

Stories from the Forum magazine: December 2011

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Family gatherings bring back my childhood holiday-time anxieties

Having grown up in an alcoholic home, I carry a good deal of baggage. Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and other family gatherings involved drinking and my parents' alcohol-fueled behavior. As a child, I felt frightened and confused.

I continue to experience anxiety during family celebrations, even though my parents are deceased and I am now in my senior years. Much of the old fear that I had about my parents' out-of-control drinking is now transferred onto my adult children.

I have been attending two Al-Anon meetings a week for the past six years. Utilizing the program's principles has become essential to my living a peaceful and serene life. Nonetheless, the old anxiety returned as I planned a lengthy holiday visit to see my adult children.

Prior to my leaving home, I shared my feelings with my home group, as well as stating my plan of action to remain focused on Al-Anon principles. Group members shared their experience, strength, and hope giving me support and encouragement. By going on-line, I printed a list of meetings in the town that I was visiting. My One Day at a Time (B-6) daily readings kept me mindful of my choice to live according to the Steps and Traditions. The Serenity Prayer and slogans helped me daily to mind my own business. I frequently used "Think" and "Let Go and Let God."

Some of my anticipated concerns regarding family drinking did occur; however, I observed that my reactions have changed. I repeated the first three Steps to myself often, recognizing that I am powerless over the choices family members make. The old anxiety is the "unmanageable" part of my life. Moving on to Step Two, I turned my life over to my Higher Power and asked Him to restore me to sanity. Recalling the first three Steps gave me a sense of peace and comfort. In addition, I did attend a meeting, which was like food for my soul.

Overall, I was surprised that I was able to focus on gratitude and the joy of spending time with my grandchildren. Utilizing the tools of the program gave me the ability to emphasize the positives and let go of the situations that I cannot control. What a blessing I receive from working the Al-Anon program.

By Nathalie D., Georgia
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My spiritual awakening—while worrying about my alcoholic daughter

I had been in Al-Anon for a good number of years when my alcoholic daughter disappeared into the streets of a major western city. For two years, I had no contact with her or anyone who knew her. I felt as though I was completely new to the program as my sense of powerlessness grew.

My life seemed to spiral out of control as I lost my self-focus. My obsession with her grew. I felt more and more detached from my Higher Power, though I prayed for my missing daughter—all for nothing, I thought.

How can I explain what a spiritual awakening is? To me it is that quiet knowledge that some force is allowing me to know or hear something. One day during my meditation, I was feeling a sense of loss, because I did not even know where my daughter was. Suddenly I almost heard, "You don't have to know where she is because I do!"

A few weeks after that, she turned up in jail; from there she went to a halfway house. I wish I could say all is well, but I don't know that for sure. I only know that my Higher Power will restore me to sanity if I can accept my powerlessness over this cunning and baffling disease. I have to live "One Day at a Time" and keep the focus on me.

By Paddy A., Tennessee
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Trusting the process of recovery

My 22-year marriage to a recovering alcoholic has been filled with times of peace and times of great calamity. There have been times when I felt very close to my Higher Power, and times when I wondered if He was there at all.

We recently moved to the spectacular central coast of California, to begin the next chapter of our life. I had to leave friends and family behind. I knew I had to get plugged back into Al-Anon meetings and start connecting to new people. There was a lot of fear and reservation associated with this process. As I learned in Al-Anon, I had to feel the fear and do it anyway. I had to trust the process of recovery.

One sunny Monday morning, I decided I would walk to my meeting by way of the beach. I came across a small river that flowed down from the hills into the ocean. I had my running shoes on and thought if I walked up towards the hill, I could maybe find a place to go around the river without getting wet.

As I walked upstream, the body of water only seemed to get wider, so I decided to walk back towards the ocean to see if there was a spot narrow enough to get over the river. Again, the river never narrowed. Then, it hit me: I was going to have to go through this water to get to the meeting on the other side.

I realized that this was a metaphor for my life. I have always tried to find a way to avoid going through the river of feelings and emotions to get to the freedom on the other side. I was always in search of something or someone to distract me from the feelings. At this realization, I began to cry. I knew that my Higher Power was trying to teach me something.

As I trudged back up the waterline looking for a spot to cross, praying to my Higher Power for guidance, I saw a big log lying in the sand. I thought if I put that log across the river, it would cause some kind of a dam effect that would stop the water flow long enough for me to cross to the other side. Sure enough, it worked and I crossed safely.

This was a huge awareness for me and I was so excited that my Higher Power used this as a tool to teach me—one more time. I made it to the meeting just before it began. It should be no surprise that the topic that day was fear and courage.

Life has its challenges and I am learning to go through the process of recovery to meet those challenges. I also understand today that my Higher Power is with me every step of the way, guiding me along the river and through the river, giving me the courage and strength I need for just that moment. As I reflect back, I know that my Higher Power has always been with me—teaching, prodding, guiding, directing, and loving me with every step and every breath I take. I am grateful to my Higher Power, the fellowship of the program, and the tools that have been so freely given to me.

By Debbie S., California
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