

Loners' Letter *Gauteng & Districts*

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

November 2023

Dear Loners

Today we hear from an anonymous Al-Anon member who shares how working the Twelve Step programme has helped her at various stages of her life.

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I was born into an alcoholic home, my father being the alcoholic, and it took me years to realise that my mother was also an over-the-counter drug addict. Growing up I saw my father disappear through alcohol use and I also noticed my mother disappearing. Initially, I attributed her disappearance to her being my father's victim, which automatically made me her defender, and I often went to war for her against my father as I was not intimidated by him.

I fought with my father almost daily and I was often told by my mother and many other family members: "You're just like your Dad." This was not about my positive qualities; it was about highlighting and pinpointing a defect that they wanted me to change. I was never told I was like somebody unless it was about a negative quality. Being told that I only had all the negative qualities of people in the family made me feel like I didn't belong.

For many years, I watched my mother exhibit mad or insane behaviour just like the story in *Courage to Change* (B-16) p. 17. The story explains how this person went around looking for the alcoholic, screaming and shouting, ranting and raving at the alcoholic, pouring alcohol down the sink when she had reached the end of her tether and other similar over-the-top behaviours. Watching my mother do all of this, I decided as a child to never be like her.

And so praying, church, meditation and contemplation quietly became my "go-to". How ironic that my go-to prayers were the Serenity Prayer and "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace". I still regularly pray and sing these two under my breath.

When I was 14, I heard a member of our church, someone I loved and respected, invite our congregation to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and because I had accepted that I was just like my father, I took the invitation personally and started attending A.A. I had a sponsor and I took to the programme like a duck to water. To this day, I am thankful for the Twelve Steps. It was only later that I realised that I needed to go to Al-Anon.

As a young adult, I was always "suffering" the consequences of other people's decisions and choices, as shared in *Courage to Change* p. 134. At 22, I was not only parenting my parents, but I was also parenting a deceased relative's three children.

As an adult, working the programme, I made liberating choices for myself and my foster kids – it was an exciting, powerful and humbling time in my life. Even though I was risking "belonging" – the thing I wanted most because I felt I did not belong – I kept working the programme and other therapies for my sanity. As a result I came to a deep knowing that I belonged to my Higher Power.

I have subsequently supported a friend to get sober as well as helped two relatives in another Twelve Step programme. During this time, I worked all the supporting programmes for myself and my continued recovery. My continued addiction is control not of people but of situations and thinking patterns that fuel insane behaviour

Later when I got married, it was all good in the beginning, even though, in retrospect, I should have realised that the snarky breakdowns, humour at my expense, and invalidations were familiar because this was how my family treated me.

I missed all the signs and started to notice that I was:

- Resisting new ways of being and armouring up when it came to my husband.
- My practices (prayer, meditation, stillness, and journaling) became sporadic.
- My broken heart became closed.
- I resisted kind touch only permitting this with my children.

I remembered that I had promised myself as a child to "not be like my mother", to not engage in behaviours that do not change a situation or a person. Yet, there I was in the middle of the night, just as described in *Courage to Change* p. 17, pouring alcohol down the sink. I had become my mother; going from accommodating to sheer madness. I realised that to keep the peace, I had given up many choices and decisions (*Courage to Change* p. 134): from big ones like financial control to small ones such as "keep quiet your father's sleeping/working/on the phone".

Then came illness and I had to focus on myself. The programme again became the primary practice I held on to. Now my parents live with us and I take care of them. Again I returned to the programme to maintain my sanity.

Recently my husband checked himself into a rehabilitation centre and I received the following theme for our family session:

"Detaching with love doesn't mean not caring. It means loving someone or something without seeking to control or own it. It means taking care of oneself and letting others care for themselves without trying to save or punish them."

My commitment remains to focus on my own recovery and give my children space for theirs because, "If we do not change our directions, we are likely to end up where we are headed" (*Courage to Change* p. 17) and "Though no one can go back and make a brand-new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand-new end" (*Courage to Change* p. 316).

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Thank you anonymous for sharing how you are striving to remain serene while remembering to focus on yourself and your own recovery. It is so easy to lose ourselves while caring and helping others. Thank you for reminding us of this and for sharing the readings from *Courage to Change* that have helped you.

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 with the subject "Loners' Letter Submission".

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Tradition Seven

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