

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

September 2022

Dear Loners

In this month's Loners' Letter, Kay explains how sharing her story and hearing other Al-Anon members share their experience, strength and hope has helped to transform her life.

When I first joined Al-Anon, I came in expecting to find all the answers and all the cures to help me help my husband get sober. The last thing I thought about was me, but I very quickly learnt that this programme is about helping me to find my serenity by improving myself and my own attitude. By following the Al-Anon programme, I try to do this as much as possible.

When I first came into the rooms, I could not share without bursting into tears and going through loads of tissues. I felt hurt, lost, angry and desperate for help. Sitting there I listened to other people's shares; however I was eager to tell my own story so that I could get advice. It took me several meetings before I realised that we are to share our stories, experiences, strength, and hope and not to expect to get any direct advice back. By sharing as the programme teaches us, to talk as "I" instead of "we", I learnt to look at myself and not to generalise for the group.

I also used to try and help people finish their sentences and chip in where I thought I was helping. (This is a huge weakness of mine, which I must work on in my everyday relationships.) I quickly learnt that it was not helpful as it caused people to get distracted and lose their train of thought. I learnt that I needed to listen and to let them finish sharing before I spoke.

Listening is also a weakness of mine; my brain is racing full steam ahead while the person I am listening to has only started on their first sentence. I try hard to concentrate on the rest of the share but once I feel I want to say something, I sometimes struggle and then lose my own train of thought if I do not write it down. In meetings it is really helpful for me to have a pen and book to write down things I hear and want to respond to, but in everyday life, the pen and book are not to hand. My brain is like a sieve these days and I normally forget what I want to say or I am not able to express myself.

This problem of not being able to express myself properly has caused many a rift in my married life and in other relationships. I know what I want to say but it comes out all wrong when I speak, only to upset the other person, and then I regret having said anything in the first place. Or sometimes the person does not get what I am trying to express and reads something else into what I am saying. In the past, I used to not want to talk about a specific issue or something that had happened in order to avoid conflict. In some situations it helped but in others it only caused a build-up of anger and frustration in me and this affected my own serenity.

I have learnt that to try and communicate what I am feeling is better than accusing someone of doing something. Now I say: "I feel that by you doing X or doing Y, it really hurts my feelings..." instead of accusing them by saying ... "You do X and you do Y and it upsets me."

Listening to everyone's shares at the meetings always gives me something to take home. Some bit of inspiration or encouragement to try something different to see if it could help me in my situation as it had helped someone else. Not everything works, but a great deal of it has worked and still works today.

(Suggested reading in *Courage to Change* [B16] pg 131)

What I really appreciate about our Al-Anon family group is that I can relate to other members. When I share, they understand me and what I am going through and vice versa. It is so difficult to share with someone, a friend or family member for example, who does not have an alcoholic or addict in their life. They have no idea what I have been through and still go through. By sharing in these rooms, I feel safe, and I know that what I say stays in the rooms and does not get gossiped about with others.

When compiling a share for our group, it makes me make time for myself to think about what I am going to talk about. When I start typing to get thoughts on paper, it takes me on a journey of discovery. It helps me to read more literature and benefits me more than anything else in the long run. I was very reluctant to produce a piece to share on when I first joined our group, as it felt quite nerve wracking and I was aware how emotional I can sometimes get when sharing. I did not want to embarrass myself. I have now come to believe that it can encourage others and it helps me to grow and reflect on myself.

(Suggested reading in *Courage to Change* [B16] pg. 116)

Since joining the programme I have found receiving calls or messages from other members very helpful. I have received love, support, and encouragement during the difficult times that I have been through and I am so grateful. I have never received judgement or criticism. I know what it feels like to want to speak to someone but being too afraid to pick up the phone. I now reach out to others and make my phone number available for calls as this benefits them as well as me. I give others my ear and listen to them, and then share my experience, strength and hope with them. Knowing that there is always someone there to help, love and encourage, makes the world of difference to me.

Sharing with my Higher Power and laying my burdens at His feet has helped me to get through many tough times. Trusting Him to give me strength, courage and guidance for what I am going through and to help me make the right decisions, keeps me sane and provides inner peace. If I kept worrying about everything, it would literally drive me insane. I am always sharing my concerns with my Higher Power and asking Him to take up my burdens and then trusting that He will always help me. No, it is not always that easy and yes, I tend to pick up some of the burdens again. But I keep on praying and keep giving them back and keeping the faith, trusting Him to carry them for me.

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Thank you Kay, for explaining how the process of sharing with other Al-Anon members has helped you to grow and learn, and how leaning on your Higher Power sustains you and keeps you going in times of trouble. We are all empowered by sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other.

Tradition Seven: Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions. Al-Anon is operating under financial constraints and we appeal to all Al-Anon members to contribute towards our operating expenses so that we can continue to provide help to the friends and relatives of alcoholics. Our banking details are below.

Best wishes

Clare

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Branch code 632 005. Please use your **name** or **group** as the reference.

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