

Al-Anon helps members reach beyond their fears.

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. press release - August 2002

Families and friends of alcoholics can find hope and help in Al-Anon/Alateen

Those who live with alcoholism often live in fear: fear of abuse, fear of anger, fear of trusting others. Al-Anon Family Groups (including Alateen for younger members) is a source of understanding, help, and hope to families and friends of alcoholics. The following story, originally published in the August 2002 issue of Al-Anon's monthly magazine, *The Forum*, illustrates some of the fears experienced.

My pattern of isolation began in childhood when my mother's abusive behavior became a source of sadness and embarrassment. I coped by being a good little girl and keeping my feelings to myself. Years later, while I suffered from my son's alcoholism, I withdrew again. When the pain became intolerable, I decided to try Al-Anon.

It was scary walking into a room that was full of strangers, so I put on my everything's okay mask. Then the members began to share their stories. Everyone's words carried such depth and honesty that I began to feel hopeful. I thought maybe I could let my guard down, too. Maybe somebody would finally understand.

Continuing to attend meetings, I confronted longtime habits of self-pity that kept me stuck in misery. It was pretty difficult to feel alone and sorry for myself when I sat with people whose experiences were the same or even worse than mine.

When I was little. I often blamed myself for Mommy's anger. Later I felt somehow guilty about my son's alcoholism. Al-Anon told me I did not cause the disease and that I could not control or cure it, either. The only thing I could change, I learned, was my own response. As I gradually let go of guilt, I felt a new sense of lightness and freedom.

Sometimes I still find myself sliding back into isolation, but now I have a choice. I can stay in a dark, lonely place, if that's what I choose. Or I can keep coming back to this program, into the healing light of intimacy with my fellow travelers on this Journey we call life.

--Kathy S.

(Al-Anon members maintain personal anonymity in print)

Al-Anon members, like Kathy, may have several relationships to alcoholics: children, parents, spouses, partners, family members, and friends of problem drinkers. All are welcome in the over 26,000 Al-Anon (including Alateen for younger members) meetings held in 115 countries. Local meeting information can be obtained by clicking on meeting information on this web site <http://www.newsa.org>, or the national (US and Canada) toll free meeting line, 1-888-4-AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 6 pm ET). Additional information is available on the Al-Anon/Alateen Web site, www.al-anon.alateen.org.