

Transcript of KUAC Radio Program with Susan McInnis Entitled: Growing Up in the War Zone: Adult Children of Alcoholics

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00:00:00

Musical introduction for first 00:00:58.

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SUSAN McINNIS: The National Council on Alcoholism estimates that between 28 and 30 million American adults were raised in alcohol homes. Other experts believe that one in every four or five adults living in the United States today grew up with at least one alcoholic parent. Adult children of alcoholics. Until recently they have been an invisible population. The health and mental health communities have focused their efforts and studies on those who drink excessively, not on the effect's alcoholism might have on the drinker's child. If this population of children had problems, it was assumed that the problems were no different than emotional difficulties experienced by Americans raised in sober or temperate homes. But in the last few years adult children have come under greater scrutiny. Some statistics are emerging that separate adult children of alcoholics from other adult Americans. They indicate that children who grow up in an alcoholic home seem to learn and take on many of the characteristics of alcoholism without ever lifting a glass. By the time they are adults, as many as 70 percent may become alcoholics themselves or develop related patterns of compulsive behavior such as eating disorders, drug abuse, workaholism. They stand at least a 50 percent chance of marrying alcoholics. And many experts believe they are about twice as likely to attempt suicide as other adult Americans. Adult children of alcoholics have been described as shell shocked. The victims of the kind of post-traumatic stress disorder most often associated with veterans the Vietnam War. During the next 60 minutes we will listen to a presentation by Jane Middleton, therapist and clinical director of the Seattle Mental Health Institute. Ms. Middleton is herself the adult child of alcoholic parents. The presentation we are about to hear was given in December of 1984 at the Family Violence Institute held in Anchorage, Alaska. Jane Middleton believes that the children of alcoholics grow up in a war zone battling the invisible and powerful enemy of their parent's addiction. They enter adulthood bearing the scars of this battle. Now Jane Middleton, in a discussion of the battle, its aftermath and the steps adult children of alcoholics may take to heal themselves once they have left the war zone.

Musical interlude from 00:03:40 to 00:04:06

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JANE MIDDLETON: What I'd like to start with is telling a little story about a little girl that was told by a child worker in Seattle who was working with kids of alcoholics by the name of Jean Bergen. And this a little girl that wakes up in the morning. She's six years old and what she wants is she wants to eat. And the story is how her day progresses from there. And what I want you to consider is while I'm telling this story is to imagine what this little child learns about life and also what she might do to adapt in her childhood and in her adulthood. Okay, so she wakes up early in the morning and her mother isn't up yet because her mother's been up the whole night before drinking. Now in my family, if I am not up by nine o'clock in the morning or ten and it's not a weekend, my kids, all five of them run in and jump on my bed and say, mother, get up. In an alcoholic family, kids learn not to do that. So, this little girl wakes up, she's hungry, she wants something to eat, she can't reach things in the cupboard, but instead of going upstairs to wake up her mother, which she has learned not to do, she waits patiently all by herself downstairs. When her mother gets up, her mother has a terrible hangover.

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And for any of you that have ever had a hangover, the last thing in the world you want in the morning is noise and to be bothered. So, the little girl comes into the kitchen and she says, mommy can I please have some lunch, it's 11 o'clock. And her mother says, get out of the kitchen, your little son of a bitch, what are you doing bothering me this morning? Now the little girl does not put together at the age of six, that the reason her mother is in a terrible mood is because she was drunk the night before and is suffering the effects on her body of a hangover. Instead the little girl goes away and wonders, what's wrong with me? What did I do wrong? How did I not treat my mother nicely enough this morning that I got my breakfast? And how can I do it right?

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So a little while later, she goes back into the kitchen a little bit afraid, musters her courage and mother, while she has been out, has had a couple Bloody Mary's. And at that point has reached a stable blood alcohol level. So, she's not feeling bad at this point. And the little girl comes in and says, mommy can I have lunch, gee you look pretty this morning, I love you mommy and goes up and tries to give her a hug. At this point mommy says, sure, what would you like? Would you like peanut butter and jelly, baloney and cheese, liverwurst? What would you like? So, the little girl says, I asked it right that time. I did it right that time and I got my lunch. So, mother tells her to go out and come back in a few minutes and she will have her lunch.

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Meanwhile, her mommy continues drinking. And when the little girl comes back into the kitchen a little while later, her mother's on the upside of an alcohol curve and is in what we call star time. Okay, mother is feeling absolutely no pain. She's grandiose, although she won't remember in a little while what she said to the little girl. The little girl comes into the kitchen, mother grabs her, puts her on her lap, covers her with slobbery wet kisses and says to her, not only are you going to have a sandwich, but after you eat it, we're going to go downtown and buy you a 10-speed bike. So, the little girl, other than the fact that she feels vaguely uncomfortable with the wet slobbery kisses

and doesn't know why at that age, thinks, my mommy really loves me. My mommy loves me so much that I'm not only going to get lunch, but I'm going to get a 10-speed bike too. I was a really good girl. I didn't bother her and she loves me.

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So, she eats her sandwich, she leaves the kitchen and she goes out to play. Meanwhile, her mother keeps drinking and what happens is she starts going on the downside of an alcohol curve and what she is at that point is she is snarly angry drunk. The little girl comes in and says, mommy, mommy, are you ready to go down to get the 10-speed bike? And her mother turns around to her and says, get out of here, your little red-eyed son of a bitch. What are you doing bothering me and who said that you could have a 10-speed bike? The little girl still does not know that what's happening to her mother is the effects of alcohol. What she knows is that somehow she did something wrong again. That her mother was mad at her and little kids do not think it's because of the parent. They think it's because of the self. Meanwhile, she leaves the kitchen and when she comes back a few hours later, she finds her mother passed out on the kitchen floor. Now I work with and treat a lot of adult kids of alcoholics and one of the things they tell me when they're working through the grief process is the first time they saw their mother or their dad drunk on the kitchen floor, they didn't think that their mother and dad was drunk. They thought their mother and dad was dead. And so the feelings that they have at that time basically of our loss and grief, which they have to stuff because they're there alone.

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Now what do kids learn about this? They learn to be hyper-vigilant and what we call hyper-responsible. They are living in a war zone and not all alcoholic families are like this one, although I've treated many adult kids from families at least like that. But there are differences in their parents from mood to mood, from amounts of drinks, to amounts of drinks, and kids learn to be hyper-sensitive to the changes in their faces, in their words, and in what's going on. They learn hyper-vigilance early on. They learn to avoid their mother here get their reasonable needs met from mother here. They learn to get their unreasonable needs met there. They learn to say the hell out of her way there. And this is when their adolescence often they learn to steal money out of mother's purse there. They learn how to react to the world in different ways depending on what is going on with mom and dad. And in an alcoholic family, if one parent is alcoholic and the other is a co-alcoholic, what we know is that the alcoholic concentrates on the alcohol. So, you've got five different stages there. The codependent or the person that is the other spouse oftentimes is concentrating on the alcoholic. So, that person also goes through five different levels of stress. So, the child learns to relate to 10 parents, not two, and learns to change with each different mood. What happens going through life here is that it would be nice when you reach the age of 18 and you left home if you no longer had to practice survival skills. But that's not how development occurs. These kids learn to be hyper-responsible very early on regarding what's going on around them. And that doesn't just switch off when they leave home. They often are 50-year-old, five-year-olds and never pass through developmental stages. And so never have gone through the process of maturity themselves. They've learned to act extremely mature.

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Okay, over the last six or seven years, a woman by the name of Laurie Dwanelle [sp?] and I and Seattle have worked with about 3,500 adult kids of alcoholics. And during that time, we have identified 21 characteristics. It's interesting when I was compiling this list, I couldn't figure out I got 20 here. I can't figure, so I call Laurie and she said, Jane, you left out guilt. It was really interesting because I was going through some guilt myself at that time. And I just couldn't remember it to put it on the list. Okay, the first one is fear of trust. If a child grows up in a war zone like this, they learn not to trust their environment. Obviously, you don't trust things when they're constantly moving and constantly changing. And the most important thing to kids growing up, the thing kids fear more than anything in the world is abandonment. One need not to be abandoned. So, kids will adapt and survive anything they grow up in in order to get minimal nurturing. And if that means that they have to change themselves in order to do it, they will.

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The second is they grow up with tremendous guilt. Guilt like this little girl coming into the kitchen, not believing there's anything wrong with her mom because she needs to believe in her mom. But she believes that there's something wrong with her. And so everything in her environment basically becomes her responsibility. And most of all, adult kids feel that they're responsible for not getting their parents to stop drinking. It's their fault. Somehow that their parents are still alcoholic or even in their own recovery that their parents are not happy. They become hyper responsible in everything they do. One of the jokes I have at the Institute is the majority of my staff are kids of alcoholics. I think the majority of human service workers or kids of alcoholics for obvious reasons. But one of the things nice about that is I don't have to worry about anything at the Institute. Kids of alcoholics do their work, my work and everybody else's work. If the person next to them has not made the copies they were supposed to, they'll go make the copies. And they'll feel it's their responsibility if the person five doors down did not do their job today. One of the things I talk about in a poem I write is kids of alcoholics feel responsible if somebody bumps into them on a crowded street because somehow they cause what goes on. They tend to be perfectionistic. Everything has to be done right all the time. And what happens when they're not? They feel that they're bad, totally bad people. Now an example of this is a woman I worked with who grew up in an alcoholic family. Her father was alcoholic, her mother was not. Her mother came from an alcoholic family. And what her mother always wanted to be in her life was a dancer. She couldn't be. And there's a statement made by a woman by the name of Jean Miller who said, the larger the hole in my mother's heart, the larger the jewels in her crown have to be. This little girl learned that the way she would not be abandoned and be accepted is to please mother.

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And one of the ways she did that was to become a dancer. And she didn't only become a dancer, she became a wonderful dancer. I got her when she was about 35 years old, came into my office in suicidal depression. What had happened was that she was doing ballet in New York and she fell and injured a muscle. And after that point became extremely totally depressed. The only thing she felt she was in her life was a dancer. That all other parts of her did not exist. That the only thing she was good for was being on stage. And the sad part of it was that no matter how much applause she got, she still felt that she wasn't good enough. She still felt that she didn't belong and she still didn't feel like she was full. I oftentimes work with

clients in the mode that they feel most comfortable in. A lot of people talk therapy is not what works. This particular woman was an artist.

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And so one of the things that she drew was she drew herself as she saw herself. And we worked with those pictures throughout her therapy. And what she drew was a little girl crying and shivering in a corner. Another little girl who was very strong and very powerful with a knife over her. And a third little girl who was a ballerina who looked very self-confident. That oftentimes is the picture of kids of alcoholics. When I asked her who is the most powerful of these three little girls. She said to me, well it must be the one with the knife or it must be the ballerina. Because I've been trying all my life to get rid of that kid. It was that kid that was in my office. And one of the things I said to her is no, the strongest of those three is that little girl. That little girl that can cry and feel. What she drew was perfectionism who was the dancer. And the flip side of perfectionism for adult kids is depression. Now depression is not grief. Depression is punitive. Depression is that part of us that we internalize that says to us that if we're not perfect and if we're not doing everything right, then we're terrible, horrible people. It was that part that wanted to kill her. So, perfectionism is something that we learn to do. Kids that I treat that have been scapegoats in that family or the milk spillers in the family; the one that when mom and dad are arguing they spill the milk so that the mom and dad will fight with them – they tell me they're not only screw ups, they're the best screw ups that ever lived. We tend to be overachievers or we tend not to be able to achieve at all. We tend to have incredibly poor self-images. Obviously if you look at this little girl, her concept of herself is not there.

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She's living in a war zone and little kids get a lot of their self-image or they're feeling about themselves from their parents. And what she has learned is that there's something very wrong with her. We need to be right because if we're not right, we're wrong. One of the things that Laurie and I joke about because we're both adult kids of alcoholics, is our tendency no matter where we go to give a presentation to go to the library and read up on everything that's been done in that area for the last 15 years in case we might have missed something. Now in the area of adult kids we've been working in this area for seven years. We've written a lot of the material but that doesn't matter because somewhere somebody might know something that you don't. And if you don't know what you're wrong. We're in denial. The mistake that is made is that only the alcoholic is in denial. This little girl in order to survive has got to be in denial of what's going on in the family. The whole family functions as if there is an elephant in the living room that nobody will acknowledge is there. This mother might have gotten socked in the eye by dad the night before. The next morning she wakes up and says I fell down the stairs. Now even if brother and sister and child all saw a dad hit her, nobody talks about it. So that kid grows up doubting her perceptions or his perceptions about everything. Did I see it? Did I feel it? Do I know it? And most of the time ask everybody. It's sort of like if you draw a picture asking everybody is this good? And if they say no then you tear up the picture, that's what kids of alcoholics do all their life. They have a fear of feeling because in a war zone you can't feel is dangerous to feel.

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If she felt what it was like in that picture she couldn't survive. So, you learn to stuff feelings not only by survival mechanisms but by being told over and over again you don't feel afraid, you're not sad, you're not upset, get on with your life. I saw a little boy at the bus stop with his mother about a week ago and the little boy was, or actually it was probably about three months ago it was the first day of school. And all little kids, you know my kids were the very first day of school a little afraid to go. You know this whole new world all these kids. So, the boy was crying and saying to his mother I'm afraid. In a normal family mom and dad might talk to him about what it's like and why you're afraid and putting him on their lap and saying it's going to be okay and walking him to school. This particular mother was saying you're not afraid act like a man. It's important in an alcoholic family because the codependent or if both parents are alcoholic, the focus is on the alcohol, kids do not get focused on in terms of normal developmental needs. They have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps very early on and grow up. That's the only way to survive. So, kids in alcoholic families learn denial. They learn to stuff their feelings and most of all they learn to be afraid of anger. Because anger is dangerous in an alcoholic family particularly if you happen to live in a family where anger comes out in a very destructive way. They have frequent periods of depression.

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Part of that is delayed grief response. One of the things I deal with a lot is a high number of people that come in and see me during the Christmas season. Everybody's out there having fun and all the lights are up and you're supposed to be happy and they're real depressed and they can't understand why. Well in their family the tree never stayed standing after the first day it was up. The turkey might have been heaved across the table. Mom might have ended up with her nose and the peas and that was not fun. And so those feelings start to break through and you're not supposed to feel them so you just keep stuffing them down. The other thing that happens with adults is this little girl will learn to do many things. She may learn to block all of her feelings by basically being responsible all the time. By taking care of mother, by getting a step ladder, getting the cereal and not only fixing her own breakfast but fixing her brothers and also her mother's drinks. She might become very goal directed in her life so that when you have one maze of goal after another after another you don't have to feel. You can't feel and do it the same time or she might become the kid that is the milk spiller or she might become the pleaser, the clown that once the ones that tries to make dad feel better when he walks in and says why the hell haven't she got little girls' breakfast yet. She might go say it's all right daddy everything's all right want to play a game. That's how kids learn to survive in that family. Kids learn to fear intimacy.

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Obviously in that kind of a system you don't want to be intimate because it's scary either because those wet slobbery kisses become really inappropriate and it doesn't feel good or because you get shut down entirely when you try to be intimate or because you just can't trust the situation at all. You learn to control all your feelings and you learn above all not to ask anybody for help. Now I'll tell a story about that – actually because I always tell this story my friend Gina from Seattle is here and I always tell the story when she's here because it was her dog that did this, so I always like to make her feel guilty. I had a party on the 4th of July and there

were about 20 people outside and we'd had a picnic and it was a really hot day and Gina had a new dog who was in an Alaskan Husky, and that dog was hot, and I have two dogs and they were hot so, we had just finished eating some ice cream and I gave the dog a carton to lick out. The dogs started looking out the carton and I didn't think anymore about it. On the way back to the picnic table I inadvertently stepped on the ice cream carton and her dog bit a whole right through my foot. Teach you to give, right? So it was inordinately painful, right at the bottom right in the soft part of your foot. I walked in the house looking at my foot. I learned a long time ago to shut off pain and you can do it. I walked into the bathroom turned on the bathtub water and was standing there with my foot with the water coming on it.

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Gina came in and was all upset, obviously it was her dog that bit me, and I said you know I've been trying to figure out how I'm going to get myself to the hospital. Gina looked at me perplexed and said there's 20 people outside. Never occurred to me to ask anybody. What was interesting about that was that it wasn't that I thought about it and decided not to it never occurred to me. When you grow up in that kind of family you'll learn that you can't ask you have to take care of it yourself and so we become hyper in control. We take care of all of our own needs which is extremely frustrating to those people that live with us and want to give to us and oftentimes we find people to marry that aren't in any way able to give to us because it doesn't feel good for a while to be given to. The first time I allowed that information or that feeling of being given to to come in I felt inordinate grief because I'd never felt it before so it opened up a door of all the losses in my life not just that moment of pleasure of being given to. We tend to be hypersensitive to the needs of others and hyper vigilant like this little girl. It was a study done in California where they found about 65% of all human service workers, doctors, lawyers, and nurses were kids of alcoholics and that makes sense because we're good at knowing what other people need and want and figuring out how they tick and being sensitive to them because we have been all our life. When you grow up in a war zone, you grow up noticing everything at all times and so we become hyper sensitive to others and we act in their play, particularly the pleaser in the family.

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One of the saddest parts for one of my clients a couple weeks ago was that she ran into three of her friends at the same time on the street. Now, the sad part of that was that she was the pleaser in the family and she was a different person to each one of those three. Now she was really into it. To some her political views changed depending on who she was with and it was during the election so to run into these three people was no good task.

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Side B begins at 00:031:02

We tend to think in black and white terms. Either everything is bad, or everything is good. But there's a whole rainbow of colors in between that we miss on a consistent basis. Being adult kid I know how to go on a vacation how come back but how to enjoy it in between is sometimes beyond me. We know how to – we know that we should play games with our children and yet they bring you Candyland and you think oh my god I don't want to play this again. We don't know how to

get down and have fun and oftentimes we don't can only do that when we're drunk or loaded or when we're using some substance of some kind. So if you look at these characteristics and you realize that these are what we do to survive. These don't go away. You look at this and you realize that it's part of basically a repressed grief system. We can't feel when we're kids. It's too overwhelming. We don't want to be abandoned and so we develop characteristics to survive.

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We basically go into a repressed grief reaction very similar to delayed stress syndrome from the war. What are parts of that? We have periods of unexplained depression that tends to come out of nowhere. As this woman when she was not being perfectionistic when she was not doing everything right she basically became self-punitive and depressed. With many people they become workaholic to the point of exhaustion and when they're exhausted then they become depressed. But we have frequent periods of depression. We oftentimes make substitutes in our life. We leave that alcoholic home and we find somebody to replace it with, and we keep acting upon the same kinds of characteristics we grew up with, only we have replaced the alcoholic parent with somebody just like them. And so instead of grieving the losses we surround ourselves by another person where we can continue that kind of war zone kind of reaction. We oftentimes have symptoms and diseases. One of the things that happens in Seattle I do Adult Kids of Alcoholics Workshops and I do a lot of experiential work early on where I talk about feelings and usually about an hour into it everybody's reaching for their aspirin bottle. We learn to put our emotions into our physical selves through headaches, ulcers, other kinds of pain. We tend to go through vicarious grief rather than grief. In other words, sometimes we become an ornately good caretakers for those people we live with. And when they grieve we grieve for them. One woman told me that she could cry for her husband's father's death. Why couldn't she cry for her own? She can cry for something out there but not inside. We turn to drink, dope and overwork. Overwork is compulsive behavior.

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If you're moving from one task to another to another to another to another all the time unless you're exhausted there's not much chance of feeling in there. It's a way not to grieve and not to feel sadness. We shut down. Don't feel anything. A number of women or men have brought their spouses in for marital counseling and said to me I don't know what's the matter with him. I cannot get through. We shut down all emotions around us and go into part of a grief state which is called numbing. If any of you have been in an automobile accident or anything close to it one of the first responses you have after impact is complete numbing. You don't feel your body. You don't feel yourself. You don't feel angry. You don't feel sad. You don't feel fear. You don't feel anything. And a lot of people remain in this shutdown state to avoid grief. We basically go through avoidance. Avoiding anything sad. Avoiding anything we don't want to hear in order not to feel the grief. Some people I treat have avoided other people all their life. They live in isolation. They don't make intimate relationships. They basically isolate themselves from anything that could cause feeling. Another response to not grieving is to freeze everything. That basically is the person that never changes anything in their mind from the time that the incident happened. I have worked with people in delayed grief whose husband, wife, or child has died and they have left their room exactly as it is, to the point where some people set the table with that person there. To keep that person there. To keep things the way they were so that the grief never takes place. \

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The next one is fixed rage. Anger and rage are part of the grief process. Some people stick in rage. They are people that are angry all the time. Everything is everybody else's fault. Everybody is blamed. People don't reconnect. They don't form intimate relationships. I work with a lot of adult kids as parents. Working with them one more generation on parenting with their own children. And one of the things some tell me is I can't bond to my child and it scares me. Or I don't know how to talk to this kid. I know he's mine but I don't feel anything. Not reconnecting. Not opening up. It's like being shut down. Constant caretaking. Taking care of somebody else which is a way of taking care of that child and you that never got any kind of an emotional care. Constant caretaking and parenting yourself through that child, whether it's an adult or your own children, is one of the things that leads to dysfunction when adult kids parent their own children. It's that constant caretaking that stops them from being able to set limits and follow through because every time their child feels pain they feel the pain and want to stop it.

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Putting the person on a pedestal. Basically creating a fantasy life of what was. One of the things that's really interesting is that I grew up in an alcoholic family with two parents that were alcoholic and it was not the kind of alcoholism in a family that you could miss. My parents were not the casual after dinner martini drinkers. They drank from six in the morning until 10 or 11 at night every day and there was violence in my family constantly. Now when I went away to college I would come home on the train and I would have in my mind that these parents that were going to meet me at the train station. Now these parents by the way bore no similarity to the parents that were actually at the train station. These were the mother that made cookies on Christmas and did all these different kinds of things. We do that to ourselves and one of the things that I had to grieve long after my parents died was not only the parents as they were, but the fantasy parents that never were. Pedestalling is a way of not grieving. The other way is undoing. My brother's reaction to the situation, particularly around my mother's death, was to continually form relationships and undo what had been done. He felt tremendous guilt about my mother's death and so his response was to marry woman after woman after woman and basically be abused and not stand up. One of the things that had happened the night before my mother died was that my brother had had a tremendous argument with her and he felt it was his fault. So he kept marrying people and letting them verbally abuse him and not standing up as a way of undoing what had happened.

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One of the most important processes that I'm talking about is that you can't go through that war zone to health without grief. And one of the things that often happens in the workshops I do in Seattle is people look at that list of 21 characteristics and want to know how they can get them all out of the way in two weeks. How long will counseling take Janes? Six weeks? And I say our approaching counseling is perfectionistically as you do everything else in your life. No, that's not going to happen. The first stage with people is in denial. And as I say kids of alcoholics are as much denial as their parents. That person that you know had alcoholic parents who says to you, my parents drank a little but they really weren't alcoholic. My brother called me probably 10 years after my parents had died of cirrhosis of the liver and suicide. He had seen me on TV doing a

special on kids of alcoholics was furious. Said our parents weren't alcoholic. Five years later he called me on the phone and he said, hey little sister, do you know our parents drank? Denial.

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One of the things that's breaking through that denial is the kids of alcoholics movement. Most of the people that I get into counseling are people that read an article I wrote, saw it on TV, saw something, and thought that's what's going on with me. They break through the denial. The second part is acceptance. Accepting that you were from an alcoholic family, accepting things as they were, accepting yourself, accepting what's going on in your family, and basically working through the process of knowing things as they are. The third part is grief, loss, sadness, mourning. And one of the things about going through grief and loss is that when you're in it, you know the difference between loss and grief and depression. It's a pain deep down inside. You cry real tears. And sometimes you do this in various ways. The first time I broke through a grief process, I cried for three weeks over a dead gerbil. It wasn't obviously the gerbil. Laurie has cried over a briefcase she's lost. It can be a book. It can be anything. New losses stimulate that process. And if you've worked through these two, then you go through a real grief process. And part of the grief process is anger. Part of it is tears, sadness, missing. Some people say I cry, Jane, and I don't think I can ever stop. And I tell them they will. But it's embarrassing. I go out downtown and I just fill with tears all the time. It's okay. You will. One of the things that the Kids of Alcoholics Movement has done is allowed kids of alcoholics, as adults, a place to come home. When we first started doing adult kids workshops in Seattle, people would get angry. And sometimes these were people that had never drank. Some of them were recovering people, but they were angry and they said, why am I angry now? This happened how many years ago? One of the things that was interesting that happened early on, which was about seven years ago before this movement had really started. Laurie and I started doing this work with professionals because we believe that one of the reasons that alcoholism was not being diagnosed by counselors and other people was because they were kids of alcoholics.

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And they couldn't see it in somebody else. During that first workshop, we realized that all the people there were kids of alcoholics and what they wanted to work on were their own issues. And it was threatening at that time to the whole AA system. I don't think it is anymore because a lot of recovering people are now saying I was a kid of an alcoholic too. In one of the workshops, a couple of people that were recovering alcoholics came and just as people started to get angry and started to cry, they stood up and said, but you shouldn't be angry because your parent had a disease. The affect in that room went straight down. Everybody in it started adapting the same way that they did when they were kids in their own family system. They felt guilt, they felt shame, they felt horrible. One of the things Laurie and I said was, this is different issues here. If you came here to deal with those issues, we welcome you. Otherwise, you know, this is not the place. What happened was they stayed and worked on their own issues. But what was interesting was the whole family system in this group of 60 people got recreated. Grief, loss, sadness, anger, or all part of the recovery process. But the thing to remember is that we don't stay here. We move from here. So you might be angry. You might disconnect for a while. You might cry all the time, but it will go away. One thing to remember is the opposite of depression is not joy.

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The opposite of depression is spontaneity. That freedom to feel whatever you're feeling, whenever you're feeling it. That's the opposite of depression. And when you work through real grief and real loss, depression goes away. The next part is integration. One of the things you learn about those 21 characteristics, when you're in the integration process, is that they're not all negative. There are parts of those characteristics which are some of my best features. I love being compassionate to people. I love being sensitive. I like being able to stand up in front of a thousand people and give a talk because I'm basically shy. I grew up in a family where I had to develop those skills. There is another side to each of the 21 characteristics and after you've gone through grief and loss, you get to a point of accepting those parts of you that are positive and those parts of the characteristics that you need to change. It's not throwing the baby out with a bathwater. You also start to see your parents as real people. I have a lot of compassion after grief for my mother as a woman when she grew up. Acceptance of her as a woman when she grew up and why she was alcoholic. I could not have done that before I grieved. The same was true of my father. He was in the service at 14.

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He was in the war I now have compassion for that process. Integration is a way of putting your life back together. And after this is behavior change. Part of all alcoholism treatment should also involve grief process. Because people in alcoholism treatment very often are kids of alcoholics. They often have lost all parts of their life during their substance abuse. And one of the things that we do inadvertently in treatment of alcoholism and in treatment of women sometimes is that after acceptance has been reached, we jump directly to behavior change. We start adding things like assertiveness training. I wish I had a nickel for every adult kid that told me they'd gone through assertiveness training and felt worse now than they did before because they couldn't pull off the assertiveness. Skills and behavior don't work until you work through your own grief and sadness and sometimes shame. I'm almost out of time here, but I would like you all to try something. Now many adult kids tell me that working on a delicate of alcoholics issues is like coming home. Part of that is because number one you're no longer unique. There's tons of people all around you that were the neighbors next door that you never told. They understand that stay away smile on your face because they got one just like it. Okay? One of the things that we benefit from is support in the grief process in sharing and in recovery. Now I'm going to pick one of the characteristics probably because it's the one that I have not completely resolved and that's having fun and enjoying things. Okay?

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Spontaneity, you know. What I would like you to do is to take out a slip of paper. How many of you are adult kids by the way? Okay, you're going to love this exercise. This is what you never got to do when you were kid. Okay? Now take a piece of paper and write one of the most positive things you do to have fun. Now don't anybody tell me eating and don't anybody tell me working. Okay, those are compulsions not fun. Something you do if you can think of it that you do just for fun. Okay, after you've written it on the paper, I want you to do what you never could do as a kid in school because you were all probably really good kids is that I want you to wad it up in a spitwad and I want you to throw it across the room. Now the person will pick that up and read it and find another way to have fun. I want you to wad it up and throw it again. Okay?

00:52:46

So this is an exercise and not being appropriate people.

00:52:51 to 00:53:17, audience is talking and laughing as they are doing the exercise.

00:53:18

JANE MIDDLETON: This is what kids do.

00:53:20 to 00:53:27, audience noises.

00:55:28

SUSAN McINNIS: (with audience noise in the background): Jane Middleton will return with her concluding thoughts in a moment. Growing up in a war zone was produced by Carla Tanella and Susan McInnis in the studios of KUAC FM on the campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This production was made possible by a grant from Fairbanks Midnight Sun Lions Club. Our thanks to the Midnight Sun Lions, to Jane Middleton and to the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies sponsors of the 1984 Institute on Family Violence.

00:55:58 to 00:54:34

Audience noises.

00:55:35

JANE MIDDLETON: Hey, let's talk now. Now, somebody in this room is going to have the compulsion to pick up all these slips of paper. I don't want you to do it. Okay. Did you learn some things that you didn't know that people did have fun? After you go through integration of grief and loss, one of the things that happens is the whole new world wakes up to you. One of the things that I learned was that there were those things that I lost in my life that I could in fact regain an example. This is called being inappropriate which I'd had never been. I had gone through a period of time doing these workshops with adult kids and also feeling myself, which is one of the benefits, worked through a lot of tears and worked through a lot of sadness of things that I never had growing up like Christmases and various other kinds of things. And one day I was going to the store with my children and on the way into the store – now mind you, I have four adolescent boys, right? Walking into the store, I saw one of those mechanical horses that you put the quarter in.

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And I looked at it and I said nah. I don't know how many times as a kid. I had passed one of those mechanical horses and I never could get a quarter and I never could ride one. And I always felt bad about that. And what I realized after integration process was that I could have just about anything I wanted at this point in my life. And if I wanted to ride that mechanical horse, I could. Now, for a brief minute, I thought, that's inappropriate for a mother to do. And I realized I had been telling myself what was appropriate and inappropriate all my life. And this was not harmful to anybody. So, I warned my kids, I said, hey, kids, you know what I'm going to do? Actually, two of my sons loved it. Two of them went into the store and pretended they'd never met me in the life. Put the quarter in the mechanical horse and I had a wonderful ride. It wasn't the riding. It was the

giving back to myself and the freedom and the spontaneity of living my life. And you can all do that. Now, I got some strange looks, but you know, those people never see me again. Then heard anybody, right? Only helped me. Okay.

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What I would like you to examine is after a brief lost process, what you hope for is balance in your life. Now, if you look at a life, I asked one of my clients to do this few weeks ago and she said her life was balanced. And I asked her to do it. And almost three quarters of that circle was covered with work. And I said, that's not balanced. Okay. If you look at your life, there's a part in it for work. There's a part in it for fun and enjoyment. There's a part in it for your children. This is not equal, but it should be here. There's a part in it for your family of origin, which means your own parents, your brothers, your sisters, and everybody else. One of the things after you've worked through the grief process, you realize even if your parents are still actively drinking is that you can work away to do things with them that does not make you feel guilty anymore and yet live your own life. Some people write them letters, but can't go there because the alcoholism bothers them too much. There's a way to work out family of origin issues. Significant other that person in your life that is there, no matter whether you do a blooper at work or make a mistake, no matter what you do, there's that time for aloneness, being just with yourself. There's a time for spirituality. And interestingly enough, after the grief has gone away, you feel the spirituality. It's a wonderful feeling that's not necessarily religion that can be the joys of seeing a beautiful mountain or the sunrise and maybe you never saw it before. It now opens up to you.

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There's community work – being responsible for part of the world in which you live. All of those things are part of life. And very often what happens in your own recovery is to look at this circle and look at what you've got in it and look at what is conspicuously missing. If it's all work, that's not good. Is it all your family of origin? That's not good. There is a balance in people. We learned as kids to be out of balance and there's this way not to be anymore. Some of you just think about this for yourself. Think about what's in that circle for a few minutes. One of the things I want you to remember is that through grief and loss comes balance. The world opens up again. And you realize that you can do just about anything that you want to.

[end of recording]