

*Experience, strength and hope from Al-Anon members for times when you can't get to an Al-Anon group*

Dear Loners

July 2019

This month Elmien shares a talk she gave to our group in April..... I overcame being irritable and unreasonable...

My non-conference approved famous quote comes from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. "Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice. Alice followed the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole, but it was his world, not hers. It was strange and unpredictable, and she was changed in many ways that she could not foresee.

Every time I listen to our preamble, I'm reminded that I have not been untouched by living in the strange world of alcoholism. This made Step One really easy for me. My life has become unmanageable. Not only by the unpredictability and all the other craziness inflicted upon me by a partner who was either inebriated or single mindedly focused on becoming so, but even more so, by the changes in me. For today, it being April, I'm elaborating on an Honest and Fearless Step Four inventory on "irritable and unreasonable" Both of which I plead guilty to.

I'm giving a short description of my life before I went down the rabbit hole and this dreaded family disease got a grip on my sanity. Although life as an artist is always unpredictable, I had a laid-back attitude towards life. I did my share, reaped my rewards and saved up for a rainy day. I fell asleep as my head hit the pillow at night and I most definitely did not sweat the small stuff. People who knew me described me as happy-go-lucky, free spirited and I was nicknamed Tigger for my care-free attitude and bouncy enthusiasm. It is ironic that these were the exact traits that attracted my qualifier to me.

And then I got sucked into the madness. I lost control over my schedule, my household, the mood in my living space. The freedom of movement that was now determined by the availability of alcohol and the appropriateness of being sober or not at any occasion. We often stayed home, or left gatherings early when I would have loved to stay, because drinking at home was safe, no driving nor judgement. In my insanity I thought it was because my qualifier is introverted. I lost control over who I could see and how often I could see them, and I became more and more isolated.

In response, I sought control over any little thing I could. About what goes into the shopping cart!!!!. What goes into the food!!!!. Which days the garden and house get cleaned. Where every little thing's proper place is. I would get upset if the itinerary was changed by 5 minutes..... To a different restaurant than what we have planned. If we said soup, I don't want pasta, and the other way around. And irritable. Don't interrupt me while I'm reading, baking, typing, dressing, gardening, sewing, thinking... And don't make me listen to any music other than Mozart's piano concertos, and I'll determine the volume. Oh, I can go on, I'm sure many of you have your own lists...I needed a wake-up call. I got two, one to tell me something was seriously wrong, and another to tell me exactly what that wrong was.

The first wake-up call came when I went away on a weekend with my family and my husband did not go along. I was a completely different person also known as my old self. The lightbulb realisation was that I'm only crazy in my qualifier's presence. The second lightbulb realisation came in many flashes as I read *How Al-Anon Works* [B22]. I'm not the only one, the parts of me that I didn't recognise were experienced by many other people and the one thing we all had in common, was an alcoholic in our lives.

This is confirmed to me so often, when I hear others share the exact same thing that I experienced. How they hardly recognise themselves, saying that they are shouting and screaming and hating themselves for doing that because they know better. And yet they do it. And realising that shouting and screaming doesn't solve the hopelessness or the helplessness.

And yet they do it... And here begins the hope. Now that I know what went wrong, I can start fixing me.

My first realisation from this new knowledge was that being controlling is a symptom of my insanity, rather than a cure for an impossibly difficult situation. So, I let go of controlling the little things that have no significance. If the food tastes terrible, I don't have to eat it and I won't die skipping a meal or eating an apple instead. We have a slogan for that: *"how important is it?"* Not sweating the small stuff was once a lifestyle that I did not need to think about. Now it is a discipline, I catch myself reacting to an unimportant thing and must apologise, mainly to myself, because that is not honouring my authentic self.

I have learned not to argue with drunk. It will escalate. Everybody will shout and then shout louder. The frustration will become unbearable. And I will hate myself for doing that. And no point will have been made or remembered a day later. This was a huge part of my insanity and I am happy to say that it no longer has a hold over me. Another wisdom comes from our closing. 'You do not have to agree with everything said here today. Take what you want and leave the rest.' This applies to life in general, and especially to this insane world of alcohol. Not everything is meant for me, even though it is aimed at me. I can choose to respond to anything thrown at me by evaluating the motive for it being thrown. I have learned that a person with a muddled mind might choose to try to hurt me to feel better about themselves, or to make me shut-up or simply just to change the topic. I have learned that drunken speech is not my concern and should be ignored for what it is.

I have learned not to take offense, just for it being offered. Taking offense is a choice, and I choose not to. If I offered meat to a vegetarian, would they accept it? Or a peanut butter sandwich to someone with a nut allergy, would they take it? If someone gives offense, do you take it? I don't need to make all the decisions. We have a slogan for that: *"live and let live"*. Although we are married, we are not Siamese twins, we don't have to go everywhere together. We don't have to like all the same things, places, people, music, food. And sometimes I can just compromise and maybe have a good time with something that is not my first choice. Who knew? I have to keep telling myself that my journey is mine alone and I'm responsible for my attitude towards all my experiences. This I can control, but it does not come as easy as before. There is no switch for undoing the past, but it is up to me how much I will let it control me. Another slogan comes to mind, *"progress not perfection"*. I have learned to be kind to myself, my recovery will run at a speed that I am comfortable with.

I can report back that my close family members are happy to see that I'm still the "cool aunt" and that Tigger has not been completely scared out of me. I have found my voice again. Occasionally I laugh with my whole heart and soul. I have learned to be in the present and truly appreciate the wonderful moments. When I'm down in my garden with my cats, my mind is there also, not chasing the anxieties that can so easily dominate my thoughts. I can once again offer my free-spirited perspectives on other people's problems, now that I can see past some of my own. A final thought, now, when I'm irritated, it is because someone or something is truly irritating. And if you find me unreasonable, it is because your counter argument is completely lacking valid points!

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