as a result, there are new mutual traumas, sorrows and grievances. Just then a kind of resentment appears, a feeling well-known by adult children of alcoholics, and it makes them convinced that they are maltreated when they let others be too close. This inability in interpersonal communication may contribute to a situation when many adult children of alcoholics will not find themselves in the role of parent or will never decide to have children⁹.

⁹ 12 Kroków dla Dorosłych Dzieci z uzależnieniowych i innych rodzin dysfunkcyjnych, (1996), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 5-6; M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O Dorosłych Dzieciach Alkoholików)* Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 25-29 and 65-67.

Ala(23): Sometimes, and since a certain moment, it always happened that in relationships with others I didn't want to make the least problem, I wanted to be 'perfect'. I always agreed to everything others wanted me to do. Simply, I couldn't say 'no' and it didn't matter whether I had time or not, whether I fancied it or not, if anybody asked me to do something for them, I did it. I had difficulties in making up my mind, I couldn't specify what I wanted and I would rather others decided for me. I was afraid of wishing something for myself, on the other hand, when I wanted something, I felt disappointed and angry when my parents didn't guess what I needed. I still have problems talking about my needs in front of my parents, I feel guilty when I ask them for money regarding my studies and other expenses.

Julia: In my childhood I sometimes suffered too heavy punishment compared to my offence, and then I felt greatly harmed, I felt sadness and I couldn't understand why it had happened. I tried to conceal every stupid thing as I could never foresee how my parents would react, whether calmly or nervously. If there was something wrong, they scream. The words of criticism hurt and until now I have had problems to accept any remarks. Sometimes, unpleasant generalisations were used, they made me not as self-confident, and I accepted them as real because a child accepts everything easily without consideration. The moment my errors are highlighted, I cannot accept them as remarks which are to help me, I can't stand listening to them when they are repeated as I realise my imperfections. I sometimes don't know how to cope with a certain thing and everything gets on top for me.

Magda (26): I have had problems with relationships since my childhood. These problems can be called inner problems as to people surrounding me I am a lively, cheerful and helpful person. Inside, though, I am still this intimidated child who is afraid to lose acceptance of outsiders. My life is this running for acceptance – I do little for myself and a lot for others. But it doesn't come from my good heart – it comes from a fear that if I don't help, I won't be necessary. The relationships with the opposite sex are based on the same principle: my personality is governed by fear of rejection. Sometimes I have an impression that my dreams have to match my partner's dreams. I keep telling myself that I desire the same as this person because it is easier for me. However, when I wake up in the middle of the night a thought comes that I am fooling myself and that my desires are locked in my subconsciousness and I can speak up only in the silence. In the morning, though, I start to fool myself and I do anything so as not to have time for thinking. As a result I am falling into workoholism. I don't even talk about my desires to my boyfriend for the fear that they will not be consistent with his desires and he will leave me. I stop and go into self-denial so as to feel that I am loved at least for a moment.

During the time of childhood and adolescence being ashamed of the fact that one or both parents are addicted to alcohol, adult children of alcoholics are ashamed by their life partner and blame themselves for the situations which happen in families started by them. Adult children of alcoholics rarely experience the joy in their everyday lives, and they have tendency to seriousness, they can't relax, they distance themselves from others and become withdrawn from activities and reality. Due to their dysfunctional families, adult children of alcoholics don't build strong self-esteem during childhood which results in their extremely low self-esteem in adulthood. They perceive themselves as being worthless and assess themselves and others very critically. Being brought up in dysfunctional families, where they have never been supported in building their self-esteem, results in the fact that they entrust themselves to the outside world in their undertaken deeds. That is why adult children of alcoholics strive to be the best so as to project themselves as valuable people and they don't search or accept other people's help. Whatever they do, ACA want to cope on their own and as a result they have problems cooperating with others, particularly in team work. They also face difficulties in being flexible in their undertakings, when they perform something, and it doesn't go according to their plan, they feel a strong fear which may result in incompleteness of tasks.

Magda: If I don't call the shots in a company (there is a prettier girl or a more eloquent person), I'd rather not be 'a part of this orchestra'. Anyone who is better than I am, subconsciously becomes my enemy as he poses a threat. I am not capable of not being the best. Outwardly, I smile, but inside I feel unworthy... It is difficult for me to adjust to others, I can have the whole day destroyed if somebody disturbs my plan. It is difficult to accept any suggestions or criticism even if it is put mildly.

Ala: Since childhood I have always looked for a confirmation that what I did was good. Simply, I wanted to hear the praise. I often apologised for the smallest mistake I made. I always wanted to do everything in the best way I could. I was afraid to ask for assistance except when I had to. A request, the way I saw it as a child, revealed my weakness. In a company I felt worse, although I was treated well, accepted and appreciated. When somebody told me that I should believe in myself, I said that I knew but I didn't feel better then, I rather felt worse... 'I even cannot believe in myself' – I thought to myself. I always thought that there was something wrong with me and I couldn't explain what there was inside which stifled me. I set high targets but very rarely I was able to complete them. I felt I should try my best, to study well, to be knowledgeable in every field, however, I couldn't say 'what for'. I wasn't able to relax, even while on holidays, having thought that it was a waste of time. Always in a hurry,

always scared that I should have done something more although there was nothing else to do.

Weronika (25): Very often when I faced difficulties or wrestled with problems, I couldn't accept others' help. I resorted to loneliness, I didn't allow myself to be assisted which mostly resulted from my lack of faith that there was anybody who could have helped me. Unfortunately, I often hurt those people who wanted to get it off my chest. Besides, I judged myself very critically, having felt a huge anger and pain the moment something didn't go according to my thoughts or when "I blew something". It happened that I disliked or had negative feelings towards strangers and people met in chance encounters or by accident. I couldn't explain why?!? There was probably a bit of envy mixed with anger and ire inside me. I didn't want to feel the way I did, but I couldn't help.

Adult children of alcoholics have a strong belief that they are not well adapted to life so very often they can only predict what is and what isn't normal in their lives. As a confirmation that they do not accept themselves might be different attempts to cause a self-destruction. It may be visible in their denying any rights for themselves, inclinations to varied addictions (to people and substances respectively), coming down with psychosomatic diseases and eating disorders. Due to the environment of upbringing, adult children of alcoholics have huge difficulties in speaking about themselves, they see the reality in black and white colours, and in many cases they don't find any sense in their lives¹⁰.

Ala: I didn't want to speak about myself in front of others until a certain moment. I was afraid that they would discover what I was like and they wouldn't accept me. Belonging to a community helped me. I was in a group where I could speak up and talked about my relationship with God. Yet, I have never talked about alcoholic problems in my family. I had also great problems with insomnia which were visible in stressful situations (before exams, interviews etc.). But, there was a moment when my insomnia problem increased and I couldn't sleep at all because of stress and fear. I wasn't able to outline whether I was anxious then or not.

Julia: I can't really enjoy my successes, for example: passing my Matura exams, being accepted to university, good marks in exams etc. The biggest dream I have is a recovery of my addicted parent, improvement of my mum and dad's relationship, peace and happiness of each family member. If only I could learn it as anything to an exam, it would be wonderful.

10M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziła moje dzieciństwo (O Dorosłych Dzieciach Alkoholików)* Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 13-22 and 37-42.





1. The source of problems

Looking carefully at adults who have led a life influenced by alcoholism provides a means to identify difficulties in their adulthood and consider the causes, whether large or small in scale, that they have experienced and felt throughout their lives. The time of being a child creates the identity of every human being. When children experience their own helplessness, they should be allowed a transition from a symbiotic to independent relationship with parents in their families. Alongside, they are to learn a lot of essential abilities to live and compose their lives to be happy and fulfilled. In a family, which satisfies children's emotional needs, where there are clear rules and principles, they develop a sound and strong identity. Thanks to this, children are able to coexist with other people who provides them with a sense of self-fulfillment throughout the whole life. The foundation, of such family existence, is in marriage based on love of a woman and man, for many of whom, has a source in God. In marriage, a relationship which allows to fulfill and develop both of the spouses, a mature love bears a responsibility for their and others' happiness and it gives a chance to be a space for a full development of a family and born children¹¹.

In a dysfunctional family this appears to be different, though. Such a family community cannot properly fulfill main family tasks (economic, social, socio-psychological) and basic tasks, such as care and upbringing. Inability to fulfill these tasks in a dysfunctional family, with a smaller or larger degree, influences each family member. A family is a system and any impaired functioning or not realising specific responsibilities by a single family member, impacts on the whole family system, particularly on its the weakest part – a child. A dysfunctional family is withdrawn, their member often live in an isolation of the outside world, deprived of any friendships or close relationships. Should such relationships appear, they are superficial, based on appearances, deprived of real feelings, insincere. In such a family the truth about its members' problems are not discussed and at the same time the reality in which this family lives is falsified and distorted. The communication among family members is also distorted and the mutual help can't be taken into account. What is more, mostly each family member is concentrated on himself/herself and ignores others. A division of roles to perform in a dysfunctional family is rigidly prescribed and family members have an inadequate perception of the reality of their home and established

11 J. Wawerska-Kus (2009): *Dzieciństwo bez dzieciństwa*, Warszawa: DYWIZ, p. 8-12; Z. Sękowska (1982): *Współzależność wychowania i rozwoju dziecka*, in: F. Adamski (ed.) *Wychowanie w rodzinie chrześcijańskiej*, Kraków: WAM, p. 99-114.

behaviours. Children in such a family do not get coherent, edifying parental patterns, which would allow them to shape positive attitudes towards themselves, others and the world. Such life community is disposed towards maintaining a family system, neglecting a development of their members. The results of being brought up in a dysfunctional family may be different for the children. It is not uncommon that one or both parents overuse or is addicted to alcohol, or any other substances, it can also be a mental disease of a family member and legal¹² or emotional¹³ divorce. Frequently, such forms of abuse can be accompanied by physical or mental violence and ill-treatment and sexual abuse¹⁴. A dysfunctional family takes place when there is a physical or mental child's abandonment by one or both parents, their emotional absence or emotional coldness towards their kids.

The behaviour of one or both parents, which may distort a child's personality, permanently consists of all those attitudes of disapproval, devaluation and even rejecting their own children expressed in words and actions. A kind of dysfunction, which influences children in these families, may be emotional abuse, it means that adults take advantage of children to satisfy parents' emotional needs, for example, to make them a confidant of adults' matters, or to create a union of children and one parent against the other. The symptom of a dysfunctional family is also setting demands for children which are inadequate for their age and abilities by one or both par-

¹² 66 thousand out of 181 thousand of married couples divorced in 2013. It denotes that a divorce ratio (divorced to newly-wed couples) is 36.4% it is increasing every year. It amounted to 25% a decade ago and in 2010 increased to 26.6% (61.3 thousand divorces out of 230 thousand marriages). On average, 177 couples divorced a day in 2011 and overusing of alcohol was the second reason of a break-up.

¹³ The research which was carried out showed that children of divorced parents in comparison to those who were brought up by married parents usually experience stronger feelings of depression, anger, hostility, sadness, sorrow and anxiety connected with future relationships and difficulties in coping with memories. They are susceptible to stress and they have tendency of being worried. They distance themselves from others and think that, in many respects, they will never succeed in comparison to their peers from normal homes. They feel overwhelmed by burdens of life and have a lower self-esteem. They put less efforts in what they do and they have lower empathy level and are pathological liars. They brush with the law more often and quit their work. They have a lot of problems in relationships with other people which causes a divorce percentage to grow and that they have difficulties to show their feelings and control them. There are many shortcomings felt by adult children which have been caused by a legal or emotional divorce. They, among other things, lack patterns of parental attitude, lack of stable and safe environment that enables them to enter adulthood, lack advisors and confidants in their parents, lack possibilities to self-realisation in the future, they are unable to love, appreciate others and be in agreement with themselves. They are also not capable of having intimate and close relationships with other people, nor working voluntarily for a common good. J. Conway (2010): *Dorośle dzieci prawnie lub emocjonalnie rozwiedzionych rodziców*, Warszawa: Logos, p. 38-39.

¹⁴ The report made by the National Program of Preventing Family Abuse in 2007 states that about 37% of Polish people admitted that at least once they experienced a kind of family abuse, and every fifth one confessed that they were abusers in their families.

ents. Such a dysfunction may appear in parents' demands which infantilise their children, or set such expectations that are impossible to be fulfilled. Moreover, when parents seem to have more demands than they show love and tenderness towards their children, and when they overprotect and control them too much, it can lead to a dysfunction of these children¹⁵.

Currently, adult people who in the process of growing up experienced one or many forms of dysfunction in their families mentioned above are described as adult children of a dysfunctional family (ACoDF). The situation of children who were brought up in a family where one or both parents overuse or were addicted to alcohol is especially difficult to the effects which appear in adulthood. In such cases, these people are described as adult children of alcoholics (ACA).

It was observed that any experiences of strong manifestation of family dysfunction by children which were not connected with alcoholic problem are similar in the results in their adulthood to those of children from alcoholic families. Therefore, some of adult children of dysfunctional families will need in the process of healing the same assistance as adult children of alcoholics. Due to the scope of the problem and consequences for children who were brought up in a family with alcoholic problem, we will concentrate on them in due time of this book. Still, it is necessary to bear in mind that strong effects resulting from dysfunction within a family and revealed in ACoDF are similar to those of ACA, hence, methods of assistance for those groups of people will be alike¹⁶.

In a family with alcoholic problem a permanent crisis connected with continuous alcohol abuse by one or both parents is visible and it is questionable whether such a family system can survive over a sustained period of time. In this case the whole family has to get accustomed to the situation when mother or father, or both, exclude themselves from maintaining necessary needs of their own family. Mainly, it takes place when one or both parents are absent physically or when they (he, she, they) intake excessive amount of alcohol outside the family home, or when they are absent mentally, staying at home but in a state of alcoholic stupor. Such forms of absence usually last many years, they make the children be in a permanent stress which forces them to behave in a difficult or hurting ways but, at the same time, it lets them survive in a dysfunctional family. The atmosphere of an alcoholic home is also connected with a state of a specific tension linked with unpredictability of what may happen, with growing anger, ire and reproaches which make the children experience a deep anxiety. The

15J. Bradshaw (1997): *Toksyczny ustyd*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 38-62.

16J. Woititz (2000): *Dorośle dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 5.

consequence of emotional abandonment in a family with alcoholic problem is the child's low self-esteem or sometimes their worthlessness¹⁷.

Piotr: In my family life was of no bigger logic or sense. Most of our activities were connected with surviving 'somehow'. Such life causes a permanent stress, you are afraid of what will happen today and you are scared of tomorrow. Being aware that it had been happening for a long time, I had a conviction, even a certainty that it would last forever. And it killed hope and made my life pointless. The only thought you have then is to have peace and quiet, and not to be scared. The stress I experienced at home influenced my all stages of life. Then I was nervous and tensed almost everywhere and all the time. This permanent stress made me have health problems, including lack of sleep, stomach aches, distractions and lack of concentration.

Ala: My parents have always been present in my family. From the perspective of time, though, I strongly feel their mental absence in my childhood and adolescence. Although, my mum drank a lot, she worked a lot, actually she worked from the morning till the evening to provide for the family. She didn't have time to talk with us, it happened that she didn't have time to cook dinner. She was a kind of a stranger to me. Dad, on the other hand, was absorbed by listening to music and reading books all the time to distance himself from his loneliness connected with mum's addiction. It happened that I asked one of my parents about something and later he told that he was overwhelmed by his activity or he didn't pay attention to me. It was the most hurtful because I felt so meaningless. Then, I promised myself that I would always manage on my own, that I wouldn't ask anybody for help.

Ania (34): I am ACA and still I feel as an eight-year-old girl who was running away from my drunken father around the kitchen table as soon as I told him that he could kill me as I wouldn't do what he told me to do. As far as I remember I always rebelled against what happened at home, probably because I thought I could defend my mum of my father's aggressive behaviour. It was an illusion but then it seemed to be real and fair. Any time of a day or night I was ready to 'protect' my mum, it gave me a feeling of being in control over the situation. Father shouted, hurled insults at my mum and me, then he went to bed and slept another half of a day or night. Another time I was to divert his attention, amuse him and put him to bed. I acted differently, it depended on the needs. What is interesting, I was 'a warrior' only at my home, outside I was a very friendly person to others. It is true, I never refused to help anybody, always engaged, overactive, joyous, and you may say life and soul of the party, stubborn in my choleric nature. I don't remember if my

17S. Forward (2007): *Tokszyczni rodzice*, Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & CO Agencja Wydawnicza; E. Woydyłło (2009): *Poprawka z matury*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 51-89.

schoolmates or playground mates knew that my father was addicted to alcohol. Only my best friend knew, she had a similar home, but we never talked about it. It was happening somewhere beyond us.

Julia: I felt horrible when, on the one hand, in difficult situations I was the person who would try to solve them, then take care of a sick parent and lend an ear to the other one as if I was a responsible adult person. On the other hand, though, I was excessively controlled and treated like a child. When I was stressed the most, I took important decisions on my own and then in a trifling matter parents didn't trust me and I was deprived of a possibility to take responsibility for my actions.

Weronika: Actually, I haven't experience closeness and emotional relationship with my parents since my childhood. Partly because of the age difference (both my parents were 40 when I was born), partially because of a model in which my family functioned. I lived with my parents and siblings under one roof but we weren't able to communicate and stay with one another. Important and crucial matters weren't discussed at home or we shared remarks while seeing each other or in a hurry. Instead of warm family hearth, emotional coldness existed and it collided with huge and beautiful desire of Love inside me.



2. The mystery of a family

The main problem of little information about situations of children in a family with alcoholic problem seems to be verbal messages they get in it. In such families the children are taught three 'don'ts' – 'don't trust, don't tell, don't feel' and obeying them is a life necessity. The attitude of distrust is a consequence of life in chaos and reaction to scars which are made by a family with an alcoholic problem. At the beginning of their lives children usually learn to trust others and get the knowledge what is going on in the world from their parents. In the example of a parent or parents with alcoholic problem children don't find a support and it results in their lack of self-esteem and life recognition. Broken promises, agreements, inconsistencies between activities and upbringing of a drinking mother or father, or both of them, doesn't help in shaping children's trustful attitude¹⁸. Furthermore, lack of clear principles in functioning of a family with alcoholic problem, permanent 'mess' causes strong disorders in emotional lives of children.

Piotr: After some time you stop trusting anybody. It is connected with a huge feeling of uncertainty. Living this way for a long time, you stop trusting yourself.

Another strong message from adults, which is received by children in a dysfunctional family, is following: no matter what, don't tell about things connected with alcoholic problem. Do not tell that one or both parents drink, do not mention about their malaise, indisposition or bad mental and physical condition. Such an attitude denotes a confinement of issues connected with families to strangers. Outside the family, difficulties at home shouldn't be talked about, nor anything connected with overuse and alcoholism of parents. Children don't talk about matters which happen in their families to anybody because of shame, fear and hope that it will be better, something will change and that isn't that bad anyway. The attitude of permanent negation sometimes leads to an enormous loneliness of a child in an alcoholic family due to the fact that any taboos which paralyse open and intimate conversation in a family deepen their emptiness of loneliness¹⁹.

18J. Woititz (2002): *Małżeństwo na lodzie*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 45-57.

19T.L. Cermak i J. Rutzky (1998): *Czas uzdrowić swoje życie*, Warszawa: PARPA, p. 7-9.

Piotr: Not talking about a family problem is, in my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes as it strengthens the conviction that nothing has happened, 'everybody' drinks after all. This sort of things closes the whole family and the problem within them and makes it difficult to be solved. We didn't talk about the problem in my family. Everybody knew, but nobody spoke openly. Our relatives didn't want to meddle in my family problems just to avoid troubles. Children were forbidden to bad mouth about their parents and if it happened to tackle an issue, you heard that others suffered worse.

Magda: My mum drank in my family. We are perceived as a wonderful family and the fact, that alcoholic problem occurred, was a real surprise, even for the closest cousins if I confided in them. I never thought that my mum was an alcoholic as despite her drinking she could provide for us and was very resourceful. She wasn't able to express her feelings, I never heard 'I love you'. But I didn't experience a moment in which I was disgusted by her drinking. She sometimes returned home in the morning and although we had been worrying about her for the whole night, the sound of a key in the lock, which meant that she was coming back, made me thank God that she was safe and sound.

Such behaviours of one or both parents, as mentioned above, cause in child's life strong emotional states of persistent ire, hatred or anger towards them. The children see it that they are threatened to be deprived of parents' love and it is a difficult mental situation for them. As a result they start to convince themselves that they don't experience such emotional states.

Piotr: Then you start to deceive yourself and swear reality. In the process of deceiving myself I realised that I didn't know what the reality and my imagination were like. Such thinking becomes a habit and leads to a moment that I wasn't sure about anything 100%.

Exposing children to behaviours which give them any subjective feeling of safety and repeated too often may cause them to disconnect themselves from their emotional world and they lose the ability to feel emotional movements of their heart. Such situations bear a distorted inner reality which weakens and disconnects children's emotional sensor that is important in life to perceive the world and themselves. It leads to a specific 'emotional frost' and permanent fight to overcome it and, as a result, they adopt an attitude 'not to feel anything in life'²⁰.

²⁰T. Hellstern (2005): *Wsparcie dla dorosłych dzieci alkoholików. Hipopotam w pokoju stołowym*, Łódź: Wyd. Ravi, p. 42-44; K. Cholnaand M. Madej-Babula (2007): *Funkcjonowanie psychiczne DDA we współczesnym świecie*. In: Z. Marek and M. Madej-Babula (eds.): *(Bez)radność wychowania...?*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, p. 95-97.

Piotr: Not until the therapy did I get to know that a man can experience so many feelings. Earlier I didn't know how to identify them nor how to handle with them since nobody had taught me that before. Until then, fear had been the predominant feeling.

Ala: For a long time I convinced myself that I didn't care that my mum was drinking. I wasn't aware that I was getting more and more withdrawn. Talking with dad about my mum's alcoholic problem was impossible if it wasn't him who started a conversation, he freaked out and shouted. He did want to hide before me and my sister the fact which he treated as a mystery, and he continued to do it when we were adult enough to see it. The problem was also hidden before other members of the distant family. For example, when my mum drank too much at the party, everybody behaved normally and then, after the party, my dad was offended for two weeks. He didn't eat anything she cooked or bought, mum and dad didn't go out anywhere together and my dad was sitting locked in his room and thinking. It was a frightening sad picture. I had always been more attached to my mum and I talked only with her about the problem and that she couldn't cope with it. She explained to me that the reason why she drank was dad who stressed her all the time. That she had to be a breadwinner and she always heard his complaints, that she didn't prepare dinner, that there was a mess in the kitchen, that she was a bad wife etc. Then she got drunk and caused that dad was offended and the circle went round and round. I was in a muddle because I didn't know who might have been more hurt. I avoided annoying my mum or telling her not to drink.



3. Playing roles

Problems experienced by children of alcoholics during their adulthood are connected with social roles they took within their family. Four types of social roles can be singled out: a family hero, a scapegoat, a child-mascot and an invisible child²¹.

The definition of 'a family hero' can be applied to children who provide self-esteem, pride and success in a dysfunctional family. In an alcoholic family such children take on different obligations and display them in the outside world in a manner which is superficially effective. 'A family hero' takes care of matters which should be done by adults, such as tidying, cooking or raising little siblings. Such children are perceived as brave, resourceful, reserved, full of sacrifice and always ready to give up themselves for the nearest and dearest. Watching the children's activities, their parents begin to be convinced that they are bringing up responsible and successful young people. In fact, such impression is illusionary because 'a family hero' wears a kind of 'mask' and under it they are still 'a child' who isn't satisfied with themselves and with what they achieve. They live under pressure in a constant fear that somebody will discover what they are really like. There is a sort of growing belief in them that they are worthless and lonely, as well as they are convinced that nobody needs them. This is due to the fact that the children who play 'a family hero' cover their road to adulthood without the time of childhood and adolescence which doesn't allow them to face future challenges of being an adult.

Ala: I played 'a family hero' in my family. Since my childhood I have helped mum and dad to do different tasks. I was appreciated and praised that I was such a helpful child but at the same time I didn't feel better. I didn't want to be loved when I did something well. Yet, I tried to do everything in a perfect way to be noticed, not to be a burden and very often I helped my sister in her duties. I had remorse, though, that I do too little for the family, I do too much...

Julia: Being a family hero I bring a lot of positive energy into my home, it means that to some extent I pretend that everything is OK, we can handle, I can't be sad, I can't have problems and I have to try to silence any doubts. This leads to moments when, apparently, nothing disturbs me but sometimes it may seem that I approach problems recklessly.

²¹T.L. Cermak i J. Rutzky (1998): *Czas uzdrowić swoje życie*, Warszawa: PARPA, p. 28-30; B.E. Robinson and J. L. Rhoden (2008): *Pomoc psychologiczna dla dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wyd. PARPA, p. 51-63.

The role of 'a scapegoat' is taken by children thanks to whom a dysfunctional family has chances to draw attention away from real problems. In such case children are treated as a kind of 'a second best object' which serves to defuse adults' negative emotions. They are seen as opposite to 'family heroes' that they are irresponsible and difficult and by their behaviour they bring a lot of troubles and difficulties. Being 'a way to release' adults' emotions, they often resort to poor learning, early alcohol drinking, taking drugs and staying in so-called 'bad company' as a result of negative emotions focused on them. They are often blatant and arrogant towards their parents. Such children often feel hatred towards people and the world, which doesn't give them the chance to be good and it manifests a feeling of envy and underestimation in them as well²².

Another role which children may play in a family with alcoholic problem is being 'a child-mascot'. Such a person, frequently the youngest sibling is responsible for improving parents' mood. Their task, their 'speciality' is to defuse tensions and create a positive atmosphere in a dysfunctional family. Unfortunately, children from an alcoholic family who are treated this way are often frightened and tensed when they have to deal with home-dwellers' anger. They are demanded to take responsible decision in problematic situations although they are not able to handle with them. What is more, children who play such a role in a family with alcoholic problem become emotionally immature for a long time²³.

Magda: Since I remember I have always been somebody who makes my family laugh. I sometimes pretended to be a slowcoach on purpose, I was a clown – but from the perspective of time, I think it was a way to be in spotlight of my family. I felt that my family members are fond of me due to my jokes and antics.

Invisible child (little princess, sleeping knight, angel), 'a child in the mist', lost child', all of them are roles taken by children who have a huge sensibility and a fragile mental construction. They withdraw from life, isolate themselves from a nightmare of dysfunctional family, they resort to the world of imagination and dreams. In a family they behave in ways that do not attract attention. Such children have little needs and can take care of themselves. They don't cause any troubles. In social interactions 'invisible

22M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 44-48.

23A. Błasiak (2007): *Rodzina dysfunkcyjna zagrożeniem społecznego funkcjonowania dziecka*. In: Z. Marek and M. Madej-Babula (eds.): *(Bez)radność wychowania..?*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, p. 75-76; B.E. Robinson and J. L. Rhoden (2008): *Pomoc psychologiczna dla dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wyd. PARPA, p. 61-62.

children' are withdrawn, sometimes are seen as shy. Playing such a role in a family with an alcoholic problem causes that these children experience a growing feeling of worthlessness and deep loneliness. The relationships which are displayed in a dysfunctional family make these children unable to get in touch with other people, appropriately express their needs or be capable of cooperating with others. In adulthood 'an invisible child' can't make a satisfying romantic relationship with other people²⁴.

Piotr: I was an invisible child in my family. I could take care of myself. I read a lot of books, played on my own, I was a good pupil and there weren't any problems with me. I was alone during most of my childhood. I didn't have many mates, I couldn't and, in fact, I didn't want to get in touch with my peers, sometimes I didn't understand them. When I was a teenager I felt lonely, I had a few friends but it was so superficial. I had already been aware that I had some shortcomings in my social development, that I couldn't make close relationships.

Weronika: Playing a role of an invisible child in my family cost an immense loneliness in my childhood. It took two aspects: on the one hand, it was constructive as while looking for help and relief I turned to the Highest Goodness which I was looking for intensely and which I needed. It allowed me to deepen my spirituality and make a personal relationship with God and Holy Mother. On the other hand, my loneliness made me feel guilty for a difficult situations and I had an irrational conviction that I should make something up and realise it. Hence, I was often lost and felt helpless in various situations.

Four roles, which have been described above, can be played by children in a dysfunctional family (within different stages of their lives they can play another role or a few ones at a time) are also defined as 'false personalities'. They are the result of unconscious reactions of children who try to cope with a difficult situation at home, circumstances when parents fail because they haven't realised their vocation of being a mother and father. Unfortunately, they are continuously played by adult children of alcoholics so as to survive in a specific area of a dysfunctional family and these roles of 'a family hero', 'a scapegoat', 'a mascot' or 'an invisible child' become the part of their own personalities²⁵.

24M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 47-48.

25B.E. Robinson and J. L. Rhoden (2008): *Pomoc psychologiczna dla dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wyd. PAR-PA, p. 63.



4. Feelings, behaviours, attitudes

A family situation which was broadly outlined above, a family in which adult children of alcoholics grew up, the roles they played has a fundamental influence on their lives, how and what they feel²⁶. It can be noticed that ACA in their adulthood experience a huge fear of being rejected and frequently it leads to avoiding any emotional engagement. They have enormous difficulties to create permanent, satisfying relationships. What is more, being in such a relationship adult children of alcoholics are sensitive to pay attention to partner's signals which suggest their leaving or weakening bonds and they precede actions by causing a break up²⁷.

Magda: I remember that I was always afraid that my boyfriend would break up and it seemed to me that mentally I couldn't stand such a situation. So, it never happened that somebody broke up with me. I was the first who left, despite the fact that I loved and suffered after split-up. Yet, I couldn't allow somebody from the outside world that it was me who wasn't loved.

Piotr: ACA think in 'black and white' categories, that is why they expect a total and unconditional acceptance. Being rejected by their relatives, they bear in mind how it hurts and will never allow something like that to happen again, so they prefer to break up themselves.

Being emotionally or physically rejected by parents, adult children of alcoholics are immensely influenced by these feelings in their dysfunctional families and they perceive themselves in a way of feeling a permanent low self-esteem or complete worthlessness.

Piotr: Children who are rejected by their parents are often convinced that they are unimportant to anybody. Many a time it is strengthened by remarks such as 'if you had never been born...'. It makes them feel worthless, unworthy of love. They feel to be a burden for a family, unnecessary object. They feel that they do not want to live, think of death, would like to be dead or escape into another and better world. This thinking often leads to addictions to somebody or something.

²⁶By taking a following test, everybody can check if they have any specific features of adult children of alcoholics (ACA): www.psychologia.edu.pl/index.php?dz=autodiagnoza&op=opis&id=1936.

This test isn't the only one method to check if a certain person has an ACA syndrome but it can be a valuable hint in this matter.

²⁷J. Woititz (2000): *Dorośle dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 51-57.

Adult children of alcoholics try to cope with this painful feeling of low self-esteem in two ways. Firstly, they behave perfectly, they set themselves high demands and they are ready to do a lot of tasks. They seem to prove their worth by performing different actions²⁸. Trying to build self-esteem by activities, adult children of alcoholics feel to be worse once again when they happen to hear criticism of what they do. And the number of praises they get doesn't help in any way.

Piotr: Getting a report for the best student at the end of a school year was my sense of life. Thanks to it I felt good and worthy. It enhanced my self-esteem and was connected with praises from others.

Ala: I had always wanted to be perfect in every field, I often asked others what I could do better if I did something badly. However, any criticism was accepted reluctantly. Actually, even the least criticism caused that the whole success didn't count. Although I appreciated people who paid my attention to 'the imperfections, faults', there was a rebellion against them inside me.

Weronika: My activities were mostly dominated by other people's opinions. I wanted to do everything well so as to be appreciated and praised. I felt a huge desire to be accepted by others. Yet, it was very difficult for me to accept when others were appreciated in my presence as automatically it caused a comparison mechanism switched on inside me: 'I would like to be like..', 'I can't do that this way...', 'I am not able enough to'... It often resulted from my low self-esteem and feeling of being worse.

Another way to cope with low self-esteem which is practiced by ACA may be called evasive behaviours. It means that adult children of alcoholics withdraw from doing difficult tasks in advance in order not to experience bitterness of failure.

Piotr: It is better to withdraw from a problem or difficulties. Another failure only strengthened a conviction that you were good for nothing and you weren't able to do anything. So it's better to do nothing or keep to the task you are sure to do well.

Adult children of alcoholics have a tendency of sticking to one chosen way of doing tasks. They don't look into other possibilities of behaving and probable consequences of their undertakings. Such impulsiveness leads to increasing hatred of themselves and the loss of a control over the surroundings. Additionally, when they realise what the situation is like, they use too much energy to make it clear²⁹.

28E. Woydyłło (1998): *Podnies głowę*, Warszawa: Wyd. Akuracik, p. 19-26.

29-Z. Sobolewska (2000): *Odebrane dzieciństwo*, Warszawa: IZP, p. 8-10.

Adult children of alcoholics are people who in their childhood experienced a state of permanent rejection from relatives and, as a result, in their adulthood they are wary and have a strong feeling to distance themselves from others. Consequently, relationships with others make them feel lonely and isolated. Then, they purposefully avoid relationships with others and they don't begin any relations with people they encounter accidentally if they don't share any emotional bonds with them. Most of adult children of alcoholics think that their parents' relationship was unsuccessful and at the same time they have an irrational faith that they are able to build a better one with an alcoholic. The way they perceive themselves and their abilities to create relationships with another person makes adult children of alcoholics have difficult relationships, usually with addicted partners. The reason why they behave in such a way can be explained as a necessity to avoid loneliness at all costs. Moreover, adult children of alcoholics are very loyal in these dysfunctional relationships, even if they find out that the other person doesn't deserve it³⁰.

Living in a family with alcoholic problem ACA experienced the reality that revealing their feelings to relatives is met with rejection and aggression from others. In their dysfunctional home they see that their feelings are not reciprocated. Being able to survive the fear and suffering, and to overcome a growing feeling of despise to themselves, they create a defensive mechanism which is based on stifling both positive and negative feelings. To defend themselves ACA don't try to recognise their feelings nor show or reveal them to anybody, they simply 'freeze their feelings'.

Ala: I remember such a situation from my childhood. My mum didn't return from work long time. We worried where she was. When we asked dad where our mummy was, he shouted at us to stop crying and went to his room. We couldn't sleep, we were praying and waiting for her the whole night. When she finally returned from work, unfortunately drunk, I and my sister were happy that she came back and ran to greet her. Dad was angry with us, then.

Piotr: To survive in an alcoholic family, ACA learn a lot of defensive mechanisms. For example, hearing the praise they can't accept it as nobody has praised them before. They ignore it and think that the person who complements them purposefully lies or wants to adulate to them.

³⁰It is estimated that even 60% of girls from alcoholic families start a relationship with an addicted person in spite of the fact that at adolescence they promise themselves that they will create a family different from their own. However, the necessity to be with somebody forces them to make inappropriate choices. T. Hellstern (2005): *Wsparcie dla dorosłych dzieci alkoholików. Hipopotam w pokoju stołowym*, Łódź: Wyd. Ravi, p. 63-90.

Ala: Until now, although I think it happens rarely, I have had problems with defining my feelings, desires, expectations towards myself, others and my life. Actually, I have often an impression that nobody cares for my feelings. When I was in a relationship with a boy, I truly could be open in front of him, although in the beginning it was difficult for me to believe that somebody could fall in love with me just like that. Rarely I speak nice things to others. It resulted from the fact that I couldn't acknowledge that somebody is better than I. Unfortunately, I often envied and tried to find faults in those who might endanger me in my environment. I played hard to get, I rarely revealed my feelings and talked about myself, I was afraid that I would be rejected if somebody got to know what I was really like.

Magda: I know that I always hid my feelings towards the opposite sex. I was frigid for boys I liked, I often ignored them. I did anything so that the other person wouldn't know that I cared. The fear that I am not attractive enough 'for him' leads to a conviction that nobody will ever love me. Although the reality is different as I often hear complements, the first thought to come is that these people can't see my interior and if they know it, they will leave.

Weronika: In spite of huge emotional coldness in my family I have a great sensitivity and desire for intimacy and recognition. I can't look at others' suffering, though. I would like to do something, sometimes just to talk so that somebody feels a relief, I would like to help. Unfortunately, it happens that when I don't help, I feel inner pain and powerlessness.

In the time of childhood adult children of alcoholics' basic emotional needs of being loved, accepted, admired and important for somebody weren't satisfied. All the efforts to deserve parents' love didn't bring ACA any expected changes and still they didn't experience unconditional love in their families which they needed so much. In order to cope with that life situation, they mastered an art of denying their own needs or they even negated them. As a result, adult children of alcoholics don't take care of themselves and at the same time they don't give themselves a chance to fulfill any of their needs. However, in contact with other people ACA try their best to meet the expectations. Such a deep denial of ACA's needs may cause a permanent inability to imagine, recognise and fulfill their own needs³¹.

Ala: The way I showed a denial of my needs was adopting an attitude of avoiding objections. I didn't care about anything as long as I didn't cause a problem and everybody thought well about me. I often overcame myself when I agreed to discom-

31M. Beattie (2003): *Koniec współzależnienia*, Poznań: Media Rodzina, p. 61-63.

fort, when I gave up my free time, when I didn't pay attention to my feelings or fears but I agreed to help others. I wanted to be good and thought that agreeing to anything and making other people's lives easier means a key to success. If somebody asks me to help them, I can't let them down, can I? However, deep in my heart I felt bad then, I was angry with me that I was doing something against my will. Yet, did I really know then what my will was?

Magda: Only recently I have noticed a lot of such situations: I can take care of my boyfriend, make him delicious sandwiches, however, when I am alone and I fancy something, I don't even feel like slicing bread and end up in satiating with anything.

Living in a dysfunctional family, in a permanent chaos, adult children of alcoholics tried to overcome it as they were convinced that their own and their relatives' safety is depended on satisfying results of combating 'mess' existing in their present families. That is why, adult children of alcoholics think that the possibility to influence their surroundings is particularly important, and this way they start to control themselves and others. It can be seen in overprotective behaviours and in manipulating members of the family. Some adult children of alcoholics have an urge to sort their lives out and it is connected with a strategy to plan their life for many years ahead. Some of them, though, react differently to the unpredictability of events in their childhood. They don't attempt to sort out anything in their lives and relationships. This group of ACA plan quite little, they have difficulties with a complete fulfillment of their objectives.

Established experiences from the childhood in a dysfunctional family teach them that any change is dangerous. When some situations were repeated it was possible to find a way how to survive them, yet, any new situations evoked a greater fright and awe in them. That is why a lot of adult children of alcoholics persevere in unfavourable conditions or relationships mostly because they are scared of any change.

Piotr: The urge to control is so strong that you control everybody and everything so as not to be surprised and in order to be prepared to any circumstances. That is the knowledge we get at an unpredictable home.

Ala: I had always been scared before leaving home, before new situations, making new acquaintances, before September 1st. Usually, before such events I didn't sleep the whole night.

Weronika: Very rarely and with few people I feel without restraint. More often, though, I am decidedly accompanied by self-control not to do something wrong nor to hurt somebody. Such feelings are strengthened in a new, strange company when I feel rather insecure.

Due to one or both parents' alcohol abuse, adult children of alcoholics had to learn to be accustomed somehow to life in their childhood when they lived in an atmosphere of threat. Unfortunately, in their adulthood they still feel this threat, even if it doesn't exist in real³².

The fear was the basic result of experiencing mental or physical abuse in ACA's childhood. They couldn't reveal that feeling outside at that time, especially in front of relatives, so they had been left alone with a strong fear, which contributed to deepening their lack of feeling safe³³. Those strong fears didn't disappear when adult children of alcoholics became adult, they still feel certain fears which become stronger in the time of a relatively peaceful period of life. Moreover, these fears make them use old methods to cope with them, mainly be stifling them or turning to escape mechanism³⁴.

Piotr: It happened that I didn't have any reasons to worry and in spite of it, I felt anxious. The fear is so rooted in ACA's life that it is difficult to feel safe later. You often think that it is too calm so definitely something bad will happen.

Weronika: I experienced fear in many fields of life. In fact, everything that was new or strange made me feel anxious straight away. Making decisions was a huge anxiety for me as it was connected with taking a responsibility for yourself and others.

The feeling of fear isn't the only one that children mustn't reveal to others. The reaction to mental and physical abuse experienced by adult children of alcoholics in their families is a deep hidden feeling of ire, anger and hatred. In their further life it can be revealed by uncontrolled tantrums towards relatives, particularly the children. Some of ACA are able to stop such aggressive behaviours and not show them outside, but they exist inside them. In such case, these feelings are stifled which leads to a strong sense of guilt and self-destructive behaviours.

32J. Woititz (2000): *Dorośle dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akuracik, p. 57-62.

33S. Jeffers (1999): *Nie bój się bać*, Warszawa: Wyd. Akuracik, p. 9-13.

34A. Wobiz (2001): *Współuzależnienie w rodzinie alkoholowej*, Warszawa: Wyd. Akuracik, p. 13-33.

Piotr: I often reacted sharply towards other people. Then, I felt guilty and realised that my sharp reaction was caused by the anger I had been hiding for years and which I hadn't been able to express before. That person wasn't often guilty but they behaved towards me in a way my parents did so it made me react so sharply.

Ala: I have always been living in a state of feeling guilty for everything and everybody. I think, everybody in my family has a problem with it. Frequently, in family arguments, everybody says that they have remorse because of expressing their opinion. After the argument everybody locks in their rooms and nobody talks about this matter anymore.

Ania: Another picture from my life is a permanent disappointment, broken promises and both my parents were alike in it. The fact that my inebriated father pretended to be dying and my child heart was falling apart seeing him suffer with blood on his face /he had fallen on the way back and scratched his face/ wasn't as painful as when my mother lied so often. Under the guise of taking care of me and being interested in me, she promised to go for a walk, or a common play. Then, I wasn't aware what was happening, I thought that it had to be that way, I didn't feel sorrow, sometimes anger and it comes back to me sometimes, when my own beloved children do something which gets my life out of control.

The first authority figures for children in their childhood are parents. Adult children of alcoholics don't perceive them this way due to the fact that in relationship with their parents they often experienced lies, words that are not kept, disappointment in important life matters. In a following life, adult children of alcoholics adopt an attitude of distrust towards people who are commonly treated as authority figures. At the same time, ACA still needs to have their own authority figures and show a longing for them.

Piotr: It is difficult for me to call anybody an authority figure. God the only. A man is an authority only in a specific field, never as the whole being.

In a family with alcoholic problem there is no room for fulfilling a clear-cut system of values. Basing on different reasons, dysfunctional parents break the rules all the time, in spite of the fact that they adopted a definite group of values and principles often coming from the religion they profess. Having such an attitude doesn't mean that they bother when they convey these chosen principles to their children. This causes that the children experience lack of moral order and clear separation of good from evil. Due to this reality ACA search intensively and then they obey moral

norms rigidly. As a result they assess all actions, situations, events of theirs and others in black and white categories. Strict moral judgments of ACA can be a reason that they have problems with encountering other people and in a close relationship, they may have a limited ability to forgive³⁵.

Piotr: ACA have to guess and assume what is 'normal'. They experienced so many opposing rules and principles that they feel lost in it. They look for clear, implicit principles which often leads to radicalism. The problem to tell the different between good and wrong is a source of many problems of their moral and spiritual nature.

Ala: The first breaking 'rules and principles' I noticed in my father's behaviour when he lied in front of the family whether my mum didn't feel well or that she was ill. It was to protect us from telling the truth. Mum also broke promises. I still remember the day I was to bake biscuits with her for school. She promised to come back earlier from work, she returned after midnight and she was drunk. I was so ashamed in front of the class that although it's been ten years since that moment, the feeling of shame connected with that situation if I only remind it, comes back somehow. Mum tried to defuse all those situations and because she earned good money, she took us to design shops for clothes. It seemed to her that when she gave us money the problem would disappear. Dad got annoyed when we defended our mum and said that we loved her because she gave us money. It is the worst moment for a child to hear such accusations, when you loved your mum because she was a mum.

Frequently it happens that adult children of alcoholics give up their personal life for taking care of alcohol abused parents. They think that their principal life vocation is to protect their mum or dad, or both parents sinking in addiction. It can also be observed that, despite having their own families, ACA spend a lot of time with their addicted parents and neglect their own relationship with family members.

Describing typical behaviours of adult children of alcoholics it should be pointed that their self-realisation may be connected with succeeding in their work. ACA can be met in many various organisations or enterprises where they strive to achieve a self-realisation by engaging in the work they do. Adult children of alcoholics can have responsible posts at various levels of a company or organisation and succeed in their work. It happens so because when they lived in dysfunctional families, where in order to survive they had to be under permanent pressure and stress, and as a result they cope perfectly with these 'states' at work and fulfill their tasks efficaciously.

35Z. Sobolewska (2000): *Odebrane dzieciństwo*, Warszawa: IZP, p. 19-29.

ACA usually carry out their duties very well and they are not afraid of difficult challenges or taking ventures if they have to. In their professional life adult children of alcoholics are responsible and they don't give in to adversities. At work they are perceived by colleagues and superiors as people who are level-headed, steady, especially in critical moments. Yet, few of those who work with them can notice that despite their outer attitude, their inner self is full of tension and fear before being assessed by others³⁶.

While presenting chosen feelings, behaviours and attitudes of adult children of alcoholics, it has to be stressed that all of them have features described above and that some of them have features which haven't been mentioned at all. However, the definition 'adult children of alcoholics' and a description of characteristic group of features seems to be helpful for people who live hardships caused by a dysfunctional or alcoholic family³⁷. It seems that the most important thing, regarding these people, is to break the state of isolation, in which they live, and to find people who can understand their huge fear and predominant suffering, just because they have similar experiences. It should help ACA to find the courage to come back mentally to the bad past and try to learn how to react differently in their current reality in comparison to the situations in a traumatic childhood³⁸.

Piotr: Without going back to the past and without going through it, I wouldn't be able to live my life consciously. I would live in a world of illusion and contradictions. Going back to the past helped me to face my difficult experiences. Thanks to it, I discovered the truth about my family, I got to know who I really am, I found my identity, I got rid of many behaviours which disturbed my life, I learned how to deal with my emotions.

36M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 59-67.

37M. Kucińska DDA – kim jesteśmy?, www.psychologia.edu.pl, 23.08.2008.

38A. Dodziuk: *Dorośle Dzieci Alkoholików*, „Gazeta Wyborcza – Wysokie Obcasy”, 10.05.2002.



5. Sense of suffering

Every human being's life is accompanied by suffering. It seems, though, that being an adult child of alcoholics is connected, in a particular way, with experiencing suffering of a different range and power³⁹. Experienced suffering, in the whole life of ACA, may have different faces. It can appear as a physical or psychological suffering, sensed mainly emotionally, or else spiritual suffering described also as moral and existential pain. That is why it is impossible to avoid questions about the reasons of suffering, its sense and why it affects a given person, particularly from the perspective of the reflection of adult children of alcoholics. It is obvious as well that asking such questions, there is no right to get complete answers, what is required to show a certain bright side in a human being's existence. The side resulting from a firm conviction that it is God who is the way to find oneself even in the greatest and non-culpable suffering.

Every person experiences suffering in this world, especially when they suffer any evil which takes forms of a certain absence, limitation and warped good. What is more, a man suffers also due to being deprived of a certain good or they deprive themselves of it – the good which should exist in their living space but it does not. Furthermore, the suffering may be the result of improper understanding and practicing a gift of freedom by a man, which is commonly understood as a mere waywardness. A contemporary human being shows a tendency of not taking a responsibility for their performed freely and consciously deeds, which can lead to increasing suffering in their living space.

In such an experienced reality, particularly weighed down by their own or their relatives' suffering, a man asks about its sense. At the same time, not perceiving this sense can lead to a deepened human suffering. They are more and more aware that they are not able to find an answer to this question in themselves. Therefore, a man turns to God with this existential calling about the purpose of the suffering. They sometimes come into conflict with Him and they even negate God's existence. We know from the Bible that God is awaiting such questions from people and listens carefully to their uncertainties. Moreover, not only does He await and listen, but He also desires to reply to these questions throughout His words written on pages of the Holy Scripture. He points that He speaks to a man and about a man. The truth about the eternal source of human being's existence appears on pages of the Bible. In this written word of God it is revealed the truth that love is the most complete information about the sense of people's lives, including those who experience an intense suffering.

39Z. Ryn: Sens cierpienia, www.charaktery.eu, 23.06.2009.

Despite so legible and straight response from God to people's questions, it is necessary to be aware that suffering, to some extent, remain a mystery to people. Received explanations may be relatively inadequate and not satisfying. That is why only with the Word of God which became the Body, Jesus Christ and because of Him, a man can understand the mystery and the sense of it. The question about the sense of suffering was the most sufficiently answered by God in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. On this cross Christ suffers voluntarily and guiltlessly combining His tremendous physical and spiritual suffering with love. This combination lets God find a way to turn evil and suffering into good. Finding a sense of suffering by a man, possibilities to take advantage of the potential it involves may, as it seems, be accomplished only by deep personal relationship with Christ in everyday life. Then the man can combine their suffering, their crosses with Jesus Christ and His Cross, and as a result find a sense of suffering on their way to faith. Looking at the suffering from this perspective, an attitude of love should be awakened, particularly towards those who show hardships of their existence. It gives a chance to transform all suffering reality which surrounds people into the world of human love with Christ and with His support. Hence, with Christ and thanks to Him, a man in his suffering may grow in disinterested love⁴⁰. In the perspective shown above there is a strong conviction and hope that sufferings of adult children of alcoholics, who experienced them in their family homes and still experience at present, will acquire a deeper meaning to them if they are tied with Christ Cross. With Christ they will be able to look differently at all what have happened in their lives, at their parents, siblings and undertake actions to strengthen the attitude of love towards them and build a mature personality.

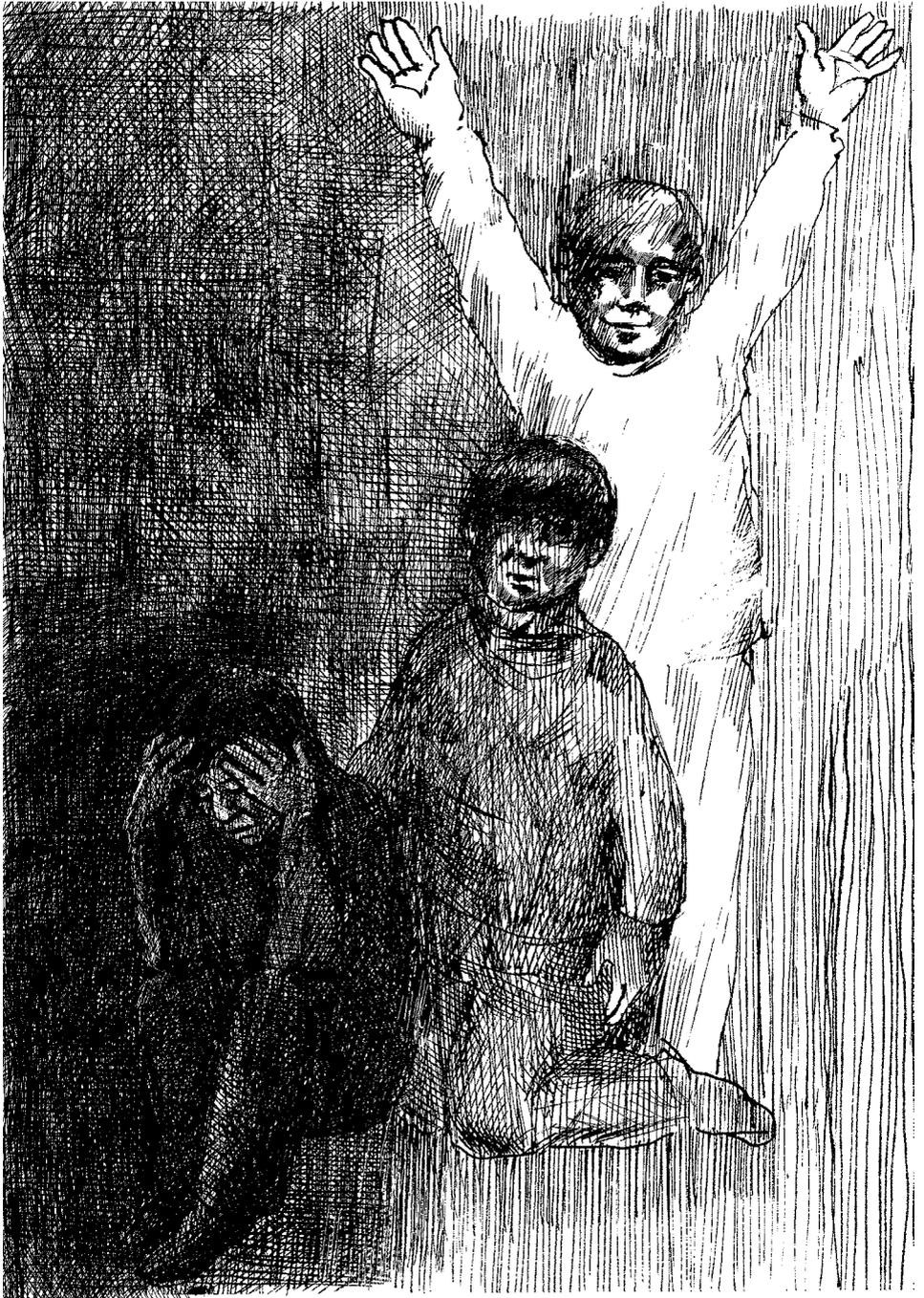
Ala: The greatest suffering for me was when I couldn't help my mum, that I saw her in a state with which I couldn't do anything. I felt a huge injustice in my life. I asked: Why could others have normal lives and I couldn't? I reproached God for why He didn't react, why my abstinence and prayer didn't work. It was a horrible feeling, as if my prayers had fallen on deaf ears, I felt extremely helpless and lost. From the perspective of time I can see the sense of it all. Although I have many dysfunctions, I have to fight for my life, for my identity and I know that without situations I experienced at home, I wouldn't have received so many graces from God. Starting with the fact that it is easier for me to understand another person, I can say I am more careful in judging. I can see clearer what a great parents' responsibility is when they decide to have a child, and how enormously the child is influenced by their behaviour.

⁴⁰Jan Pawel II (1997): *List Apostolski Salwifici Dolores*. In: *Wybór listów Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, p. 39-72.

Through my persistent prayer my relationship with God is deeper, I can see how much He loves me and shows that if you trust Him, He will show you the best way out of every hopeless position. Long-standing abstinence has always been a struggle for me – I have been mocked and nobody even tried to understand me. Nevertheless, I was able to overcome all those difficulties, it exercised me in forbearance and, probably, it will protect me and my future family from being addicted to alcohol. I know that if I had lived in a normal family, I would have avoided many disappointments, but probably I wouldn't have met Jesus, the most important person in my life.

Piotr: It seems to me that if there wasn't any suffering, I would be less contemplative. I wouldn't ask myself so many questions what the world is like and what really matters in life. I think, only thanks to God I survived all those difficult moments in my life. He was the only and unique hope, even though it seemed that there was no hope. I am convinced that without God, I wouldn't have been able to endure that suffering nor enter the way of healing.

Ania /34/: When I turned 17, God revealed Himself in my life. I got to know people connected with Church and my way to self-awareness, self-determination began and today I can tell it was a way to love and happiness. When I saw that it is possible to live in a different way, I was astonished, now I feel sad and disappointed not only by my father's but mostly by my mother's behaviour. Although my father hasn't been drinking for a few years, my mum can't cope with co-dependency. She can't function normally and drags me in her weird moods and emotional manipulations. My mum is aware that I am stronger and I don't allow her to govern my emotional life. I got to know my husband and his family, people who don't talk vainly about how much they love one another, but their lives are filled with work and celebrations. They get together very often as a deeply religious multigenerational family with traditions. They have their better and worse sides, yet, they accept me with open arms. I am not homeless or an orphan any more. My husband has taught me how to enjoy every day, how to slow down and not to be afraid of emptiness which rushes upon my mind /and what now?/ or the fear of separation, failure and betrayal. His love is so humane, it isn't perfect, sometimes lazy and full of assumptions, but it allowed me to love myself, my life history, immature child in me, and my body. My parents 'blessed' me not only with a dowry of lost childhood but also a genetically determined appearance which reminds me of whose daughter I am. The greatest God's grace for me is an awareness that He is the person with whom everything has begun. He gave me a life so it is a value in itself, only He is faithful and I can trust Him. I encountered so many difficult moments, from borderline loneliness through days filled with challenging illnesses and ailments which are inheritance from my family home. I have never been left alone. God always sends people who can empathise with my fortunes and miseries. Glory to Him for this.



6. Change of life

With a great degree of certainty it can be said that a problem of adult children of alcoholics is getting worse and creates a kind of snow-ball effect. It means that this group is bigger and bigger in our country, therefore, all possible quick and determined actions should be taken to counteract this tendency.

As it was shown in the introduction, it seems that commonly understood academic community such as universities, students' organisations, university societies and chaplaincy are obliged to undertake certain activities in this regard. It is the academic community which is stringently required to realise its mission, mission which concerns activity for the benefit of the society. Describing a mission and assignments of every higher education institution in Poland, the Higher Education Law unequivocally points to the double role of education at the level of Higher School⁴¹. Namely, apart from tasks resulting from providing knowledge, universities and every lecturer has a duty to bring up students. It can be accepted, therefore, that any activities undertaken in university community for the benefit of students and employees – adult children of alcoholics – will fulfill the law of the obligation of the process to bring up. It must be strongly underlined that the whole academic community should realise its social responsibility for the environment in which they fulfill their mission. It can also be said that university community should realise their social responsibility by scientific re-think and specific educational and organisational informative undertakings on behalf of children of alcoholics. Their number, as it was aforementioned, is increasing in Poland every year and it is becoming a crucial social problem.

There are at least two possible opportunities for the university community to undertake specific actions. The first one exists inside the university and is connected with any help which can be given to students, employ-

⁴¹The Higher Education Act of 27.07.05, art.13. p. 2 and art. 111 p. 1.

ees-adult children of alcoholics⁴². It could be done by implementation of preventive activities concerning a wide range of addictions for the first-year students, for example by the 'Correction' program.

This program is addressed to adult people and tailored to the needs of a given group. It is preventive, educational and many a time interventional program. The program providers are aware that most of participants have contact with alcohol. Thus, the main purpose is promoting moderate drinking and conveying information about conscious and reasonable alcohol intake. It is to prevent problems with hazardous drinking, frequently leading to overuse and harmful drinking, and as a result, to addiction. Moreover, the program aims to prevent and decrease damages which currently are visible in young people's lives, because they and the people surrounding them drink alcohol and take other addictive substances. It also aims to promote health and assist to develop their abilities to lead healthy lifestyles. Preventive activities at 'Correction' are to strengthen motivation and attitude of those students who are determined to be, or remain, abstainers.

While conducting the program 'Correction', it was revealed that students show interest in raised issues and some of them lively participate in discussions. The first-year students become very active due to 'brainstorm' method used by those who lead activities.

In the first part of this program, students, who participate, give reasons what benefits, in their opinion, there are from drinking alcohol. The benefits most often mentioned are: good fun, improved mood, facilitated relationships and health benefits. This part of activities reveals how stereotypes about alcohol are deeply ingrained in thinking of first-year students. Discussions with students based on professional knowledge, research results and leaders' experience give a possibility to prove how many of those common convictions are pure myths. The point is how to make first-year students of higher education institute notice that many of those benefits re-

⁴²Implementation of specific help for students, employees, ACA included, has taken place in the University of Economics in Katowice, Poland, since 2001 when the first permanent on-call role of psychologists was established. It is pursued in the university two hours a day, from Monday to Thursday throughout the academic year. Currently there are two psychologists on duty, Ms. mgr Maria Rabsztyń and Ms. mgr Magdalena Adler. In November 2005, the University of Economics joined the program 'Higher education institutions free from addictions' and the then rector Prof. dr hab Florian Kuźnik appointed the author of this book as his proxy responsible for prevention of addictions. The following academic year, as part of 'Higher education institutes free from addictions', the research about addictions was held in the University of Economics and it was directed to 700 students of different years of full-time courses. The results of that research explicitly revealed the need to undertake certain actions to prevent addictions. Therefore, preventive activities 'Correction' were introduced for the first-year courses. In the academic year 2008 – 2009 the 'Correction' program included all students who started studying at UE /both full-time and extramural/. Almost 4000 students were allowed to take advantage of preventive activities concerning dangers and addictions to psychoactive substances, particularly to alcohol. An important step towards activities directed to help ACA students was creating a therapy year for them within Chaplaincy 'Zawodzie' in 2001. Since then, there has been created a therapeutic group conducted by mgr Teresa Adamczyk every year with a financial support of Katowice Town Hall. Uczelnia wolna od uzależnień, www.ae.katowice.pl, 02.06.2009.

garded by them are indirect, immediate and short-lived. And, what is more, that drinking alcohol is connected with many losses which are long-standing and frequently difficult to be spotted at the beginning. Most students who take part in the 'Correction' program see only positive aspects of drinking alcohol but along with it they are aware of losses resulting from it. However, they do not identify them with each other. For them, there are losses of 'those whoever other people'.

Another part of the 'Correction' program is when students have to answer questions included in an AUDIT screener. Each student individually and anonymously answers the questions about their contacts with alcohol. On the base of received results, participants of the preventive program can be divided into three following groups: abstainers, drinking relatively hazardously, drinking hazardously and drinking compulsively. It is necessary to underline that the results received while conducting the preventive program are not a diagnose of those students, but they are to aim to illustrate a way of drinking of a given person⁴³.

The 'Correction' program is recommended not as a direct form of assistance for ACA, but, with a great probability, it can be said that it provides a chance to highlight situations connected with alcohol which took place in their family homes.

Apart from realising the 'Correction' preventive program it is important to provide proper literature about ACA syndrome for academic community and creating websites linked with it. The first step to change adult children of alcoholics' lives is to raise awareness about who they are and to realise how their family situations, connected with overusing or addiction to alcohol of one or both parents, influenced them. When a person has a possibility to gain some knowledge about what happens in a dysfunctional family, he has a chance to spot that he experienced something similar.

It allows them to think over their lives and be aware how many specific feelings of ACA behaviour are present in them. Those considerations can lead to identify them as adult children of alcoholics and awaking hope that there is a possibility to change their frame of mind and lifestyles. This moment in ACA' lives is called a contemplation stage. But, before any changes are followed in their lives, they usually begin to verify their thoughts with acquaintances or people who took part in a therapy for adult children of alcoholics. They can also turn to psychologists and, with them, they try to recognise if it is advisable for them to take part in a therapeutic group. Hence, it is so important to enable members of a university to take advantage of psychologists' help, for example, during their on-call roles at the university.

43M. Kolečka-Rusecka, G. Polok: Sprawozdanie z zajęć profilaktycznych 'Korekta', www.ac.katowice.pl, 02.06.2009.

Realisation by some people that they are ACA may result in different reactions and behaviours. Some of them, being aware who they are, do not take any steps to change anything in their lives claiming that they live good lives. Others, aware who they are, start to think about a possibility to change the quality of their lives. It makes them begin a process of inner change and force them to take part in a therapy for adult children of alcoholics⁴⁴. Academics should create possibilities of participating in a therapy by members of academic community with ACA syndrome and it appears as a next step to realise that there are possibilities to help people from dysfunctional families.

The work with adult children of alcoholics can be done in an individual or group therapy. It aims to recognise the problem by ACA and create conditions for them to realise what was denied and suppressed and face it. It is to lead adult children of alcoholics to accept reality and make a choice directed to development. Taking into account the work with addicted people, the most effective is the one within a therapeutic group. Throughout the therapy ACA experience again all painful feelings and emotions which were present in their lives and alongside they learn how to defuse emotions in a positive way. Moreover, people in ACA therapeutic group help one another in expressing and defusing strong emotions of anger, fear, worry, suffering or joy. In a safe atmosphere full of support, participants of therapeutic group – adult children of alcoholics begin to trust one another and recognise their inner strength. During meetings of existing therapeutic group of ACA, they create community which takes care of each other, they seem to build ‘a family’ which becomes a strong support. At the same time, working with such a group, there should be enough time and place to take a close look at individual problems of its participants.

In a group, therapy adult children of alcoholics get to realise that their fundamental problem is co-dependency. During the therapy they are able to know what this co-dependency means, why it has developed in them and what kind of complications are connected with its long-term effects. Participants of such a group slowly come to a psychological balance by reconciliation and forgiving themselves and others. They learn to make proper choices which is a decisive moment for gradual healing process in case of adult children of alcoholics. Throughout the activities in the group they are also able to free themselves from emotional burdens of the past which in today’s reality is overwhelming. They also realise that they have abilities to make changes in their lives. Participating in group activities should also

44M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p. 70-71.

help them to understand how their dysfunctional family situations have influenced their acquired behaviour patterns, and as a result, may cause them to be able to make changes in their present lives⁴⁵.

An outlined therapeutic process frequently leads to a breakthrough in lives of adult children of alcoholics which appears to be the beginning of their emotional healing. This process is connected with the need of finding a safe place for ACA, a place where they can express their emotions, trust somebody and share their lives with others. This way, another phenomenon occurs during or after the therapy, a kind of support groups.

The work in each therapeutic group can be preceded by individual consultations and people who are willing to take part in it should be motivated to a personal change and express a strong desire to be involved in the therapeutic process. It should be visible in high attendance at year-long therapeutic meetings. It can be noticed that every cycle of a yearly therapy is divided into two parts: psycho-educational /open group/ and therapeutic /closed group/.

In the first part of psycho-educational cycle adult children of alcoholics are to gain knowledge about alcoholic disease and about ways of functioning in a distorted family system. It is followed by a mutual encounter of the participants, the growth of their sense of a group security and the development of an open, sincere way of communication. At this level of the therapy, adult children of alcoholics have a possibility to see themselves and their functioning in a group. Furthermore, they start to discover their personal methods of coping with fear or obstinacy which appear when they take particular roles in a group and how they relate to other participants. Workshops of the first part of therapeutic program are directed to teach adult children of alcoholics how to communicate and how to behave assertively, the abilities they have not learnt in their own families.

The second part of a year-long therapeutic work gives adult children of alcoholics a possibility to self-diagnose, gain insights about themselves, and go through their inner conflicts. In the long run, it causes the participants to be free from their family past and not to repeat certain mistakes in the present as a way to cope with themselves and the surrounding world. A year-long therapy for adult children of alcoholics also allows to notice how, in a process of creating a group, personal stories of each participant start to be revealed. How much hard work they put to break their inner fear and obstinacy which allows them to build structures of the group founded on new rules and principles⁴⁶.

45T. Adamczyk (2008): *Krocz dumnie, nie biegnij – terapia DDA*. In: I. Celary and G. Polok (eds.): *Zagrożenia rodziny w aspekcie pastoralno-społecznym*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo AE, p. 330-304.

46Ibidem, s. 304-305.

Describing a therapeutic group it is necessary to show advantages it provides for adult children of alcoholics who take part in it. However, it should be stressed that the range of changes, which are made in ACA's lives, depend on many factors such as the power of dysfunction, which impacted each of them, personal and temper dispositions, and the following work after the end of therapy. Active participation in a therapy can contribute to significant improvement of psycho-emotional comfort and reduction of symptoms of depression which are often visible at the beginning of the therapy. It should also give a chance to strengthen self-esteem and possibilities to allow them to make mistakes. A process of making real their life situations can follow and it let them recognise, in certain life situations, their own helplessness and face events they cannot influence.

Julia: If any of the features described above you can find in yourself, you cannot hesitate, it is worth going to a psychologist, thinking about a therapy. The sooner the better, as leaving it for later you prolong the state of uncertainty which will be increasing. I am writing this because myself I didn't have a chance to cope with it right away and with time more doubts appeared, questions without answers and it led to more tension and feeling of getting lost. Nowadays, such development is crucial as in a professional life we pay more and more attention to soft skills but first and foremost we should do it to improve our daily lives and relationship with the loved ones. Each of us is building our own life history which consists of memories, so it is probable that coming back to the past, trying to analyse and shape it, we will have a chance to create a better future.

Piotr: Thanks to a therapeutic group I saw that I am not alone with such a problem. I met people who understood me and knew what I felt because they had similar experiences. Experiences of others helped me remind my own history and change my way of thinking as well. Their comments and advice helped me cope with my problems. Telling about our own, very private problems we went through isn't easy in front of a group, but this way you gain acceptance and understanding of others, you get rid of fear and shame. It is impossible to gain it in an individual therapy, though. I approach my life more consciously and I respect myself. I don't blame myself for any reason and I try to live a conscious and rational life.

Weronika: ACA therapy let me discover that I have a right to have my own feelings and needs and I can reveal them. Prior to this, I was totally lost in this regard and took a lot on me, at the same time I was getting lost. Now, I can look at myself more reasonably and I am able to assess if something is conflicting with me. It is easier to assess and express my feelings.

Regarding assertive behaviours, adult children of alcoholics' participation in a group therapy contribute to the increase of abilities to express their opinions, abilities to refuse and to accept criticism and praises of other people. It may also be revealed by the ability to limit aggressive attitudes towards them and others or even to control negative feelings in a better way. These abilities give a chance to improve their relationships with other people, more openness on others, the close family included. Having a better inner insight during a therapy and an awareness of a personal history can help to defuse the old defensive mechanisms, particularly hostility towards oneself and a strong desire to escape. Moreover, thanks to participating in a therapy, there should be a lower frequency and intensity of experiencing such negative feelings as guiltiness, feeling of rejection, hopelessness, sadness and fear in adult children of alcoholics. Instead, a tendency of increasing experience of positive feelings should appear. This, in turn, should allow them to start a process of leaving a feeling of loneliness and nurturing an isolation mechanism in motion. It can also make adult children of alcoholics limit to build negative opinions about them and discern a subjective number of threats posed by other people in ACA's lives.

Participating in a year-long therapy for ACA should also allow them to increase gradually the respect for themselves, enjoy their lives more fully or to strengthen the feeling of their safety and give up the attitude of excessive responsibility. Within a year the therapeutic group gives a chance for adult children of alcoholics to increase the feeling of their causative power, more positive opinion about their choices and decisions and can contribute to strengthen their abilities to think positively. It may be followed by the improvement to care for their health, appearance and realisation of their needs.

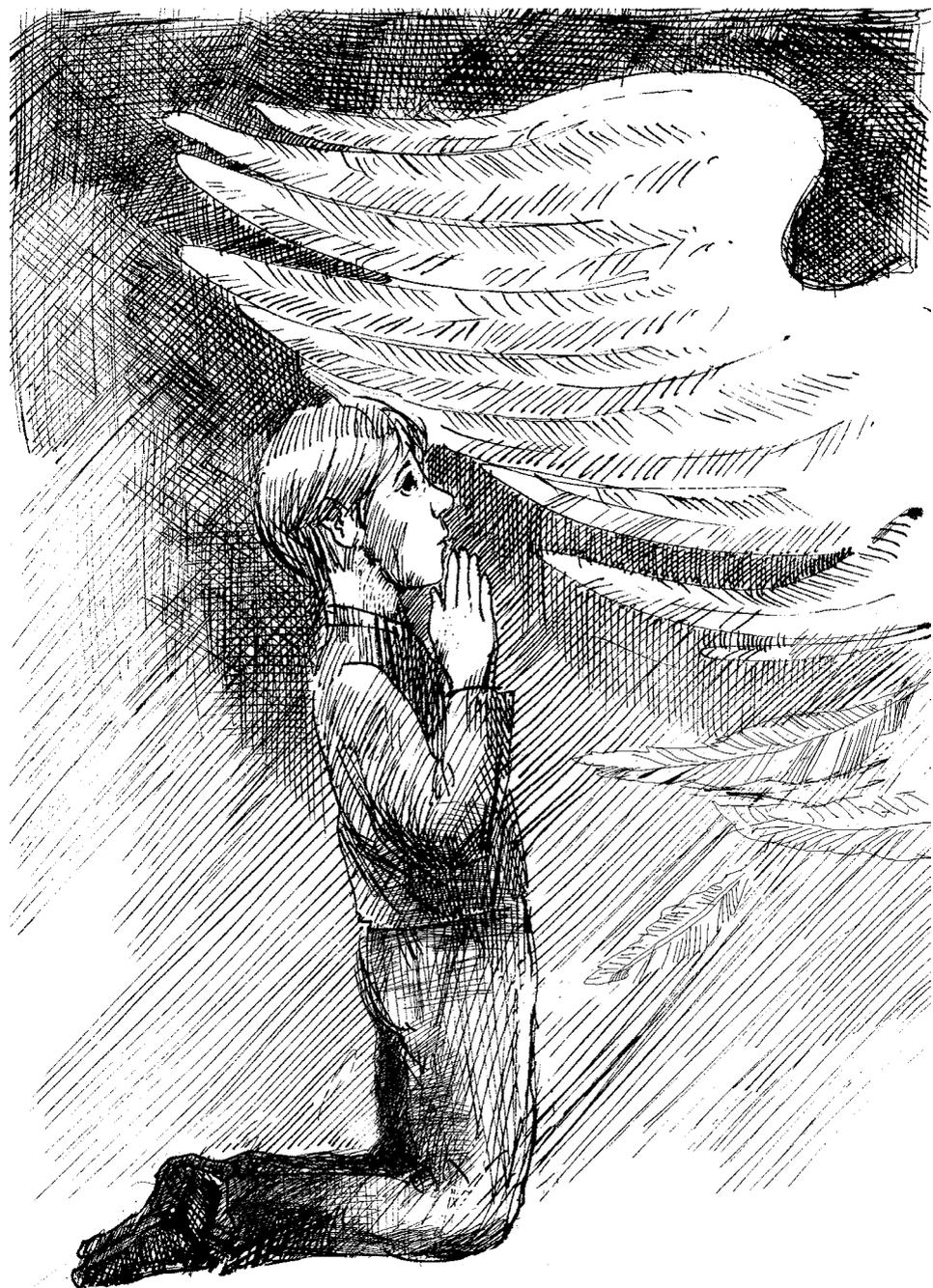
Usually during the therapy, as well as afterwards, the life situation of adult children of alcoholics doesn't change, and what is more, it becomes more difficult but taking part in this therapy allows ACA to change the attitude towards everything what happens in their lives. They are now more capable of looking for help and support outside than they did before, they look for this help among other people and various organisations. They are able to concentrate on the problem itself and assess what happens with them in a particular situation taking advantage of abilities and knowledge gained at the therapy. The increased field of their consciousness and abilities to self-reflection is discernible, which gives them a greater chance for their independence and maturity⁴⁷.

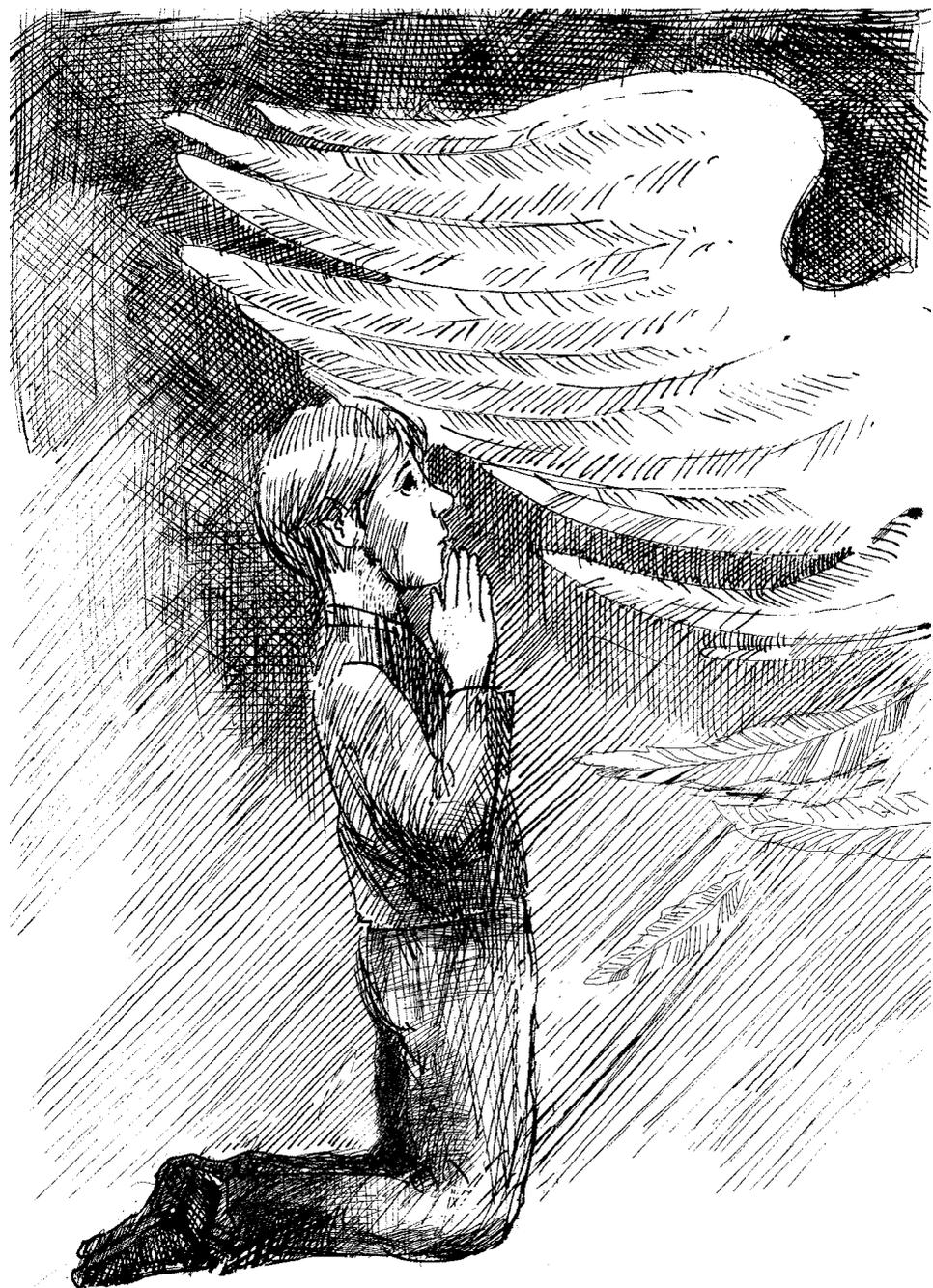
47M. Kucińska (2006): *Gdzie się podziało moje dzieciństwo (O dorosłych dzieciach alkoholików)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Charaktery, p.72-76.

The possibilities of changes in lives of adult children of alcoholics shown above and results of intensive engagement in participating in therapeutic activities point to profound meaning and necessity to create such groups and programs, especially prepared for them. It is to be noted that the most immediate intervention concerning adult children of alcoholics and their constructive inner transformation can contribute not to duplicate distorted patterns of their homes in their future starting or presently existing families. It increases the likelihood that the future generations in our country will not so largely consist of adult children of alcoholics⁴⁸.

Another possible opportunity for benefit of ACA within academic community activities is connected with all those ones which this community should perform in the society of our country as a socially responsible organisation. Higher education institutions, university research centres, academic lecturers and students should carry out all possible surveys that results will contribute to help Polish family, which – as it seems – is in crisis. They should also make the results of carried surveys available to the public, on the basis of which they should lobby about appropriate legal solutions in our country, about such government, local authorities and non-governmental organisations' actions that will support the family in our country, especially a dysfunctional family. Academic community should also animate public discussion about the condition of Polish family. Taking into considerations all those actions, specific steps should be taken for the benefit of so numerous Polish adult children of alcoholics whose dysfunction becomes a crucial social problem. Various assistance directed to ACA is one of major solutions to counteract the development of dysfunctions in Polish families.

⁴⁸T. Adamczyk (2008): *Krocz dumnie, nie biegnij – terapia DDA*. In: I. Celary and G. Polok (eds.): *Zagrożenia rodziny w aspekcie pastoralno-społecznym*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo AE, p. 305-308 The evaluation results of therapeutical group at „Zawodzie” chaplaincy of the University of Economics in Katowice in 2003 can be found in this article. They were conducted by Ms mgr Teresa Adamczyk who is a leader of the therapy.





7. To trust God

In Polish reality a lot of adult children of alcoholics are active Catholics, Christians or other denominations believers. This gives a chance that on the foundation of faith and with the help of God's grace given to ACA they will go through all the scars resulted from being brought up in a dysfunctional family. It should be stressed that adult children of alcoholics who begin their individual or group therapy will be convinced that they are supported by God's love and friendliness of a given denomination community. That is why every denomination community has to take part in supporting ACA in the process of healing.

Piotr: It's very important for ACA, for me. I often lacked any support in my family, although I needed it a lot, especially in the view of difficult and demanding efforts therapy. In my opinion, there is no complete healing without God. Certainly, you can go through all the scars on the base of psychology, but it doesn't answer most fundamental questions of existence, a sense of suffering included. If you place your healing on God, you are sure that it is Him who loves you and that everything is in His hands. He gives an unconditional support in every moment of our life and He is with us when there is no friendly person nearby.

As it was mentioned before, a broadly understood academic community is particularly obliged to support adult children of alcoholics in their activities to change their lives essentially. An important part of the academic community is the chaplaincy where the members of academic society gather in a faith community. In the example of believers of Roman-Catholic Church, this ministry is done by a priest of this Church⁴⁹. The chaplaincy per se should be the space where each of adult children of alcoholics (a student or higher education institution worker) should find their place and support if only they express their desire. The most important message which should reach ACA and be the base of any activities of the chaplaincy is the truth about unconditional love of God towards each of them revealed to people in a specific way by Jesus Christ. People who didn't often experience a true love in their families or they experienced lack of such love or only conditional love should be presented to God's love towards them in Jesus Christ. It is Him who accompanies them actively from the moment of conception, during every moment of their lives, in spite of the fact that they

⁴⁹The author of this book is a Catholic priest, chaplaincy priest and at the same time an academic at the University of Economics in Katowice, so any further reflections in the matter are directly connected to a chaplaincy community of the Roman-Catholic Church.

weren't able to realise or feel it. Showing God, who loves unconditionally, is especially important to adult children of alcoholics as they might have a strongly distorted image of God, particularly God the Father resulting from their parents' dysfunctional attitude towards them. Hence, leading adult children of alcoholics to relationship with Jesus Christ, God's Son, a friend and brother seems to be especially important. It can, to some extent, lead to build a positive child relationship of adult children of alcoholics and God the Father. A child relationship which was never experienced by them in their families.

The unconditional love of God is especially experienced in the chaplaincy by sacramental services, particularly when the Mass is celebrated. The Holy Spirit presents Christ to each of them and lets them participate in a redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus. It becomes a chance for ACA to include their sufferings, fears and anxieties in sufferings of a risen Christ. They can look for support and strength in Him to work on their wounds and to become 'a new person'. It is also important for the participants of the Eucharist to be aware that the presence of the Holy Spirit makes it a new Pentecost, a new sending of God's unconditional love⁵⁰. This new Pentecost gives hope to ACA believers that they will receive His graces and gifts which are necessary to learn an attitude of mature faith. Despite many adversities resulting from the past of adult children of alcoholics, they can grow in true love by participating in the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist when the Holy Spirit descends on everybody and has the power to change them⁵¹. This means that the Holy Spirit strengthens inner lives and powers of the baptised and allows them to undertake the process of healing and more and more mature living their lives. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the believers are called to offer themselves, their past and presence, their self-development and everything what constitutes them to Jesus Christ. It allows them to bring their sufferings, wounds, negative feelings to Christ in the Eucharist so that He would support them with His graces and give them strength to a continuous transformation of their lives. Such attitude of adult children of alcoholics supported by God's grace becomes a chance to find a more complete sense of their existence⁵².

The possibility to come to a sacrament of penance and reconciliation is also very important to adult children of alcoholics. In this sacrament a believer receives forgiveness from their sins and the Holy Spirit gives

50 *Pełna jest ziemia Twego Ducha Panie, Oficjalny dokument Komisji Teologiczno-Historycznej Wielkiego Jubileuszu Roku 2000*, Katowice: Wyd. Św. Jacka Katowice, p. 129-134.

51 W. Nowacki (1998): *Jak Duch Święty działa w Kościele*, „Zeszyty Odnowy” No. 24, p. 33.

52 J. Szymusia (1968): *Zgromadzenie Eucharystyczne wyrazem Misterium Kościoła*. In: H. Bogacki and S. Moysa (eds.): *Kościół w świetle soboru*, Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha, p. 118.

a deep peace which means reconciliation with God⁵³. By the power of the Holy Spirit a healing of souls is made⁵⁴. Experiencing God's forgiving love, receiving a peace in heart is particularly important to adult children of alcoholics as in their childhood a sin was often present in the families and created unpleasant results such as strong anxiety and fear. That is why they need so much an experience of being forgiven and this peace in heart which they receive from God in the sacrament of penance. It is essential to make them aware that this sacrament is a sacrament of healing. God heals the inside of the man which is hurt by their own sins and their neighbour's and it allows them to overcome their own weaknesses and grow up in love to God and people.

There were a lot of situations which may be defined as hurting during childhood and adolescence of adult children of alcoholics. In families where one or both parents overused alcohol there were behaviours which caused mental scars, soul and body hurts and these facts may result in their mental or somatic illnesses. It is advisable for adult children of alcoholics to receive the sacrament of the sick in the community of chaplaincy. Receiving this sacrament should be preceded by a catechesis which will explain the sense of receiving it. In this sacrament the Holy Spirit makes the recipients feel inner strength in experienced sufferings. Moreover, the Holy Spirit gives peace of heart and courage to survive any mental or physical diseases which are consequences of wounds experienced in their families. Furthermore, the Church believes in it, the Holy Spirit heals the soul and sometimes a body in this sacrament. In the sacrament of the sick the believers are strengthened in the process to trust and believe God and to fight the temptations of the evil spirit. In the perspective of experiences of ACA such God's actions are important as – they pointed to it – when they decide to participate in a therapy, they especially experience a strong spiritual fight⁵⁵.

It is crucial on their way to faith that adult children of alcoholics will develop a strong relationship with God through His words written on pages of the Bible. It can be done by a personal meditation (Lectio Divina) or in a chaplaincy, for instance within a Bible group. A meditation over the word of God included in the Bible is considered to be a chance for ACA to receive graces which allow them to see a true image of God. The image which is so often distorted in their families mostly by a father who overuses or is addicted to alcohol. Reading the Holy Scripture is a way to experience un-

53Jan Paweł II (1992): *Duch Święty – źródłem prawdziwego pokoju* aud. gen. 29.05.1991. In: *Wierzę w Ducha Świętego Pana i Ożywiiciela*, Watykan: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 373-377.

54R. Silvano and E.F. Mascarenhas (2000): *Duch Święty*, Kraków: RHEMA, p. 102-104.

55B. Nadolski (1995): *Duch Święty w liturgii*. In: M. Rusiecki and E. Pudełko (eds.): *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego – wprowadzenie*, Lublin: , Wydawnictwo KUL.

conditional love of God and to strengthen gradually their low self-esteem. Listening, accepting and fulfilling the word of God included in the Bible may allow adult children of alcoholics to unite deeply with God himself which should counteract their feelings of loneliness and rejection. Everyday reading of the Bible can be a kind of a tool in God's hand which enables ACA to lead a fuller life when they will recognise better the sense of their existence and undertakings⁵⁶.

Magda: Since childhood, when you hear God the Father, subconsciously you see Him with your parents' qualities. God, to me, always was somebody who punished for something you hadn't done or when you committed a sin. However, a prayer was always something which let me survive. God was the only reason to understand what I was living for. I came to Him with a request: 'Help me' and I never doubted that He exists. But, in a certain moment my image of Jesus started to change. My grandfather (he teaches me how to pray) used to buy me a 'Droga' magazine. Actually, I wasn't happy with it as much as with my grandfather's joy when he brought it to me. I came across an article about God Mercy in it and I think it was a breakthrough. Of course it is difficult to accept love of anybody, but the love of somebody who is as Great as God is more difficult. I started to read the Holy Scripture on regular basis and I found a lot of beautiful words of God's love towards people. I had more opportunities to read various religious books and I know that it wasn't by accident. For example, I had a problem and just then I ran into somebody who had just read 'a good' book. I started to read it and while reading I realised more and more that what is written in the Holy Scripture can't be directed to people as the whole, but individually. When God says: 'My grace is sufficient for you', he says: 'Magda, my grace is sufficient for you'. I began to understand that God desires me, I am somebody who is really like a child for the parent. Once I was at the retreat and then I heard a part of a poem: 'God speaks to you, you are everything I have'. How incredible is this love! Everybody has a right to it and everybody is loved the most. Not until I had realised that I wasn't one of a billion people in the world, I realised that God speaks directly to me and it was the moment when a process of healing began and I started slowly to forgive my parents. When I started to think how strongly God loves me, it made me feel like crying. ACA has it difficult to believe that somebody loves them as we are used to being 'loved' only when we are polite, smiled and don't have our own opinion. And I got to know that God is waiting for me and does anything to enable me to come back to Him.

56G. Martin (1982): *Czytanie Pisma Świętego jako Słowa Bożego*, Kraków: PTT, p. 13-14.

Weronika: In a certain moment of my life I felt that it was important to me to believe God and it hasn't changed. Through sacraments and Lord's graces I was able to find myself in life and take a good direction. Although there are some areas to go through in front of me, I feel permanently His assistance and support.

Meditating over the word of God is one of individual forms of prayers of people who want to start a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is the source of every prayer of baptised people⁵⁷. He gives the gift of prayer to believers, thanks to that they can turn to God⁵⁸. He ignites the need to say prayers and shapes it while being close to those who pray. He leads believers while they are praying and He fulfills their inability to pray⁵⁹. Apparently, for adult children of alcoholics a prayer is the space where on the one hand, they can experience helpful activities of God in the Holy Spirit, and on the other hand, they can strengthen their relationship with God and make it a strong base of their lives. The Holy Spirit as a main creator of the believers' prayers carries the prayer of the Son into their hearts, His calling directed to the Father. It helps them to live a foster son-hood while praying⁶⁰. Such moves of the Holy Spirit are especially valuable for adult children of alcoholics because in their lives they weren't able to establish a strong and good relationship with their father, and, they often associate the word 'father' with a feeling of scare and fear⁶¹. The Holy Spirit through prayers evokes them to be alert on their way of life. Then, they are able to resist temptations and they get a power to fulfill their human and Christian identity⁶².

Julia: In my family alcoholism was always treated as a disease and actions of evil powers, that's why when we felt helpless and couldn't do anything more, we prayed a Rosary as it was the only way to help an addicted person in that situation. Both parents were and still are believers so they rooted Christian values in my personality. I tried to accept all those moments as something that would strengthen me and God was a real support for me. Recently, I am more and more aware why Christ suffered so much. I know that when something hurts me, He is with me and when I can see the sense in His death, I can hope that what happened to me has its reason and meaning.

57Paweł VI (1971): *Duch Jezusa* aud. gen. 17.05.1967. In: *Trwajcie mocni w wierze, Paweł VI (Przemówienia na audiencjach ogólnych 1963-1967)*, t. 1, Kraków: WAM, p. 99-100.

58Paweł VI (1974): *Obrzęd i Tajemnica* aud. gen. 13.08.1969. In: *Czy modlimy się dzisiaj*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Świętego Wojciecha, p. 83.

59E. Carter (1975): *Duch Święty jest obecny*, Warszawa: PAX, p. 47-48.

60Jan Paweł II (1992): *Duch Święty sprawcą naszej modlitwy* aud. gen. 17.04.1991. In: *Wierzę w Ducha Świętego Pana i Ożywciciela*, Watykan: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 353-354.

61B. Pittman (1996): *Modlitwy do 12 kroków, czyli jak wyjść na prostą*, Warszawa: Wyd. Akuracik ; R. Lerner (1999): *Codziennie afirmacje*, Warszawa: Wyd. Akuracik.

62E. Carter (1975): *Duch Święty jest obecny*, Warszawa: PAX, p. 47-48.

An important area necessary in the process of healing of adult children of alcoholics is a possibility to be in a community of people who back one another. The chaplaincy centres are the chances to create such places⁶³. They should be a place where real communities arise, where all students are accepted and the atmosphere foster a creation of friendly bonds. Being in such a community, building healthy and positive relationships with others is a huge chance for ACA students to strengthen their process of transforming their lives⁶⁴.

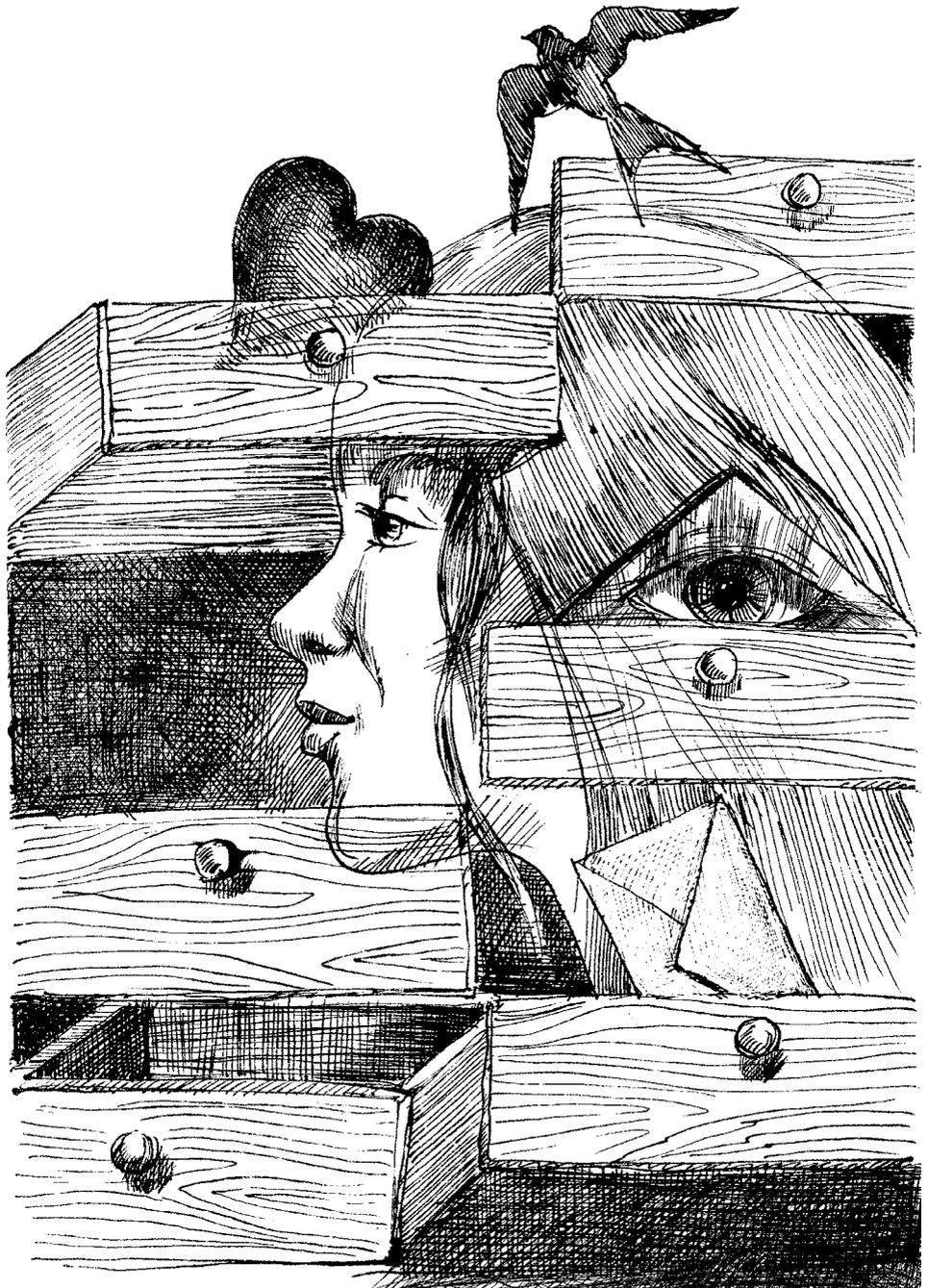
Ala: Church community played a substantial role in my development. When I engaged in its activities and started to build my relationship with God from scratch I felt more confident and I could be somebody who was important. I had my duties in the community which I fulfilled earnestly. The most beautiful was the fact that there was somebody who trusted me and gave me responsible tasks. It wasn't home but that community where I felt secure.

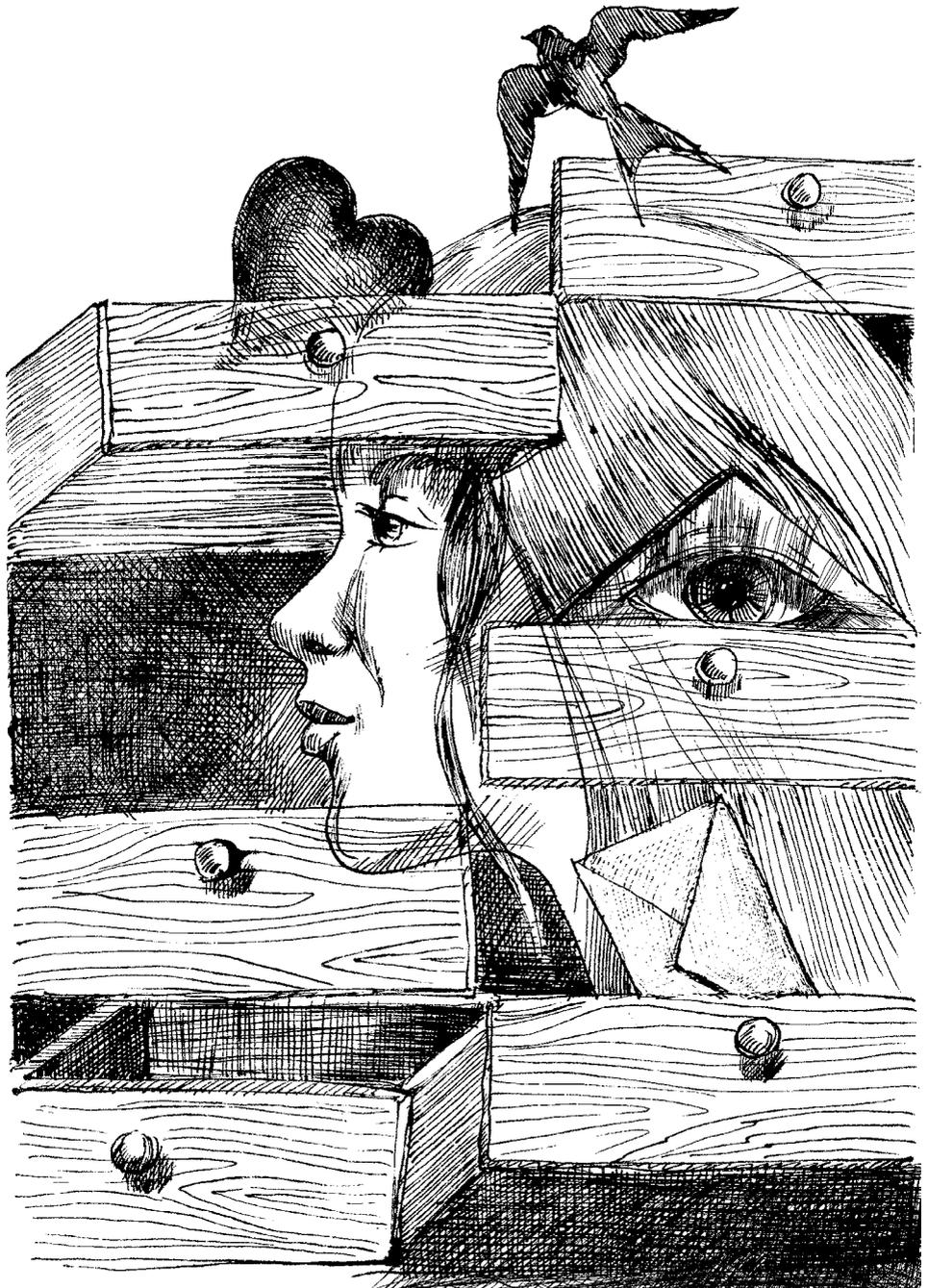
Believing in God, living a relationship with Him in a deeper way, receiving holy sacraments, reading the Holy Scripture, individual and common prayers and being in the community can be considered as a basic way of support for ACA. Their human feelings are enriched and they develop their spiritual part. It is possible that the whole life of adult children of alcoholics will be put in order because of realisation of moral values importance. They can develop virtues in them and undertake activities which will create a specific goodness in and around them and they may become a paradigm for others⁶⁵.

63Stolica Apostolska (2002): *Obecność Kościoła na Uniwersytecie i w kulturze uniwersyteckiej*. In: *Informator Duszpasterstwa Akademickiego w Polsce*, Warszawa, p. 27-29.

64M. Jedraszewski: *Duszpasterstwo Akademickie dziś: wyzwania i nadzieje*, www.katechcza.episkopat.pl, 08.06.2009.

65K. Chohna and M. Madej-Babula (2007): *Funkcjonowanie psychiczne DDA we współczesnym świecie*. In: Z. Marek and M. Madej-Babula (eds.): *(Bez)radność wychowania...?*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, p. 117.





Instead of the End.....

There will be no typical end here. Nor there will be a summary, conclusions or propositions for new research. All that is included in the book seems to be sufficient to reach an intended goal. That is why, in this place you will find a 'longer' statement of one of the adult children of alcoholics...

Asia (30) "My drawers"

Childhood is the best time under the sun. But, is it always the best? My personality is often shaped by memories hidden in the deepest recesses of my soul and, depending on my emotional condition, they open appropriate 'drawers'. Some of them are still locked and inaccessible to everyone, even to myself. Some of them are neatly tidied, dusted from time to time to remind me, just in case. However, if I open some of them, it still hurts and reminds me of the suffering but I know, I have to open them especially when troubles pile up inside me and a solution for everyday life is necessary because, in fact, the possible answers are hidden in my 'drawers'. Answers to questions about how to live in the world, and with my fears and anxieties which I experienced more often than any joys. To be honest, I long for the time when I will burst out laughing without thinking that I can't do it because I will be punished for this moment of joy.

What have I hidden in my 'drawers'? Everything that I experienced when I was a child.

What do I remember? Today I can call that time a loneliness, the time which accompanied me all the time. Back then, it seemed to me as natural as the process of breathing. Alcohol has been present in my family for generations.

One of my 'drawers' includes my grandparents. Both parents' families had somebody who was addicted. I was more affiliated with my mum's family and, as far as I remember, there were nice moments during times of antics. The time spent with my grandpa in the park, looking for a hedgehog, and eating scrambled eggs from one pan. When I came back from school to my grandparents', there was always a mug of chicory coffee for me. However, when I look carefully at the relationships between them, I have to admit sadly that my house was similar to theirs. Grandma controlled everything and my mum did the same. First of all, it means that grandma and mum had to have the last word in all issues. No matter if they were right, the situations, any opposition, 'threaten' a complete paralysis – a silence or a row. I remembered when my mum told me that her brother was preferred by her mother and she vainly tried to meet her expectations. Unfortunately, this vicious circle repeated in my home. I made superhuman efforts to satisfy my mum who, as you can predict, found flaws. And what next? A silence.... This way, 'a generation inheritance' has been passed a level further.

It was good, though, that I had a dog – Reks. I spent most of my time with him wandering in the parks, streets. I loved going to my favourite park where I always found a quiet spot for me. The dog was running around and I was reading books. It could take hours. When it was getting dark, we were forced to go home. In winter, cold days didn't allow us to sit in the park for too long, so we were walking along streets and looked into people's windows. I had my favourite play; guessing what might be like I was in a given house. The light and curtains were very important. Then I always imagined what might be happening inside, I imagined their lives and conversations they had. And that life was completely different from mine. There were a lot of conversations, everyday life was full of buzz. With my inner eye I saw communal meals, kindness shown to each other. I was tired when I returned home, I went straight to bed and forgot about what was happening behind the wall.

I remember very well the time spent in my bedroom when I wasn't allowed to leave it. Punishments, nobody knew for what. Orders to stay at home. That time was spent with the company of my Reks, books and music. It was, though, the time of altercations behind the wall, not all noises can be drowned out by music. When there was something wrong in my home, I was a kind of buffer to defuse emotions, to compose and tidy the flat after a party. I was afraid every time but I couldn't show it. I was afraid of screams, quarrels, even today when I witness a quarrel or misunderstanding, it gives me the collywobblers. I'm scared that it will end like it did at home, with violence, upsetting words which hurt to the quick.

I can also see afternoons spent at my classmates and friends' homes, homes where there was quietness and I feel sorrow that none of my friends could come to my home, that my mum wouldn't accept them. I took advantage of those visits, I observed their homes, the relationships of my peers with their parents, how people behaved at the table. Today, as much as I am able, I'm trying to introduce these observations to my own life.

Out of one of my 'drawers' a 'casket' fell out. When I open it, I can see a crushed heart. Crushed by the result of sadness, sorrow and guilt. When something wrong happened in my home and everybody thought that I was guilty, I made a lot of endeavours to beg my mum for forgiveness. I remember all those small notes left everywhere with news that I loved her and I was sorry for everything that was wrong. I never wrote what I was sorry for exactly as I never knew what I had done badly that time. This knowledge made my mum stop talking to me and she could continue it for weeks. Finally, when I couldn't stand the atmosphere any more, I decided to do something. After some time, my mum decided to 'withdraw offence' and began to talk as if nothing had happened. Those were the most beautiful moments when she started to talk with me.

Unfortunately, a small box hidden in the corner of my 'drawer' is labelled 'dad'. Unfortunately, because this word has no meaning for me, if anybody asked me what my dad was like, I wouldn't be able to answer it. To me, he is an outline of a person who is transparent inside. I hardly associate anything with my father. There are two events which are in my memory. The first one is connected with a pigeon which was brought home by dad. I was overjoyed because I had always wanted to have a pet but of no avail. Unfortunately, the pigeon stayed at home only to the moment my mum returned from work and it was taken out. The other event is connected with a certain Saturday. My father went to the shop... and returned with a dog. I remember until this day that it was a brown cocker spaniel. It wagged its tail eagerly and I was over the moon. And another disappointment. When my mum woke up and realised that the dog had been taken from the outside shop by my dad, he had to take it back to the owner. I don't remember anything more.

One big 'drawer' I reserved for my big brother. I remember the time spent with him. He made tents in which we used to hide (they were made of blankets, chairs and tables). Because there is a big age gap between us, he had companions he never took me to. I always spied on him and watched what they were doing. I liked sitting next to him and watching what he was up to. He spent most of his time away from home. When he came back, I usually slept. When he had his own car he sometimes took me for a drive, when there was another row at home. But, there were also moments in this 'drawer' which made me angry and sad. Józek and my mum sitting in the kitchen and talking about the passing day. Mum was always interested in what he was saying, she listened to him. I looked forward to such moments but in vain. When I was old enough and I needed to confide in somebody, my mum was deeply addicted and it made 'our encounters' impossible.

Another 'drawer' is a time of rebellion. During my time at secondary school and my disagreement with domestic injustice and lack of safety. I don't like to open this recess. I felt huge shame and guilt connected with that time. The shame that I allowed myself to a lot of things. Parties with alcohol, my relationships with men. If only I could, I would turn back the clock and repair many things. Isolation from home, living my own life, company not accepted by my parents, now I only have to forgive myself those situations. My friends were important to me because they accepted me the way I was, they gave me a sense of a community which I could belong to and in those situations I was able to give away my loyalty, faithfulness and actually, my whole being.

The most important of my 'drawers' is the one labelled 'sadness'. There are all those situations, images which caused my eyes to well up with tears, drowned in despair and suffering. The most difficult thing for me to accept was the fact that my parents never kept their word. I listened to many words, plans and promises. Nothing

came ever true. And that feeling of the air which is escaping from punctured balloon... the hope rushing out. When you live in such a home, you have to learn how to survive, you have to 'work out' a system which gives you strength. I calculated days when my parents would be drunk and when they would be sober. More often than not, it didn't work out, their drinking was unpredictable, but using such a method kept me alive because, to some extent, it gave me a feeling of control and predictability. I learnt to read the signs: when they were intoxicated, when they were going to drink again. I gained the ability to recognise even when they had drunk a single beer. And when I knew this, it allowed me to change my plans for the day, my attitude. Immediately I slammed the door to my heart and envisaged myself as a soldier prepared for any events might be faced on the field of battle. Such preparedness lasted until the next day. I learned when I should 'tiptoe', be silent, disappear. I knew when there was going to be a row at home. I learned to keep 'my mouth shut' so that things wouldn't get worse.

One more 'drawer' leaves me bleeding until this day. 'The drawer' in which I hide a lack of love, horrible coldness and emptiness. Theoretically, although I know today that everyone makes mistakes, I was deprived of this possibility. When I broke a toy (they said I had 'stiff hands'), when I got a bad mark. When I was incapable of cleaning the whole flat on time... all of these things only served to confirm my thinking that: "I was good for nothing". I also received this impression from my parents. One picture: I had a beautiful handbag which I dreamed about. It happened one day that we went for a walk. I was the happiest girl in the world. Finally, I got tired and asked my dad to carry my handbag. He shouted at me and threw it into a bin. Again, my insides collapsed and any tears or screams could have helped.

I experienced a time of rebellion. I was angry. Why couldn't I have a 'normal' home? Why was it just me who had to experience it? I wondered if the pain I experienced was caused because I had been a bed person. Why didn't my parents love me? What had I done to them that had caused them to treat me so badly? I carried those questions for a long time. Because I couldn't find the exact answers, I was angry at everybody. I often felt like a bird whose wing was broken and couldn't fly in the air. It was as if my life had been held back and my whole childhood blighted by those plans and possibilities. It used to be that way. Now, in the perspective of time, I can see that every moment of my life was necessary. Everything that took place made sense and took on a double meaning for me, my domestic experiences have influenced everyday relationships with other people. Lots of situations from my past taught me very useful skills such as independence, coping with difficult problems, understanding other people's troubles. It gives me a feeling of responsibility for myself and my relatives and my work. It made me engage with and have willingness to live a real life. It made me be myself first of all.

God has had a special place in my life and He is still important. My parents never go to church on Sunday. I met God when I went to a retreat before my Matura exams, I went there only because I wanted to get out of the house for a while. In First Meeting, I was embraced by His Heart and delighted by His love and calm. I remember that time perfectly, I was moving around with a smile on my face. In spite of my all problems, I felt good. Another important moment was at my student retreat. Actually, I was 'pulled' there by my friend. During the time of my studies, I was isolated from the world of other people. I had only a few friends and I didn't socialise with others. So, it was a real challenge for me to go with a group of people I didn't know. I didn't have plans for holidays, though, I didn't want to spend that time at home, so I agreed to go. And I fell into God the Father's arms there, I could call Him Father, I took delight in His presence and care. I could talk for hours about everything that hurt me. I asked plenty of questions to which I didn't get answers straight away. Eventually, I found the confidence to ask them. And, to be honest I am next to Him all the time. Sometimes I rebel terribly, as I think that He doesn't help me, that He forgets about me and it happens that by being aware of my unworthiness I distance myself from Him. Nevertheless, I know that He is close to me, even when I don't go to church on Sunday as a protest. I can see His care and assistance through different events and situations, through people who direct my attention and heart into the proper place. I had never belonged to any community before, although I needed it so much. I often 'shouted' to others to allow me to stay in this place for longer. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed.

There weren't many friendships in my life. I didn't have anybody who was close, because nobody could see what was happening in my family and my mum destroyed those few acquaintances I had. Information such as: "you can't trust anybody because they leave you in limbo", "only family can understand and help you", "people are bogus" only made me keep friendships open for a while. When I came back into 'my mum's arms' telling her about misunderstandings, she abruptly remarked: "didn't I tell you?" Even today this conviction haunts me. When I came across the slightest disagreement, it makes me see a huge fear and willingness to run away, to withdraw.

Currently.....I understand more. I guess so. The reasoning does not always help, especially when I experience the same thing again. But, more and more often I use it to explain all the circumstances and behaviour of both myself and others. Everything that happened in my childhood has its reflection in the present. Every day, every slap on a cheek, every tear. These days, being uncertain about myself or others, about today and the future, I open my 'drawers' and I look at why it is so. And I often find the answer most of the time.

I am very afraid of misunderstandings, conflicts and arguments. Every day I face misunderstanding and a feeling of otherness. I learn to accept the reality in its true colours, as it really is. I try not to run away, not to slam the door and pretend that

there is no fear. Indeed, my first reaction is fear itself. Later on, I look carefully at the reality and let my reason work so as not be taken away by a flow of feelings.

My middle name could be defined as 'guilt'. When you are responsible for things that are far away from you fall into the trap of thinking that you are responsible for everybody and everything. And that's my problem. At times I feel guilty in situations which are out of reach because I am not physically present. When my mum feels bad, when she is in a bad mood, when I am not able to help my neighbour.... These and many other situations make me feel unworthy.

I wasn't aware of how important other people's opinions were to me. It would be wonderful if everybody likes me. Unfortunately, that isn't possible. All the time I face the need to be accepted and when I feel that I am trapped by such thinking about myself, I explain myself that it is mum who criticising my actions and behaviour. I have a desire to be perfect in what I do. Subconsciously, I try to validate my worth. To show and prove that I can do something, that I am suitable to a task. At the same time, though, when I hear complements, I don't believe that they are true and, I can't find too many virtues in myself.

But a tender spot for me is building relationships with other people. When I start to care for somebody, I withdraw immediately and look for a reason for such my behaviour. I often explain to myself that such relationships make no sense because eventually they will break. Sooner or later, but they will break. I am very careful when I meet new people and let them enter my world. I am visited by thoughts that I am not attractive as a friend, that people will soon get bored with me, so what's the point of engaging. In such situations I need logic and ability to open an appropriate 'drawer'.

In fact, every day I repeat to myself: it is worth doing. It's an unusual journey – inside your being. Discovering what you are really like. Getting to know your interests. Sharing your world with other people. Experiencing pleasant feelings – joy, love, contentment, satisfaction. It's marvellous to 'throw away' small clothes and restock the drawers with new creations. I don't know completely who Asia is, but I know her a bit already. I love sitting in my flat with a cup of coffee and watch the swallows through the window (I'm dreaming that they will build a nest close to my house). After a long and tiring day I like taking a warm shower and reading a book on my couch. I'm happy with my cat's purring. I'm pleased with the sparkling eyes of my friends when we talk together. I sing and dance – still alone, but it satisfies me. I can't imagine a year without hiking in the mountains with my friends. Feeling wind in my hair, tiredness and the warmth of the room in the evening. But most of all I like coming back home. My home. Coming back without fear and stress. I associate returning after a long day with joy, peace and safety. Making small talk with neighbours on the staircase.

All this is possible thanks to help of well-wishing people who I meet every day on my way. Thanks to ACA therapy I can enjoy all those bits and pieces which slipped

through my fingers. The best therapy is a close relationship with another person in which you don't have to overcome yourself all the time. To fight with your own fear and uncertainty. It is the other person who is able to heal wounds, even the deepest ones. However, by engaging with ACA community you are able to discern the source of your troubles and sufferings, to acknowledge that your relatives were not always fair towards you. But such a first realisation was painful to me, when I had to address my loyalty to my family. When I uttered for the first time: 'my parents are alcoholics' it caused me an immense pain. The pain of a small child who is shouting: 'I love my parents and I need them'.

Looking back and reflecting on the way things are now, I am aware that a yearly therapy doesn't mean the end of wrestling with my past. It's the beginning of a road, sometimes very rocky which hurts my feet. Sometimes a sandy road where I sink to my knees. But more often than not I raise my head and see the beautiful scenery which surrounds my road. And when I walk this beautiful part of my road, I give thanks to the Friend who once left his footprints encouraging me to stop and look inside my soul. To the Friend who raises my head every day to make me pay attention to the beauty of the world around. To the Friend who helps me to see the world in its true form and explain its intricacies.

Half a year ago I met a girl whose family situation was similar to mine. I began to spend more time with her, help her with difficulties at school and to cope with family problems. I saw a lot of myself in her. She reacts in a similar way to different situations, has a similar outlook to the world and the same sensitivity. I thought to myself: why not? It may be at that moment I was helped very personally by somebody. Why shouldn't I pay back my 'debt'? Might it be the time to pass the baton on? Unfortunately, my mum, sick with envy, claiming that I betray her, she has found an excuse not to talk to me. It must hurt her that I can cope without her help and that I am able to live my own life. She must be afraid that there is somebody else, apart from her, who is important in my life and that's why she uses the most effective method she knows. Shouting, she 'throws' me out of our family, humiliates me when she says about my unworthiness. She behaves this way again and again. Last time I thought that I wouldn't survive it. I was wrong. I have the impression that I'm becoming increasingly resistant to her behaviour, I free myself from her anger and blackmails. I decided to write a letter to her this time. A letter in which I say everything I want to tell her. Here is the letter:

Mum,

I'm writing to you because I want to tell you something about me. I have been listening to you carefully so far. Now, I want to tell you how I feel inside. If you have courage – listen.

In the beginning, whatever happens, I love you. Although sometimes it may not look that way, I do. I have always tried to be a good daughter. I have done my best so that you could be glad of me. I wasn't successful, though. There was still something which made you be disappointed with me. Do you know how many times I have heard that I didn't have a mother? Try to imagine our roles reversed. These words hurt so much. When I am accepted by complete strangers, I feel sorry. So many people ask me what is going on, how I am, they simply talk with me. I don't have such experiences with you. You are telling me about your care and sacrifice. Do these quarrels and rows mean care? Do you really believe that we have 'sunk to such depths'? Why?

You can see only your perspective, I have never told you how I see it. It seems to me, however, that you don't want to listen. It is easier to say that everybody around hurts you and doesn't understand you. You can't see that actually it is you who hurts others. You hurt me by your behaviour. You know how much I don't like your silence. You just stop talking to me and I never know why. Sometimes You wouldn't say a single word to me for a week. And I stuck in a muddle, why?

I have often wondered if everything that happened in our home was a figment of my imagination. Yet, I recently met Patrycja and we were recalling the old times. And she confirmed that there was a feeling of wrongness in the air. Just providing food is not everything. I don't know why my behaviour makes you feel angry and that I don't do it on purpose. I'm not going to. I feel like an adult at last. I live the way I think is appropriate. If I make a mistake, I will draw a conclusion.

I am proud of myself that I have managed to achieve so much. And I'm happy that I achieved it myself. There are friends who have enjoyed it with me. There are people who support me and who provide a shoulder to cry on if I have to. They simply accept me. And if I have done a stupid thing, they don't 'throw me out'. I know how to live. I set my targets clearly. It seems that there has been a relative ease for the last two years but today you and dad hate each other again. It isn't possible to live in such an atmosphere. A long time ago I decided to sort my life out, to be totally different from yours. I don't want to be surrounded by people who don't like anybody.

Do you know what I remember from the time spent with you? A continuous apologising for things I didn't do. You taught me this skill to perfection. And you know what? I can't do this anymore. Something has burnt out inside me. I won't return with the words "I'm sorry". If you want, if you need me – I'm waiting for you.

You know, sometimes I happen to cry into my pillow. I need Mum. A mum who understands and loves me. Loves no matter what. These words mum and dad sound empty to me. There were moments in my life when I was going to Zosia and her mum more often than to my home. Now I have my own home. Home which is visited by my friends, even late in the evening. Home where I feel good and safe. Once I thought so badly about Agnieszka that she moved far away from her home town. Today,

I'm trying to understand her. She visits home regularly and her parents are doing fine. There is no bitterness between them.

What is happening between you and dad is your business. You have chosen such a life and prepared it for yourself. It's high time you took responsibility instead of accusing others for your problems. It used to be your choice, mum, you chose him for your husband. I and Józek are only your children.

I am sorry when it happens this way between us. I'm sorry that you have never say 'sorry' for your words. There is debris inside me. You may need to live apart from me to understand. I am really sorry that you feel sorry for yourself. I am not able to do anything about it. I don't want to hate the whole world. People are good and the world is beautiful. A life is worth living. It is necessary to notice it and I'm going to do it.

I am nearby if you need me.

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