

# What I found behind that closed door

By Jay K., Nebraska

There it was again. I'd seen that door at least four times before, without ever stepping through it. I had driven by when meetings were about to start, hoping to get a glimpse of the type of people who went to Al-Anon. This time my son volunteered to go with me, so I couldn't turn back now. It was time to actually walk through the door.

My family and my life had become so dysfunctional that there was entirely too much "dys" and not nearly enough "function." My life resembled a grossly entangled fishing reel. Little did I know what peace and happiness I'd find on the other side of that door.

What I found was a new way of looking at things. While I was aware of the negative impact others had on me, I was completely oblivious to the negative impact I had on them. I learned it was much healthier for all of us if I'd take my attention off of the alcoholic/addict in our family and begin to focus on me.

For me, the real growth came at Step Four, as I took a hard look at my defects of character. At the time, I didn't think I had any. I thought I was a misunderstood martyr, suffering for loving others. Oh, brother! Then, like an anvil falling on my bare toe, God not only

showed me I indeed had defects of character, but the huge role they've played in my life.

As I began to read the Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature and listen to what others were saying at meetings, I slowly began to grow. As I related to different subjects (resentment, self-pity, despair, smugness, worry, etc.), I began to see that they were my defects of character, as well. As I struggled with difficulties in my life, I soon began to see it was due to a specific defect of character.

*"While I was aware of the negative impact others had on me, I was completely oblivious to the negative impact I had on them."*

My life really began to change when I'd write down what I was learning through Al-Anon for each defect of character. Now, when one rears its ugly head, I only have to either remember or go back to my lists of defects to read what I've learned, and amazingly, it's over just as fast as it started. My day is no

longer ruined. I've recognized that I'm flawed just as everyone else is. My happiness isn't controlled by circumstances, but from within, and dealing with my defects of character.

Today, I have a new door in front of me called "making amends." I must admit it looks a little intimidating. But you know what? I think I'll walk through that one as well.

## Tidbits from the 2015 Membership Survey

Eighty-four percent of members rated the condition of their mental health before attending Al-Anon meetings to be *below average*, compared to only six percent after attending meetings.

Members rated the average intensity of experience with *negative* emotions much higher before attending Al-Anon compared to after; they also rated experience with *positive* emotions much higher after attending Al-Anon compared to before.

Here are a few comments from the survey participants on the emotional ups and downs they have lived through:

*"The one thing that I am most grateful for is the desperation I felt that took me to my first Al-Anon meeting."*

*"I had no idea why I've always felt that something was wrong inside of me, but since joining Al-Anon I became aware of feelings and emotions I've been suppressing, ignoring, and allowing to fester inside me."*

*"After 32 years in the program, I consider my regular meetings my weekly mental health checkup."*

Do you relate with other members' mental health and emotional experiences, before and after attending Al-Anon? In Al-Anon, you're in the right place.

Feel free to reprint this article on your Web site or in your newsletter, along with this credit line: Reprinted with permission of *The Forum*, Al-Anon Family Group Hdqts., Inc., Virginia Beach, VA