

Endorsements

Mrs. Ford sends you her best wishes. She enjoyed reading the excerpts that you sent and knows that, just by writing the book, you have not only helped yourself but will surely help many others.

Jan Hart, Personal Assistant to Betty Ford

Alpha Chick is Mal Duane's inspirational memoir for women who want the rewarding, fulfilling and happy life they've always dreamed about but didn't know how to achieve. Listen to your intuition, follow Mal's well-defined, doable steps, and you'll be led into the light of happiness and success!

Lynn A. Robinson, Author

LISTEN: Trusting Your Inner Voice in Times of Crisis

At the time I needed it the most, Alpha Chick appeared in my life. Every word Mal wrote gave me encouragement, peace of mind, increased faith and a deepened belief that I can make it through anything . . . and experience more blessings and miracles than ever before. Thank you, Mal, for sharing your story and offering such inspiration for women!

Christine Kloser, Award-Winning Author

The Freedom Formula: How to Put Soul into Your Business and Money in Your Bank

The tried and true principles in Mal Duane's Alpha Chick can help women from all walks of life achieve success, happiness and an overall positive mental transformation. Whether a woman has experienced a broken heart, has an addictive personality, or just needs to find a way to cultivate positive change in her life, the 5 steps in the Alpha Chick Process will put her on the road to meeting all of life's challenges with a full heart and a confident attitude.

Melysha J. Acharya, Author

The Breakup Workbook: A Common Sense Guide to Getting Over Your Ex

Mal Duane's book . . . gives us an insightful, practical and loving guide to shift our life story from one of pain and suffering to one of power and possibility. All women are recovering from something, whether it is a failed marriage, the loss of a loved one, an unexpected illness, a career change or an addiction. Alpha Chick shows us how to accept and transform our painful life experiences and losses, into divine opportunities for personal growth and healing. This book is for any women in the midst of a life transition that longs for a renewed sense of hope, strength and a brighter perspective on her current situation.

**Michele Wahlder, MS, LPC,
Founder, Life Possibilities and Author
*Alphatudes: The Alphabet of Gratitude***

Mal Duane, in her inspiring book, Alpha Chick, takes the reader on a spell binding journey of her life. She climbs emotional hills, descends into behavioral valleys and through it all, maintains her ability to face life fairly and squarely. Her painful journey into and out of active alcoholism (both her own and her family of origin) is a story that many women will recognize as similar to their experience. Her ability to understand the recovery process and put into words a clear and available formula for recovery can be understood and accepted. As Mal describes recovery, the reader can fully understand and accept the five steps of Faith for change and healing. Her plan of moving from pain to power is a valuable guidepost and support for any woman who wants to grow and find strength, hope and power.

She supports the philosophy that each of us grows in our own recovery as we help others face their hills and valleys and continue the path toward complete healing.

**Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, Best Selling Author
Learning to Love Yourself, Family Therapist, Founding
Chairperson of National Association for Children of
Alcoholics and Founder of Onsite Workshops**

ALPHA CHICK

"A remarkable formula for transforming any life"

Dr. Joseph S. Rubino, D. M. D. CEO Center for Personal Reinvention

ALPHA CHICK

*Five steps
for moving
from pain
to power*

MAL DUANE

www.AlphaChick.com

Alpha Chick: Five Steps for Moving from Pain to Power

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The author of this book is not giving medical advice or prescribing the use of any of her practices or exercises as a form of treatment for mental or emotional or physical problems. Please consult your physician. The author is only sharing tools that she used personally in her quest for emotional well-being. If you use any of the material in this book, the author and publisher assume no responsibility.

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This book is dedicated to

Holly

My life was blessed with a shining star. The influence that Holly had on me and so many others can never be fully expressed with words. Her dedication and commitment to everything she undertook was highly inspirational. She taught me patience, grace, compassion, courage, and ultimately acceptance of what life offers. She was the guiding compass in my life.

Gratefully, my lessons continue. I hear Holly's voice in my meditations, inspiring me to be more and do more—her Golden Rule. Her essence was that of a true Alpha Chick, and her light will always shine brightly on all of us who knew her.

*Two books in one to encourage
and guide you to uncovering your own
true magnificence*

Like many women, Mal Duane endured some pretty rough times. An ugly duckling child, she found herself surrounded by viciously mean “friends” whose cruel criticisms destroyed virtually every vestige of Mal’s self-esteem. Life at home became increasingly tense eventually pushing Mal to a complete disconnect from her parents. Later, despite having evolved into a striking beauty and successful model, genuine relationships eluded her and heartache and self-loathing were frequent companions. But in her late teens, Mal had found a coping solution: Alcohol.

By her mid 40s her life seemed all but over. She was spiraling downward, hopelessly out of control. Then a final heartbreak pushed her over the edge and she found herself looking death right in the eye. From the fires of that particular hell, Mal, Alpha Chick, emerged. She chose to shed her past and start living.

Alpha Chick is more than just Mal’s road to happiness, success, and fulfillment. It is a model for any woman who dreams of those things.

The first part of the book is Mal’s painfully honest story. Its purpose is to illustrate just how far off track Mal had been and to inspire you to be able

to pick yourself up as Mal did, no matter how far off course your life has gone.

Inspiration, however, is rarely enough to carry you through. And that's the importance of the second part of the book. It presents Mal's practical plan for transforming pain to power and sets you firmly on the road to becoming an Alpha Chick. It grew out of her own recovery process and revealed itself during one of her daily meditations. Her epiphany was that the plan had five steps. And it did not surprise her that the foundation letter of each step spelled out a single significant word:

Focus

Acceptance and Attitude

Identification and Intention

Thoughts

Healing and Helping

The brilliance of this program is not that it shows you how to become a *Mal Duane* Alpha Chick. Its genius is that it clearly guides you to becoming your own unique brand of Alpha Chick. It sets you on your own road to being the ideal you; the sizzling, empowered woman you are meant to be.

Alpha Chick shows you how to recapture self-love, faith, and hope. It provides all you need to create a new vision and to achieve your new, exceptional life filled with passion, purpose and power.

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Acknowledgments

I am so grateful for the remarkable people who have supported and inspired me along my path to discovering my inner strength, peace, and purpose in life. Since our first meeting at the end of 2001, the greatest influence in my life has been my kind, intelligent, and loving husband, Michael Pearlman, aka “Dr. Delicious.” Michael encouraged me to share the story of my alcoholism and the dysfunction it had created in my life. He believed I had a powerful message that would help other women. Michael, you have inspired me to take chances, to grow, to believe in myself, and to not be afraid to appreciate my imperfections, and, by doing so, to release them.

The chapter “Sweet Pea” provides a small glimpse of the most inspiring young woman I have ever known, my niece, Holly. She taught me what is really important in life: courage and perseverance. Although gravely ill, she spent her days caring about others and always trying to ensure that her illness did not intrude upon their lives. She never resisted or denied her condition; instead, she lived her life fully and courageously. As my grief subsided after she died and I was able to think about her life, her strength, and her determination, I knew I wanted to write a book that would honor her—a book to inspire

and support women to help themselves and grow in strength. Holly's spirit gave me the energy to begin writing *Alpha Chick*, and she was with me as I wrote every page.

I am grateful to master coach and Science of Mind practitioner Siobhan Murphy for introducing me to the Science of Mind spiritual philosophy. Siobhan taught me the power of prayer and how to use the Law of Attraction. She also showed me how to exercise leadership from the heart. Her strong spiritual guidance, patience, and comforting and reassuring words during challenging times in my life have been invaluable.

After I had written the first draft of *Alpha Chick*, I shared the manuscript with my good friend and client Joan Fallon. Joan loved the message of the book and enthusiastically offered to help me arrange my thoughts more clearly on paper and assist me with editing the material. For eight months, we met weekly, recording our meetings and adding details to the book. Her suggestions were flawless and her insight into the purpose of the book most helpful.

For two years, my soul sister Ann Peckham listened daily as I talked about the challenges I faced while writing *Alpha Chick*. She always expressed her belief in me and my ability to write and finish the book. I was comforted by the knowledge that I could call her at any time, day or night, to hear words of encouragement and compassion.

In the summer of 2008, I experienced a medical emergency that required surgery, followed by complications for several months thereafter. My personal trainer and good friend Rhonda Skloff helped push me through the resulting fatigue and gradually brought me back to my previous level of strength. She also gave me inspiration to continue writing *Alpha Chick* during the times when I was discouraged by the physical challenges presented by my recovery. Now Rhonda shows me how to stay healthy.

Finally, thank you to Maggie Lichtenberg, my book coach, and to Barbara Doern Drew for putting her brilliant final edits on the book and allowing me to fully know the potential of *Alpha Chick*.

Foreword

Clearly, nearly everyone experiences some degree of assault to their self-esteem levels and has their own story to share about how it all transpired. Mal Duane is no different. You'll find her story in the pages that follow to be interesting, humorous, entertaining, tragically sad, and inspirational. In sharing her own personal triumph and transformation from low self-esteem, depression, failed relationships and the downward spiral of alcoholism to self-love, happiness, fulfillment, and contribution, Mal inspires us to see that we all share common characteristics that can rob us of our personal power and prevent us from living our dream lives if we allow them to do so. Her story of overcoming the challenges of her first four decades goes far beyond just entertaining us. Mal actually teaches us the very same principles she personally used to transform her own life to one of joy, abundance, rich relationships and fulfillment.

From realizing the value of living intentionally to making the law of attraction work in your life, Mal spells out in clear and compelling step by step fashion a remarkable formula for transforming any life that may be characterized by struggle, suffering, and the tragic consequences of low self-esteem to one of self-respect and positive expectation. Her action guide exercises

allow readers to map the life-impacting principles she shares onto their daily lives with dramatic results.

I invite you to not just read but devour this book, take on the lessons and principles Mal shares and look for how each one can specifically enhance your life to be taken to the next level. As human beings, we are all inherently magnificent – although too many of us forget this fact all too often. Enjoy Mal’s gift to champion your magnificence and decide now to give up your right to invalidate yourself or suffer any longer by thinking that all the good things that the world has to offer are for other people but not you. Step into your personal power, love yourself and others, contribute your gifts to the world, decide what it will be and live your life purpose and know that anything you can dream, you can achieve if you have the courage to do so.

– Dr. Joe Rubino

Founder, CenterForPersonalReinvention.com

A Note from Mal

Dear Sisters,

Are you sick and tired of waking up paralyzed by guilt or dread over past mistakes, fearful of how you will get through the day, and suffocating with anxiety over tomorrow? If the answer is yes, please know that I have a sense of how you feel because I have been in that very place myself. In fact, this is why I have written this book—to let you know that you are not alone and that there are other possibilities for you. While there are many books currently written about *getting* what you want, *Alpha Chick: Five steps for moving from pain to power* is about *becoming* the person you were meant to be—living a life filled with love, honesty, and self-worth; the life you are meant to experience.

“So what is an Alpha Chick?” you may wonder. An Alpha Chick is a spiritual being who has worked to deepen her connection with and faith in the divine presence within—your source of guidance, passion, and personal power—in order to meet life’s challenges with purpose and strength. She is empowered to live a joyful life at her true and fullest potential. I thought of the term Alpha Chick several years ago as an appropriate way to describe my four closest friends. We all had experienced dark times in our lives and had pushed

through them to live with purpose and passion. We are fulfilled and happy with ourselves, and our lives are rich and joyful.

I am telling my painful personal story in this book so you will know that I am similar to you—the symbolic girl next door. My story is a woman’s story. I am just an ordinary woman, not a movie star and not fabulously wealthy. I am considered intelligent but certainly no genius, and my formal education was limited, as I left college in my first year. You and I may share many of the experiences that I reveal in this book; some of them we may have been too ashamed to reveal to anyone else. Yet I put my story on paper so you can see for yourself how I survived. And not only have I survived, I now have the most exquisite life and I am married to the man of my dreams. I am an ordinary woman living an extraordinary life.

When you read Part One of this book, you will see how I was able to overcome troubling and painful issues and humiliating experiences. Today I live a life very different from the one described. I am sober. I have fulfilling and meaningful relationships with my family and friends and a successful career. I run a multi-million-dollar real estate business I love. I make a concerted effort to take impeccable care of myself mentally and physically, and I am told I look great—much younger than my age.

As you read my story, you may ask yourself, “How did she do that?” Part Two describes specific practices you can follow to transform your life as I did. No matter what has happened to you or what you have done, you, too, can become an Alpha Chick.

My journey has taken me to an awakened and higher level of consciousness. On the way, I discovered a life-changing process that consists of five steps, which I call the *Alpha Chick Process*. When I deliberately repeated these steps over and over, my life turned around. This process literally saved me, and today I still utilize these same steps. The purpose of this book is to give you this process in detail so that you may use it in your own life. I will also tell you a little bit about other Alpha Chicks who inspired and supported me along the way. Hopefully, reading about them will give you ideas about what you can look forward to as you become an Alpha Chick yourself.

The steps outlined in the second part of the book show you how to recapture the self-love, faith, and hope you need to create a new vision for an exceptional life filled with well-being. Great teachers whose works I have read have influenced many of the ideas the steps contain, and I share some of their wisdom throughout. With repetition over time, the steps will lead you to a simple yet powerful spiritual practice of aligning yourself with

the divine presence within you, whether you call that your soul, your source, your energy, your guiding light, or by some other name.

To help you make this lasting and permanent shift, I have created a free Alpha Chick Action Guide to be used for the steps outlined in the second part of the book. You can download your action guide at www.AlphaChick.com/actionguide. Please do so now, while you're thinking of it, so you can begin to take steps toward a more purposeful, passionate and fulfilling life.

I sincerely hope this book will bring you all the strength and courage you need to allow yourself to change your life, and the infinite wisdom to venture on the path to your own personal awakening.

Mal Duane

Framingham, Massachusetts, 2011

P A R T O N E

*From Innocence
to Obsession
to Transformation*



The Early Years: From Carefree to Caretaking

I remember my sixtieth birthday well. Standing naked in front of a mirror, I did a self-assessment. Basically, I observed, everything was still God-given and where it was supposed to be (except for the well-placed shot of Botox in my forehead to prevent it from crumpling like an old brown bag). While I'd discovered hair growing in places I'd never thought it could and turning white in places I'd never thought it would, nevertheless I looked young for my age. I had lost fifteen pounds over the previous nine months under the watchful eye of Weight Watchers, dragging my tired tush to the treadmill every day. Though I'd worked with a personal trainer for five years, I had never given 100 percent until recently. I'd found the rewards to be significant.

I started thinking about how so much of women's self-esteem and confidence is based on body image. While I was working hard to keep myself looking as good as I could, I realized that I'd come to a place where my sense of self was no longer defined by how I looked. I was celebrating a life that was everything I had ever wanted and more—what a change from where I had been before! Now, when I experienced life's disappointments and sorrows, I knew how to manage those feelings; I didn't need to suppress them or numb them with alcohol. I had learned how to calm myself and relax, and I didn't need to drink myself to sleep. Over the years, I developed a process that led to these transformations, and I found myself thinking that if I wrote a book telling my life story and showing how I pulled myself from the depths of despair and dysfunction, other women could duplicate that process. The ideas started to flow and I was eager to begin.

As I looked in the mirror, my mind wandered back to my childhood and one of my fondest memories: the story my father had told me about where I had come from . . .



My father was the center of my world. He invented wonderful games that grabbed my attention, and he lit up my life with his humor and imagination. As a little girl, I

sat in his lap each evening listening intently to the remarkable tales he told me.

One chilly day when I was five, we were having hot chocolate after raking leaves, and he told me the story of my "birth." He explained to me that I had landed in our back yard in a minihelicopter on a very hot summer afternoon. I listened to every word with anticipation while dropping more marshmallows into my cup. I fired back what seemed like a thousand questions: *Who flew the helicopter? How long did it take to get here? Why didn't it land in Mr. Cardy's yard next door?* My dad answered every one. The helicopter flew on automatic pilot and was all set up to land in our yard and not our neighbor's because I was being delivered to my parents.

I believed every word and was so excited by this revelation that I couldn't wait to get to school to share the news with my kindergarten classmates. My best friend, Mary Elizabeth Crandon, was crushed when I told her the story because she had been told that she came from a seed that her parents planted. For me, my arrival by air was so much better than a mummy's tummy, the stork, or any of the other renditions of child delivery that I had been told about. I knew I was a very special child because I had come in a helicopter.

I now understand that my father told me that story because he had a playful and imaginative mind, and he understood my adventurous and inquisitive nature.

Throughout my adolescence, he stirred my imagination every chance he got. He was one of the best storytellers I have known. Simple tasks such as raking leaves and going to the hardware store became extraordinary when I was with my father.

Back then, when I was five years old, I thought my life was perfect. I was born in Boston and we lived in a beautiful brick-facade home in the affluent suburb of Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. We had live-in help throughout my childhood; our maid lived in her own private quarters above the garage. We had a beautiful summer waterfront home in Cataumet on Cape Cod, with perfectly manicured rolling lawns and a circular driveway in front. My sister and brother and I each had our own sailboats and were given sailing lessons. By the time I was seven years old, I was sailing on Squeteque Harbor on Cape Cod. All three of us went to exclusive private schools.

My parents married later than most of their friends. My mother, Katherine, nicknamed Kay, was thirty, and Larry, my father, was a few years older. Dad had had a brief marriage that ended in divorce before he met my mother, but that was never spoken of. He was a tall, good-looking man, about five foot ten, and very fair—a real towhead. I look like him and have his temperament and sense of humor. He became stocky as he aged, and his hair became silvery.

My mother was petite and slender with lovely dark hair, what they call “Black Irish.” She was always immaculately groomed and beautifully dressed in expertly coordinated outfits, usually in a pencil skirt and high heels. She shopped in the finest clothing stores in Boston. She never wore jeans or sneakers, and she told me she thought both were unbecoming to women. Mom wouldn’t even go to the post office without her red lipstick. She was a fabulous gardener, and the beautifully landscaped grounds of both of our homes reflected her talent. My mother was also a superb entertainer and hostess—she was charming, calm, organized, and a terrific cook. People loved her gatherings and parties, although she was more reserved and proper than my dad. She aged well and always kept herself impeccably groomed and dressed.

I know people really liked my mother because all her friends went to her with their problems; she was their confidante and they trusted her. In fact, Big K, as she was known in the family, had an uncanny ability to make everyone feel like her best friend, although she herself trusted very few people. Many times I would watch her and wonder what she was really thinking. My mother was a very private person; those dark Irish eyes held a lot of secrets.

My mother wasn’t just a socialite, though. She was a Catholic with very strong faith. As an adult, I was to see

her faith carry me and other members of our family through some terribly difficult times and losses.

My grandfather Duane was fabulously wealthy. He had started out owning restaurants and convenience stores, and then made a fortune as the cofounder and owner of First National Grocery Stores, one of New England's first grocery store chains.

Grandmother Duane looked like a queen without a crown. I have a photograph of her taken by Bradford Bachrach, Boston's top photographer at the time, in which she is wearing two large diamond brooches and many diamond bracelets. She was a cold, elegant woman who had almost no interest in her five children. She traveled extensively around the world, and my father, like her other children, was shipped off to boarding school from the time he was very young. When at home, he was raised by maids, nannies, and chauffeurs.

Despite his lack of parental affection, or maybe because of it, my father was warm and loving to his own children, and I adored him. He had that wonderful ability to weave a story, and we wrote and performed hilarious skits together. Although he was intelligent, well educated, and spoke three languages, I don't believe my dad lived a fulfilled life when it came to his work. He graduated from Harvard College, where he majored in journalism with a minor in criminology, after which he worked as a criminal reporter for the *Boston Herald* newspaper.

The only times I ever heard Dad speak with passion were when he told me about his work as a journalist. One of his most exciting assignments in college was studying the high-profile, controversial Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti murder trial in the 1920s. He confided to me that he thought the pair was innocent. He secretly showed me the boxes in which he kept all his notebooks from his reporting days and cautioned me, “Don’t tell your mother about this!” I’m sure she thought this work was “low class.”

Eventually, Grandfather Duane got my father a position in the more “respectable” field of marketing and advertising, which likely wasn’t too hard to do since my father would bring the First National Grocery Stores account with him wherever he went. Probably because of his father’s influence and connections, my dad’s firm was one of the leading agencies managing the advertising for John F. Kennedy’s senatorial campaign in the early 1950s.

My father inherited money and made more—for a while. He was a great provider for nearly twenty years of my parents’ marriage. All the money he made was spent on his family. However, I don’t believe he was happy about himself, where he was going, or what he was doing. He went to work because he had to, but I believe he never loved his profession. He had done “the right thing” by going into advertising as a way of providing for his family. He had done what his father

wanted him to, but in doing so he had abandoned his own dreams and aspirations.

My father appeared very strong and dependable to me in my early childhood, but as I matured, my impressions changed. I think he was essentially not his own person, dwarfed by his father's shadow and ultimately weakened by traces of depression and drinking, as were his three brothers. Alcoholism was a thread woven throughout his family.

My grandfather repeatedly bailed his sons out of the trouble in which they found themselves, and as adults they remained dependent upon him. In 1953, at the age of seventy-six, he played eighteen holes of golf at the legendary Breakers resort in Palm Beach, Florida, turned to play another eighteen, and died from a massive heart attack on the golf course. His children were left with money, alcoholism, and failing marriages.

My mother's parents, Timothy and Katherine Hickey, emigrated from County Cork, Ireland, and settled in a modest colonial home in Brookline, Massachusetts. While not wealthy, it appears they were quite comfortable.

My maternal grandparents were two of the sweetest people I have ever met. When my mother would drop me off to visit them as a young child, I always knew that they were genuinely happy to have me there. I had so much fun on those visits! Grandfather Hickey played the piano, and whenever he played *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*, I

would sing and dance around the room, laughing and clapping my hands.

Their neighbor across the street, Mr. Getty, who was a firefighter in Chestnut Hill, had a wonderful vegetable garden. When I stayed at my grandparents' house after dark on summer evenings, I would sometimes sneak over to "steal" tomatoes and other goodies from Mr. Getty's garden to bring home to them. Of course, Mr. Getty knew I was the one who was taking them because my grandparents told him, but he let me get away with it and never once came out and stopped me. I would be so excited when I ran back to Grandmother and Grandfather Hickey's with my pilfered veggies! Those were sweet and easy days.

My grandparents were rather formal people in their dress. Grandfather Hickey always wore a freshly starched shirt accented by striped suspenders. My grandmother wore tailored dresses with nylon stockings and finished off her outfits with chunky black tie shoes. I remember those shoes and how strange they looked to me as a little girl. She also had something that was very fashionable in those days—a mink stole with the head of the poor animal as a clasp and its feet dangling from the other end. It was my favorite dress-up plaything in their house! Grandma would let me wrap it around my head and pretend to be an animal, growling at the two of them.

I don't have lots of memories of my maternal grandparents because Grandmother Hickey died when I was around six years old and Grandfather Hickey passed away about two years later. My mother usually controlled and restrained her emotions, and the occasion of her mother's death was the first time I saw her sob uncontrollably. The second and only other time was when we visited my father's grave shortly after he died.

I don't remember my mother playing with me like my father did—she seemed to dote more on my brother and sister. She rarely hugged me or comforted me physically. The only times I remember her holding me close were when we were swimming in the surf at the ocean. She would grab my waist and hold me tight against her, probably so I wouldn't be swept away by the waves. Mostly I turned to my dad for affection and nurturing. With Mom, I could scream, cry, or pull my hair out, but she wasn't moved in the least. Dad, on the other hand, would let me have my way—he had a hard time saying no.

I was born when my mother was thirty-seven. The youngest of three, I was the baby of the family. Although I had this precious title, I did not receive any special privileges along with it. I was lanky, with platinum blond hair and wide eyes. Frequently I cut my own bangs, which then looked like a broken picket fence. I was outgoing and sensitive to others, much like my dad. My brother, Larry, and my sister, Kathy, were dark-haired and

mild-mannered compared to me. Born a year apart, they were almost like twins, and were always very close. Together they did their best to torment me. For example, for years they told me I was adopted, and until I got older, I was never sure.

In my earliest years, I was a happy child, precocious and gifted, with a wicked sense of humor. I loved animals and found my greatest comfort with them. I was always surrounded by furry creatures, inside our house and out. I brought home wayward animals and kept them in my bedroom. Once, four baby robins that had fallen from a nest in a nearby tree provided unique decorations for my room—from one end of it to the other, white droppings speckled the pink carpet. I'm still amazed that my mother allowed me to do this—it was the one time she didn't say no! Over time, she got used to my love of animals, but she never stopped checking my pockets as I came through the front door.

While my sister loved her Madame Alexander dolls, my passion was stuffed animals, along with the live ones. I was a tomboy and often wore my trusty six-shooters in a double holster. My best friends were the neighborhood boys. My only girlfriend, Mary Elizabeth, was a funny little kid who looked like a female version of the Jerry Mathers character "Beaver" on the *Leave It to Beaver* TV show. We shared a love of bugs, birds, and bikes, as well as a mutual disgust for frills, lace, and dresses.

I was very sociable as a child. By the time I was five or six years old, I made regular visits by myself to our older neighbors in Chestnut Hill and at our summer home on Cape Cod. Surprisingly, I was allowed to roam the neighborhoods alone at this very early age, except in the spring, when my mother warned me to beware of the Gypsies who came to Chestnut Hill to pick dandelions for dandelion wine—at least that’s what she told me. I don’t know if they were real Gypsies, but they did come every year in strange garb, and my mother told me they kidnapped children. However, other than warnings about the Gypsies, my mother wanted us to be independent; she discouraged her kids from being clingy, dependent children who couldn’t think on their own.

From the very early age of four, often after dinner I would visit Mary Ferguson, the caretaker of the older gentleman who lived in the house next door. I would ring the doorbell and say, “Mary, I’m here for my Oweo cookie,” and she always had one for me.

Frequently, when we were on the Cape, I would visit our neighbor, Father Johnson, an aged Catholic priest who raised and bred champion Boxer dogs. One day I accidentally left my “pockey”—my small gold sequined handbag from which I was inseparable—at his house, and I was devastated. We never could find it, though we looked all summer. Father Johnson felt so badly about

the disappearance of my “pockey” that he gave me a boxer puppy. I named the dog Jeffrey.

Making the rounds of our neighbors’ houses by myself, I would make up the most insane stories to share with them and would gossip about everybody. In my wide-eyed, theatrical manner, gesturing with my hands, I would tell them about how other neighbors’ houses were a mess or how I heard a family down the street yelling at each other and having fights. Everybody I visited knew my stories were fabrications, but they would attentively listen to me as I told them. What an imagination I had in those days!

Once, while talking through my missing teeth, I told them that I had “wrats in my pwayhouse.” Everyone thought I had made it up, but this seemingly tall tale was true. I had put baby food for my stuffed animals in my outdoor playhouse and somehow the food had attracted rats!

To sum up my early childhood, while my mother didn’t dote on me as much as I might have wished, my days were relatively carefree and full of adventures. However, this perfect world started to change when I was nine.

At six o’clock every day, my parents had their cocktails: two bourbon manhattans. All their friends did the same thing. Dad was always home for this. My recollection is that until I was ten years old, he remained in the city after work on only two or three occasions.

Then he began a pattern of increased drinking as his finances became more precarious. Since previously he had always come home at the same time, when he didn't show up on the nightly train in time for dinner, we knew he wouldn't be back until late at night.

On these first few occasions, when Dad finally did come home, he would be intoxicated. He would try to sneak into the house quietly, but it never worked. When he'd finally get the key into the lock and try to open the door, he wouldn't be able to get in—my mother would intentionally put the chain locks on the doors. He would walk around to all the doors, rattling them, which would cause Jeffrey to bark. Because my bedroom was on the side of the house near the back stairs, I could sneak down to unlock the back door and let him in. He would be unstable on his feet, his face flushed and his eyes glassy. He looked and acted very different—what was happening to my father?

Sadly, as I grew older and my sister and brother left for college, this occurred more and more frequently, and that look and behavior became all too familiar. His drunkenness scared me—it made me feel like my world was upside down and falling apart. There was a transformation taking place. He became a different person, sad and disconnected, needing help—not the dad I had known, the one who was supposed to take care of us. The man I loved so deeply was slipping away

before my eyes. I felt I needed to take care of him. Sometimes I would heat up a can of his favorite Dinty Moore beef stew to make sure he had something to eat. Then I would help him get upstairs and into the maid's room, if she wasn't around, or into mine if she was. On the nights he stayed in my room, I slept with my mother.

So, at a young age, I became my father's caretaker, and along with that, I became frightened and sad. As a child, I thought something at home was driving him away. I don't know why, but I believed the problem was with *us* and not with *him*. If only we were good enough, I surmised, Dad wouldn't act this way. (This fear and sense of abandonment stayed with me for many years and resulted in devastating consequences in my adult relationships with men—I developed an inability to trust, and I felt responsible and compelled to repair these relationships.)

After these episodes, my mother would be furious, and for the next several days, she would make Dad's life hell. She would serve dinner to the children, but not to him. There would be no communication between them—she would act as though he were invisible and refuse to talk to him. She was the Queen of the Cold Shoulder, and he would be ridden with guilt. At these times, our home had a tense, heavy atmosphere for a young girl to live in. Unfortunately, as I got older, my father's alcohol intake increased. However, my love for him never diminished, and I still felt his love for me.

Most of my parents' friends also had pretty close relationships with alcohol, especially when we were on Cape Cod in the summer. Drinking was a way of life for that crowd. I remember one time when my parents were coming into the harbor after cruising around on a boat with a bunch of their friends—one of the men was so drunk, he walked right off the boat into the water! Another time, a couple of their friends who were on the way home from an evening of partying took a wrong turn and drove their convertible over the curb and right down onto the beach, where it got stuck in the sand. They had to walk home drunk and leave the car to be towed home. Some of us kids saw it in the sand the next day. We knew they had been looped and thought it was funny. This was a typical summer Saturday evening activity for our parents, who went to the yacht club parties, and we considered it to be normal!

In the 1950s and 1960s, prominent Irish Catholic families never discussed or even mentioned the word *alcoholism*. Today, we describe this as the “elephant in the room”—huge but unmentioned, a secret only to the secret-keepers. Now people openly discuss the disease of alcoholism and their personal experiences with it. Alcohol dependency is no longer a dirty word but a recognized medical condition, well defined, with highly sophisticated treatment options. For example, former First Lady Betty Ford, a self-admitted addict and alcoholic, opened a

treatment center under her own name. However, during the time I was a young girl, the family disease model of alcoholism and the effects of one person's drinking on everyone in the family had yet to be identified. Nevertheless, it was the defining theme of my adolescence, as were secrecy, denial, fear, and sadness. As I got older, I was always uneasy, worrying about what might happen next.

I spent three years in public school and constantly got into spats with the kids in my classes. One time in third grade, I was playing kickball with a few other kids. One of them was a real nebbish named Morton. He picked up the ball, which you weren't allowed to do in kickball, and I yelled at him to put it down, but he didn't. So I went over to him, intending to kick the ball out of his hands because I wanted to play the game the *right* way. I wasn't feeling too tolerant of his cheating—even at that age, I wasn't afraid to stand up for what I believed in. Well, instead of contacting the ball when I kicked, my red-sneakered foot slipped and inadvertently went right into poor Morton's crotch, and he fell to the ground screaming and rolling around. All hell broke loose over this one! His parents called my parents, insisting I had done this to their precious Morton intentionally, which I hadn't. Who knows, I might have ruined Morton for life when it came to girls. Sorry, Morton.

By fourth grade, my parents thought a change of venue was in order. They hoped a girls' school would soften my tomboyish ways and sent me to the Brimmer and May School, a private day school in Chestnut Hill. As it turned out, Mary Elizabeth was sent to Brimmer and May at the same time, and I was really glad about that. Neither one of us was too keen on the idea, but at least we were together.

Mary Elizabeth lived nearby on Hilltop Road. Her parents were both doctors, which was kind of unusual for those times. Mary Elizabeth was pretty much raised by her rather inefficient nanny. Despite her parents' comfortable incomes, she always looked like a little ragamuffin, with stained clothes and torn hems hanging down above her scuffed shoes. We were the best of friends and had great times together.

One time when we were about ten years old, we were out in the neighborhood riding our bikes together. I took a bad fall off my bike and really banged myself up. My knees and legs were scraped and bloody, and I was distraught—I cried because it hurt so much. Mary Elizabeth ran to the house to get bandages and tried to fix me up and comfort me. I knew she cared for me and was really worried about me. She was a real friend.

I settled down in private school, made new friends, and loved most of my classes. At Brimmer and May, classes were much smaller than at the public school,

with a ratio of one teacher to about ten students. The teachers stimulated our interest in what we were studying and gave us a lot of individual attention. The school had a great sports program that I loved. I especially liked to play field hockey and was quite good at it.

During the rest of my elementary- and middle-school years, I was pretty content and actually had a bit of self-confidence. I think it definitely helped that there were no boys around to make fun of me because my ears stuck out, like the boys in public school had. I was so tired of being told that I looked like a “taxi with the doors open.” None of us were competing for the boys’ attention, either. However, as I approached puberty and my teen years, the ways in which I was different from my contemporaries became more apparent. The roots of my inferiority complex and lack of self-esteem started to sprout, and a huge dose of fertilizer was lurking around the corner.

