

# My Sigh of Relief

In the 20 years of living with active alcoholism, my view of people and situations in my life had become severely distorted. I was plagued by guilt because I knew life was a gift to be celebrated, but I often just wanted to die. I could not cope with the pain in my own heart, or in the lives of those I loved. I had no boundaries either, hence, anyone and everyone's pain became mine! How could this "beautiful life" be so hard and how could it ever be "beautiful" if there seemed to be no end to my problems?

I was persistently urged by my counselor to attend Al-Anon; advice I sadly resisted for years. I felt I was already "working hard enough" in our sessions, reading every book she suggested, and "doing the right thing" in all areas of my life. "Why should I have to do more work?" I would sorely ask. I completely misunderstood what gifts Al-Anon would give me if I only let go of my pride and followed her sound advice!

The most ironic thing is that I did not grow up with active alcoholism. My stepfather was the adult child of two alcoholics. Apparently, the damage he suffered was enough to carry aspects of the disease into our home. Apart from drinking, there was still a high level of dysfunction growing up. I moved out at 18; moving never solves anything, and my personal affliction continued to escalate as I dated one addict after another. My sister married an alcoholic and my brother's wife is the adult child of one. We all arrived in the same spot, even though the active disease had skipped a generation.

I decided to try Al-Anon when a feud between my mom and sister drove me to a near nervous breakdown; their refusal to speak to one another felt intolerable to me! I finally heard the message that Al-Anon was about me, not the other people in my life, and would help me identify the things inside myself that prevented me from coping with life as it unfolded. Al-Anon would help me to see where I was inserting myself into situations that did not involve me, and where my true attention should be directed—towards those things that did.

Since joining this fellowship, I have healed and grown. I not only can cope, but also truly enjoy life, even though serious problems continue to present themselves in my family of origin and my marriage to an active alcoholic. Because of the incredible wisdom and power of the Al-Anon fellowship, I am mostly calm, secure, and dare I say, happy—even amidst the ongoing chaos. Can you hear my sigh of relief from where you are? My body and soul are finally at ease, and a gentle, relaxed smile is on my face where once there was only a deep and angry frown. Thank you, Al-Anon.

*By Arlene W., Rhode Island*

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