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The Joys of Being Healthy

By Kay Kopit

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by: **Kay Kopit**

It is amazing to be able to say I am a whole, happy, healthy, loving woman. I was sick for the first 40 years of my life. Like millions of other human beings I grew up immersed in the family disease of alcoholism. For generations it has plagued my family. The unbalanced life I led is so common in our society; I didn't know anything was wrong. I was a participant in the chaos, confusion, neuroses, pain and suffering which is present in dysfunctional families. I call it The Dance of Death.

I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri in the community of Clayton. The only memories I have of my father are when he would beat my brother and me with his belt so severely my clothes would cling to the bloody strap marks on my legs. He would make us wait for our punishment in our room before he dealt the ugly blows. My mother closed her eyes to what was happening. Both of them partied on weekends where I would find empty highball glasses scattered all over the living room. I had holes in the soles of my shoes while my mother would model a new diamond cocktail ring, winnings from a weekly poker game. My dad was also a compulsive gambler. He died at the age of 45 when I was nine years old.

My mother attracted another alcoholic to her life soon after my father's death. They had a symbiotic, codependent and addictive relationship. Every ten days they would consume a case of scotch which was delivered to our apartment from the local liquor store. My mother never appeared drunk but she was distant, selfish and narcissistic. My step father's disease had progressed to the point he was visibly inebriated most evenings. His attitude was condescending, nasty and self-righteous. He was verbally abusive and drove his car while intoxicated on many occasions. When I think back to that period of my history I remember keeping my personal life secret!!! I was ashamed of their behavior. I pretended all was well and I began developing neurotic habits for self-preservation.

In my teens I danced several days after school, participated in theater groups, worked in a department store and had creative life in my head. I imagined the way I wanted my world to be and was in denial as to the truth in front of me. I became obsessive, compulsive and an over-achiever. Because I

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worked so hard I accomplished a lot for a young girl but the reality was it was inspired by fear, insecurity and a need for control.

In college I devoted myself to art and earned a B.S. in Education and a M.A. in Painting and Ceramics from the University of Missouri. I was hired as a college instructor soon after graduate school. I felt happy for a time because I was away from home and involved in teaching. I took my job very seriously but the loneliness I felt when I was by myself was debilitating.

I longed for love . . . any kind. I didnt realize it at the time but I had never felt affection. I became preoccupied with thoughts of men. I had guys on my mind constantly! I was popular and had many choices but I picked the ones who I thought needed me. Most often they were from dysfunctional families. I dated a lot of drunks during my 20s. It felt familiar. In spite of my success as an artist and a teacher, I had low self esteem and I knew something was wrong with me.

In 1969 I began a new life in another city. Within a week of moving to Boston, Massachusetts, I was brutally raped and hospitalized. I never received help with this trauma and didnt properly grieve until years later. I pushed down the pain and was then, more than ever, resolved to create the perfect life for myself, (as if it were in my hands?)

This was made easy for me when Joey Haudel entered my life. He filled the position of my Knight in Shining Armour, albeit, distorted. He was young, handsome, and alcoholic and had just been released from prison. We needed each other like ducks need water. We bonded in a codependent relationship that lasted 12 years.

Our experiences together were astounding. What I learned about myself was profound. Our journey is almost unbelievable. I have told this story in a dramatic narrative, *I Survived: One Womans Journey of Self Healing and Transformation* on DVD. It is filled with the dark world of illness and moves to the light of wellness. I reached my bottom after years of suffering. I was contemplating suicide but was saved by the Grace of God and the dear voice of a telephone operator who kept me on the phone for over an hour.

I spent years in recovery; beginning with Al-Anon meetings in 1973, several series of Adult Children of Alcoholic Therapy Sessions, individual therapy with numerous therapists and devouring self help books. I had the courage to look within and face the demons. It wasnt easy and many times I wanted to quit. I often felt I was too depressed to get well. One step at a time I forged ahead and never looked back! I visualized a healthy prognosis. Today I am living that beautiful picture!

I am happily married to a man 19 years my junior. What makes our relationship extraordinary is that my husband was born in 1960 the year after I graduated from high school. I am older than his mother. We recently celebrated our 17th anniversary and continue to share the most fabulous life. The secret of our success is our deeply committed love for one another. We enjoy a passionate romance. I wish what Bryan and I have could be sprinkled over the world like angel dust.

We met in 1985 during a rainy winter in San Francisco. We were neighbors on a tiny street near the historic Mission Dolores. The worst storm of the season was on its way and my roof was leaking

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profusely. I was in dire straits financially, having been newly divorced. I was preparing to fix it myself. Unfortunately my ladder wasn't tall enough. I needed help. None of the folks I knew were home that Saturday morning but I noticed an open door directly across from my house. I hurried upstairs to the second story flat in the azure painted duplex and walked down the long corridor to the living room. There on the sofa was a guy watching the football game on T.V. I introduced myself and then proceeded to ask for his assistance. He looked at me like I was nuts. The silence was deafening. How often does a stranger enter your apartment with a request for help with a major repair? I was flushed with embarrassment but was in too deep to recover. Fortunately he agreed to help me.

This uncommon beginning signaled the magic that lay before us. The sparks flew. We went on our first date within days of this meeting. Bryan's car was broken so we took the bus across the city to an authentic Moroccan restaurant where we sat on paisley cushions and ate with our fingers. I remember clearly how primitive this felt and how natural it was to be with him. He didn't seem the least bit concerned about my age. I, on the other hand, was more sensitive. I was still healing from the codependent relationship of 12 years and had never experienced true intimacy. I wasn't sure it was the proper thing to do but I couldn't help myself; I was falling in love. I was scared because these feelings were coming so quickly.

Bryan moved in with me within weeks of our first meeting. I remember thinking if it didn't work out it would be easy to ask him to leave because all he owned was a T.V. For Valentine's Day he created a hanging wire mobile in the shape of intertwined hearts and presented it to me with flowers and chocolate. This type of thoughtful gesture is typical of Bryan. He has never missed a special occasion and has often surprised me with jewelry when he returns from a business trip.

One evening in the spring we were waiting to board a dinner train in Mendocino. A drunken man approached us and said, How come you two are dressed up? Are you getting married? Bryan looked at me and said, Yes, we are aren't we? That was his proposal. It was decided we would plan a wedding for later that year. But, first I needed to meet Bryan's mother.

Just the thought of it terrified me! Bryan and his mother, Sharon, have a rare bond. He insisted he would not tell anyone about our engagement until she and I met. We drove to southern California where Sharon was visiting her sister, Bryan's aunt. I felt sick the entire trip. I knew in advance he was going to take his mother shopping the next morning alone to break the news to her. I couldn't sleep at all that night. What felt so right to Bryan and me was unusual, especially in the eyes of a parent. When they returned from their excursion Sharon looked like she had just come from a funeral. Fortunately, for me, Aunt Toby accepted the situation and eased the tension by giving me a white angel ornament. His mother is a wonderful woman. In spite of her disappointment, she welcomed me into their family. Over the years our relationship has evolved into a unique friendship, a cross between a peer and a sister.

December 7, 1986, dressed in an ivory colored Victorian gown, I was driven to our wedding in a horse drawn carriage. I remember the sensation well. As I heard the clip-pity clop of the hoofs hitting the pavement I felt it was the happiest day of my life. The ride was several miles long and I enjoyed cars honking loudly at every turn. When we arrived at the elegant Alamo Square Inn Bryan was waiting to escort me inside to the nuptials. It was a good thing he took my hand, for as I exited the carriage, my

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knees collapsed from shaking so hard. The day was spectacular marking a lifetime of love.

Both Bryan and I had always wanted kids. By the time we met my biological clock had run out. He told me he would rather marry a woman he loved deeply than to wait for someone to bear his children. For several years we were content to be a unit of two. After my dear Aunt Letha died in 1992 I longed for a child. Bryan agreed to adoption. It was an arduous experience requiring patience and resilience. We had several birthmothers who changed their minds for different reasons. This process took three years and a great deal of money. Ultimately we were blessed with a baby girl we named Mariah. Our daughter is now 8 years old and the light of our life. I am grateful I am able to be a good parent and I relish every moment I spend with both of them as a family.

Bryan continues to be my rock, strength and loving support. During our years together I have had many tragedies including: my brother Johns suicide in 1988, my ex-husband Joeys death from alcoholism in 1989, and my girlfriend Debras suicide in 2002. I was hospitalized with a potentially life threatening blood clot in my lungs in 1998. Bryan stood by me through all of these. I married a great guy! I am a fortunate woman to have found true love in the heart of a younger man.

Each day I thank God for the gifts I have been given. I see my world as peaceful and balanced. My mission is to inspire people to their own healing and recovery. It is truly possible to find serenity, joy and love. If I can do it, so can you.

To learn more about Kay Kopit visit:

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Kay Kopit, accomplished artist, actor, writer, speaker and gifted teacher.

Kay Kopit grew up in the Midwest town of Clayton, Missouri. At the age of sixteen she choreographed as well as designed and made costumes for several high school productions. Here she found her passion for art and theatre.

Kay attended the University of Missouri where she received a B.S. in Art Education and M.A. in Painting and Ceramics. While in college she continued her interest in theater production succeeding in choreography and costume design for several major productions, including Carnival and Once Upon a Mattress. After graduate school she taught Life Drawing, Design, and Ceramics at the very prestigious Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri.

In 1969 Kay was inspired to move to the East or West Coast. By the flip of a coin (literally) she decided to move to the East Coast where she made Boston, Massachusetts her home. She was immediately offered a position teaching art at Lexington High School. After several successful years teaching Kay was determined to pursue a career in the arts and theatre and moved to California.

Kay moved to San Francisco where she trained with Wendell Phillips of the well-known Stagegroup

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Theatre. For several years she studied acting, dance, public speaking, and playwriting with reputable names such as Elizabeth Huddle of A.C.T., Peter Layton of The Drama Studio of London at Berkeley, and Sue Walden of the Improvisational Workshop.

Kay had continued success in her acting and modeling career. She appeared in many national commercials including: Dreyers Grand Ice Cream, Hunt Wesson Foods, Totinos Pizza, Shaklee, and many more. She acted as the principal spokesperson for several Industrial Films including: Chevron, Firemans Fund, Zenger Miller Productions and American Protective Services. Her print work was extensive including: Ketchum Advertising, Safeway, and Emporium–Capwell.

Kays good business sense and devotion to teaching inspired her to open her own pottery in Marin County, California. She founded and operated, Clay In Mind, a ceramic school and gallery in San Rafael. This venture led to Clay In Mind II a manufacturing plant in San Diego, California. After many productive years the opportunity to sell came and Kay felt it was a good time to do so.

Most recently, Kay is the writer and producer of a documentary of her life story, I Survived: One Womans Journey of Self–Healing and Transformation which covers 15 years of living with an alcoholic. Although Kay was successful in her life, behind closed doors she endured pain, shame and emotional maiming. Her story is being told to help others overcome the debilitating disease of codependency.

Kay is now living an amazing life with her husband Bryan of 17 years (who just happens to be 19 years her junior.) To complete their family they adopted a daughter at birth when Kay was 54 years of age. Besides being a mother and wife she continues with her love of painting, writing, teaching and

speaking on the subject of codependency. Her passion is not only the arts but to help people through her inspirational story. Her courage, stamina, and faith have given her direction and the gift of helping give others hope. Kay has several published articles and writing a monthly column for Recovery Times.

Read more about Kay Kopit at

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Family Meals – Better For Children, Easier For You

By Geoffrey Cook

Another day, another dinner to prepare. Are you having a difficult time finding easy to prepare meals that can satisfy your growing family?

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You want to give your family the best, but time is in short supply and preparing a healthy meal has become a chore. Too often take out or frozen dinners have to do. Is there a way to combine healthy eating with convenience?

Yes! New methods of cooking and easy to prepare staples can change your eating habits and lead to a better eating style for your family. According to the 'Kid's Health' Program created by the Nemours Foundation, family meals are an important part of developing healthy habits in your kids. Eating as a family will encourage your kids to eat healthy foods like whole grains and vegetables. It will discourage unhealthy snacking and even make them less likely to try smoking, alcohol or marijuana.

But how do you plan healthy family meals on a tight schedule? Here are some ideas to start:

Does your family love lasagna? Maybe you thought that it was a labor intensive dish that just doesn't fit your lifestyle. Cheesy and full of fat, perhaps it's not even a wise choice. However, lasagna is actually one of the most versatile meals to prepare – and with instant (no boil) noodles, it doesn't even have to be a big job.

There are lasagna recipes for vegetarians, low-carb, low-fat and even diabetic diets. Lasagna noodles now come in instant, no-cook preparations that cut time and energy when making this hearty dish.

For lasagna or other pasta dishes, try using whole wheat pasta and shredding carrots or zucchini into the meat sauce for an easy way to up the nutritional value. Using lean ground beef or even substituting with ground turkey or chicken can make for a surprising, yet nourishing result. Buy bottled pasta sauces for even faster preparation – many grocers carry a wide assortment that will add variety to your dishes.

Looking for an elegant chicken dinner? Don't forget about frozen skinless chicken breasts. Baked in the oven with a dollop of salsa and shredded cheddar on top makes for a healthy alternative to frying or heavy sauces.

Need ideas for a side dish? Why are you wasting time cutting and washing lettuce when you can pick up a prepackaged bag at the grocers? Not to say it's the cheapest method, but it definitely helps busy families put nutrition ahead of convenience when planning a meal.

Have you ever tried steaming vegetables in the microwave? Fresh or frozen veggies make for another easy side dish when they're popped into the microwave for a few minutes. Add a couple tablespoons of water and cover with a paper towel, an easy AND healthy alternative to frying or boiling.

We're all concerned about our children eating healthier foods. Regular family meals will encourage kids to develop healthy eating habits – an important key to good health later in life. By making meal time less stressful you can focus on the joys of spending time together instead of the hassles of preparing

meals.

You too, can manoeuvre in the unfamiliar waters of gourmet cuisine, with just a few well-learned

techniques that are easy to master, and build a repertoire of literally hundreds of dishes and deserts. Let Geoffrey set you on the path today, to gastronomical delights!

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