

The Reluctant Host

Claudia Cunningham

“I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt; I fear; I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul.”

-- Jonathan Harker, from
Dracula, by Bram Stoker

I have been granted the gift of life. I have also been granted the gift of free will. So have you.

Talk about a good deal.

I think that, even when we are not consciously aware of it, we remember these gifts and know that they belong to us. Something in our lives may cause us to misconstrue or forget our ownership rights *intellectually*, but somewhere in our “spiritual” memory and even our “cellular” memory, I believe the knowledge endures.

When I think back to my drinking and using days, I know that one of the reasons I found it nearly impossible to conceive of a life without sedatives was that I was in such turmoil all of the time. Active addiction is a lot of work, as anyone who’s had experience with it can tell you. To live in addiction is to live in slavery and fear every minute of every day, with the only break from the job being an occasional departure into unconsciousness.

That’s one of the positive things I can say for alcohol addiction – at least we get a break from all that misery in the form of a blackout once in a while. As alcoholics, we may not be what you’d call “present” to appreciate that break in its fullest sense, of course; but one takes what one can get.

Some of the hardest work for me during the years I was addicted to alcohol and drugs was the work I devoted to keeping a secret from myself. It was such a whale of a secret, after all.

Living in a dark and obscure part of my memory was the awareness that, over the years, I had become enthralled with alcohol and drugs, and especially the freedom and safety that they seemed to provide. In that darkness I knew that I was sacrificing my gifts of life and free will to a belief that was not serving me well; to the belief that drugs and alcohol were necessary to my existence. I knew that the appetites of my addictions were getting bigger every day, and it was becoming clearer all the time that their hunger would never be satisfied. I knew that I could not manage their destructive impulses, and that it would always be my job to apologize (but never be forgiven) for their rampages. It seemed that my whole life was dedicated to their feeding and maintenance, their pacification and concealment. When I wasn’t tending to their appetites or cleaning up their messes, I was making myself sick with worry about the next time I’d have to do so. I knew that the demands of my addictions kept me from somehow being a part of “real life,” but I could not imagine my life without their thrall.

One of the problems with quitting was that an image of myself drug and alcohol free was just so hard to conjure up. On some level I understood that if I didn’t have a drug and alcohol problem, I would probably be expected to take responsibility for myself and define myself in some other, even *more* “exceptional” way. Without my handicaps I would have to be the world’s greatest...er...ah...*something* or other – and that was just too hard to think about.

Besides, a drug and alcohol free life seemed to be out of the question for me; I’d tried being straight thousands of times and it was just plain torture. *God*. How could anybody stand to live without a big, fat buffer between themselves and their feelings? I just didn’t get it.

That I had a problem with drugs and alcohol was no news to me; the experience of my addiction was not, as I say, the “big secret” that I was keeping on myself. The big secret that took so much of my energy to confine was that I had given my gifts of life and free will over to this addiction – this *vampire*, if you will. And that was a fact I really needed to disconnect from.

I can remember downing little palm-fulls of Xanax and juice glasses of straight vodka to blanket the knowledge in my throat and in my stomach, and especially in my heart. Because there was that memory I had, somewhere that spark of knowledge that my life and my will were my own – that they’d been given to *me* - and that I’d surrendered their custody over to something that did not have their best interests at heart.

This vampire was not a good keeper – did not provide the freedom and safety it had promised me, and somehow I couldn’t get my life back from it. It was in charge of everything I did. My free will had dried up. My life was no longer my own.

That felt pretty crappy, I can tell you. But here’s what I figured out later: All of that fear and doubt and eventually despair I felt back then was exactly what I *should* have been feeling, and what’s more – every one of those unpleasant feelings was **on my side**.

My ability to feel when something in my life isn’t working for me is a gift from my designer, engineered and installed to work perfectly on my behalf and to my advantage. I am not designed to turn my sacred gifts of life and free will to a vampire; that’s not what they are made for. They are made to thrive in light and freedom and especially in love, I’m pretty sure. When my spirit finds itself wasting away under the dark thrall and bitterness of a vampire, it is designed to let me know about it.

One of the signals it sends up is that **fear** I was telling you about. Man, I hate that one.

Another one it sends to warn me is **despair** – not exactly my idea of fun, either. One other I’ve noticed that I *really* try hard to swallow and pretend isn’t there, is **rage**.

They’re all healthy warning signals, but the thing about them was that they didn’t *feel* very good. I thought when I got that uncomfortable it meant that I was supposed to find a way to stop the discomfort, or cover it up. And I was certainly willing to try that.

As coincidence would have it, I’d found that alcohol and drugs worked pretty well to muffle a lot of those troublesome signals; thus it seemed like a good idea, at the time, to obtain and consume as much of any kind of tranquilizer that I possibly could. If I’d been thinking of my disease in terms of a vampire that was trying to eat me alive back then, the thought balloon above my head would probably have said something like this:

“Maybe if I give my vampire enough blood on a regular basis, I’ll be able to live with it.”

That was typical vampire-hosting logic, on my part. Since I cannot imagine life without my vampire, then maybe I can figure out a way to live with it – to *manage* it.

That was me, the reluctant (but diligent) host. Only I didn’t know the vampire rules at the time. I didn’t know that a vampire’s appetite is *never* satisfied. I couldn’t see that if I continued to feed it, it would only use me up and suck me dry. I almost had to die before I got that part – and even after that, the vampire was still hungry.

So what has this got to do with our situation, as individuals gifted with life and free will? Only this, I think: Those signals we get from inside, however uncomfortable and not fun they are to experience are there to serve and protect us. The reason that it doesn’t *feel* good for us to give our will and our life over to the service of vampires is that it *isn’t* good for us. And trying to

soothe the vampire is never going work, at least not for very long. It always comes back and bites us again. I think that's why feeding a vampire just feels worse and worse over time - never better.

And it would seem, too, that there is a part of us that isn't about to take this wasteful and self-destructive nonsense of ours sitting down. That part of us – that *inner voice* of ours – is just plain relentless; and I'll tell you something else: It belongs to something stronger and more enduring than any vampire can ever hope to be.

So if we haven't made up our minds to stop feeding our vampires yet, I'm sure it's okay. That inner voice isn't about to give up and go away. It will keep the warnings coming, and might even turn them up a bit, just in case we can't seem to hear them.

Those warnings might not *feel* good, but they *are* good. They come from a part of ourselves that loves us most - that never misses a single action we take, thought we have, or feeling we experience. This part is aware of all our strengths and vulnerabilities, and knows *exactly* what we came here to do. It is the part of us that can always be relied on to tell us the truth. It lives beyond our intellect and our fear, and, once sought, becomes our most dependable help and ally – the compassionate and sure warrior within us, our defender and our guide.

I'm talking about The Slayer, of course. The one inside each of us who knows the difference between right and wrong, between freedom and captivity, and between genuine charity and simply indulging a vampire...the one who's always been there, even when we've tried to bury it, hide from it, or replace it with something else.

We all know our Slayers, don't we? So now it's just a matter of getting to know them better.

Claudia Cunningham is a recovering alcoholic who has been hosting her own personal vampires for most of her life, and is keenly acquainted with their habits, appetites, and protocols. In recovery for over the past 10 years, she has discovered the absolute necessity for clear, unsentimental, and efficient methods for dealing with her vampires, which she has learned from her own experience, and the shared knowledge and experience of others like her. She is currently working on her book, *The Practical Vampire Slayer*. To learn more about her technique, please go to www.practicalvampireslayer.com.*

* Site will be up and running by June 1st, 2006

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