



Intentionally Deleted: A Tale of Two Uncles

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In the legal profession, Intentionally Deleted identifies an act of redaction.

An acknowledged removal of something that previously existed.

My two uncles suffered from alcoholism and addiction. I stayed disconnected from them for years while they suffered through their afflictions. I hid these moments of darkness in my life as if they never existed. I intentionally deleted them, because of my shame.

My uncles lived together in Myrtle Beach for a while. One summer, I vacationed there with a girlfriend but chose not to tell my uncles we were in town. I decided to at least drive by to see if the house appeared ok.

As we slowly pulled up to the house, I noticed one of my uncles walking trash to the road. I chose not to stop. Instead, I sped past, because I was too ashamed to introduce my girlfriend to that uncle.

My other uncle is my godfather. Years after the Myrtle Beach incident, my godfather was convicted of aggravated assault. It was a drunken, drug-induced fight, where he took a kitchen knife to another guy's neck.

My godfather spent six and a half years in prison. I chose not to visit or reach out. I was too ashamed to make contact with him.

While in prison, my godfather found the 12-steps, then found God, and then found recovery. In his last weeks of imprisonment, we finally exchanged letters to reconnect. When he was released, he committed the rest of his life to helping others find recovery. During that time, we slowly built a mentorship relationship.

A year after my godfather's release, I was hospitalized for 17 days from a stress-induced mental health episode. Most of the people in my life do not yet know this about me. It's lied dormant behind my own veil of shame.

My godfather was one of the few people there for me when I needed him most. I learned the 12 steps from him and found ways to apply those lessons toward my own healing journey.

To be clear, I am not an alcoholic [1-3]. My relationship with stress was the closest thing I've ever had to an addiction. I obsessively overstressed myself in a constant pursuit to fulfill a nebulous pit of "potential." My godfather served as a sponsor on my journey toward recovery.

In the winter of 2021, we lost my godfather to COVID. He died a few weeks after helping host a New Year's Eve sobriety event. He had dedicated his life to helping others find recovery, and ultimately lost his life in service of that cause.

My godfather's last lesson for me was about finding strength outside of ourselves through acceptance of our weaknesses. After he passed, I discovered Kintsugi, the Japanese tradition of honoring the cracks in broken pottery by filling them with gold. Through embracing flaws and imperfections, we can choose to create something more beautiful out of what's broken.

As part of my healing journey, I sought to make amends for the

suffering perpetuated by my shortcomings. Weeks after my godfather passed, I called my other uncle to apologize for the incident in Myrtle Beach. When we spoke, my uncle's words were slurring so bad that I could hardly understand him. I suspected my apology was falling on deaf ears.

Tears started rolling down my face as I told him about how I previously drove past him in shame. I shared the details of my hospitalization and explained how that experience created a deeper understanding of his circumstances. I promised to make amends by not metaphorically driving past his continued suffering with alcoholism.

To my surprise, my uncle began another attempt toward recovery that day. We started talking several times a week, and from that point forward, I became an unqualified sponsor for his recovery.

I learned so much through our conversations together. My uncle's suffering ran much deeper than I realized. He knew how his actions perpetuated a cycle of inflicting pain on those around him. His shame was clearly evident, and it seemed to further trap him in this habitual cycle of suffering.

I could never fully empathize, because I didn't know the true depths of the pain of addiction. I listened and connected as best as I could while trying to learn from his experiences. He would try to relate by comparing his addictive behavior to a challenge like denying myself the impulse to stress eat a treat instead choosing a healthier snack. But, I knew my life wouldn't unravel in the same way if I decided to make a single unhealthy choice. It made it really hard for me to truly appreciate the amplified strength of his urges or the full depth of his suffering after succumbing to a single urge.

On one call, he shared the most vivid image of how his addiction felt. He described one side as a forest filled with darkness, pain, and death, and the other side as a wide open landscape with an oasis far in the distance. In the middle was a long path, with countless forks in the road leading into the dark forest. No matter how much he wanted to focus on the road or the oasis in the distance, he couldn't help having his attention pulled toward the darkness at every step. My heart still breaks at the thought of that pain.

My uncle fell off the wagon a few months into his attempted recovery. That would be his last attempt. His heart gave out several weeks later, but anyone who knew him knows that my uncle lost his life to his alcoholism.

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I'm not ashamed of how my uncle lost his battle, both in life or at his death. I can give him so much more grace thanks to the deeper understanding I gained through those weeks we shared together. For me, grace simply comes down to experiencing forgiveness & honor, regardless of worthiness.

I forgive both my uncles for the pain they perpetuated through their afflictions. I understand now that hurt people, hurt people, and most people could only connect with the unhealed outer shell that they shared with the world. After seeing a glimpse of the healed version underneath, I know that their suffering does not define them. With this peace of mind, my shame is intentionally deleted, because of grace.

Much like Kintsugi, grace can shine like gold on the dark parts of our life where we are weakest or fractured. We can choose not to recede under the darkness of shame. Instead, we can use this golden light of grace to create something more beautiful out of what's broken.

My uncle passed away on the same date as my godfather's sobriety

anniversary. A 0.2% chance. There's something beautiful and poetic about the two of them now sharing the same sobriety date for eternity. I miss them both dearly, and I am grateful that both are free from their pain.

My uncles are now only a memory of what previously existed. I choose, with intention, to honor both their memories with grace. I pray this message finds anyone who can benefit from the lessons I learned on my own journey to mend what was broken underneath shame.

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