

## **Georgia's Story - the telephone voice of Al-Anon in District 5**

(posted 12/10/08)

Lewie and I were married in 1938. Neither of us did any drinking until after Lewie went into the service in 1943. Lewie was stationed in Rockford, Illinois, and I went to live in Rockford for ten months, until Lewie was deployed overseas. I worked in a restaurant, and Lewie would come in to the restaurant in the evenings. We used to go to the bars there - there wasn't much of anything else to do! I drank to keep Lewie company. Then Lewie went overseas, and I think he started to drink a lot more while he was overseas. When he came back in 1945 or 1946, his drinking didn't seem too bad at first, but it progressed. I used to drink with him to keep him company - but I couldn't keep up with him.

There were not a lot of places for people to live when Lewie came back from overseas, so we lived with my aunt for awhile, and then we lived in a trailer for awhile. We bought a house out on Dixboro Road just before our first son was born. When Lewie was released from the service he drove a truck delivering gas and fuel oil. Around 1950, he began working at the King Seeley plant making automobile gas gauges. King Seeley was later taken over by Chrysler, and Lewie continued to work for Chrysler until he retired. I worked in Goodyear's Department store on State Street in Ann Arbor. I worked up until the June before our first son David was born in October 1949. Our second son Harold was born in November 1950, 13½ months after David. I didn't work outside our home until Harold started school in the mid-1950's; after that I worked until I retired. I worked during the hours our sons were in school so that I would be back home when they returned home from school.

Lewie rarely went out to bars, and he mostly did not drink until he came home after work. Lewie would arrive home at about 4:00 or so and I would have dinner ready. He would pick up alcohol on the way home, and drink until he fell asleep in a chair. He did this from the 1950's until he quit drinking in 1973. We didn't have much of a social life, and it bothered me that he spent as much money as he did on alcohol. It wasn't a real fast progression of his drinking, but as time went on and he began working afternoon shifts, he began drinking before he went to work. Lewie wouldn't listen to me when I tried to talk to him about his drinking being a problem. It seemed that the more I said, the worse it got! Finally his superior at work asked him why he drank before coming to work. After this, he decided to get help. He went to Brighton Hospital for treatment.

I had decided to stop drinking when I went to Boston for eye surgery in 1972. I spent 22 days in Boston; the first surgery was not successful in re-attaching my retina so I had to have a second surgery. I promised God that if He spared my vision, I would stop drinking - and I did. The years between when I gave up drinking and when Lewie got sober were difficult in that I missed being able to sometimes keep Lewie company by drinking with him. But again, I could never keep up with him!

I went to Al-Anon some before Lewie got into A.A. I went a few times with my sister in law (Lewie's brother's wife.) I used to go to the YMCA meetings on Wednesday nights - this was the only Al-Anon meeting in Ann Arbor at that time. Al-Anon was on the main floor and A.A. was upstairs. I went to Al-Anon with the purpose of getting my husband to stop drinking! I remember that the first couple of times I went to the meeting at the Y and told them I was at the meeting to get my husband to stop drinking. They told me that wouldn't work! Now, that idea seems funny to me but back then it didn't. It was actually a relief when they told me there was nothing I could do to make Lewie stop drinking - that I wasn't responsible for his drinking or for getting him to stop.

It was also a relief to me when Lewie went to treatment at Brighton Hospital. I think the program at that time was about ten days. When Lewie was released from Brighton my son Harold drove to Brighton to pick him up, and I came with him. On the way home, Lewie stopped and picked up a pint of whiskey and a six pack of beer, and I thought, well, that treatment sure didn't do very much good! However that was the last alcohol that I know of that Lewie ever drank. He had twenty years of sobriety - and we had twenty years together with Lewie being sober - when he died in 1992.

Lewie was supposed to stay home for one week after treatment, and then go to a doctor to get a release to return to work. The doctor said to me, "I don't think Lewie is an alcoholic, he just drinks too much," and I thought to myself, "what is the difference?" Fortunately Lewie knew he was an alcoholic and that he needed to stop drinking.

Lewie started attending A.A. right away after treatment. There was a meeting at 1:00 pm on Friday afternoons that was the only closed meeting Lewie was able to attend while he was working afternoons. He had a friend who had lost his license and Lewie used to pick him up and go to the meetings with him. We used to go together to the open A.A. meeting on Saturday nights when Lewie didn't have to work.

After Lewie got sober, when we went places and he was offered a drink he would turn it down. We played cards with a couple of other couples who drank, and Lewie told them they could bring drinks when they came to our house but he would not serve alcohol in our home.

I helped care for my aunt for awhile, and Lewie and I moved into her house. I still live in this home today. Our oldest son David got married when he was 19 years old and he attended the University of Michigan starting in 1967- he and his wife lived in our home on Dixboro Road. Our younger son Harold attended Michigan State starting in 1968.

A.A. and Al-Anon had an answering service, and I got involved with answering the A.A. and Al-Anon calls a couple of times a week. A couple of the A.A. men were quite upset with an Al-Anon answering A.A. calls, so we separated the A.A. and Al-Anon information lines in the Fall of 1979. I got an Al-Anon line installed in the house, and I have been answering the Al-Anon calls ever since. I added the "literature depot" a couple of years later, and still maintain that as well. I used to get calls sometimes that were intended for the A.A.

hotline - if Lewie was there I would just put him on and he'd talk to the caller; if Lewie wasn't there then I would handle the call. By that time I could talk pretty good A.A.! Lewie used to tell me sometimes that I needed to go to A.A., and I told him that Al-Anon needed me more! There was more for me to do in Al-Anon!

Shirley and some other Al-Anon members got other Al-Anon meetings started besides the one at the Y, but there were not a lot of groups back then. A couple of the groups would give me money to help pay the phone bill for the Al-Anon hotline. I got started selling Al-Anon literature to help pay the phone bill. I have maintained the District literature distribution center since then. I keep a supply of Al-Anon literature - books, pamphlets, meeting lists, newcomer packets etc., for distribution to Al-Anon groups and members who need literature. My time has always been voluntary for the literature and the answering line. Any money that comes in above the costs of the literature is used to pay expenses for the Al-Anon information line or for literature distribution expenses such as printing meeting cards, or is returned to the Al-Anon District, Area or World Service Office.

I have enjoyed answering the Al-Anon hot line calls and maintaining the Al-Anon literature depot, and I have made many friends from Al-Anon service. I dread the thought that I may at some time have to give up the literature. I enjoy the calls from people ordering literature and the visits from people picking literature up. I've also helped to start Al-Anon meetings and have served as Group Representative and District Representative. I enjoy doing service! It gives me something useful to do, and I get a lot of satisfaction out of doing Al-Anon service. I think anyone getting into Al-Anon service will get a lot of satisfaction from it.

Al-Anon has changed in some ways over the years. When I first began attending Al-Anon meetings, we had round tables with about eight to ten people at each table. Each person shared about why they were there, we discussed different problems, and we shared our experience, our strength and our hope - sharing our experience, strength and hope is what Al-Anon is really all about. We studied the Al-Anon Steps; we studied the Al-Anon Traditions also but not as thoroughly as the Steps. We hadn't heard of the Al-Anon Concepts back then. Learning about the Steps is a very important part of the Al-Anon program. Today, I continue to try to live by the principles of the Al-Anon program every day. It is a very important part of my life.

In March of 2006, an Al-Anon friend and I started a new meeting on Tuesday evenings at St. Clare's Church/Temple Beth Emeth on Packard Road in Ann Arbor called "Sharing and Caring Al-Anon." We started it to allow "cross talk," where people can share their experiences with similar circumstances, which was the way meetings went when we first started going to Al-Anon. Al-Anon is all about sharing and caring.

Getting into the rooms of Al-Anon for me was a life-saver. I had a place where I could go and talk with people with similar problems - it was the first time I felt as if my problems were not so bad compared with the problems other people had. When I went to meetings I

mostly listened - I didn't talk that much, but I got a lot out of listening to other people. I made some very good friends in Al-Anon. We've had a lot of fun in Al-Anon. I have traveled a good many miles with Al-Anon friends, all over the state. That's one reason I stayed with Al-Anon and I still attend; Al-Anon is where my good friends are.

Al-Anon is a spiritual program. The spirituality of the Al-Anon program has always been very meaningful to me - it has made a tremendous difference in my life. It was one of the first things I grabbed on to in the Al-Anon program. My Higher Power, whom I choose to call God, has always been uppermost to me. I grew up in the Episcopal Church - I was baptized and confirmed there and went to Sunday school. As time went on I think I lost much of my faith - and my faith in God came back in Al-Anon, even stronger than it had been before. Al-Anon gave me back my belief and made me realize that there is a Power greater than myself. Al-Anon has helped me to feel that there is always "something" that I can depend on and go back to, i.e. my Higher Power. There is an entirely different trend of thoughts and feelings in Al-Anon compared with in church. I talk to my God, and there are a lot of times that I ask God for help. I say "thank you God" often, even for things like keeping my old furnace working and the heat on. For me it is almost like talking to a person but without the person talking back! Al-Anon brings me much closer to my Higher Power.

At most meetings, they say "Keep Coming Back" to the newcomers. But it's important for newcomers to get to Al-Anon in the first place! If you think you might belong in Al-Anon - I strongly encourage you to try a few meetings! You have nothing to lose. And if you get to a meeting - Keep Coming Back! I tell people this on the phone, and I also tell them that if I can be of further service to call me back.

I am grateful to the Al-Anon program.

Georgia D.