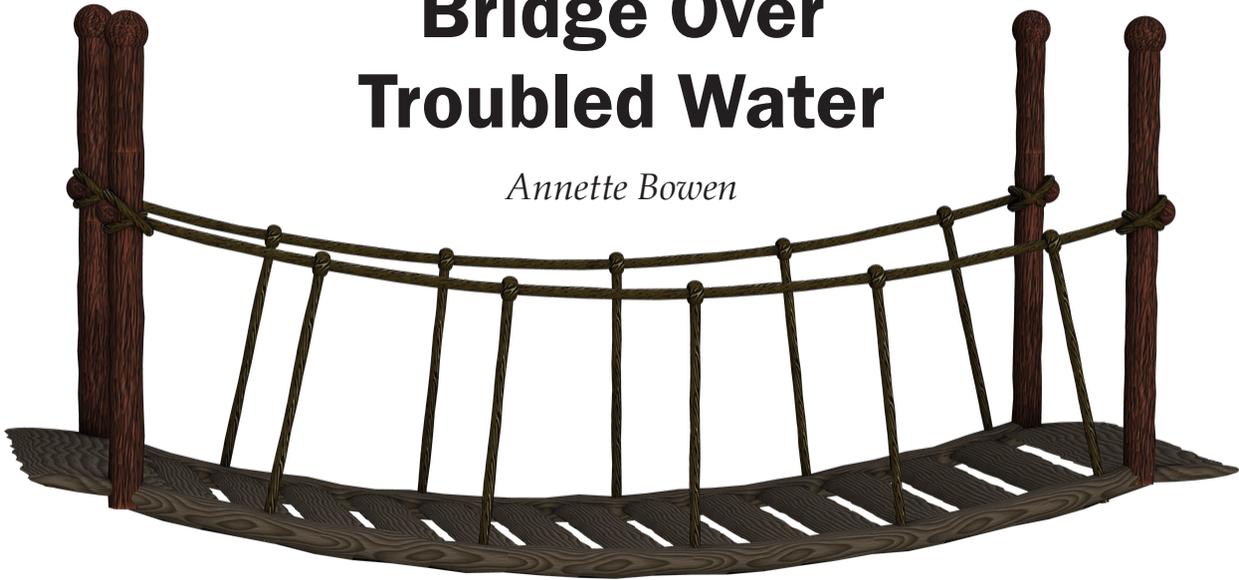


# Bridge Over Troubled Water

Annette Bowen



**BEFORE YOU READ:** Note that obstacles are things that “obstruct or hinder progress.” What are some examples of obstacles in your life?

## Many Obstacles

In my life, I’ve had my share of obstacles, including drugs, alcohol, emotional and physical abuse, and disabilities. It took me years to discover how to remove these obstacles from my life. The process was tedious and painful, but also liberating. I shed a lot of tears. I had to dig deep into my psyche and pull out every monster that haunted my life.

Let me tell you, I had no idea of the hidden obstacles that plagued my existence. For example, my birth parent was an alcoholic, and I was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. My childhood was plagued by severe stuttering and difficulties in school. No one wanted to be my friend because they called me “slow.” Nevertheless, even at a young age, words created a bridge for me. Writing gave me a way out of my suffering.

As an adult, the first obstacle I faced was domestic violence. It was shocking, demeaning, and painful. Then my husband introduced me to crack cocaine. One hit was all it took!

Why did I smoke crack cocaine? I wanted to have some sort of connection to my husband other than him beating me. Over time, I divorced him, but the crack remained. For 10 years, I chased one rock after another, trying to relive that first “hit.” The ramifications of addiction not only hurt me, but my kids as well. At one point, I was homeless and addicted with two teens.

## Opening My Mind’s Eye

To deal with addiction and abuse, I had to *open up my “mind’s eye.”* Yes, your physical eyes enable you to see the world around you; your “mind’s eye” taps into your head. The process of using your “mind’s eye” requires time. You have to be willing to challenge what is hurting you inside.

I’m proud to say I’ve been crack-free for 30 years. How did I get clean? I was sitting in the back of a police vehicle. A young police officer reprimanded me so harshly, and my mind just snapped. For the first time, I looked in the mirror and saw my own empty eyes and sunken skin. The exact words from my lips to God’s ears: “Lord, if you take the taste of crack away from me this day, I won’t smoke again.” So, here I

am—crack free 30 years later. Never doubt your strength.

After I got off crack, I had to repair the damage I had done to my son and daughter. They deserved so much better from me. But our relationship was severely fractured. Here were two intelligent young people who had watched their mother waste away chasing crack. Where should I begin?

First, I apologized. I didn't *sugarcoat* anything. How could I? They had seen me at my worst. Next, I backed up my talk. I stayed clean. Then, I got a job. I became a functioning adult. I paid my bills and provided for the two people most important in my life.

Moving on from domestic violence was harder. This was a generational curse that had to be broken. Domestic abuse flowed through my families' bloodline *like Niagra Falls*. My dad beat my mom, and my mom beat me. As the oldest, I endured years of mental and physical abuse. Then I got married and started being abused by my husband.

In order to escape this self-imposed prison, I divorced my husband, sold everything I could and moved! Since my son wanted to live with his dad, I dragged my daughter from place to place. One winter, we were in an empty apartment with nothing but heavy plastic. Then we were at a women and children's shelter. That didn't last long, so we moved to my best friend's house. It took a lot of tries, but on my daughter's 16th birthday, I was able to move us into stable housing.

### **Sending Out an S.O.S.**

In all these years of struggle, I spoke with three different therapists, and various psychiatrists wrote me countless prescriptions. I had anxiety and depression. Negative voices inside my head threatened to tear me down at every turn. My self-esteem was at an all-time low. The doctor diagnosed me with "auditory hallucinations." I developed coping mechanisms such as writing, listening to a sound machine, and going to

therapy. These practices amplified my own positive voice and helped to minimize the negative voices. Now, I'm thriving thanks to years of medication and wonderful mental health professionals.

### **Crossing the Bridge...One Step at a Time**

Despite all that I accomplished, doubts crept in. Could I maintain a "normal" existence and not fall back into old habits?

This is what I did: I built an *arc of positive energy*. I developed relationships with people I can trust with my deepest and darkest moments. For instance, a longtime friend of over 25 years has been a constant source of positivity. Between us, there's no topic off limits. Together, we empty out the negativity, and inhale goodness. We call ourselves sisters. She's my confidante and prayer partner.

I keep my "mind's eye" open. I face the things that are haunting me. I talk, write, scream, cry... whatever it takes to empty my brain, silence the noise, and put me back in touch with myself.

This is how I *tackle obstacles*. Head on and with ferocity.

#### **AFTER YOU READ:**

1. The author uses wonderful figurative language. Some of these instances are in *bold italics*. Study some of the phrases. How does she use metaphor and simile to communicate her message?
2. One of the headings uses "S.O.S." Look this up to find out what it means.

Annette Bowen is a former student at Literacy Action in Atlanta, GA. She is a repeat contributor to *The Change Agent*. As an avid reader, Annette loves the power of words. "Writing and reading challenges your mind, calms the storms within and enriches the lives of others."

