

Loners' Letter *Gauteng & Districts*

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

July 2023

Dear Loners

This month we hear from an Al-Anon member who shares how working through Step Five has helped her to understand herself better and to soothe some of her emotional wounds.

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*Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

One of the things that scared me about this step was the emphasis on what we have done wrong and how bad we have been. I know we are asked to list our good points as well to lighten things up, but essentially it's about the exact nature of our wrongs. How mean, spiteful and destructive we have been. It's not hard to recall all that stuff but not comfortable either. So where and how do we begin?

First, I think it's important to cut ourselves some slack. I have done stuff I feel awful about and I have spent decades feeling deeply guilty about things I did. I left three of my kids and spent the rest of my life feeling guilty and suppressing my grief and loss by being tough, being the adult, getting stuff done and not letting on about the constant pain in my heart.

Carrying that burden of guilt on my shoulders may have been part of my Judeo-Christian heritage, but was it helpful to the people round me? That sadness in my heart actually affected my youngest child hugely. She was the only child of my second marriage. Only after I had been in Al-Anon a few years and had lightened up a whole lot, was she brave enough to tell me so.

The first part of Step Five involves talking to our Higher Power. For me it goes something like this: *"Okay Universe. You saw what I did then. Damn. I'm so blasted sorry. It didn't go the way I thought it would. I never thought it would go so wrong. And I made it worse. And I have hurt people. What can I possibly do now?"* And then I listen and wait. Maybe go and weed the garden or do the dishes or a load of washing. Or make a cup of coffee. And the answers come. *"Thanks Universe."*

Next, admitting to ourselves. I felt deeply embarrassed and guilty about the things I had done. Even the thought of talking about them was terrifying. Would I be kicked out of the fellowship? I couldn't remember anyone being asked to leave though. It's not part of Al-Anon, judging who is good enough and who is not. Showing up here is all we have to do, because we're here to repair our damaged selves.

The feeling of "being worth it" is core to the Al-Anon Program. *"Keep coming back it works, if you work it, and you're worth it"* – This little ending to our every meeting was a wonderful gift

to me, though it took quite a while to sink in actually. Being allowed to be of value and worthwhile... what a gift! It helps me recognise that I'm not basically mean or harmful or in any way unacceptable. I am worthy and valuable despite what is on my list of harms that I think I did to others.

Can you look at those aspects of yourself for which you feel guilty and embarrassed, and see and feel them with honesty and compassion for yourself? Well, your sponsor or trusted person can and will, if they are any good as a sponsor. Compassion for myself and my own wounds was what my sponsor gave me. She heard my story and said, "I'm sorry... but what they did was not acceptable. That was mean and cruel, what was done to you... what you were told and how you were treated. What you did, you can make amends for. What was done to you, was not okay and not your burden to carry any longer."

She was my champion. She was on my side. She recognised my pain and distress but she also acknowledged where I had gone wrong. That's why we tell someone else what we've done. They listen, understand and are compassionate, and they help us work out how to make amends in due course.

Although it's embarrassing and painful to share this Step Five stuff, it's very healing to stop hiding from myself. It's extra healing to share why I did it. I discovered that my granny's life story directly influenced my own decision to leave my children, without my even knowing it. Her husband was a bully and used his belt to keep the family in line. He was also in love with a younger woman. So my grandfather told my grandmother to go, to leave the children for the younger woman to bring up. And my granny did. She left heartbroken, without a proper education or marketable skills.

My remarkably similar situation to my granny had to end the same way, I thought. It was the way we behaved in our family. And so I left to make space for the younger woman, like my granny had done. It took me decades to understand why I had left my young children without a fight. It was because I thought it was what we did in our family. I had been brought up with that story.

What I'm saying is that many of our actions and thoughts are patterned on our upbringing. Doing Step Five, writing down that list of things we have done, is useful not only as a guide for making amends later when we're ready, but also as a way of examining the past and identifying patterns from childhood. Those strange behaviours that we thought were normal but were actually brutal and cruel to us as human beings. This idea that I had no rights to my children was a family idea. How many family ideas do you have in your subconscious that are still doing you harm? Step Five helped me uncover many of mine and start to fix the damage, not only to others but to myself.

Thank heavens I found Al-Anon and a wonderful sponsor who, with her constant ongoing support and kindness, helped me work the critical and life-changing Step Five. I have been able to resolve many, many issues in my life and "find contentment and even happiness" as it says in our opening message.

The best thing about Step Five is the sense of relief and release when you have done it. I cried a lot, and a lot of it still makes me cry, but it was like a lead blanket fell off my shoulders when I was heard, understood and forgiven. Gradually over time I am learning to

forgive the people who caused me hurt, harm and grief as I hope those whom I have hurt may forgive me.

I continue to work through the steps at my own pace and with a great deal of kindness to myself, which can then seep out and turn into kindness and compassion for others.

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Thanks very much for sharing your story with us and enabling us to learn from your experience of this important step.

Best wishes

Clare

P.S. If you would like to send a share for possible publication in the Loners' Letter, please forward your contribution to [alanontvl@absamail.co.za](mailto:alanontvl@absamail.co.za) with the subject "Loners' Letter Submission".

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

#### **Al-Anon Spring Food Fair**

**When:** 9 September 2023

**Time:** 12h00 - 16h00

**Venue:** St Francis Methodist Church, 1 Talton Road, Forest Town.

**Contribution:** R50 - Adults R20 - Children

**RSVP:** 4 September 2023

**Payment:** See banking details below. Send proof of payment to [alanontvl@absamail.co.za](mailto:alanontvl@absamail.co.za) using this reference: **Spring Fair and your name**

Al-Anon is a self-supporting organisation – we rely on financial contributions from our members to keep our offices open and our meetings going. Thank you to everyone who contributes.

### **Tradition Seven**

*Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions. If you would like to contribute towards our office expenses, payment options are provided below.*

#### **Al-Anon Information Services**

ABSA Bank, Oakdene, Current Account No: 1118881482 Branch code 632 005.

Please send proof of payment to [alanontvl@absamail.co.za](mailto:alanontvl@absamail.co.za) and use your **name, event or group** as the reference.

#### **PayFast: Al-Anon Information Services**

<http://www.payfast.co.za/donate/go/alanoninformationservices>

Please use group or event and members name as reference.

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