So I’ve had this life long pattern of assuming the worst intentions of people and alienating or preemptively disliking them. I’ve always felt “on the outside.” I don’t know if I can describe it well but I think it might stem from growing up in a mixed family and not having a relationship with my biological father. My eldest sister and younger brother (RIP) are from the same father. My younger sister and I are from the same father. My mother had my eldest sister when she was 16 (turning 17 the day after. My step father was about 6 or seven years older than her (this was the 70’s) but not yet very mature. They broke it off before my older sister was born and my mom met my father at work shortly thereafter. She married him, had me, and then when she left my father a few years later, got back together with Mike, my older sisters father who would later become my stepfather and adopt me. This outcome was nearly inevitable as my mothers older brother an fathers elder sister were married, which is how my mother met my stepfather.

I give all this background because part of the issue was that my stepfather and I didn’t get along very well. We were what could be described as working poor: though we were never homeless or hungry, I wore hand me downs and we lacked some of the niceties and conveniences of the middle class southern NH town that we lived. I never even had a real bedroom growing up. In Boston, before moving to Derry NH, my bed was in the middle of then living room. When my mother and stepfather got back together, we moved into a 2 bedroom condo. My sisters shared a room but there was no space for me. In the next home, my bedroom was the unfinished basement where I once nearly died of carbon monoxide poisoning. After my parents lost the home to foreclosure, my next bedroom was an unheard garage. Aside from these, I briefly shared a bedroom with my younger brother.

For these reasons, I was extremely socially awkward and often teased in school. It didn’t help that I was always very tall for my age. So in addition to dressing funny, I also stood out awkwardly.

My stepfather took his financial frustrations out on me as wellbeing was , sometimes in the form of physical abuse.

One time, when I was about 7 or 8 years old, he decided to spank me and my younger sister for fighting in the car. Instead of spanking me he decided to punch my rear end, claiming “you’re too old to be spanked.” It was necessary as spanking was no longer effective, in his mind. He often employed logic like this. In Boston, I had been caught playing with matches. So he lit one under the sink and proceeded to burn a blister into my index finger so that I knew what it would feel like if I burned something or someone.

His apparent resentment of having to take on two kids that were not his own, only intensified once my younger brother was born. I imagine it only further highlighted that I was not his, something his extended family would be sure to remind me in their disparate treatment of me and my half siblings who would be offered to go on trips and fun things with similarly aged cousins. One aunt would slip money to my younger brother, reaching across me to do so, almost as if to make a point. This aunt did this on several occasions until my mother once said something. Needless to say, Ive had extremely poor self esteem throughout my life. This, in turn, resulted in difficulty making and keeping friends.

My mother wasn’t much of a comfort. She too suffered from significant traumas as a child such ask being repeatedly molested by her brother when she was very young. Related or not, she was always very aloof and kept me at arms length, so to speak. I have to imagine that compounding these issues was the fact that I am her ex husbands child and a constant reminder of that period of her life. I was always treated as nuisance and didn’t receive a lot of warmth or positive encouragement from my parents.

When I was ten or eleven years old, my mother sent us on a camping trip with two of her cousins, who I didn’t know very well but one of her cousins had a son about my age who I was friendly with. Over the course of that weekend, however, I was repeatedly molested culminating in a full on “R-word.” I didn’t tell my parents at first. Around this same time, my biological father decided to give up his legal right to parentage after my mom asked for some money to help with football and cheerleading for his kids.

My younger sister and I had started to see him again periodically after I wrote him about how much I wished we could. Even though my time with him as my father was brie, I still felt a lot of heartache, probably exasperated by the anger I received from my stepfather. Whatever else my biological father had been, he was always very kind to me and I longed for that. That side of my family too, from what little I could remember, were much more loving and kind.

I had been taking excessively long showers and running the hot water out. This was a big no no in our house. As a poor family, power usage and and running water were monitored intensively. If you even flushed the toilet unnecessarily, you could expect my stepfather to lose his shit - something he did frequently particularly to me. On this particular evening, my father confronted me and I gave him some pre-teen like snide remarks, so he grabbed me by the collar or my shirt. I had received a necklace with a pewter bald eagle that Christmas and his drip was pinching the necklace and my skin while choking me. Normally I’m very passive and scared of my stepfather, as I had been conditioned to be but on thinking, I too got angry.

Mike saw me balling my fists into the couch while choked me and screamed expletives in my face about how selfish I was. He challenged me to punch him if I wanted to punch him. So I did. He fell completely backward. Although very young, I was big and strong for my age. Mike immediately popped back up and returned the punch to my face. I spent the rest of the evening crying in bed while my mother threatened to send me to live with my father. Their justification to me for how I was treated was that someone else has it worse.

The next day I went to school wearing a turtle neck to hid the marks in my neck. The turtle neck could not, however, disguise the welt on then side of my face. When my teacher saw this, she reported it and child services got involved. They interviewed me and my siblings about the incident, recording the interviews. These were later played for my parents. My mother was so angry at me talking to child services that she didn’t speak or acknowledge me for over two weeks.

When the dust finally settled, I at some point thereafter told my mother about what had happened to my on the camping trip. I didn’t tell her directly. I wrote it on a note and left it on her bed. I had been feeling a lot of guilt and shame about the incident and just wanted it out in the open. As illogical as it sounds, I had this recurring fear that it had been a test set up by my parents to see if I were gay and I failed the test. My mother didn’t respond for a few days, only intensifying those fears.

That is until one afternoon when I arrived home alone from school and my mother finally confronted me about it. Apparently the mother had slipped behind the bed and she hadn’t seen it until changing the linens. We discussed it and, long story short, filed a report resulting in his arrest and ultimate imprisonment. To my parents credit, they continued to push for charges even after her aunt and uncle attempted to settle with a $3000 go away check. Sexual assaults and molestations are common in my mothers side of the family and are typically handled in house. My mother gave me the option and I chose to push forward, creating a rift in what was before a relatively close family, another point in my disfavor. My mother tried to rationalize it by telling everyone it’s because I was so tall for my age. My stepfather wanted to know why I didn’t fight him off (he was in his thirties). Later during therapy we’d realize that I was likely taking such long showers because of the sexual assaults.

There’s more to the story that manifests later especially during high school but I could wrote a novel. Many if the latent issues would manifest themselves in an unhealthy first love. My parents more or less stopped parenting me age 14. Throughout most of high school, I could come and go more or less as I pleased. I often stayed out over friends during school nights. A lifelong athlete to that point, by the end of soohomore year I had quit everything, opting to chase my on again off again girlfriend and a crew of losers around smoking pot. I quickly gained a lot of weight and depression in the process.

Immediately after I graduate, my parents decide to relocate to Manchester NH with my two younger siblings. Their new place did not have space for me. So I crashed on the couch for a week or two until moving out on my own at the age of 18. Fast forward to joining the Army in April 1999, I intentionally escaped and didn’t look back until 2016 when my daughter was born and we settled back down closer to my parents than I had been since I left for the Army. They are now raising my brothers three children because he and their mother both died of fentanyl overdoses within six months of one another.

Many of these issues began to pop up for me after having children. I had never given my childhood much thought or considered it particularly traumatic. If asked, I would not have described it as a particularly happy childhood but only because I can recall so vividly how desperately lonely I get at all times. So much so that I once attempted faux suicide taking a random mix of different prescription pills I found in the cupboard. I didn’t really want to die. I just wanted someone to know that I felt that way.

I’ve done a lot of work on myself over the years. I quit drinking. I’ve gone to talk and CBT therapy, I’ve done the AA steps and gone to meetings to try and find enlightenment there. I excercise and try to meditate. I take an NRSI. I’ve mined all the “why’s” of my being but am ultimately always left with “so now what?”

I believe that my addictive personality and remaining vices can be chalked up to one simple fact: I am unable to be still. I cannot sit and just be with myself. Mediation is ineffective, and doesn’t get to the root of the issue. I’d like to achieve some lasting inner peace so that I can be a more present father and husband, and so that I can stop obsessing over my inner turmoil and focus on being of service to others.