

My Amends began at Ground Zero

Family Negligence Headed the List

By Rick R

I was serving in the navy, living like a fleet sailor, in a rocky marriage, with one child, in and out of port, drinking and quarreling a lot with my wife, and circling the drain. One day my ship pulled into port and tied up to the pier. I grabbed my essentials and went to my home in the navy housing facility to find the place empty and deserted. Gone was my wife, my son, my furniture, my car, my marriage and my pride. I returned to my ship, shamed and humiliated and absolutely crushed. I spent the next two years crying in my beer and looking for sympathy. I stared across the bar at myself in the mirror wondering if everyone in the bar knew how much pain I was in. I began to have problems getting back to my ship on time in the morning, and after the third such episode, when I woke up at 9 am, I was already two hours late for muster, I called the local A.A. fellowship and found my way there. That was on Oct. 15, 1969, and I have been sober ever since. A little over a year after I got sober, I remarried to my current wife of 53 years. About a year into that marriage, I remember waking up in the middle of the night, sitting up in bed and my wife asked me, "what's wrong". I replied, "I can't do this anymore". She asked me what I was talking about, and I replied, "I have to stop bad mouthing my first wife". From that day until now, my wife and I have been treating her with kindness, respect, empathy, understanding and love. That is where I started getting into making amends and family negligence headed the list. There are many areas in our lives where we need to repair damaged relations, but there's no more important place to start than at ground zero. Our families have been on the receiving end of our errant behavior for years, and it will take time to regain their trust. They were not the problem, we were, and they don't owe us anything. Until we gain some credibility, we can't make any demands. Credibility is doing what you say you're going to do, and not making any promises we can't keep. A whole bunch of credibility leads to the beginning of integrity. We can repair other relations as we spiral outward from our families to our close friends then to our work mates and our fishing buddies and so on. Being a good husband/wife, a good father/mother or, a good sister/brother, I think, should hold a top priority, as our families need us. About twenty years ago, after living in the same community for 24 years, at the time, and attending meetings daily I made a statement at a meeting that I would give anyone \$100.00 if they had ever heard me say one negative thing about my first wife, and nobody could collect on it, including my wife, and that son I thought I had lost. As I think back on that incident, I realize that it was the seed that fashioned my whole attitude about how I practice my principles. Now tell me, if I say that I never say anything bad about my first wife, but I am still gossiping and being critical about other people, am I not a hypocrite? I cannot be selective about who I apply these principles to. Principles are not flexible. They are the solid bedrock that my credibility and integrity rest upon. Learning how to treat my family makes it much easier to repair the damage to those outside the family circle and my family will be witness to my credibility and my integrity.