


Al-Anon Family Groups
Help and hope for families

Gauteng & Districts

Loners' Letter

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

Dear Loners

November 2021

Thank you, Madge, for sending me this long personal share on **Concept Twelve, The General Warranties of the Conference**

I'm the adult child of an alcoholic also, the sister of a very addictive person; was married to a sex addict; this program relates to a whole lot of things. When I came to this program, I was very clever. My intellect got me a very firm seat in this fellowship. I thought I knew everything, I just needed to try harder. What I like about the program is the gentleness and love, the way people related to me and that I know now that I wasn't alone. That people here really understood alcoholism and its ugliness, and what it causes in me. I wasn't born the way I became and a lot of it was defensive, argumentative, explaining my life away and defending myself the whole time.

So, I grew up, my father was an alcoholic, I am one of five siblings (the youngest) and got classified the dumbest (because of my age). I got bullied by my older sister. I think I was a baby she didn't like; I took up all her space or all her sunshine. She kept me on high alert for the rest of my life until she left home. So, that brought up a lot of things for me. When we are affected by alcoholism, we are anxious, obsessive, we feel guilty about everything, angry for everything and we deny what hurts and we don't even know where it comes from. In the preamble it says we become unreasonable and irritable without knowing why.

Today I'm going to talk about a topic called the **General Warranties of Conference**. Now it is actually related to Al-Anon service, but I'm making it personal for my life and why it's important for me because Al-Anon is the school where I learned the life skills I didn't learn growing up with alcoholism.

So, Warranty One is all about money. **"That only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle..."** from *Reaching for Personal Freedom* [P92] page 168

My father was very stingy, and my mother was very generous, so I saw both sides of the coin. I didn't see a something nice in the middle. Money is very important. And it's not to be rich necessarily, it's to have enough to be comfortable, so it gives an emotional comfort that makes me operate calmly. In Al-Anon I learned, if we're HUNGRY, ANGRY, LONELY OR TIRED (HALT), all those things can cause us to act out our character defects. Now if you don't have money, you can be hungry, or you don't have a house, don't have a car, don't have means to find a job or whatever the case may be. So, money is very important.

I grew up with this principle of having ample funds and a prudent reserve and not having too much debt. I understood that before I came into the program. But when I got divorced from my Ex-husband, he said to me one thing... He said, 'You are so good at what you're doing, you don't need my money. And if you would just work the way you should work you would never need my money.' And I think subconsciously that day.....I decided I'll show you! That day will not come until these kids are out of school'.

And I actually shot myself in the foot. I only realised it about two years ago, that I was actually shooting myself in the foot. My need for being right was stronger than my need to be happy.

Now what does a warranty mean? It's a guarantee. It's a safety net. But me as an adult child, I don't like rules, and if you call it warranties and you write numbered points in a way like this, it looks to me like rules, man. I finally had to learn that if I start being obedient, making sense out of these things, then my life starts becoming easier. So, what are my character defects in not applying these things? It's procrastination, being a victim and self-sabotage... When I came into the program and I heard '*Let go and let God*' I thought it meant that He's going to bring me food, provide for me. I spent four years into recovery until my sponsor said to me 'Girlie, you need to stop it.' But I've learned a few things... like... I don't have to always work under pressure. I can work in a more constant basis. I can be more consistent, I can be more reliable, I don't have to do it all at once, and I can only do what I can do in a day, and that's how I softened this whole thing for myself, and it's now a cushion. If I have ample reserve (which is pension funds and medical aid), if I have enough money for three months to cover myself, then I'm in a safer space. I have to work on it constantly. I like my new way of living. It does still create chaos in my life. If I don't work consistently, I become that person who has no money for three days then I get loads again and that kind of thing. It's really sounds like it's all about money, but it's not. I don't feel emotionally well if I am uncomfortable in my bank. And it doesn't need to be overflowing. That's what it says. A prudent fund. What we do in Al-Anon is we pay our debts, and we give the rest over to Al-Anon to do the work necessary for the fellowship to grow.

Warranty Two, **that no conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members.** from *Reaching for Personal Freedom* [P92] page 168

Now growing up, I saw my brother as a god. When he said I'm stupid, I'm stupid! When he says I'm good, I'm good! One day he called me a 'slapgat' which means a person who doesn't like to work, and five minutes later he offered me a job in Joburg at R60 000 a month to come back to Joburg while I was still living in Cape Town. Now that's the kind of things... I believed both. How can you offer somebody who doesn't work a R60 000 a month salary? It's not right. And then I started learning that I am not qualified over other members, other members aren't qualified over me, even if it sounds like it... I remember when I came back from Cape Town to Joburg and I started confronting my brother, I lost that fear of his authority over me. I learned about principles above personalities. He is not my authority, and I am no one else's. In our house violence was permitted even if I just didn't like what you said. My fear for violence has often caused me to stay silent or people please. Violence was also berating, screaming, belittling and the likes. Now I know what comes out of another's mouth, even if it is about me says more about them than it does about me.

The Third Warranty, **'That all decisions be reached by discussion vote and wherever possible by unanimity'**. from *Reaching for Personal Freedom* [P92] page 168

Now that's not how I grew up. I grew up with dictatorship. I grew up with the oldest as the boss, I grew up with not having a say or think or feel too much about anything. And when I was first in Al-Anon and they would discuss everything at length. They bored the heck out of me to be very, very honest. But as I kept coming back and sat in more meetings, I realised how nice it is to hear everybody's opinions and when everybody has opinions, we come to a conclusion I could never think up by myself. I learned that I could change my mind if new information comes up and I agree with that more than my original thoughts.

And 3 of us and 10 of us and 12 of us and 15 of us have got much more insight into one thing than I have. It is so nice to listen to discussions and I don't even get irritated any more if someone disagrees with me or agrees with me. My sponsor said to me, 'When you have a teenager, they don't have to do anything with a smile on their face.' And that was me. I was that person who said no straight away... or yes.

I couldn't just sit and listen and decide and think. This is also part of emotional maturity... of actually listening to other people, enjoying the banter, spending that time...

You know, in our house, everything had to be done so quickly that often it felt like I was missed in the whole situation. And by this discussion we actually gave each other so much attention just by listening to them and hearing them. I told my son he must go for a computer course because I thought he was very good at computers. He defied me completely. It cost me R1800 a term already on top of R8 000 a month for a good school and a good boarding school. I felt he did this to me. Eventually I realised he wasn't going to the classes, and what did I gain? I did not listen to him when we had the discussion cause I thought I knew better. And when I moved from Joburg to Cape Town, I didn't discuss anything with my children. Me and my ex-husband decided we're going to move and make a break and we went. And my son was very unhappy after a while. He said, "You know mummy, when you took me out in Grade six and... you know Grade 7 is when you become prefects. In Grade six everybody has got friends already." But when I moved back to Joburg I didn't make the same mistake. I put them down and said, "Okay Cam, you and Sacs, Shanny you don't have a choice you're 12 years old, you're coming with me. But you can decide what you want to do when we get there. Cam, you're in Cape Town, do you want to come home? He said, "Mommy I want to stay." I said "Okay. I'm going to see you less..." and so on and so forth. But they were in agreement. When we have unanimity, we move in a group. Even though we were separated we moved without the emotional stuff that comes when people don't agree when I force myself on them, and we discussed every single thing. And it was nice! Today I can say I have a good relationship with my kids. We discuss everything. We discuss money, we discuss budgets, emotions, relationships anything.

The Fourth Warranty, "**That no conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy.**" from *Reaching for Personal Freedom* [P92] page 168

I'll give you a fight between my mother and my brother. My brother asked my mother, "Please can you find out a price for tyres for me." So, my mother got the price for example R1300. My brother independently didn't trust my mother so went for another price, say R1250. When I got to the two of them, they were calling each other 'stupid' and 'why are you lying to me' and 'why this' and 'why that' and 'why the other'. And I sat there with my Al-Anonese, and I said, 'what tyres are you going to get. What about the tyres which tyre are you going to get? And I realised that's the way we fought. It could never stay with the tyres! Why do we get personal when we fight? And Al-Anon taught me when I'm fighting, I don't attack the person, I attack the problem. Then it becomes 'us versus the problem' compared to 'me versus you'. And that has been helpful in businesses, in my private life, when I got divorced, with my ex-husband to sort out things that I never attacked him personally ever again. I wanted to! I could say that to my sponsor. But he could just see the best side of me. And thank God for my sponsor that let me rant and rave in her ear so I can be nice to the people.

The Fifth Warranty, “**That though the Conference serves Al-Anon it shall never perform any act of government; and that like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.**” from *Reaching for Personal Freedom* [P92] page 168

So how did I grow up? Everybody had a status. My granny was one of those people, that if you didn't have a status, she would give you a status. If you weren't a doctor or a dominee or something you were that one's wife, husband, auntie, or something like that. Everybody had a status. But I thought I was either better than somebody or worse than somebody.

I couldn't understand the concept of humility that everybody is the same and that we all struggle with this thing called humanness and once I started accepting that, I could listen to anybody. This concept also puts in place that we don't need to know each other's surnames, we don't need to know what work we do when we come to this program. Actually, in real life I don't ever ask someone where they come from, what work they do or anything like that anymore because I realise it's just a bunch of nonsense. It just makes me think like my Ouma did in terms of status and nonsense. And also, even more so, what I did and didn't do wrong in my life. I don't even judge people. They can tell me the horrific stories; worse than mine, better than mine... I just see us all being human. That is what these warranties have done for me. It's given me the emotional safety net - a soft place to land but only when I decide to be obedient to these unenforceable warranties that will warranty myself to be emotionally safer than I was when I grew up. And I can now stand away from anything else and just *Let Go and let God. And Live and Let Live.* Thanks guys.

The loner committee welcomes all share for consideration in our newsletter. Please send to the office. If you would like to attend an online meeting, please go to our websites www.alanongauteng.co.za or www.alanon.org.za to find contact details for online meetings. Tradition Seven: Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions. Although we are under lockdown our office expenses still need to be paid. If you are able to help our bank details are below.

Stay Safe, Juliet

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