



Gifts With Recovery

By Stephanie Abbott



The holidays are a time for taking stock, for giving gifts and, for many, a time to rejoice in the rewards of a new lifestyle. Sometimes the best way to measure the distance between today and “back then” is to remember the way it used to be when someone else’s drinking or behavior was the most important thing in the world. Here are my gift ideas for any one affected by someone else’s problems, either now or in the past:

The gift of forgiveness. One of the most difficult things in life is to drop membership in “Our Brothers and Sisters of Perpetual Vengeance.” Those who have forgiven others and themselves for the way it used to be report a good feeling of completion, an ability to close the door on the past.

The gift of separateness. Co-dependents tend to get confused about where they end and another person begins. One woman told me she could never forgive herself if her husband hurt someone when he was driving drunk. Recovery means you have figured out emotionally what’s you and what isn’t you.

The gift of letting go. This one is wonderful. You can allow others to be wrong, you can enjoy life even when someone else isn’t living the way you think they should. It means saving energy for your own improvement.

The gift of choice. When all bogged down with managing someone else’s behavior, you begin to feel that this

is all there is to life, and you have no options but to go on with it, or that any alternatives that you have thought of are unworkable. With the gift of choice, you let other people help you brainstorm solutions, either in a self-help group or in therapy. You begin to get creative about problem solving. You can have your way more often if you have more than one way.

The gift of sharing. Recovery means we break the rule of keeping everything to ourselves. You no longer have to pretend that your life is perfect, or that you don’t need anyone. Now you can let some people see you as you truly are.

The gift of limitation. What a relief to accept that no one can do it all or have it all. Sometimes we want things that are opposite of each other. We have some control over our lives and feelings, but no one manages everything even when they pretend they do.

The gift of intimacy. One of the most precious aspects of a relationship is trust and sharing, but it is only possible between two equals. Addiction by its nature means there is game playing and power struggles, with one up and one down. It is also impossible to be emotionally close to a practicing addict, since feelings and thoughts are distorted by drugs, and so much play-acting by everyone is necessary to maintain the alcoholic life style.

The gift of self respect. Freedom from the delusion that you should be

strength of your will and cleverness means you can now see yourself in a much more positive light. A more reasonable assessment of reality makes self respect possible.

The gift of balance. In the hectic atmosphere of family reaction, there is a tendency toward extremism. There is undue euphoria or exaggerated depression based on what happened today, or intense closeness followed by intense alienation. Recovery brings a balance of feelings and behavior.

The gift of equality. When the family is thoroughly upset by addiction, managing alcoholism is the main event. This means the family revolves around the behavior of the addict and he or she is the star of the show. The spouse or parent or child closest to the “star” is extremely important in the manager role, and all others become secondary. In recovery everyone

“Rejoice in the rewards of a new life style.”

in the family is of equal importance; everyone’s needs are considered in a healthy family.

Awareness of how far you have come gives you gratitude and zest for the recovery rewards still ahead. Thanksgiving is the best gift for us all, and the most potent remedy for resentment.

Stephanie Abbott specialized in the family aspects of addiction, created the family program at Brighton Hospital in Michigan, taught at Marymount College in Arlington, VA and is editor of the NACoA NETWORK.