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## HEART & SOUL: Love helped friend kick drama habit

BY JENNIFER HANSEN

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LITTLE ROCK — We decide to change our lives for the better, so we focus on good things. Then distraction happens and we backslide. We refocus on the good things, and distraction happens again. One more time we focus on good things, and ... you get the picture.

Resolving to make a positive change is only the first step in actually changing. Recognizing triggers for negative behavior so we can avoid them is essential. Staying strong enough to override our reactions to those triggers, that may be the toughest battle.

We're human. We're confused and broken and, hopefully, working to get better. Our willingness to work to become better people (whether we run or plod toward that goal), may be the nearest we get to perfection. I believe it's what we're here to do.

While some circumstances are beyond our control, who we are in the face of difficulty is always in our power to change. To choose complacency is to abandon the seeking-ness of our nature. It's resigning ourselves to be less than we could be.

A friend who has always entangled herself in drama was jolted out of that tendency a few years ago when her actions backfired and embarrassed her daughter. The daughter was at an age when being embarrassed was excruciating. My friend was devastated, and she took the impressive step of admitting how much her drama-addiction had cost her own family. The jolt of adrenaline that accompanies intense situations was a drug for her, she said, and she had to kick the habit.

She was serious, but soon found that her decision led to a new challenge - how to love her old friends yet remove herself from their drama-creating tendencies. After all, she didn't create all that drama all those years by herself. Those friends were still doing what they'd always done and they wanted her back in the game.

"I don't want to just drop them," she told me one morning.

I suggested she try the Al-Anon teaching, "Detach with love." Detach means don't engage, don't react until you've stepped back and considered the situation, and don't dwell. You can detach from someone, yet continue to love them safely and, if necessary, from a distance. She loved this concept.

My friend's growth meant, as it often does, that she'd outgrown her old friends. She couldn't interact with them without finding herself pulled back into the old pattern. Once she saw what all that drama did to her life, how it looked from the outside, and how much time and energy it consumed, she reduced the time she spent with these people by being busy more often, by getting off the phone when the drama recitation started, even by avoiding their calls.

Since her daughter is still at home, my friend has a constant reminder of why she decided to change. Her commitment set an example for her daughter, and the pain she caused her child strengthened her resolve. Once she determined that she was willing to let go of these friendships rather than continue to be drawn into their pathos and tumult, she found new friends and deeper friendship with women who hadn't been part of the drama machine. As her life became calmer, more positive, and less distracted, so did her family's.

The reinforcing effect of this woman's decision to stay the course of positive change in her life was clear. When she stepped out of one negative cycle, she actually ended up breaking two - not only does she not participate in the drama game, she no longer pulls her family into it with her. As it became easier and easier to stay focused on positive things and avoid the old drama triggers, she saw the whole situation differently. Now, she wonders how she engaged with the drama machine in the first place.

Write to Jennifer Hansen at Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, P.O. Box 7, Springdale, Ark. 72765. Email her at

**[jhansen@arkansasonline.com](mailto:jhansen@arkansasonline.com)**

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