

## Stories from the Forum magazine: June 2008

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### I tried Al-Anon as a last resort

My father was drunk most of the time. He was a very abusive man, physically and mentally. My mother didn't drink a lot, but she took her frustrations out on me.

I was always in trouble for something. The rules in our home changed every day—sometimes many times a day. Consequently, I was always in trouble for something. I would get a beating from Mom and then a worse one later from Dad.

I learned very young that I was dumb, unimportant, and responsible for everyone and everything. I was supposed to do what I was told without asking questions. It was unsafe to express my emotions. To forget any of these could be fatal; Dad tried to kill me a few times.

I survived childhood and took what I knew into my adult life. I chose friends and partners who treated me the same way I was treated in my family. It was normal for me. Needless to say, none of the relationships lasted, and I blamed myself for all of it.

I had been living with a woman for almost 20 years when I ended the relationship. Life with her was good at first. Then things started to get crazy and just kept getting crazier. She had threatened to shoot me a couple of times. I finally found the courage to tell her I did not want to be with her anymore.

I was on my own and my life was still crazy. I was so guilt-ridden I didn't want to live anymore. I was about to take my own life when I remembered something I had heard about Al-Anon and how it could help. I thought I could call them and see what they had to say. If I didn't like it I could always come back out and finish what I was going to do.

I went in the house, found the number, and made the phone call. I got an answering machine—someone would call me back as soon as possible.

I waited ten days until that call came. I didn't go out to my shed because I was afraid of what I might do. After all, the rope was still there and ready to use.

Finally, someone called me. He said there was a meeting that night and that if I wanted, he would take me there. I said I would go. I just sat there at the meeting, scared as hell. I listened as each person shared *my* family secrets. I didn't know how they knew; they just did. I knew I belonged. I kept coming back.

I didn't share; I just sat there for the next six months. I still couldn't believe how they knew my secrets, but it made me feel better to know that I was not alone anymore—that other people felt the same way I did. Eventually I started to talk a little bit. I was growing in the program.

I started to take more interest in the group—setting up, making coffee, chairing meetings, and so on. I needed more, so I started going to another meeting and getting involved. The district wanted to start an Alateen group and needed Sponsors. I knew right away that I wanted to do it. I knew what it would have done for me if I could have had help as a teenager, so I became an Alateen Sponsor.

A few months later, my group asked if I would take the position of Group Representative. I didn't think I was good enough for the job, but the members assured me that I was and that they would help me. I took on the job, started attending district meetings, got involved with the Regional Service Seminar Committee, and attended my first Assembly. It was totally awesome.

At my second Assembly, the job of newsletter editor was open. Thanks to the encouragement of my Higher Power and a few wonderful Al-Anon members, I took on the job.

Life has been tough since coming to Al-Anon, but I would never trade it for the life I had before. I have a Higher Power who loves and guides me, true friends who care about me, and a wonderful program to live by. I have peace, serenity, and sanity within myself today. What more can I ask for?

By Mervin Y., Saskatchewan  
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## **At first, I didn't think I belonged in Al-Anon**

As the father of a heroin addict, I tried everything to get him to stop. Then he went missing; I didn't know if he was alive or dead. I reached out in sadness and Al-Anon was there.

I felt like an outsider at my first meeting because I thought my son's drug of choice was not alcohol. (Only later did I realize that he is also an alcoholic, as is my younger son.) Everyone there had a different story, but their feelings were the same as mine. When I shared, they said, "Keep Coming Back."

Both of my sons are serving time in prison, but they are alive, sober, and in recovery. I do not know what the future holds, but I know that if I give one hand to my Higher Power and the other to someone in need, I will keep my hands out of other people's business and I will be okay.

By John B., Connecticut  
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## Improved self-image turned my life around

At 19, my self-concept was incredibly skewed. I thought I had to be someone who could handle anything, who had seen everything, and whose inherent coolness oozed from every pore.

I obsessed about my friends, my abusive alcoholic boyfriend, and how to maintain my façade of coolness in any and every possible situation. I needed to control others' perceptions of me in order to feel okay. But my mentally-rehearsed laughter and smiles rang hollow. I continued to feel like an imposter, unable to escape from deceiving the world.

While it would be easy to blame my distorted perceptions on my young age, the truth is that I continued to react to the effects of growing up in an alcoholic home.

I pursued my college career like everything else, doing well at first and obsessing about other people, all the while trying to push myself to fit a mold I would never fit. My grades suffered. I couldn't pass my basic requirements, and I began to think I was incapable of pursuing a higher education. I dropped out of school after failing several classes.

I found myself working five part-time jobs, only three of which paid me. I was broke, depressed, and anxious. I didn't know how to drop the "mask." I couldn't slow down for fear that I would never come out of the negative emotions I had been running from. By the time I was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown, I was too afraid to leave the house.

Emotionally crippled and fearful, I dragged myself to the rooms of Al-Anon and began to work the program. Shortly thereafter, the woman who became my Sponsor moved to the area. I knew she was the one for me because she annoyed me with her proactive attitude and acceptance.

With a little serenity and sanity under my belt, I began attending college again. This time I took fewer classes and focused on subjects I enjoyed. I began to see that I could do well. I could focus on myself by working my program, doing the next right thing, and taking small steps toward improving my own life. My GPA shot up and my self-esteem increased as I learned to trust myself to finish my studies "One Day at a Time."

As my Higher Power guided me, I began to realize that my earlier failures were not due to stupidity or laziness. They were simply a manifestation of growing up in an alcoholic environment.

Last week I graduated with honors, with my bachelor's degree in a subject I truly love. Because I enjoy it so much, I've decided to attend graduate school and pursue a career in this field. While this field is generally stereotyped as "un-cool," I love it—and that's all that matters.

By Nancy W., Tennessee  
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