

## **One Al-Anon Journey: A Spouse's Experience with Addiction**

### **Lessons Learned**

The following thoughts might be helpful to you and your loved ones as you find your way forward.

- Both my husband and I, as well as all of our loved ones, should have expected disappointments and setbacks as we attempted to make progress. We were all on a path of learning a new way to think and live. Connecting with those who have had experience in recovery is essential. It is a good idea for everyone to become involved in a support group, whether it is Al-Anon, Alateen, or AA.
- I found it extremely helpful to attend open AA meetings. They gave me a window into what alcoholics are struggling with, and allowed me to see people who were clearly embracing recovery with joy. This gave me a frame of reference when I was looking at my husband's words and actions.
- Humor was tremendously healing for us, especially when we were able to laugh together at the absurdities of life. This does not include ridicule at the expense of others. Laughing at ourselves was a great release.
- When I was feeling distressed, worried, or anxious, it helped a great deal to check in with my senses so I could be more anchored in the present moment. I looked up at the sky and noticed the clouds; listened to the birds; felt my feet on the ground and the wind on my face. I learned to notice and appreciate the sky at night more often. There is a world out there, with joy waiting, when I am able to be present.
- When I could be grateful, then it was easier to find happiness right where I was, in the present moment. I learned that my happiness could be independent of outside circumstances; in other words, if I could be grateful, then I could be happy. I came to appreciate the slogan, "The attitude of gratitude." In the first month of attending meetings, a program friend told me to start with the basics. When I wake up, can I see and hear and move and talk? Lots of people can't. When I turn on the faucet, do I appreciate that clean water comes out? Let's not take it for granted. I can say thank you that there are people who love me, that I love. I can appreciate, as much as I can, the good things in each day. I can bring joy to others even if I'm not feeling happy myself.
- When I was feeling especially anxious, worried, or depressed, and wondered how I was going to make it through the day, I found it helped if I made a list of what I was going to do in each hour. This "bite-sized chunks" approach helped me focus on the moment, and enabled me to keep going as I thought about "first things first."

- As I re-read my journals in preparation for writing this account, I was amazed that I had been able to keep going through the years of ups and downs. I was also surprised at how much I had forgotten. I believe it's a good thing we can't see into the future, because I think I would have been more tempted to give up. I survived because I was living one day at a time, and I had a good support system. And now that I'm on the other side, I can be thankful that I made it, and perhaps others will benefit from my experiences.
- Life became more manageable when I was able to ask these two questions at the time I had to make important decisions:
  - o what is God asking me to do in this situation, and
  - o what is God's will for me?
- A program friend shared something she had learned about deciding how much assistance to provide to others: give what you can – only what you can – and give it freely.
- The program saying, “We are responsible for the effort, not the outcome” was a tremendous comfort. Over time, I was able to take it to heart that I could do my best and then let go; God might have a different plan in mind. Everyone has his or her own path.
- I believe we are here for a reason, that our lives have meaning and purpose, and it is possible to live life as a grand adventure to figure out what that reason is.
- When I was able to develop feelings of compassion for struggling loved ones, then my resentment receded. I asked my Higher Power/God for help in this. However, this does not mean I have to accept unacceptable behavior.
- “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking” (Richard Rohr). This concept has been very helpful. Thoughts generate feelings. If I want to feel differently, I need to change my thoughts. My old and familiar thought patterns did not help me make better choices, but when I tried making a different choice, then this could lead to changed thoughts.
- The passage of time can help resolve an issue.
- The saying “Every day may not be a good day, but there is good in every day” is helpful, and I realized that I could play a part in making it a good day for someone else through simple gestures – smiling, or thanking people for doing their job. If I can bring joy to others, it lifts my own spirits.
- “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” (Rabindranath Tagore)

- I heard a commentary on the radio some years ago, related to how best to be “happy.” The author made the point that instead of focusing on “happiness,” we should instead be thinking of what makes our life fulfilling, because that is what brings lasting joy.
- My instincts were not always right, but often they were. I learned over time that if something didn’t seem right, I should check it out.
- I have found it helpful to write down my dreams, a habit I started as a young adult. While many did not make sense at the time, I discovered that if I waited a few days or weeks or months or even years, and looked at them again, a new insight could jump out at me.