

Dear Kathy:

I married my high school sweetheart when I was 20, almost 21. I should have known that the case of beer that he and his buddy used to share in a night wasn't normal. He was always a funny drunk and everyone liked him. We had plenty of fun times and grew together--at least one of us did. At 24 I decided to go back to school to become a court reporter. My husband resented me going back to school and just continued partying. I graduated, one of 5 in my class out of 40, and eventually got an officialship with a Judge and got a really good job.

After we had been married for 9 years he decided to move out and have an affair with one of the summer help at work--she was 18 and he was 30. After a separation of 5 months, I welcomed him back. Shortly after we went back together, he got pulled over going 80 on a regular highway at about 2 in the morning for the first time ever. He decided, and me encouraging him, that he might have a drinking problem. He used to go out on a binge when we were first married that would last the entire weekend. As he got older it was generally about once a week, coming home at 3 or 4 in the morning. I always worried about him killing someone else.

He was evaluated at a medical facility and was told that yes, he was an alcoholic after he admitted that he could drink a fifth of vodka a night. When he said that it was just a matter of fact, the evaluator was in shock. He stayed sober for one year and decided to have a drink on New Years Eve and ended up right back in the saddle again.

He was a happy drunk and never physically abusive. It did drive me crazy that he just could not go a day without drinking. He wasn't really involved in any activity. Every night on my way home I would wonder if he would be there or be at the bar. I had constant anxiety worrying. I never felt secure in our marriage. I always knew he would leave me for someone else and someone younger.

I took up water-skiing and really started to love that. He would accuse me of having an affair with one of the people I skied with--and we were skiing at 6 a.m. in the morning!

Fast forward to being married almost 20 years: I came home from work and I had a Dear John letter--only the letter was to me, "Hi, Bye." This time he had had an affair with a girl he worked with. He had moved out and for a week I didn't even know where he was. Where he worked told me that he was on vacation. I was devastated! I was hurt and feeling guilty that I had complained too much. I dropped down to 109 pounds. I was 40 years old, and I was going to be alone. My husband had had a vasectomy when he was 28 as he didn't want any children.

We ended up getting a divorce and he married the girl from work and she was younger.

After going through all the stages, and pretty quick I might add, I made up my mind that this was going to be the first day of my new life. I would be fine on my own.

I was at a blues festival with a girlfriend of mine and I was the designated driver, something I was used to. Out of 4,000 people, God pointed out a man walking down the bleachers. I told my friend that we had to go where he was going. Imagine someone who hadn't dated but one person since she was 16 and now 40 plus! We went down to the center stage and a bunch of us were standing around, women, men and children alike and he and I began talking. At the end of the night, he asked me if he could call me and I said call me Tuesday. I ended up driving to a meeting place I had arranged, as I didn't know him and hadn't dated in 20 years. He had arranged a double date--not even knowing any of my circumstances!

He ended up being quite a bit younger than me--which wasn't planned--but we had this connection. Early in our relationship, one night I was thinking to myself when he hugged me, "Oh, my God, I'm in love with him." And he said out loud right after my thought, "I love you too." That's how it's been from the very beginning.

God gave me a second chance. On our second date he asked me to go to church. I ended up being baptized into the Catholic faith and was able to be married in the church with a full mass.

I've gone on to get a degree in interior design. I've been blessed to ski in the Nationals at the age of 53 and 54. And just this past year after 30 years of court reporting, I retired and I ran for office as treasurer of my community of 73,000 people. I was elected in spite of being the only person who wasn't a career politician (my competition of 3 other people were very well known.) I turned 56 on a Friday and was sworn in on the following Monday. And interestingly enough, my ex-husband and his wife supported me. He drove around with my sign on his truck, they had my sign in their yard, and they both came to my fund raiser.

God has blessed me with much and much is expected. If I would have never been married to my first husband, I would never be where I am now. There is a reason for everything in life's journey! No matter how far we get off track, we can always get back on. I continue to learn and there is always hope. - M