

## Conquering the spiritual disease of fear

The first time I had heard of Al-Anon was when I met my mother-in-law. She babbled on about how great a program it was and how it saved her life. Considering my background, it was absolutely mind boggling that I had no idea that alcohol could be such a problem in people's lives that they had a program for it.

My mom was just 18 years old when I was born. At 16, she married a man with an inclination to smoke pot, drink, and try to flush her head down the toilet. They were divorced by the time I was one year old. When she began to raise her two children alone, she had a bad accent and the equivalent of a high school education.

She soon fell in love with the man who became her second husband. He drank, smoked, snorted cocaine, and sold drugs. My stepfather would have liked it better if I hadn't been around. I can remember several occasions when they took me to parties where—instead of a potluck table—there would be all sorts of colored pills, bottles of liquor, cocaine on mirrors, and clouds of pot smoke wafting from room to room. I was the lucky one who held my mother's hair back while she vomited her guts out in the bathroom.

As I got older, I swore I would never put myself in that position—wasted and out of control. My first boyfriend was an alcoholic drug addict. My second was, too. My third was 24 years older than I am. And then I met my husband. He actually had the good sense to tell me he was an addict. I didn't listen. I had never known anything else.

I entered the Al-Anon program at the advice of a therapist about four years into our marriage. I thought I was going to learn about my husband's behavior and how to handle it. I worked through the Steps with a Sponsor, but I really didn't understand that my life was unmanageable because of my disease. I just thought I attracted "jerks."

When I moved two years later, I worked the Steps again with another Sponsor. This time I learned that I could be controlling. But my husband was using again, and didn't that make him the biggest jerk of all?

It wasn't until December of last year that I hit bottom. I was severely depressed. I thought killing myself was the answer. I truly thought that my three sons would be better off without me, that I was teaching the younger ones bad habits, and that I was making the older one miserable. My husband, then sober, asked me to postpone killing myself until I had worked the Steps with a particular Sponsor. I agreed, and my life changed.

What I learned was that I have a disease that is just as detrimental to my health and well-being as alcoholism or drug addiction. I suffer from the spiritual disease of fear. When my disease is in control of my life, I am spiritually sick; and my behavior is bad. I am resentful and feel like I'm a victim.

On the other hand, my attitude brings serenity into my life when I focus on spiritual principles: acceptance, open-mindedness, honesty, love, forgiveness, harmony, faith, hope, light, and joy.

I oscillate between living in fear and living in the solution. Today I am quicker to become aware of my diseased thinking and gently place myself back into the hands of God.

Today I am able to admit it when I am at fault and make amends for my behavior. I am able to pray for God's will for me and the power to carry that out. I am able to pass on what I have learned to someone else who is living in fear.

My father, ex-stepfather, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband are all alcoholics. What I have learned from Al-Anon is that any problem I have with them is the result of my diseased thinking, not their behavior. I can now clearly see the separation between me, my disease, and the rest of the world. I owe my life Al-Anon and all the members who help to keep me free from the spiritual disease of fear.

By P.A.M., Wyoming

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