

The Conflict Between Love and Trauma

My second Adverse Childhood Experience occurred throughout my childhood until Uncle Andy, my great uncle died the summer before beginning my senior year in high school. Though the ACE, involving alcoholism, was really a conflict between him and Mammy, my grandmother, it affected the entire family. I have come to learn the trauma affected me most.

Some backstory will help you more clearly understand the experience. My grandmother was from the old country as she always called it, Czechoslovakia. I recall her stories of having to take care of her younger siblings. Apparently, Mammy and Uncle Andy were very close until he left for the Merchant Marines. As my parents always explained, she hated him for that. Once he stopped serving, he bought the two-story house in which I spent my childhood. Once they left Brooklyn, my grandparents moved in with him, living upstairs while he lived downstairs. After Pop-Pop, my grandfather, passed away my parents and siblings moved into the house. Because Mammy and Uncle Andy has a contentious relationship and both drank Genesee Ale beer from sunup until sundown, the entire day was filled with them arguing with each other, saying hateful things, screaming at the top of their lungs. Sometimes, she would make him so mad, he would turn his television up full volume just before going to bed, giving us all strict orders not to turn it off; he loved to make her angry.

Their relationship created, in my mind, an uneasy and unstable environment. As such, I was riddled with anxiety; this created a perpetual sense of fear and uncertainty for me. I so looked forward to the day I could go away to college just so I could find some peace.

Despite their animosity toward one another, my grandmother and great uncle had a tremendous love for, and would do anything to help, us.

Then, you have my parents; they did not believe in yelling or arguing in front of us children. So, we never knew when they were in conflict. I also don't recall them showing affection for each other.

The dichotomy growing up amid a cantankerous relationship and a relationship lacking affection created a sense of great confusion. Add to that the reality that our parents did not teach us about relationships or talk to us about 'the facts of life' or dating, and you have a recipe for vulnerability.

Because of my innocence, some people I would meet on my journey of life loved to refer to me as naïve. I always hated that word, because I interpreted it as them calling me stupid which I was not. I was, however, uninformed, and unprepared to venture out on my own. So, when I went looking for love, which was almost never, I found it in the wrong places. Now, I can say, in a sense, perhaps I was naïve; that certainly is no longer the case.