

Loners' Letter

Gauteng & Districts ▪ *Never alone in Al-Anon*

October 2024

Dear Loners

My journey to recovery started in around 2014. I began receiving psychological counselling and over the next ten years, I learned about the effects alcohol had had on me as a child growing up with an alcoholic dad and being married to an alcoholic husband. I also learned about “adult children of alcoholics” and I identified with all the character traits listed in the resources I found.

Fast forward to 2023, when certain emotions were triggered during a holiday with friends. Being in an extremely controlled environment with another “adult child of an alcoholic” for four weeks took me back to my childhood, causing a mini breakdown.

After the holiday, it felt as if all the emotions that had been bottled up within me just spilled over. I continued in a state of depression, without my usual positive attitude and will to live.

Out of desperation, I decided to start attending Al-Anon meetings close to my home.

Living in the Present

After about four months in Al-Anon, I was asked to share my thoughts on “Living in the Present” at an Al-Anon Rally. For someone who had no idea how to do that, it was quite daunting. Having just started working with a Sponsor and doing Step One, I felt concerned that I might not be up to it.

However, I enjoy challenges and was eager to learn as much as I could about the topic. I wanted to understand how to live in the present and in the moment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, or only existing instead of living life to the fullest.

Someone once said: “There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done about: one is called yesterday and the other is called tomorrow. So today is the right day to love, believe, do and mostly live in.” Today, I know I have a choice, and the choice of where and how I want to live is mine, and mine alone.

Living in the Past

I believe I became a workaholic because of being surrounded by alcoholics in my life. My work was an escape in many ways, and I didn't mind leaving home for work-related travels at all. Our house did not feel like "home," neither did the house I grew up in as a child, and I did not enjoy spending time there. At one stage I decided to accept a job in a different town; another way I tried to flee my circumstances without realising it.

During this time, I had an affair with someone I got to know, something I felt very ashamed about and for which I have had to forgive myself. It was an extremely toxic relationship as the person was also an alcoholic. There is no excuse for what I did, but I was looking for someone or something to fill the gap inside of me, where there was only emptiness in my mind and soul. This emptiness stemmed from growing up emotionally disconnected from my parents and siblings, and from an emotionally absent alcoholic husband.

When I decided to return to my home town, I had a hard time ending this affair and letting go. Upon my return, I told my husband about the affair, but he did not want a divorce. I agreed to stay if he would go to rehab, which he did. He remained sober for around two years, but not much else changed. Although he stopped drinking, I still felt extremely lonely and disconnected.

In 2020, Covid happened, and I had no choice but to stay home. I managed to keep myself busy despite having a husband in recovery and my daughter's friend temporarily staying with us, which created an extremely difficult situation.

The relationship between my daughter and this friend was extremely toxic (it felt as if my daughter had followed in my footsteps), but I knew I had no control over it, and if I wanted to maintain a relationship with my daughter, I had to manage my emotions.

I enabled this boyfriend, providing him with money for courses and he would also often borrow money from me, never repaying it. Fortunately, the relationship between my daughter and her boyfriend finally ended, but it was a traumatic time for all of us.

I am always surprised at myself for remembering the painful, sad, heart-breaking, unhappy incidents in my life in detail, and I have very little recollection of the many good things that happened. Life was not always bad, but for most of my life, my mind has been cluttered with thoughts, worries and plans. Stress, anxiety and overwhelming emotions were a standard part of my life. I did not know how to relax, not even when on holiday, and was forever in fight or flight mode. Little did I realise that this was why I struggled with "living in the present".

So many things started to make sense for me after joining Al-Anon, reading the literature, doing Step One, getting a Sponsor and learning from the wisdom of my new friends in Al-Anon.

Living in the Future

I am almost as good at living in the future as I am at living in the past. I am a manager and I am used to planning and controlling things, and ensuring that all goes according to the plan.

I used to fear my future and, from time to time, I still do. Earlier this year, I went through a period where I worried about my relevance, job security, and how we would survive financially after my husband retired and then ended up in rehab. I also questioned whether I should enrol in further studies and felt disappointed at the prospect of not doing so. This disappointment is mostly rooted in never feeling good enough and having low self-esteem.

Back to Living in the Present

While working on Step One, I admitted that I am powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable. I realised that I was not only powerless over alcohol but also over others and life in general, and over what had happened in the past and what will happen in the future. I cannot change anything or anybody around me, but I can change myself.

One reason I struggled to live in the present is that I was not used to slowing down and allowing my mind to take a break from productivity or planning ahead. I thrived on adrenaline, and maybe that was also something I had become addicted to. I let small things feel bigger than they were and allowed them to consume more mental energy than they deserved. I also tended to anticipate the end of a “good” moment before it was over, letting this anticipation interfere with my appreciation of the present moment.

To help me live, and not just exist, in the present, I am working on myself. I have lost some of the excess weight I gained and I am doing Pilates and going on walks. I am taking care of my body. I have joined Al-Anon and continue to see my therapist. I am working on my mind and emotions, and becoming emotionally mature. I am working on my soul and spirituality. I am also trying to spend as much time as possible in nature and with my pets, who love me unconditionally. I have also reached out for help to manage my debt and I am doing well.

A while back, my husband bumped into another car. In the past, I would have exploded, but thanks to Al-Anon and the Serenity Prayer, I managed to stay calm and we discussed how to approach covering the damages to the other car.

As a small family, we are trying to create new special memories for ourselves. We have been camping and hiking. As a family and as husband and wife, we are working on creating opportunities where we can spend time together and get to know each other as the new, healthier people we are becoming.

My husband has been sober for 18 months, and I know he is far more than just the disease. Our daughter has been seeing a therapist for a while now so that she too can recover from the effects alcoholism has had on her. I am glad that I have had another chance to set a healthy example for our daughter.

With this, I want to end off with a quote from the Al-Anon book “*From Survival to Recovery*” [B21]:

“I haven’t succeeded in changing my past, of course, but the present is filled with promise, and, amazingly, I am discovering it is fun to be me.”

Best wishes

Anonymous

If you would like to contribute towards our operating expenses, payment options are 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 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.

If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to alanontvl@absamail.co.za with the word **UNSUBSCRIBE** in the subject and your name will be removed from the distribution lists. If you know of new members who would like to receive this newsletter, please inform the office. **If you would prefer to receive this newsletter via WhatsApp, please let us know.**