

## One Alateen conference changed my life

I didn't believe it when my mother first told me she was an alcoholic. My image of an "alcoholic" was an old man stumbling down the road in dirty clothes with a brown bag covering a bottle of something in his hand—the town drunk.

My mom told me she was going to A.A. One day, she approached me and said there was a place where teenagers could meet called Alateen. She asked if I wanted to go. I said "no."

One day my mom walked up to me and said, "I got you a scholarship to an Alateen conference and you're going. I don't know if you need a break from me or I need a break from you, but you're going!"

After packing, my mother drove me to a church and escorted me to a room in the basement. She gave me a hug and a look of reassurance. "You'll be alright!" she said and left.

In the room, I saw kids talking and smiling. Then it was time to start the meeting. Scared, I sat in a chair with a pole between these people and me, just in case something happened.

I found myself thinking these people were a little strange, and I really couldn't grasp the language they were all speaking. After the meeting, we held hands, said a prayer, and put away our chairs.

I didn't say much because I felt nervous. Everyone seemed very kind and acted pleasant to each other and to me.

When we arrived at the member's house, each of us was given our own bed. Mine was really comfortable, and I felt more relaxed. I slept well, and morning came quickly.

At the convention the next morning we sang songs and heard stories about "cold pricklies" and "warm fuzzies."

There were different meetings we could choose to attend. It was my choice—no one told me what I had to do. That weekend, I got a crash course in Alateen.

I made tons of friends, felt safe, talked to peers who had the same problems, and found out that I was not alone. Until then I had been isolating myself from the world. I learned so much about alcoholism.

After the closing meeting, hugs were given, t-shirts were signed, and phone numbers were exchanged. A lot of weight was lifted. Many long-lasting friendships were made.

I felt exhausted and exhilarated at the same time. Hope was not lost. It had just begun.

By Lorraine, New York

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