

Faith Interview

I was born on November 12, 1963, in New Richmond, WI. I am the youngest of three children. My brother, Mark, is the oldest. My sister, Linda is the middle sibling. My sister and I were very close growing up. My brother was a little more distant. He was more of a loner. My mother was an office worker for the majority of our growing up years. She worked a very short time as a CNA until she injured her back and could no longer do the physical work required. My father was always a factory worker. He never graduated from high school because his father told him he was needed on the family farm. I am German and Norwegian decent. I have always been part of a middle class family, both growing up and still today.

I was born and raised Lutheran. My husband and I were married in the Catholic Church. I had intended on changing over to Catholic after we were married, because I always thought they had a strong faith. After some serious consideration I decided that there some issues with the Catholic religion that I just did not believe in; Purgatory, being one of these issues. The demand for money in other ways also seemed a bit more than I thought was necessary. Our son, Waylon, was baptized Catholic. Today we practice the Lutheran religion. My husband actually made the change to Lutheran. Regarding our son my husband and I feel that he can decide when he is old enough what religion he wants to practice. We feel that a foundation of some faith is better than none at all.

I lived in New Richmond until 1998 when I moved to Marshfield, WI to marry my husband. As I mentioned I was born the youngest of three children. I do not recall any spectacular events that took place during my growing up years. No fancy vacations, no significant trips; other than an occasional road trip with my Grandparents. Any significant events revolved around going out to eat or some sort of celebration involving food, which I will elaborate on later. My sister and I were very close. We played typical games and we all got along well. I was, however, sexually abused by my cousin when I was about 8 years old. I did not tell anyone until I sought psychotherapy in my late twenties and early thirties that this had happened.

My father is an alcoholic and for many years we dealt with his drinking. He was physically and emotionally abusive to our mother, but never to us children. I recall the fighting when he would come home drunk after the bars closed. Nothing was ever discussed regarding these issues until I was in 6th grade. My mother filed for divorce because of my father's drinking and abuse. He sought treatment for his drinking. Things appeared to be better on the outside. He had a slip and started to drink again in 1982 and went back into treatment. He is still

sober today by the grace of God. I also graduated from high school in 1982 and then went on to school for Cosmetology. Upon graduation from Cosmetology school I returned to my home town to work at a local hair salon and after that went to another job in Stillwater, Minnesota. I enjoyed this type of work because I knew what I was doing made others feel good about them self. During this time I met a man named Vince who I will elaborate on a bit later. It was because of my overindulgence in service to him that I decided to switch careers.

As we were growing up we often spent time at my Grandparents house. My Grandfather was quiet, but a very loving, kind gentle man. My Grandmother was as kind as she knew how to be. Today I realize that she was sick because of her own sexual abuse issues. She was emotionally abusive. My memories of her are that she told me I was fat and that did not need to eat certain things. I have another cousin who remembers these same things. He too was overweight as a child. She also had a big influence on my religious beliefs from an early age. She would tell me that God was always watching me; but the way she said it made me think I was bad, so therefore, I grew up with a lot of shame. Our family attended bible classes and attended church on Sundays. So we had religion in our lives, but never really understood how it all worked. I got mixed messages I guess.

Today I understand that religion and spirituality are two different things. Today I live to serve God. I do my best to carry his message. I thank him daily for all that he has done for me and all that he has blessed me with. My life is full of joy. I live to be of service to others. I enjoy helping others in many ways through my home life, work, community and my church. I love my family and friends. I have been blessed with an awesome husband for the past 14 years. I would say he is truly my soul mate. We have one son together who is the apple of our eye. We are so grateful to have him and truly believe he is a miracle.

After our son was born we attempted to have more children, but unfortunately had four miscarriages. These miscarriages were very devastating and talk about a reality check on your faith. The question "Why?" came up over and over and over. My friends gave me a book they purchased at a retreat center. The book was called, Empty Cradle, Full Heart. This book helped me to heal from the pain of these miscarriages. Some feel that a baby is not a baby until it is born. I personally feel life starts at conception. A couple of these times when I was pregnant I had lost a significant amount of weight and was not prepared to be pregnant emotionally. So when they ended up in a miscarriage I felt as though God took them away from me. Today I realize that there was something not right about them and that was why I lost them. But it was very hard emotionally going through all of this.

These experiences have made me realize how much of a miracle life is. When we think of the human development process it truly is amazing. I tell my son what a miracle he is and how truly grateful we are to have him. It breaks my heart when I see parents who do not appreciate their children or feel they are a burden. Granted parenting can be a challenge, but for those who can have them they are truly blessed. Children are a gift from God to be treasured. They only on loan to us to raise. We are just the vehicle to getting them here on earth.

Today I have a job that I really love. I work as an Administrative Secretary at our local clinic. I am very appreciative of this job because I applied over 15 times for different positions. I had interviews, but never got the job. I honestly feel that because I have changed my life and my attitude has changed from negative to positive, and I believe the timing was right, that I found this position with these fabulous people. The goal of this department is improving the quality of our healthcare within the clinic. With my background in changing my own life this fits right into what I believe.

My parents taught me good work ethic. They were both dedicated employees. They went to work every day and never complained about their job, at least not outwardly. Even my father working at a factory – never complained but was grateful to have a job. When he got out of treatment for his alcoholism he worked straight days. He felt working the night shift encouraged the drinking. He loved to go to stock car races and we attended with him on the weekends. Often times he would go several times during the week. We enjoyed it for the most part, except when he would go in to a party and we stayed in the car and waited and waited and waited for him to come out. He sought treatment for the alcoholism in 1976 after my mother filed for divorce.

He rarely attended church. I recall several Christmases that he came home drunk and we waited for him to get dressed to go with us to the church Christmas program. From there we went to our family Christmas celebration at his parents' house. There was always arguing between him and his brothers and my Grandpa. They seemed to want to argue about anything and everything. My Grandpa was very belittling to his sons. There were six of them.

My father seemed to be the "black sheep." I never really knew why or asked why. My personal thoughts are that two of three eldest sons served in the military. One of the others had the brains. The second to the youngest was the all-star athlete and the youngest was just that – the youngest. So my dad fell somewhere in between almost like the middle child.

He told us he started smoking at about 14 years of age. I suppose he felt like an adult because he had to work on the farm rather than attend school. I often

wonder if this was the start of his addiction because of his feelings of inadequacy from his father.

My mother worked as a secretary, as I mentioned prior, the majority of her working career. For a very short time she was a CNA. She injured her back so was not able to do that type of work any longer. The nursing home she worked for offered her the receptionist position and from there she progressed to Office Manager. My mother is a very kind, gentle natured person. She is very sweet and loving to others. She was the third child of four. They also grew up on a farm. She always said couldn't wait to get out of the house and live on her own. She wanted to be a career woman. I heard her say one time that she never wanted to get married or have children. One day my dad showed up with a ring and she said yes and then before she knew it she had three little kids. At the time I took it to heart thinking that she never really wanted us.

She has had a rough life with my father. He had several affairs and left us many times. She continued to fight for her marriage, even after all the abuse. She sought help through Al-Anon back when my father first went into treatment. I am so very grateful that she was able to stop that merry-go-round at that time. My father then proceeded to gamble. I do not know much about that. I know he tried several times to quit at my mother's request. He asked God to help him stop gambling and smoking. He said even if you have to hurt me; but not too bad. My father slipped on some ice in the driveway and broke his ankle. He ended up in the nursing home. He had to stay at the nursing home because they lived in a two story house and he could not make it upstairs to use the bathroom. So be careful what you ask for you just might get it. Once again my mother forgave him and they stayed together. Her mother never really liked my Dad and would outwardly say that to her. I think this was a struggle for them as well.

My perception of my parents has changed over the years. It has grown from thinking that my mother is a fool to put up with all of this chaos and my father is a jerk and I could not stand the sight of him to; I love them both with all my heart. I can see how committed they are to each other and their marriage has endured over the years. My mother, who said she never wanted to get married or have children, made the best life she could for all of us. She gave what she could when she could. We always came first. My father too did the best with what he knew. He learned some hard knocks lessons through his drinking and gambling years. He has learned that his family is number one to him and we are his priority every day. They attend church every Sunday and attend bible study together.

My parents have taught me that life can be tough, but with faith it all works out. I truly believe it has been my mother's faith that has kept us all together and lead us to where we are today. Also because of my parents involvement in 12-

Step programs I occasionally attended different functions so was vaguely familiar with how it all worked. But apparently I had not learned enough because even with that background I still managed to find some dysfunctional relationships to get involved with. I seemed to look for men who were not able to commit to a relationship. They were looking for a physical relationship and I was looking for approval and validation. Needless to say I had several sexual relationships that never lead to anything but heartache and disappointment and not to mention tons of shame and guilt.

I struggled with my weight my entire life. When I was in 1st grade I weighed 100 pounds. I was on my first diet the summer between first and second grade. I believe around the time I was sexually abused by my cousin I started to gain weight. My first serious relationship wasn't until I was in 9th grade. But I didn't know how to relate this boy. Because I really had no relationship with my father or brother, I felt inadequate talking to the opposite sex. I struggled for many years with dead-end attempts at relationships.

My first semi-serious relationship was with a boy named Mike. Mike lived in St. Paul, MN. He, of course, was into drugs and alcohol. He spent time in the work house and faithfully visited him there. He and I had a car accident and totaled out my first car. I suffered a permanent back injury from that accident. I suffer with that pain on a daily basis. We continued this relationship until his mother told me that I was too good for him and that I should leave and never come back. So that is what I did.

My next serious relationship was with a man named Vince. He too was a drunk. I first met him when I was bartending several years before. I knew he liked me but I had my sights on some other lost soul. I ran into Vince several years later and we started a relationship. This relationship turned out to be a real growing experience for me. The relationship lasted approximately 8 years.

Shortly after we began dating Vince was in an apartment fire, that he allegedly started because he fell asleep with a cigarette. He was burned over 50% of his body with third degree burns. He was in the hospital and I was there by his side the entire time. I was the dutiful girlfriend.

We eventually moved in together. We had our ups and downs. At first he was so very grateful for all I did and praised me up and down. Eventually he began to cut me down and emotionally abuse me. He continued to drink against all orders by his doctors. This relationship was like a roller coaster. I never knew from one minute to the next if we were moving forward or backward. This was the life of a co-dependent person involved in the chaos of alcoholism. I wanted to be loved so badly that I was willing to endure all the pain and suffering to be with this man.

During this relationship I had decided to go back to school for my Associates Degree in Administrative Assistant/Secretarial after being a cosmetologist for about 8 years. I made my way through school and graduated. I was, and still am proud of my accomplishments; especially because this was such a challenging time living with an active alcoholic. I also paid for my own schooling.

I moved to Seattle, Washington after I graduated to get away from this relationship and start fresh. Somehow I allowed him to manipulate me and bring me back to Wisconsin. Come to find out he had been with other women, as he had done before I left.

After several years of splitting up and getting back together we decided we would get married. Why not right? Well once again, he let me down and backed out of the marriage not once, but twice. I was devastated yet relieved. Deep down inside I was miserable and wanted to get out of this relationship. Even though I still loved him I knew that it was going nowhere. I finally ended this relationship for good. Through therapy and my involvement in a 12 program I had gained enough self-confidence to leave and never return.

I remained single and dated a few more men along the way. After several years of soul searching and deciding what I truly wanted out of life I placed a personal ad in a magazine. I met my current husband. He loved me when I was still fragile and recovering from the years with Vince. Once again I believe God had a hand in our coming together. We met and it was love at first sight. I prayed that if this was not the right thing that God would somehow let me know.

Since I met my husband my life has been transformed. I would say I am the happiest I have ever been. Not because he is the icing on the cake, but because of his unconditional love and support. I have regained self-confidence that has enabled me to grow and make myself into a better person and therefore, helping others in my life to make changes for themselves and improve their lives as well.

The beginning of this transformation came when I found a solution to my eating disorder/addiction. I had struggled for many years trying to find a solution that would work for me. I had tried everything I could imagine to try and lose weight. I turned back to the 12 step programs. Many years earlier my mother had mentioned Overeaters Anonymous. This has been my true spiritual awakening. By the grace of God I have transformed my life. I have been relieved of 185+ pounds of "garbage." I no longer need this fat to hide behind. My life today is happy, joyous and free of the food obsession. This has been the turning point of my spiritual growth through this program.

A quote that I received today actually says what I have learned, "The things that I have learned from my own experience, and from the Big Book, and from my friends in A.A. (OA in my case) – patience, acceptance, honesty, humility, and true faith in a Power greater than myself – are the tools I use today to live my life, this precious life." P475 of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I truly believe there is a higher power guiding my life today. I surrender daily to this higher power. He is my guiding light. All I need to do is turn my life over and he does the rest. I have to do my part daily and do his will of carrying the message, but he has the greater plan. I no longer struggle through life. I am deep to the core happy. I no longer need to isolate from the world. I face challenges and fears head on. Yes I still get anxious and nervous about things, but push through with the help of my fellowship of compulsive overeaters, my sponsor and my higher power.

I have found my purpose in life and that is to be of service to my fellows and, as mentioned above, to do God's will. When I am of service I feel the best. When try to do things my way I feel, as we say, restless, irritable and discontented. That means I better get to work at correcting something. Usually when these feelings come up I have moved away from God. He is constant. He never moves or crumbles under pressure.

I believe in being true to yourself. We can never make everyone happy all of the time. We need to do our best and have no expectations. Acceptance is the key to happiness. We cannot expect perfection from ourselves; neither can we expect it from others. God is the only perfect one.

The dove and the butterfly are symbols of freedom. The rainbow with the pot of gold remind of the daily challenges and the growth that happens as a result. Each color reminds me of the various challenges and they all end up in the pot of gold; the pot of gold being the end result that we treasure and this growth from the experience.

My family, friends, OA fellowship, co-workers and my church family are all people who support me. They have all seen my struggles over the years and believe in and encourage me to keep moving forward. If it weren't for all of these people I would not be where I am today. I constantly have people telling me how proud they are of me. This truly means a lot to me that they even notice.

The 12 Steps of OA are what I live by. I use prayer and meditation on a daily basis. I turn my will and life over to God. The steps have been written from the religions so that anyone can follow them. As I read our books from class I can see the many parallels between the 12 Steps and the different religions. For the past four years I have committed my life to working the 12 Steps of Overeaters

Anonymous. By surrendering on a daily basis I have been able to overcome my compulsion to overeat, as well as, make changes in my life. Relationships have grown and changed; communication is better. Our personal financial situation has changed and continues to get better. My own personal growth and continuing my education is another way my life has been transformed.

I am more able to stay calm and balanced during times of crisis, struggles or challenges and not turn to the food or other negative behaviors. By the grace of God I have been able to do this daily. I have been able to improve my career outlook, again by the current job that I have and now by going back to school for my Bachelor's Degree. I am pushing through the fears that used to hold me back from growing and facing challenges that used to paralyze me. I still have fear, but today I know that it will not kill me it will only make me stronger.

Any and all decisions that I need to make begin with deep thought and meditation. Often times I will journal about it. This helps to get the thought process flowing. I ask God's will for me and help me seek the right answer. I then discuss it with my husband and then usually with my sponsor and if need be by OA fellowship. When I pray I feel a strong pull to do or not do something. One example of how faith has worked in my life that I would like to share. When we were looking to buy a new car last year we had decided on a Ford Edge or Escape. We went to the dealership and tried out several different styles and even some other cars. When we were heading out in the last of several cars I prayed that God give me a sign, a word, that would help make a decision because I did not feel the strong sense of connection that I wanted any of the cars we tried out. When we came back to the lot I spotted a car across from us. I asked the salesman what that car was. He said, "That is a Dodge Journey." I knew at that moment that was my new car because in OA we call working our program "a Journey." It still brings a smile to my face. Both my OA journey and my Dodge Journey have brought me great satisfaction. That is how I know God is working in my life.

I personally feel we are all God's children created equally and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. No matter where we came from or where we are going. No one knows the burden their brothers or sisters carry. We can only see what is on the outside.

I really try to stay in today and live each moment as it comes. Although I am a planner I can get tied up in looking too far ahead. I may not make it until tomorrow or next week, so to worry about issues that I do not have control over feels like a waste of today and my time and energy. Time goes so fast we need to stay in today and make it the best that we can right here and right now.

Death scares me a little bit only that I will no longer be here for my family and friends. But I guess I feel I am ready. I feel I am doing the best with my life as I can. I have made many mistakes in the past that I have forgiven myself for and I know that my God has forgiven me as well. So I have no worries. Death is going to be with our Lord and Savior. I feel it will be glorious and there will be no more suffering there. I feel some suffer more than others because they are either afraid of the unknown or are not living according to God's plan. They are not being of service to others. They are going against the grain, as they say. They are going against what they truly in their hearts. But they are the only ones who can change that. God is constant he never changes or moves. Only we change and or move away. The closer we are to him the better off our lives are.

I believe that we make our lives what it is. If we chose to live a meager life and not have much and or be poor that is what we will have. If we chose to make more of our lives and take advantage of opportunities that come our way life will abound with riches. I believe it is cause and effect. I truly believe our thoughts become our actions. If we chose to sit and feel sorry for ourselves and not take strides to improve ourselves or ask God for his will then that is what you will have. There is a difference being choosing to live a simple life and being poor and living with luxuries we can afford and being in spiritually fit condition as well.

I am not sure how I feel about whether life will go on indefinitely or whether it is about to end. Obviously we will not stay on earth as humans forever. Unless life changes and we go back to living until we are in our hundreds. When we think back to biblical times people lived to be a couple hundred years old. The human body just does not seem to be able to endure that long any more.

The most significant religious experience I have had was after I began working with Overeaters Anonymous. I knew that religion and spirituality were not the same things, but was not sure how they differed. One Sunday we were sitting in church and I felt a huge sense of peace and tranquility comes over me. It was awesome. A few weeks later I felt the same thing and I thought to myself that was the feeling that I wanted from my program. That to me was my spirit awakening. That was the moment that I realized while I was at church where I practice my religion it was my faith in my religion that brought me the spiritual piece/peace. I felt truly transformed at that moment. I knew then that God was working in my heart.

When I think about God I feel warm inside and very much at peace with life. I know that he is everywhere I am. I can ask him to show me his presence somehow and he has always done that for me. I feel at peace when I talk to God. I feel like I can talk to him about anything at any time. It is like talking to

my parents. I just share all my fears, anxieties, challenges etc. This helps to ease my mind.

I feel I am religious and I have learned much through my religion and hope to continue to learn more.

When I pray I feel I am having a conversation with God. I am, as I mentioned above, sharing my most intimate feelings with him. I am becoming closer to God because we are sharing these intimate thoughts. There is nothing he does not know about me. I used to feel that he was judging me. Today I realize he is not he is so forgiving because he understands what is it like to need forgiveness.

I am not sure about the religious outlook – I guess I feel they are true because I continue to believe how the world was created and continues on. Life started somewhere and do not believe it started with a “bang.” Sorry that just does not make sense to me. Something brought the “elements” of first life in to existence to begin with.

To me a sin is going against the Ten Commandments. My feelings have changed since I was a child in that I know when I commit a sin I am forgiven and no matter how many times I sin I will be forgiven. Because I make a mistake that does not make me a mistake. We are all created equally and therefore, I am a sinner just like the next person. I do not intentionally sin. I do my best to live a clean life, but as I mentioned before if I move away from God my defects start to show up.

I guess I must have some idea of what sins were because we did not turn out too badly. I am sure we did our share of lying, cheating and stealing. Sometimes we did it intentionally, but meaning no harm. For many years I lived in sin by having sexual relations outside of marriage. I lived with two different men not being married. I have done my share. I lived with regret for many years. Today I do my best to live without sin. I am conscious of what I am doing. The OA program I work has a 10th Step daily inventory which includes the following: Was I resentful, selfish, dishonest, afraid, owe an apology, kind and loving toward all. Was I thinking of others, do I have worry or remorse. I end with telling five things I am grateful for to end it on a positive note. So with this I usually keep my life pretty clean and simple. I do not want to have to make amends or have things show up on my inventory that I might have to go back and deal with. So I play it forward and think about what the outcome will be.

With regard to morality I guess I believe that if we do not have some sort of boundaries that yes things will begin to break down. It is human nature to want or need boundaries. If everyone just did whatever they wanted when they wanted we would have all sorts of negative things happening. There would be sin of all sorts.

As I mentioned before my life is growing by leaps and bounds in so many ways. My personal and professional life has improved. Because of my spiritual growth through OA I feel all things are changing for the better. There is always room for improvement and as I peel back the layers of the onion I will seek these things that still need to be improved upon. For today I continue to seek my future career goals. How and where will this Bachelor's Degree benefit me? I know it will improve my life for certain, but just at times struggle with the commitment. Because of this commitment I have to give up time with my family who is so precious to me. I know in heart that what I am doing is of benefit to them, but at the same time I feel life is short and I do not want to miss out on things.

At times I still struggle with my marriage as to how we can continue to improve. One area I struggle with is intimacy and my past of sexual abuse. Along those same lines are the miscarriages and thinking that if there is no intimacy there can be no pregnancy and therefore no more heartache. I also struggle with my body image after losing so much weight I have a lot of loose skin and do not feel attractive; although my husband is very accepting and does not care. He is very happy that I am happier and healthier. He tells me all the time how proud he is of me and my accomplishments.

I face the daily challenges of parenthood. We are blessed to have a very intelligent son. He is very kind hearted and so has not caused us much distress, but the daily parenting can often be a challenge. Being consistent and always looking for ways to improve or show by example can bring new challenges on a daily basis. So I know all these struggles are mine to deal with and I continually work at them through my program.

Finally my image of mature faith is unconditional love and acceptance of people, places and things just as they are at this very moment. We are, as I have mentioned several times, created equally and in God's image. We are exactly who we are supposed to be right at this very moment. I feel we can continue to do God's will and live by his word every day. We should carry the message to others. Today's sermon at church was about the mustard seed. The seed represents the church and how it can help faith/spirituality to grow throughout the world. This to me is what mature faith looks like.