

Stories from the Forum magazine: February 2008

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From anger to serenity: changing myself, understanding others

I came to Al-Anon because I was very angry at a young alcoholic. He is the son of the woman I am dating and he is making her life - and consequently mine - miserable. I wanted to learn how I could change him. I also wanted to understand what his mother was experiencing.

And because I wanted her to be happy, I needed to change her too.

To my surprise, I didn't learn how to cure the alcoholic in our lives. In fact, I was told I had no control over alcoholism. This was a shock. At the very least, a good kick in the pants should work! Not only could I not control his disease, I couldn't control my friend's reactions. What was I doing at this meeting?

Maybe it was the members' warmth and kindness or their insightful comments that kept me coming back. I attended an open A.A. meeting and read the Al-Anon literature. Soon I found myself listening and learning from all the members of the group as I continued to participate.

Over time, my anger toward the alcoholic dissipated and an understanding of his mother's angst evolved. I now realize what has been happening. I was no longer trying to change or control other people. Although I am an unfinished work, I have been changing myself.

Al-Anon helps me with my daily life, whether in work situations, social interactions, or the painful experience of my brother's recent death. What Al-Anon has brought me is a new outlook on life.

As I have worked on my self-improvement, I have also seen my friend improve. Each of us attends a meeting and when we get home, we telephone and discuss the insights we have gained. It is an important element that has led to a loving, supportive relationship.

On this, my first anniversary, I want to say that I admire all of you and I thank you for your thoughts, support, sharing and courage. And yes, as the Suggested Closing says, I have come to love each of you in a very special way.

By John F., Indiana

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At mid-life I found self-knowledge - and recovery

At the age of 18, I got married. Twenty five years later, I got divorced. In those years I moved to a different city, hours from my family, with my new husband; finished college; and had two children. I wanted to start over and have a better life free of the problems associated with the alcoholism and addiction that I grew up with.

I loved my family and I missed them, but I needed to have some distance between the alcoholic and me. I didn't yet understand that the problems and bad feelings I wanted to leave behind were engraved in my heart and soul. I didn't know what to do when these same problems, feelings and fears kept resurfacing over and over again.

My turning point was when I realized that I was recreating the same turmoil for my children that I grew up with as a child. I came to Al-Anon because I wanted to be a better mother, and in the process I became a better person.

Once in the Al-Anon program, I was like a sponge - I wanted more and more. I read every book and subscribed to *The Forum*. I came to understand that alcoholism had permeated my family for generations, that there were valid reasons for my feelings and shortcomings, and that I was responsible for myself and could change and become a happier, more spiritual person. Al-Anon helped with the awareness of my problems and new ways to solve them. I have tools to tackle those problems: attending meetings, listening, and sharing; reading the daily meditations; praying; using the slogans; and talking with my Sponsor and other members.

Today my life is fuller and richer than I ever imagined. I have come full circle. I am more capable of dealing with the everyday problems and the major challenges. Al-Anon has shown how to become a better version of myself. I have returned to my hometown to start a new life on my own - independent and more comfortable with myself, yet connected to my family and friends. I don't regret the past; rather I live in today and look forward to the future.

By Karen H, Kentucky
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How I've changed since my first meeting

I recently celebrated my eighth anniversary in the Al-Anon program, and I'm a very grateful member. I look back at my first meeting and smile, knowing that my Higher Power played a part in getting me there and having me hear just what I needed to hear.

The room was very full of people. I was so sad and afraid. My best friend was with me; we sat in the back row, close to the corner. My head was down and my shoulders were slumped. I was barely able to say my name as everyone went around the room for introductions.

The topic was "Let Go and Let God." My friend and I were amazed. I remember feeling better that day, just being in the room. I kept coming back, wanting to feel even better. I read some Al-Anon literature and found all of my secrets exposed. These people knew everything I had done and loved me anyway.

They knew about my threats to leave the alcoholic, how I poured alcohol down the drain, and how I drank with him so there wouldn't be as much. They knew about my searches in the garage for hidden bottles. I realized that not only was I not alone, but that these strangers understood me and loved me. I kept attending week after week and started feeling much better.

My life has totally changed from that winter eight years ago. I am no longer afraid. I have the strength to take care of myself and my children.

I have faith that things will work out just the way they are supposed to. I will be forever grateful for a room full of strangers at that first meeting and to the Al-Anon program for giving me back my life.

By Diane B., Oregon
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