

Rolf Horst

My life among alcoholics

Our neighbour had to go to the hospital for suspicion of meningitis and asked us whether we could take care of her dog named Wusel. Since we have a cat and a dog, Wusel couldn't go into our flat. So in the morning at six o'clock a round with our dog, one with Wusel. In total, we made five courses with the older dog.

That would have been well over a longer period of time if Wusel had not always done her big business – unfortunately often with diarrhoea – in her owners flat.

I managed the first morning somehow and cleaned up the mess, despite the urge to gag, with wet wipes. On the second day I almost vomited myself in the flat. I got a headache – unfortunately I noticed very late that it was a migraine attack. On the third day, the memories of my childhood came up with me. How was that the same? My mother was visiting the neighbourhood. My father was drunk in his bed and threw up. As a twelve to thirteen-year-old boy, I cleaned and washed him. I would have liked to vomit myself. And it was precisely this feeling that Wusel was shaken up again.

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Biographical narrative



The author: Rolf Horst was born in Bremen in 1960. He lives with his wife to a dog and a cat, both of whom come from animal welfare, near a small north German town. Niece Horst, today 60, is Asperger Autist, Studied German Studies, French, Adult Education and Sport, practiced Japanese Rinzaï-Zen along with the monastery in Japan for many years and, with her husband, developed her way of life of silence, simplicity and structure, which makes it possible to live on the edge of an abandoned, ignorant neurotypical society.

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Prologue

I have considered for a very long time whether I am writing another book about the problems and experiences in a family in which – also in the area – alcoholic, co-dependencies, divorce, illegitimate children and suicides are extremely widespread. In my first book on this topic "Inherited trauma – lived addiction" I have already told a part of my life story. In the present book, I report, not in chronological order, about the experiences with my addicted parents, siblings, relatives and my first wife. I dedicate a part of my time in a self-help group in which relatives were also welcome. I tell of my add to, the new foundation of a community and my exit. Furthermore, I report on my different psychotherapies and who or what helped me find my way again or better at all.

I would like to thank my wife Nieke, who has always been there for me for over twenty years.

Seeks? Alcoholics, drunker or drinkers? According to my family, only the "homeless" from the train station were affected by this, but not our father.

Addiction is a gradual process that is usually not perceived by the personal environment and the person concerned does not know what to accuse them of. Alcoholics, I? I don't need that and can stop drinking at any time!

Many others are impacted by a person's addiction disease: partner, children, friends, relatives, neighbours, employers, health insurance companies, clinics, society.

It is the family members in particular who mostly adapt to the condition of the alcohol patient – co-dependency is called. As the son of alcoholic parents, I only understood this when I deal with the addiction - I myself have no disposition to addictive, my first psychotherapist confirmed that. But I had been married to a wet alcoholic for a few years.

Alcohol was always present in my parents' home. No matter whether in a liquid form on the table or as a replacement for brain fluid in the head. Alcohol influenced everything and everyone. Also, me as a child, only I didn't notice that back then. As well as? All adults participated and so it was completely normal for me. I couldn't imagine that it had been dif-

ferent in any family. Beer was part of everyday life. There was always a bottle or a full glass of it in the flat somewhere. And after all, beer was not alcohol – so they thought in the 1970s and unfortunately sometimes today. It was also normal for my parents to pour brandy in their breakfast coffee at the weekend. If I still had some, the thought of it would now be afraid of the neck hair as they did in my childhood. My father drove trucks and was travelling all over North-Western Germany. He also drank during working hours. Whenever he took a break, he ate a little something and drank his beer.

A box with twenty bottles then had to be fetched for the weekend, and it usually didn't last long. On Friday evening there was a map evening when my parents took turns playing with a neighbouring couple at our place and at theirs. Of course always with beer and often enough with a grain schnapps. There was always an occasion – but actually it didn't need it – to get a bottle out of the basement or from the fridge.

And often enough, his beer did not get along with the already little food he consumed. At some point, my father had been removed two thirds of the stomach because of his stomach ulcers, and this led to a difficult absorption and processing of the firm food. You can rinse with a beer if it only stays with a beer. But in the course of one evening, a sixth or more.

And the more my father had drunk, the more he overestimated his knowledge, strength, and his perseverance or stamina. He was born in 1925 and as a very young soldier in the second World War.

After it, he was no longer accessible for everything new and the "post-traumatic stress disorder" as a recognized clinical picture was not yet available. The German army has only been researching since the 1990s.

So how to deal with the trauma experienced? What to do when the memories and the terrible pictures are coming back?

Drink them away, drink so much until everything blurs in the head and the past only waves around in the fog. But what kind of future was that? Nobody thought about it.

Now and then drunk, that happens in every family, well and, that's why you are far from being an alcoholic. After all, he is not a bum from the train station. I got such answers from both my parents and my siblings when I had once again dared to talk about these unspeakable conditions in our family.

When the father was drunk, he always told the same war stories. Otherwise, neither his experiences nor that of my mother, who had to flee from Silesia with her mother and half-brother, were topic at our home.

When my mother's half-brother came to visit with his family, they all drunk and it got loud. He also drank more and more than he could tolerate, and then, drunk as he was, he tried to play with us children. It didn't take long and there were tears and shouts, mostly with his son and later also with his daughter.

If he was drunk, it always exaggerated. And he was often drunk. Whether with grandma, at home, with my parents or in the beer garden while drinking boots. Although he was my godfather, I didn't know anything about him. Not what he worked and not what thoughts tortured him.

But he suffered, just like my father and mother. Through the war, they all had traumatic experiences, regardless of whether they were on the front or on the run from their homeland. In any case, he was the first to put an end to his life through suicide.

But what prompted my siblings to take over this addiction? Had also transferred our parents' traumatic experiences to them or were it actually inferiority complexes that resulted from co-dependency. I think it was both.

I didn't know feelings of inferiority, I had no feelings at all. Later I told a therapist: as a person, I didn't exist. I couldn't create my own profile. For many

years I did the one I believed that others expect it from me. I had no expectations myself. Wishes and dreams, yes, I also had them, but expectations? No!

The oldest of my brothers, born in 1947, was the son of our father's first marriage. The marriage was divorced because the woman had sexual intercourse with foreign sailors – so it was in the divorce judgment. The little son was awarded to the father, which was certainly not common so shortly after the end of the war.

During that time he trained as a bricklayer and certainly didn't earn much. I still remember that he often brought me "Siku" metal toy cars as a gift. I don't even know where he got the money for that. As I played on the floor, he always sat on the sofa with my twin sister and put his arm around her.

But after completing his basic military service, he no longer worked because he supposedly had a hole in the heart, but only drunk and smoked. In the evening he went into a nearby pub and came back drunk in the middle of the night. Then he finished his intoxication until noon. I had the feeling that he never washed himself. He stood up for alcoholic evaporation, sweat, cigarette smoke and pus. At his neck my brother always had several purulent places that were provided by our mother.

He very often brought the old records out of his main pub – whether German hits or English language records – what was no longer possible in the music box was exchanged. So I came to the music when I was eight or nine years old, and it became my first big hobby.

However, it got worse with my brother. One night when he came home drunk, he crept into our room. Here slept our older sister, my twin sister and I. He folded the blanket aside with my older sister and wanted to get into bed with her. Maybe there was a shouting. My father stormed into the room, grabbed his son and pulled him out of bed to the kitchen. There was a short, loud argument and my father threw him out after he had handed over the front door key.

The next day he came again with a few friends of a political party, whose member he had been for some time and picked up his remaining things. To my great delight, the singles, and LPs remained there despite all the trouble.

He lived near us. An old woman had rented a room for him. From time to time he visited us at home and at our confirmation he was also present. One last time I saw him shortly after our father's death. In the meantime, that was over forty years ago. Our mother was born in illegitimate and wore her mother's birth

name. She was driven out of Silesia with her daughter and her half -brother, who probably had the last name from his father. The money was scarce at home. After all, we were seven people and our parents had no great earnings. The storm surge in 1962 had completely destroyed their small house near the Weser River and the family was housed separately in various people.

I myself have no memories of it – I was just two years old. The only thing I often saw in my mind's eye was a large, white building with a courtyard and a lot of people on it. I only recognized this building in adulthood: it was a school in a nearby district. Mother also brought a son to the marriage, who, like her, was born in illegitimate. While my father worked as a truck driver, my mother cleaned in a supermarket in the evening. So there was always someone from the parents at home – they were neither truly there as loving individuals nor as parents who support their children.

My father often made very easy food in the evening. He put a pan on the stove and put grey bread there until it was dark brown and crisp. A decent portion of salt rounded off the whole thing. I did that often later as a teenager. However, he wanted to eat a curry wurst with fries more often, and I should always get him.

At the time it was mostly dark and as a little boy I was afraid to walk the dark – as I know today – only five hundred meters long way to this pub snack. But my old father believed that I couldn't hurt.

After all, he would have been as a teenager in the war and wouldn't have behaved like me. My older siblings didn't get involved and didn't offer to go instead. My father's drinking got worse. One day he fell off the truck and had to go to the hospital. A medically necessary disc surgery didn't bring the hoped-for success, and he was given very strong painkillers.

He could no longer do his job as a truck driver, but his company was generous and gave him a job as a camp master. That was the time when my best friend and I also worked there during all holidays and could therefore fulfil some wishes – from our own turntable and record, to the guitar amplifier.

The work was dirty and heavy, but well paid for at that time. We had to unload railway wagons with insulating wool and store them in the large warehouses – partly with intermediate floors. In the evening we were happy when we could take a shower, we were not only dirty, but itchy from the glass wool.

However, one day our father lost his job after almost twenty-five years. Even if a colleague had targeted

his position as a camp master, his increasing alcohol consumption certainly gave the far greater occasion for his release.

This was followed by a longer "dry spell" (so fitting for a wet alcoholic) as he searched for a job. The employment agency (at that time known as the "Employment Office") placed him, but he even had to sue an employer for his salary. The offer from a neighbour came at just the right time. This neighbour was employed by the city fire department, and they were looking for a warehouseman. With the neighbour's support, our father actually gets this position.

But what did he do with it? He drove drunk in a company vehicle. He even visited me at the company because he was nearby, of course drunk. Sometimes I get angry that I didn't call the police.

That went well for a while, but since he had completely fallen into the addiction, he finally lost his job at the fire brigade. Our neighbour, who had conveyed the job for him, never spoke a word with him again.

In the meantime, he had been classified as severely disabled due to his back problems and received a pension. Therefore, he was at home all day.