Hi

My name is Cini Shaw, and I am in recovery.

I was born and raised in Peter Cooper Village on the lower east side of Manhattan. My mother was orphaned at the age of 7, marrying my father in her early 20's. My parents divorced when I was 4 yrs old because of my father's drinking and erratic and abusive behavior. He then abandoned our family. I was told, many years after his death, that he died of organ failure because of his drinking. My mother remarried another man with an alcohol use disorder. She divorced him, we never talked about why. He died years later after falling out of a moving car in a state of intoxication. And then, looking for love as we all do, she went on to marry another man yet again, different face, same issues with alcohol. He died of complications from his from his drinking 2 years ago.

So, as you can imagine, after growing up in a volatile home with these men, I was determined NEVER to marry someone with an alcohol use disorder. It never occurred to me that I would develop one. But I did.

My biological family was ridden with alcohol abuse. It was part of the fabric of our lives, the solution for everything. It was how we unwound, grieved, and celebrated. I had a myriad of examples of unwellness all throughout my life, but no examples of people asking for help. No examples of recovery.

It is no wonder that I have suffered from panic attacks, a deep seeded fear of abandonment and low self-esteem.

But, of course, I wanted what everyone wants: to be accepted, to be loved, to be confident, to be brave and to be happy. Alcohol helped me feel that way for a short time. It is important to understand that my alcohol use was not random. It helped me sit with all my uncomfortabilty, fear and sadness. It helped me show up on planet earth the way I thought I was supposed to…

I got married (of course he too had an alcohol use disorder, what else did I know!), moved to Darien, had the perfect home, 5 amazing, wonderful children…I had it all!!! On the outside we looked like Barbie and Ken with 5 children and a suburban. But on the inside my inner turmoil continued to rage. I drank at it because it was the only thing I knew how to do. The only coping skill I had.

I bought into the myth of the "mommy wine culture". It is not only a myth, but also an outright lie. My fall into this was insidious. First a glass of wine in the evening, then two, then three, then a bottle, then the double size. My life and my family were falling apart. My solution was to drink more but do it differently.

I switched to vodka. It worked faster and had no calories... because of course I had to be thin to pull off this “perfect image” ! I would drink alone until I passed out every night. This is when the cheese really fell off the cracker. I was slowly killing myself. I didn’t want to die, but I knew I didn’t want to live the way I felt.

I checked myself into detox and then began going to AA. 3 meetings a day. My recovery journey began. My wonderful children, Dougie, Timmy, Taylor, Gregory, and Justin were there to support me all the way. But they were just children and teens trying to find thee way in the world. Their role was not to take care of me. I was supposed to be taking care of them. To my surprise, I discovered I had the option to choose a recovery family. How incredible is that!!!

I could learn how to self soothe and how to cope without harming myself… I learn to reparent myself! My recovery family is made up of women in AA, Lisa Hope, who introduces me and who has been my mentor/supervisor since 2014 and the reason I can speak to you today about this and do the recovery work I do; My CCAR family, my Liberation Family and of course my incredible Lighthouse Family who have stood by me through some of the most difficult years of my life! I love you all!

My recovery has been a patchwork of blended families, practices like 12 step work, Dharma, meditation, self- compassion, therapy (lots of it!) and connecting with others in recovery. It has not been easy. In 2015, I found my beautiful son, Gregory, dead of an opiate overdose. He is honored on our remembrance wall. This is how Paul Reinhardt and I became family. In 2020, Doug, my ex-husband and the father of my children passes away… and almost 2 years ago my beloved John lost his battle with cancer.

I am standing here today as a decent sober woman because all of you have lifted me up with grace and kindness, just like a family should! You have taught me that I am stronger with you, that I can count on you and today you can count on me. Like a healthy family you have shown me that I have a light worth shining and I have a safe place to exist. I am forever grateful.