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Celebrating 50 Years of Hope

The year 2001 marks Al-Anon Family Groups' 50th Anniversary of offering hope and help to families and friends of alcoholics. At Al-Anon and Alateen (for young family members) meetings, families and friends of alcoholics come together to help each other recover from the effects of someone else's drinking. The organization has its roots in the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

When AA began in 1935, family members also attended AA meetings. In many areas in those early years, "family groups" began forming and sought guidance from the Alcoholics Anonymous office in New York. Bill W., co-founder of AA, suggested to his wife, Lois, that she write to these family groups. In May 1951, Lois and her friend Anne B. wrote to the group and individual names obtained from the AA office, and a new fellowship was born. Via correspondence, the name "Al-Anon Family Groups" was selected, and the Twelve Steps of AA adopted, changing only one word.

All of these family members have the common bond of living or having lived with a problem drinker. Al-Anon and Alateen members learn about alcoholism and focus on their own recoveries, not on the alcoholic. Al-Anon's co-founder Lois' awakening to her own need for recovery happened unexpectedly. It was 1935, Bill was sober, and their house and time were filled with helping alcoholics, and going to lots and lots of meetings. In Lois' words,

"Even after Bill's spiritual awakening, it didn't occur to me that I needed to change. The idea must have been working in my subconscious, however, for a trivial incident woke me up with a start, and I realized my own need to spiritual growth.

"One Sunday, Bill casually said to me, 'We'll have to hurry or we'll be late for the Oxford Group meeting.'

"I had a shoe in my hand, and before I knew what was happening, I had thrown it at him and said, 'Damn your old meetings!'

"This unexpected display of anger surprised me even more than it did him. I might have had an excuse for losing my temper during his drinking years. But why now, when everything was fine, had I reacted so violently to his very natural remark? ... That day I began to look at myself analytically for the first time."

From *Lois Remembers*, © 1979, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

From its humble beginning in Lois and Bill's home in Bedford Hills, NY, with manually typed letters to 87 scattered groups, was born a fellowship that would reach out across the US and Canada and the world, helping those affected by someone else's drinking to learn about the disease of alcoholism and better ways to cope with its effects. Today there are approximately 27,000 groups in 115 countries. In Northern California, there are 750 Al-Anon and Alateen meetings both in English and in Spanish and one in Punjabi. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., in Virginia Beach, Virginia, publishes literature, maintains records of groups in the US and Canada; provides support to Al-Anon structures outside the US and Canada- provides a toll free meeting information line (1-888-4ALANON); maintains a web site; and communicates with groups, members, and national organizations. In Northern California, the area Al-Anon assembly maintains a listing of local Al-Anon Information Services who maintain literature distribution centers. For information about the Al-Anon literature, including where the distribution centers are, go to the area web site at

<http://www.ncwsa.org/litbooks1.html>

Throughout the year, Al-Anon members and groups around the world are helping to celebrate the organization's golden anniversary with varied events. For meeting times and locations in Northern California, visit the web site <http://www.ncwsa.org> , visit the national web site www.al-anon.alateen.org or call toll-free 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666).