

# Stories from the Forum magazine: January 2012

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## I came to Al-Anon to help my wife, I came back to help me

I heard the First Step, and not much else, at my first meeting. My wife's treatment program counselor had told me to go to Al-Anon. "If it will help her, I'll do it," I said.

It was all women at that meeting. As I saw it, they all had alcoholic husbands and I had an alcoholic wife—a completely different situation. One man came in a few minutes late. Afterwards, as I was fleeing, he tackled me in the parking lot. He suggested the Wednesday night men's meeting. What kept me coming back was the hour-long conversation with two men in the parking lot afterwards—they listened. On the way home, I realized it was the first time anyone had listened to me without telling me what to do. We eventually became life-long friends.

I quickly settled into several meetings and found a home group that had many men in attendance. A long-timer said that I should make coffee. I said, "Someone already has." She replied, "I meant for October, November, and December." I am still unsure if that was a suggestion. My over-developed need to please got me there every week, which was the whole idea.

After a while, my name appeared on the calendar to speak at the meeting. I asked the person next to me what I should talk about. "Serenity," he said. "I don't think I have any," I replied. "Talk about how you lost it," he said. It is so nice to have choices!

Soon, my young children began attending Alateen and our behavior started to change. After several years in Al-Anon, I sensed the universality of the program while listening to a young woman tell her story at an anniversary meeting.

I don't recall if she was the A.A. or Al-Anon speaker, but she qualified for both. At the time, I was a mid-50s white male raising two daughters. She was a 25-year old African-American woman who was bisexual, cross-addicted, and a dual member.

Our stories were very different, but the feelings that led her to what she did were the same feelings that led me to do what I did. It was clear to me that our lives had put us on different paths with a common destination—recovery.

After 25 years in the program, I noticed the Preface to *Courage to Change* (B-16) and I quote, "Because these selections are based on sharings from individuals, they contain references to gender and specific relationships, but the thoughts are applicable to people in all walks of life."

Al-Anon helps me make sense of the changes in my life. Being with other Al-Anon members helps me realize I am not alone. We are going through the same kinds of changes—and we are doing it together.

By Michael H., New York  
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## Husband's relapse posed spiritual challenge

Even in the midst of storms in our lives, I have come to realize that my Higher Power gives me refuge and provides serenity. All I need to do is ask for help, be aware, and listen for a reply.

Recently, my husband relapsed while we were visiting our daughter out-of-state. We missed our flight home because this disease was in full tornado mode. After changing our flight and eating the fee, we were waiting at the gate to board our plane.

The storm was at a steady downpour at this moment, with sharp words and comments from both sides. My mind went into a tailspin, not knowing what else to do to stop the storm from escalating. It was then I remembered, I had choices and I could do something.

I removed myself to a quieter area of the terminal and reached out to my Sponsor by telephone. Her calming words were like an umbrella sheltering me from the storm. And her laughter, even in the midst of my turmoil, wrapped my shaking, cold body in a hug. I started to calm down and actually felt my heart beating in a more normal state. When I hung up with her, I followed her guidance and began to seek refuge from the subsiding storm by praying to my Higher Power.

My primary thought was Step One and how so very powerless I was. After 16 years in Al-Anon, I had never felt the depths of powerlessness quite like this before. Could it be because my husband had just finished an amazing 30-day inpatient rehab just prior to us vacationing with our daughter, and he already relapsed again? Could it be that I was questioning our 34 years of marriage? Could it be that I was so very, very tired and didn't know how I could go on doing the same thing over and over?

My life certainly was unmanageable! For goodness sake, I was sitting in an airport terminal with tears streaming down my face, feeling the storm starting to escalate again, not even knowing what to do next.

But I did know what to do next. I closed my eyes, bowed my head, and once again talked to my Higher Power—this time truly admitting how very powerless I was over this disease and how my life had become unmanageable. I said that I was truly surrendering and asked my Higher Power to let me know He was there for me.

I kept saying over and over, "I am powerless, I am powerless, I am so very powerless," all the while praying for my Higher Power to show me that He was with me. Then the most amazing thing happened. As I felt my breathing calm down, I opened my eyes, and the first thing I saw was a huge advertisement on the wall of the airport with an inscription that said, in capital letters, "I AM POWERFUL!"

I smiled and felt the storm subside as the inner calm of my Higher Power's words were there before my very eyes, letting me know that I may be powerless, but there is One that is powerful and will help me find serenity, even in the midst of the storm! I snapped a photograph of that advertisement, and keep it in my journal to this day, letting me know that my Higher Power is, oh, so very powerful!

By Denise P., New Jersey  
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## Overcoming grief, despair, and anger—a father's tale

I did not come to Al-Anon willingly. I was, after all, too worldly, too well educated, and far too experienced to require help from anybody. My grief and despair for a son caught up in the disease of alcoholism and drug abuse persisted despite all my efforts to cure him or to have him cured. Such were the actions I believed a responsible parent was supposed to perform in our society. I expected him to stop. His conduct was contrary to those I believed to be the hallmarks of our "class." Yet he persisted.

My despair did not sustain me. My grief did not sustain me. Neither did my eventual anger at alcoholism, drug abuse, drug dealers, and purveyors of alcoholic beverages, educators, his friends and acquaintances sustain me; nor did any other person, place or thing, including me, that I could remotely associate or blame for his condition. And so, as Al-Anon has pointed out, I became frustrated and angry.

The first lesson I received from Al-Anon, and for which I am eternally grateful, was the knowledge that I was not alone. We seem to live in a society in which we compete with each other to be more popular; have more toys; dress better; have a better job; be more athletic or handsome—to be "more." Consequently, there exists an emotional distance between each of us because we are competitors.

Our institutions pander to this need to feel superior to our neighbor. It is reflected in our advertising, our entertainment, the things we eat, wear, and read, our homes, cars, working environments, even our friends and acquaintances.

To me, at the time, Al-Anon seemed to be suggesting that there was a simpler way to live and that this simpler way was a better way; one in which I could accept the support of my fellows un-constricted by the notion that I was losing some obscure competitive advantage.

The people I met in Al-Anon seemed to be better able to deal with the uncertainty, pain, and despair in their lives than I was. I wanted to be a part of that. I also discovered that the social status in the larger community in which we all resided meant not a whit to any of my new Al-Anon brothers and sisters. I was, at that time, confounded that the concept of "class" was not even a remote consideration within the Al-Anon community; that everyone had the same social status, rendering the concept of "social status," and all its baggage, moot.

Knowing that I was in a group of people who were experiencing the same grief and despair I was experiencing somehow nourished my soul in a way I had never experienced. When I finally worked up the courage to share my experience - to tell my story - (I didn't have any "strength" or "hope" yet) with the group, I was surprised at the reaction. It took courage for me to admit to what I saw as my failings to be a good parent to these relative strangers.

In the larger community, I felt that my worth as a parent would be measured against the result: my son was an alcoholic; therefore I was a bad parent. What I got in Al-Anon instead was understanding and support. What I did not get was judgment.

I think we all realize that the larger society in which we live is one in which we are constantly engaged in measuring others and ourselves against some standard. One of the many beauties of Al-Anon is that it subscribes to neither the standard nor the measurement. In the Al-Anon community, we ask only that we keep each other's secrets, accept life on life's terms, and follow the dictates of our hearts as expressed by what we have come to know as our Higher Power.

What a blessed way to live!

By Andy H.  
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