

Physical therapy for the soul

It's taken me a while to understand the depths of my need for this Al-Anon program. My husband has been in A.A. and sober now for almost four years. He's still an alcoholic though, and I'm still a poster child for Al-Anon.

I came through the doors broken, a heartbeat or two short of an ugly divorce. This program took me in like a triage team in an ER. The lifesaving techniques I was given took me from the critical list to stable almost overnight. But that was just the beginning of the story. It doesn't make sense to save a life unless the patient is given the tools needed to survive outside of the intensive care unit.

I consider everything else that's taken place since to be physical therapy for the soul. How do I take a crippled heart and help it love again? To trust again? It takes weeks, months, even years of daily exercise and labor. It's a lot of work and I can't do it alone. I need nurturing, pushing, training, cheerleading, and someone next to me who can genuinely look into my heart when I'm ready to give up, and say, "I know how you feel today, and it gets better, just don't give up."

Now, even when I am feeling strong, it's only because I am doing the legwork. The minute I relax, my program starts to atrophy and old wounds begin to creep back into my daily life. I have to stay involved, diligent, and willing. Some days I'm the patient, and some days I'm the support, but I only stay strong when I am working the exercises that got me strong in the first place. Without that, spiritual atrophy sets in, much more quickly than I expect.

Fortunately, there is clear evidence that all this hard work pays off. I look around the room, and I see tears of pain turn to tears of gratitude. I witness growth, strength, and serenity in people who could barely hold their heads up when they were wheeled in. Recovery is palatable in these rooms, and keeps me coming back for more.

By Carrie S., California
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