Example #18 — My Mother

This is a resentment against a parent who was emotionally controlling and unavailable — a pattern described extensively in psychology research on attachment and family systems. It is one of the most common resentments in recovery and often one of the hardest to write because the person may still love and feel loyalty toward the parent. As the Big Book notes: "Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes" (p.67) — not because the parent's behavior was acceptable, but because we can only change our own.

Columns 1 & 2

#18) My Mother

- **A)** She was never satisfied with anything I did — always criticized me, compared me to my siblings, told me I was "too sensitive."
- **B)** She ignored what was happening in the house — my father's drinking, the chaos — and pretended everything was fine.
- **C)** She guilt-trips me every time I set a boundary. "After everything I've done for you."

(Nothing I do is ever enough, and I'm not allowed to feel what I feel)

Column 3 — Resentment Inventory

> *"God please help me see the truth about my resentments"*

#18) A — My Mother / Never satisfied, always criticized, compared me to siblings, told me I was "too sensitive."

Affects my:

SELF-ESTEEM — *"I am..."* | Fear of being...

- I am a good person who deserves to be accepted as I am. *(not good enough, fundamentally flawed, defective)*

PRIDE — *"Others should..."*

- A mother should see and appreciate who her child really is. *(invisible, unacceptable, never enough)*

AMBITION — *"I want..."*

- I want to stop needing her approval and still feel okay about myself. *(permanently broken, unable to function without external validation)*

SECURITY — *"I need...to be okay"*

- I need to know that I'm lovable exactly as I am to be okay. *(conditional love is the only kind, will always have to earn it)*

PERSONAL RELATIONS

- Mothers love their children unconditionally. Mothers protect their children's sense of self. *(unprotected, unloved for who I am, never safe at home)*

SEX RELATIONS — *"A real man..." / "A real woman..."*

- A real person doesn't still need their mother's approval at this age. *(immature, weak, stuck, never going to grow up)*

POCKET BOOK

- *(Not directly affected in this resentment)*

#18) B — My Mother / Ignored what was happening in the house — my father's drinking, the chaos — and pretended everything was fine.

Affects my:

SELF-ESTEEM — *"I am..."*

- I was a child who deserved to be protected. *(not important enough to protect)*

PRIDE — *"Others should..."*

- A parent should put their children's safety before their own comfort. *(sacrificed, collateral damage)*

AMBITION — *"I want..."*

- I want her to admit what happened. *(crazy, making it up, can't trust my own reality)*

SECURITY — *"I need...to be okay"*

- I need to know that what happened was real and that it wasn't my fault to be okay. *(gaslighted, alone in the truth)*

PERSONAL RELATIONS

- A mother protects her children from harm. *(abandoned, unworthy of protection)*

#18) C — My Mother / Guilt-trips me every time I set a boundary.

Affects my:

SELF-ESTEEM — *"I am..."*

- I have the right to set boundaries and take care of myself. *(selfish, ungrateful, bad child)*

PRIDE — *"Others should..."*

- Others should respect my boundaries, even if they don't like them. *(controlled, manipulated)*

SECURITY — *"I need...to be okay"*

- I need to be able to protect my peace without being punished for it to be okay. *(will always be controlled, can never be free)*

PERSONAL RELATIONS

- Healthy parents let their adult children set boundaries. *(trapped, enmeshed, suffocated)*

Column 4

> *"God please help me see the truth."*

The Realization

"How have I done the things I've resented in Column 2 to the person I've listed in Column 1 and/or others?"

- I have been critical and unsatisfied with others — partners, friends, co-workers. I've compared people to others and found them lacking.
- I have ignored problems in my own relationships and pretended everything was fine — especially when I was drinking.
- I have guilt-tripped people who set boundaries with me. I've punished people for telling me "no."
- I have told people they were "too sensitive" when they told me I hurt them.

> *"God, this is a sick person like myself. How can I be helpful to them? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."*

Fourth Column — "Where had I been..."

SELF-SEEKING: *My selfish actions or activities were...?*

- Cut her off for months at a time with no explanation — then showed up when I needed something.
- Used my drinking as a weapon: "You made me this way."

- Screamed at her, called her names, threw her failures in her face during arguments.
- Refused to visit, refused to call, then complained that she didn't understand me.
- Put my partners in the middle — expected them to take my side against my mother.
- Took money from her while simultaneously resenting her for everything.

SELFISH: *My selfish attitudes were…?*

- She owes me the childhood I didn't have.
- She should have been stronger. She should have protected me.
- If she can't give me what I need, she's useless to me.

DISHONEST: *I was in the delusion that…?*

- I was in the delusion that she was capable of being a different person — that if I just got angry enough, she would change.
- I was in the delusion that the way she raised me is the only reason I am the way I am — that nothing is my responsibility.
- I was in the delusion that staying angry at her was the same as protecting myself.

AFRAID: *I was afraid…?*

- Afraid that she was right — that I really am too sensitive, too much, not enough.
- Afraid that if I forgive her, it means what happened was okay.
- Afraid that I've become her — that I treat the people I love the same way she treated me.

The Chain

AFRAID: Afraid she was right about me — not enough, too sensitive, fundamentally flawed. Afraid I've become her. ↓ drives → **DISHONEST:** In the delusion that staying angry protects me. That she could have been different. That nothing is my responsibility. ↓ produces → **SELFISH:** She owes me. She should have been stronger. If she can't give me what I need, she's useless. ↓ generates → **SELF-SEEKING:** Cut her off, used drinking as a weapon, screamed at her, took money while resenting her, refused to show up.

Harm

- **My mother** — I was cruel to her. I cut her off. I used her failures as a weapon. I took money from her while telling her she was worthless. I never considered that she might have been doing the best she could with what she had.
- **My partners** — I put them in the middle. I expected them to fix the wound my mother left. I was critical and dissatisfied with them the same way she was with me.
- **My siblings** — I created division in the family. I pressured them to take sides. I resented them for having a "better" relationship with her.
- **Myself** — I carried this resentment for decades. I used it to justify drinking. I let it define me — "the one with the bad mother" became my identity, and it kept me from building a new one.
- **My recovery** — the resentment against my mother was the one I most resisted putting on paper, because I believed examining my own wrongs meant excusing hers. It doesn't. It means freeing myself from the prison of it.

Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text: p.64-¶3 (list resentments), p.67-¶1 ("Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes"), p.67-¶2 (SDSF questions)

BBA workshop methodology: Seven areas of self, Column 4 SDSF format, The Chain

Recovery literature & psychology: Resentments against parents — particularly mothers — are among the most commonly shared in recovery meetings and forums. John Bowlby's attachment theory established that the quality of the child-caregiver bond shapes all subsequent relationships. When the bond is characterized by criticism, emotional unavailability, or conditional love, the child develops what Bowlby termed "insecure attachment" — a template of relating that persists into adulthood and directly fuels the patterns inventoried in Column 4. Pete Walker's *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving* (2013) describes the "inner critic" — an internalized voice of the critical parent that continues long after the person has left home. Many of the Column 3 fears ("not good

enough," "fundamentally flawed," "defective") are the inner critic speaking. Karyl McBride's *Will I Ever Be Good Enough?* (2008) addresses the specific wound of the emotionally unavailable mother and the adult child's persistent drive for approval. The Fourth Step inventory does not ask us to deny the wound. It asks us to see where we have carried it forward into our own behavior — which is the only part we can change.

Note: This is a constructed example created for this guide. All names and details are fictional.

From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from "Originals & sources." · source examples/18-my-mother.md