

Loners' Letter • **Gauteng & Districts** •

Together we can make it

March 2026

Dear Loners

I was born as the eldest child of an adult child of an alcoholic. My mom was an only child with two alcoholic parents. From a young age, she taught herself to avoid pain by simply not making emotional connections with other people, even those close to her. I did not understand this as a child and simply deduced that my mom was ashamed of me.

After I completed my studies, I married my husband. He was an alcoholic, and also suffered from depression.

When my husband was very ill, my only child, started using drugs at age 15 after a traumatic life event. She simply did not want to live and attempted suicide several times. The chaos created in our household by my husband's alcoholism was turned into absolute madness. I was desperately searching for help at great cost – emotional as well as financial. I was pretending to the outside world that all was well – attempting to hold everything together.

I was, however, unable to care for myself. Looking back now, it's glaringly obvious that my pretence could surely not persuade anyone that all was well.

I then decided to leave my husband so that I could save my daughter. I received a lot of criticism and hard times from friends and family about how I dealt with my husband's and daughter's problems.

Eventually, I found Al-Anon. My child lived in a halfway house with a program and regular meetings, and I started attending Al-Anon weekly meetings and went to my first Al-Anon national convention.

The truth is that I eventually realised that it is pointless to try and help someone who does not want to help themselves. When I think about it, it seems logical. Obviously, why should I spend energy, time or money on something that is completely outside of my control? Still, one of the hardest things I have ever had to do was to release my addicted loved ones to the consequences of their own behaviour and choices.

I realised I had completely lost my own self-worth, and that some of my actions had harmed them because they never had to take responsibility for what they did wrong and could not learn from their mistakes. The true reality of the 3 C's kicked in for me – I did not Cause it, I cannot Cure it and I definitely had no Control over what they did, thought, said or did not do.

I also learnt through Al-Anon to put my hands on myself. I realised for the first time in my life how I allowed my addicted loved ones to affect my life and how I had been putting my needs last for a very long time.

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I felt extremely alone but I felt so much guilt and shame that I did not share my pain with anyone else – not even my own family knew what was going on. In Al-Anon I found a lot of people, good people, kind people, people from so many walks of life who were dealing with the same monster. What a relief to hear someone else say – “Me too” – or to know that when I share my pain and story, there are those who can listen to me and fully understand what I go through.

Then, eight years after I joined Al-Anon, I met my life partner, a larger-than-life, super-intelligent, compassionate alcoholic. We bought a house together, worked together through the lockdown, started a business and shared basically all our free time and hobbies.

He tried to stop drinking several times during our relationship. (At least I now knew I could not save him.) He did have a friend who had reached ten years of sobriety through Alcoholics Anonymous, and they did talk about the hard stuff from time to time. My partner had also reached seven years of sobriety before, but by way of white knuckling it. His ego never allowed him to attend an AA meeting himself or to go to rehab.

It was clear how he struggled with the alcoholism and depression, and I have always found it very hard to see someone I love struggle. Eventually, he committed suicide, and I found myself squarely at Step One again – not able to make sense of what had happened. This hit me very hard especially as by now I thought I knew a bit more about living with alcoholism.

Then I read these words: I either get bitter or I get better. It is that simple. I am either going to take what has been dealt to me and allow it to make me a better person, or I am going to allow it to tear me down. This choice does not belong to fate; it belongs to me,

And so, with the help of Al-Anon, I began to put my hands on myself. Beginning with these tips:

- One day at a time. Just for today.
- Small lists and accomplishments. Very basic, if needs be.
- Morning ritual and daily reading in my garden.

I came to realise that my wounds couldn't heal while I tried to hide or deny negative feelings. It's an easy trap for me to fall into when I am struggling. I don't want to experience the negative feelings, so I deny them or try to numb them with alcohol, eating, or staying too busy. I reached a point where I became totally numb to all emotion. I could only start healing once I learned to feel my feelings – to let them come and go like guests – and to realise that “feelings are not facts.”

I also had to learn to show up – to be present. Not just hiding in my own home or behind my too-busy schedule. I started with small things: drinking coffee with my colleagues instead of alone in my office, and accepting invitations. Then I moved on to starting a new sport or hobby, and then deliberately planning adventures in my life – something for me to look forward to.

Early in the process, I realised that my greatest enemy lived in my own head. I had to teach myself not to get stuck in my own negative thoughts, but to express and live my own truth. To do that, I first had to experience the anxiety, guilt, discomfort, and pain – write it down and grow through it as just one step or phase in my growth process. I started to write an online blog in Afrikaans.

Through everything, I had to teach myself that it's a process and that I can only hope for progress, not perfection. I can't always choose my circumstances or what others do and say around me, but I can choose my reactions to them. I choose my reactions to the thoughts that come up in my head. If my reactions don't work, I'm free to try again and choose a different reaction. If I make mistakes, I'm free to apologise sincerely and to recognise that I'm human – I make mistakes.

Because I'm trying harder to truly be present in my own life and not just "survive", I can notice what works and what doesn't. I don't have to crucify myself when I make mistakes, instead I can experience them as an opportunity to learn something new and even move on to the next phase of the growth process.

I want to exercise and eat healthier so I had to stop hiding behind excuses that my life and body were in chaos because of other people's actions. Regardless of what is happening around me, I choose what I put in my mouth, whether I get to exercise, and to make time for prayer and meditation.

I'll be honest. It's quite a challenge to figure out how one is actually supposed to live after forty. I was definitely a candidate for "care-giver burnout," and I completely neglected my own thoughts, happiness, health, and dignity in my efforts to care for my alcoholic husband and addicted child. After my husband passed away and my child got clean, I felt totally useless – as if I had no purpose or dream left.

I had to make the decision that I wanted to get better. I had to be able to continue with my life even if my addicted loved one could not. It is not easy. It takes time. It takes all that I have. I am not where I want to be, but I thank God that I am no longer where I used to be.

Best wishes

Anonymous

▪ Tradition Seven ▪

"Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

In Al-Anon we support ourselves. Please contribute towards our operating expenses so that we can continue to help ourselves and others.

▪ How Al-Anon Works ▪

Al-Anon is a group of people who have been affected by the drinking of a family member or friend. We share our experiences with others like ourselves and share what has or has not worked for us. Having a common experience enables us to have insight into how we are being affected or have been affected, and what has helped us.

Al-Anon Meetings: In-person meetings and Zoom meetings are held throughout the week in South Africa and internationally. [Click Here to Find A Meeting](#) or phone our office on 063 270 2535.

Alateen Meetings: We hold Zoom meetings for young people (9 – 17 years) who have been affected by someone else's drinking. We help them to understand that they are not at fault and help them to keep a healthy focus on themselves and their own responsibilities.

Al-Anon Books: We have a range of Al-Anon books which detail the experiences of other Al-Anon members and what they have found works for them. Some suggested starter books are:

- *How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics* [B32ZA]
- *Courage to Change* [B16ZA]
- *Discovering Choices* [B30]
- *Alateen - Hope for Children of Alcoholics* [B03ZA]

These books and others can be ordered from the Gauteng Al-Anon office: alanontvl@absamail.co.za

Free Downloads: We also have a range of Free Downloads available on the Al-Anon website. <https://www.alanon.org.za/free-downloads/>

Al-Anon Information Services

Bank Details

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, group and/or event** as the reference.

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Please click on the link: <https://pay.yoco.com/AlAnonInformationService>

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