

Siblings Confront Their Past and Help Each Other (Part 2)

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis

Last time we met Stu and Janet they were in couple's therapy because their marriage was suffering from Stu's alcoholism. The only thing that kept them together was the memory of their deep love for each other and their two children. In an argument about his having pot in the house, Stu realized he rebels against anyone telling him what to do. In exploring the origin of this, he had an image of his big sister, Candyce, whom he called "Bossy Mom." Stu realizes his 28 year old drinking history is connected to his self-destructive rebelliousness.

At my suggestion, he called Candyce and Toby, his younger brother, asking if they'd fly in for a weekend of therapy to help him. "They both said yes, even before I finished explaining," he says. He's stunned at their adamant support, even though, "I've not been a very good brother to either of them for many years."

On a Friday evening, Candyce, Stu, and Toby meet at a local retreat setting. Stu says, "You both know Janet and I have had marital problems for years. I now accept our problems are related to my being an alcoholic." He explains the connection being the intensity of his reaction to any comment as Janet telling him what to do.

Candyce, the oldest, smiles remembering his coming home from the hospital after he was born. "You were so cute. Up until about age 11 you were a happy, laughing kid."

I ask, "What do you think happened to change that?"

"That was when Mom's sister was having severe medical problems, in and out of the hospital, so she went to take care of her and her family. She only went for a week, but every few days she'd call to say she was staying longer. She was gone four months."

Toby asks, "We were living on Conrad Street then? I remember that. You were always bossing us around."

Stu wiggles his left foot. "I do recall she went away for a while; I'd forgotten why."

"That must have been tough for you guys," I say. "You were how old?"

"They were 11 and 10," Candyce answers.

"I hardly remember. I just know Mom wasn't there and," turning to Candyce, "Toby and I called you Bossy Mom. Always bossing us around; clean up; eat; don't do this; come home when I tell you. I was constantly furious at you."

Candyce gets teary. "That was an awful time for me. I had just turned 16, just gotten my driver's license. I had to take you to school; it was only 10 minutes in the opposite direction from my school, but I had to go on the highway. I was terrified. Twice a day."

"Boy, were you a terror on the road," Toby grins.

"Yea, we would sit in back and laugh..."

"Or scream," pipes in Toby.

"Planning our funerals for when you got us killed." Stu and Toby chuckle.

Candyce snaps, "I was a new driver, for Pete's sake. If you were scared, imagine how I felt." She chokes back a sob. "I raced you to school and barely got back to my own school by first period. I always missed homeroom. After school, I raced back to pick you up, got you started on your homework and got dinner ready. I rarely had time to sit and eat because Dad needed me at the store in the evenings. I worked with him until closing, getting home by 9:30 or 10:00 when I started my homework."

Stu's mouth is hanging open. "I had no idea about any of this." He slowly shakes his head. "I only knew you were so bossy

Out of spite, if you told me to come inside I'd stay out, even if I just walked around. You were not my mother, so I didn't have to obey you."

"I'm awed listening to you." I look at the three of them. "I have such sympathy for this overburdened girl. And for you little boys."

Stu shakes his head. "I had no idea what you went through. That's much too much responsibility. I suppose Mom and Dad had to rely on you, but that must have been awful, taking care of two bratty brothers, with no time for yourself or your friends.

The awareness of what Candyce went through seems to be hitting Stu hard. "I'm sorry. It must have been hell for you, and you were only trying to be Mom's good little girl."

Candyce tears up again as both brothers acknowledge how difficult that time had been for her. When their mother returned, life went back to normal – or so they all thought.

"I miss you two so much," Candyce whispers through her tears. "Right before my divorce, you were both sympathetic. But then you went on with your life with your wives and children. I had no husband, no children. If I wanted to see you, I had to come to you; you never called or visited."

Stu stares at her. "I've been selfish. You are right. I never think about you. Not back then, and not after the divorce, nor now. I'm so busy with my life."

"And your drinking." Toby finishes Stu's sentence, and turns to him. "I don't call you anymore because I hate talking to you when you're drunk."

Candyce looks at him. "I need you – sober."

Stu goes over and hugs her. They both cry. "I never feel anyone needs me," he gulps.

"I need you," she repeats.

They hug for a long time. As their tears subside, Stu turns and pulls Toby into a hug. "I love you buddy."

When he sits back, Stu looks at them both, then at me. "I'm going to beat this alcoholism. I've got to beat it. I want my sister and brother back. I want my wife back. I've always been the tough one, but," he looks back and forth between them; "will you stand by me and help me through this? I don't deserve it from either of you, but..."

"Of course," Candyce and Toby respond simultaneously.

(See Present Day Problems May Be Rooted in Childhood Relationship with Siblings (Part One) for the couples' session that led to this sibling meeting)

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis has been a marriage and family therapist for over 40 years with an expertise in adult siblings. She is author of numerous [books on relationships](#) – for siblings, marriage, singles, and friendships. Since 1996, she has run [Unique Retreats for Women](#) and does weekend retreats for adult siblings. She has offices in Washington, DC area and Cincinnati, Ohio. She is also available for phone and skype consultations.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis
DrKarenGailLewis.com
drkgl@Drkarengaillewis.com
301-585-5814