

I deserve to be happy

By the time I got to Al-Anon, I was an angry, resentful, withdrawn woman. I had shut my parents and siblings out of my life because I didn't want them to know what was going on. I always hoped the drinking would stop and no one would need to know what was going on in our home. Of course, I wasn't fooling anyone. Finally, my sister, who had been attending Al-Anon for years, asked me if my husband's drinking bothered me. I said it did. "Then Al-Anon is for you," she said. I went to my first meeting.

After going to Al-Anon for several years, reading the literature, getting a Sponsor, and working the Steps and Traditions in my life, I learned how to live with active alcoholism with some peace and serenity. I was unhappy in my marriage, but felt I had no choice but to continue in it. I had seen the effects that the breakups of my three sisters' marriages had on my parents. I did not want to put them through that again. I was scared to live on my own and be responsible for myself and my living expenses.

Meanwhile, my father's health had been deteriorating. One morning, my mother called to say he had been taken to the Emergency Room. She asked my siblings and me to come to the hospital, as it looked like he was nearing the end of his life. My siblings and I took turns going in to see him to say our goodbyes.

When I went in, he was barely conscious, an oxygen mask covering his face. I took his hand, told him I loved him and that he should stop fighting, to breathe and let go. All he could do was squeeze my hand. My mother had to speak for him. She told me that he worried about me and just wanted me to be happy. I realized then that I'd thought I was protecting my parents, but I'd been causing them grief instead, as they watched me in my unhappy marriage. I felt that my father gave me permission, before he passed away, to end my marriage.

I was ready for a change. Within a few months, I told my husband I wanted to separate. I wanted to end my marriage without hurt, but I realized that after 25 years there was going to be some pain. With the support of my Al-Anon friends and my family, I worked through the pain, grieved the end of my marriage, and survived without too much heartache.

In Al-Anon, I learned that I had choices and I deserved to be happy. I learned to be independent and to speak up for myself. I learned that I could face my fears with my Higher Power by my side. I learned to be open and willing to accept God's will for me, and to put my father in God's hands to look after. Because of Al-Anon, I met and married my second husband, who is a recovering alcoholic and attends Alcoholics Anonymous. It is great working our two programs together in our home.

Sometimes, I see the effects of growing up in an alcoholic home on my children. Two of them attended Alateen and Al-Anon many years ago. As much as I want to, I know I cannot fix their problems. I might quote a slogan I think might be useful, and I always tell them if and when they want to attend Al-Anon, I would take them to a meeting. A few years ago, my first husband passed away because of complications from his alcoholism. I was able to grieve and support my children over the loss of their father.

I thank God for putting that alcoholic in my life and bringing me to Al-Anon. I am grateful for all the wonderful gifts I've received by practicing this program every day and in every area of my life.

By Marilyn K., Ontario
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