

Dear Mom,

I have spent so much time thinking about the past. About the things I have carried with me for so long that made me feel hurt, confused, and angry. There were times that I wished things could be different. Times where I wondered why alcohol took up so much space. I still kind of wish things could've been different.

For years, I held onto these feelings because, as a kid, what else can I really do? When I felt lost about everything that was happening, feeling anger was the one thing I knew was right and that nobody could tell me anything different about. Recently, though, I've read *Forgiveness: The Story of Eva Kor by Joe Lee*. It made me realize that carrying this resentment towards you, even after you've gotten sober, only serves to hurt me. Eva went through so much hardship and the answer for her was forgiving the ones who put her through that. I don't want the hardest parts of my childhood to control my adulthood. So, I figured I would try out her method for myself.

I want to tell you that I forgive you. I forgive you for the times that your drinking made you into someone I didn't recognize. I forgive you for all the times alcohol came before my sisters and brothers and I. I forgive you for all the times your drinking prevented you from being the mother I really wanted and needed. I forgive you for all the times you promised change, just to hear once again that you are drinking again.

This doesn't mean that those things don't still hurt. They do. I always thought that saying you forgave someone was you saying that the things they did no longer affected you. I thought it meant pretending that everything that happened was okay and forgetting about it. I realized by hearing Eva Kor, a literal Holocaust survivor, forgive her oppressors that that is not what forgiveness is. You made choices that left wounds that may never totally close up and there's not much I can do about that. What I can do, though, is forgive you for giving me them and let you try to help them heal. I am choosing to not let those wounds define my relationship with you or who I become.

I also want you to know that, as I have gotten older, I understand that alcoholism is more complicated than simply making bad choices. You were struggling with something bigger than both of us and a lot of people who could have actually done something to help, failed you. I know you have experienced horrible things in your life that only alcohol could provide temporary relief from.

I hope you can forgive yourself too. You have put so much effort into being a better mother and grandmother these past couple of years and I appreciate that so much more than I can say. I know that getting sober and staying sober is not something that can just be done overnight but, so far, you have stayed committed and I appreciate that. You are my mama and, throughout everything and even when I was hurt by you, I never once doubted the love you have for me and I think that says a lot about your devotion as a mother.

I can't read the future. I don't know for sure if you're going to keep with sobriety. That was a thought that kept me from forgiveness for so long. But, regardless, I want to make room for healing and make peace with the parts of our past that I cannot change. I love you mama and I hope we can continue to move forward.

Sincerely, Annabelle