

# #MeTooACA

My name is Karin S., I am an adult child and a member of ACA. I have been in recovery for 10 years at this point, and it has transformed my life. I am writing today to share a part of my story that is difficult to address. I need to share it, though, because that is how I recover. I also need to share it because I owe it to my ACA community to speak openly about my experience, so that others can learn from it. Finally, I need to speak out about it so that no one else gets hurt.

The experience I am sharing reflects the growth I have experienced in my own process of recovery – first that of a newcomer learning about boundaries and how to set them; then of a community leader struggling to preserve the unity of the fellowship that we all depend on for our personal recovery (Tradition 1). **Finally, after years of silent struggle, the recent MeToo movement and some difficult conversations with fellow travelers have helped me understand that predatory behavior of individuals at meetings is not just a problem for individuals targeted by this behavior, but a group responsibility. It therefore needs to be addressed on the group conscience level.**

I have always seen myself as independent minded, articulate, and accomplished. Never mind the struggle of growing up in a dysfunctional home and being confronted with abusive and manipulative behaviors on a day-to-day basis in my family of origin. Finding myself on my knees in midlife was humbling if not humiliating, realizing that I had internalized so many of the self-deprecating messages that I ended up in a career and in relationships that were perpetuating the abuse I had experienced in my childhood.

I got into recovery, for the first time admitting that I needed help, that I wasn't able to fix this on my own. I was willing to try anything, open to any suggestions. One of the first people I encountered when I started coming to meetings was X. He approached me after a meeting, offering unsolicited advice about things I had shared, and expressing his willingness to provide additional support outside of meetings. I met with him after a meeting once, in the meeting space, after other attenders had left. He sat next to me, held my hand as he spoke to me. I don't recall what he was saying, but I do remember feeling extremely uncomfortable about the situation.

I did all the right things. I shared my discomfort with a therapist. Coincidentally, another (male) program member offered some guidance about sharing with members of the same sex/gender in 12-step meetings, to avoid romantic or sexual confusion and the distraction and trauma they may cause. Hearing this, I instantly realized why I felt so uncomfortable around X and backed away from interactions with him. I later discovered the readings in the BRB about 13<sup>th</sup> stepping, which also helped me put a name to these types of boundary violations. X was not the only person I experienced them with, and I am pretty certain I've been guilty of them myself, unwittingly, on occasion.

X did not let go easily. He continued to approach me after meetings, and to challenge the boundaries I was beginning to set. At one point, he stood in the doorway of a meeting room after the meeting had ended, waiting for me to leave and blocking my way when I tried to pass. Another time, he approached me after a meeting and offered or requested a hug. It wasn't until I had turned him away in several similar encounters that he seemed to accept my refusal to engage.

I observed X approaching other newcomers in similar ways, and I found myself hovering, ready to jump in and run interference if needed to shield these young women from his inappropriate advances. I became aware that he acted as a leader in certain meetings, smaller meetings that were vulnerable enough to allow him to prey on newcomers in the same way he had preyed on me. I even called a group conscience to close down one very small meeting, in order to prevent him from "taking it over" in this way.

Then, I was invited to take on a leadership role in the local ACA community. A group of program friends asked me to participate in an effort they were making to launch an Intergroup in our area, and I eventually agreed to serve as the temporary chairperson of this brand new Intergroup. X showed an interest in Intergroup activity, but no consistent effort to participate. He ended up being invited to present at day-long recovery workshops that Intergroup put on in the first two years of its existence. In the light of my previous experience with him, I felt some reservations about allowing him to speak, seemingly with the endorsement of Intergroup, but I was hesitant to broach what felt like a potentially divisive issue, for the sake of preserving the unity of the group. As a result, X presented at two annual recovery

workshops in our area, in at least one of these presentations using the fellowship as a platform for views and approaches which were recognized by many in the room as not belonging into a framework of ACA recovery.

Through all of this, I never openly addressed my concerns about X, or shared specifics of my experience with him. It was only when another friend approached me about his concerns regarding X that I finally opened up about my own experience with him. In doing so, I found myself rather surprised at the intensity of the feelings that arose within me, a clear indication that there was a part of my experience that remained unprocessed.

This friend approached me again a few months later. He had heard from another program member about experiences with X that reminded him of what I had shared. Since then, one other female newcomer has come forward sharing similar experiences with boundary transgressions by X. My friend and I decided to bring this issue to Intergroup for further discussion and investigation. As soon as affected individuals shared our experience, we saw others nodding around the room. They recognized the behavior we were describing and acknowledged they had observed X behaving in similar ways in meetings they attended.

Our Intergroup has moved forward to address X's behavior directly, on the Intergroup level. Our next goal is to make recommendations to local meetings on how to prevent predatory behavior at meetings and protect particularly newcomers from being targeted by it. This appears difficult. One meeting, when the suggestion was made to include a paragraph on 13<sup>th</sup> stepping in the opening, failed to see the relevance of this – because the issue is so rarely openly discussed.

As our subcommittee learned when investigating this issue, it is often discussed among what might be called “informal networks” of supportive members, who may even be sworn to secrecy, and who look out for one another and other potential victims, much the way I did years ago. This amounts to silent collusion with the perpetrator's behavior!

**It perpetuates the illusion that the issue is one of personal boundaries – the victim's boundaries. The recent MeToo movement has helped me understand how much this perpetuates a view that we have been socially and culturally conditioned to accept without questioning: a view that silently condones violence against women and places the responsibility for preventing it squarely on our own shoulders! By the same token, we as women are held (and holding ourselves) accountable for maintaining our own safety in meetings, not even expecting to be supported by bystanders and onlookers to our experience!**

While I don't take responsibility for X's bad behavior, I realize that my own silence of eight years helped perpetuate a situation which allowed many more newcomers to be affected. The recent victims who came forward were targeted by the same individual within the last 12 to 18 months!

**WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THIS! While there are already helpful resources out there, we need to make them widely available to local meetings. We also need to help these meetings understand how important it is to make this information easily available to newcomers, those of us who are the most vulnerable to the type of inappropriate behavior we are talking about here. We are ALL responsible to bring the Traditions to life in our fellowship in a way that is both welcoming AND safe to all, including the most vulnerable of our newcomers!**

My goal in sharing my experience (in all its ambiguity) is not to indict myself or other program members for not speaking up and addressing this issue sooner. My goal is to help create a safe space for this conversation to happen, and to move it out of secret “informal networks” of supportive members into the group conscience of the fellowship, from local meetings to the World Service Organization. I am sharing my experience to encourage others to share theirs. This week, the problem of predatory behavior will be discussed at ACA WSO's Annual Business Conference. My hope is that many others will come forward and share their own experience, both as victims and as perpetrators. Only this way will we be able to come to a true and genuine group conscience around this issue.

***Please e-mail me at [metoo.aca@gmail.com](mailto:metoo.aca@gmail.com) to share your comments, questions, and observations. All communications will be treated as anonymous and confidential. The National Capital Area ACA Intergroup is working on developing resources and a workshop to support further discussion. Please stay tuned for more information about workshops and additional resources on this topic.***