



In Gratitude: How Our Lives Have Changed!

During my first six months in Al-Anon I started working a fourth step. It was a long and arduous process that taxed my emotional state. I found myself facing a number of very painful memories that had occurred throughout my life. Memories of losing both my parents by the time I was fourteen found my way into the inventory, as well as frustration with the alcoholic stepfather who had raised me. I came face-to-face with my anger at God, school, the military, the police, my employer, and everyone else I found cause to resent.

Friends in the program recommended that I say something positive in my fourth step. Not having much to say that was good, I included a short gratitude list. When the time to do my fifth step arrived, I shared years of pain with my sponsor. I shared shame that I never believed I would share with another human being. I talked about how bad my life had been.

And then, at the end, I shared that short list of things for which I was grateful: the fact that the sky happens to be my favorite color, that I could afford a new car, and that I had a good job. Emotionally drained after working my fifth step, I went for a walk at one o'clock in the morning.

It was during this walk that I realized that the life I had lived was not all bad. There were certainly tragedies that had occurred, things I could have done better, and opportunities I had missed. But my gratitude list made me realize there was also love, fun and laughter. There were days spent growing up on a farm in the summer where we rode our bicycles and threw rocks into the creek. There were cold and still nights in Northern Michigan with the light glistening in the snow. There were vacations and long walks on the beach with friends.

Al-Anon helped me to understand that my life is as I choose to see it today. If I am having a bad day, it is because I have made the decision to perceive it that way. I have the freedom to change and grow with each day. I can choose to appreciate the beauty of God's universe, or turn my back on it by focusing on fears and resentments. My parents may have given me life, but Al-Anon taught me how to live it. **Jack B.**

Al-Anon service work has had positive side effects for me. Although I took on tasks mainly to benefit my fellow members, I've helped myself as well. At different times I was treasurer for my group, for the Service Center, and for the District. Each of those jobs increased my understanding of financial stewardship. As editor of the District Newsletter, I was forced to meet deadlines and hone my computer skills. As a GR and then as acting DR, I've gained confidence in dealing with people.

Doing Al-Anon service work has taught me to budget my time and has made me a more well-rounded person, and I am eternally grateful. **Joan H.**

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Gratitude, continued

For the past five and a half years, I have been privileged to be in service to the VA Area Assembly of Al-Anon. The first one and a half years, I was the Area’s Website Coordinator; the last three years I served as Area secretary.

I have been grateful for these opportunities for numerous reasons. First, I was able to give back to an organization (and people) that has given so much to me! The gifts I have received from Al-Anon are priceless, and my time in service was a small token compared to these gifts. I have met, learned from, and worked with some of the most wonderful people; people who helped me grow in ways that I had not imagined.

I have been humbled by the love and acceptance you offered me. I have learned to accept criticism without being devastated and in turn, I learned to critique without being critical. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to watch others and learned from them what it means to be a “trusted servant”. From these experiences I came to admire and stand in awe of our system of “reverse hierarchy,” where the elected officers truly are servants to the groups, the real power of Al-Anon. I have had the opportunity to see the Traditions and Concepts of Service in action, and understand how they work, not only in service, but also in all aspects of my life.

For these things, (and so much more) I am eternally grateful to Al-Anon. Most of all I am deeply grateful for all of you. Love in service and fellowship, **Linda S.**

As my three year term as Alternate Delegate winds down many thoughts run through my mind. First and foremost has to be how much fun it has been to serve in this post. In working with three Convention Committees I had an opportunity to meet new members of our fellowship all over the Virginia Area. I also got to know members on a different level that I already knew from Assemblies and Virginia Area World Service Committee meetings.

But beneath the fun part of the job there were many opportunities to practice the principles of Al-Anon and Alateen, particularly as they relate to control issues. Since control is a big issue for me, it was good exercise for me to be the liaison and not get in and try to run the Conventions. I'd like to say that I was always successful in my efforts not to control, but I can't. I recall one instance where I overstepped that boundary, and it probably was one of the best lessons I ever learned in Al-Anon. In that instance, I also got in a little practice in amends making! But I think that it was a great learning experience for me and underscored once again the recovery potential of service.

I want to thank the Virginia Area for allowing me to serve as Alternate Delegate for the past three years. **Don F.**

More Gratitude continued on page 6.....





How to start a Pre-Teen Alateen Meeting

Recipe for Success

One strong Al-Anon meeting
One strong AA meeting
Consistent babysitting service
Good location, Good night
Not too late on a week night
And ... Two willing Alateen Sponsors
(who have Service Sponsors themselves!)

A Pre-Teen meeting can be started with just a few children.
You may find them sitting in the babysitting room,
waiting for someone to start a meeting for them!

Talking with parents from both meetings,
giving them a few pamphlets about Alateen,
then setting a date for the meeting to start.

Give yourself about one- two months to talk up the meeting,
to meet with the Al-Anons, talk with the AA group, and to circulate a flyer....
to Al-Anon/Alateen and AA groups!

Don't forget to pass the word around your district, and neighboring ones

Children 8-12 need a meeting as much as teens do...
They are often more willing to go to meetings

Share the 6 meeting rule...
Come to 6 and if you don't like it we will refund your misery!!!

Suggest that parents treat them to something special
just for trying those 6 meetings....





Dear Serene

Dear Serene;

I have been in the program quite a while, but I still have a terrible problem. I have a brother who drinks too much. Due to this and other factors, we don't get along. It causes a big riff in my family and my family of origin. I haven't yet found a way to fix this problem. I have tried every way I can to make peace. Help!

Dear Riff;

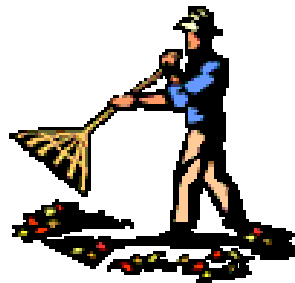
It is easy to think that we have all the answers once we catch on to this marvelous program. We aren't saviors, and trying to **fix** someone else is the old behavior we try, each and every day, to give way to adopt a new attitude and way of life.

Learning about your own powerlessness may help you come to a few conclusions and decisions; you didn't cause anyone to be an alcoholic, you can't cure it and you can't control that person. You can have compassion for your suffering brother. None of us knows the battles others are dealing with. We can use the program to strengthen ourselves and to accept those around us.

We can learn how to show unconditional love with boundaries....the program teaches us to love ourselves and others. It is possible to have a relationship with a relative or friend outside of this loving program- it just takes work to do that. And it may take more time. You may have changed, but your brother perhaps has not. He may not understand how you have changed, or why. Give yourselves time to heal.

Pull out your best tools- your literature, your sponsor, your meetings, and your Higher Power. Sounds like you are in for a period of growth! Serene sends loving thoughts and prayers to you.

*An attitude of gratitude leads to forgiveness...
forgiveness brings peace... peace brings happiness..*





Poetry Corner

*The disease first overtook my best friend, My Dad
But it was my entire family who was suffering
They told me it was not my fault
I am powerless
This monster came into the open
Gnawed on my heart
Ripped my compassion to shreds
His face wore two masks
Darkened eyes glazed over
It came after my siblings
I watched it happen in front of my blinded eyes
I knew I had to look the other way though
It knew it could no longer manipulate me
Clawing at my soul
You can't get to Me!
I won't let you, father
I want my Dad back
Just snap out of it Damnit!
Now!
It's up to You!*

David L





Gratitude, continued

Regularly, I have tremendous gratitude to my alcoholic former husband and his mother for making my life so miserable that I called AA looking for a marriage counselor who knew something about alcoholism. I also have gratitude for my marriage counselor who drove her little red Honda to my house to take me to my first few meetings. Without them, I would never have had the opportunity to meet the wonderful, loving GRs, group contacts, and district officers within the Springfield-Annandale District. We've worked through Internet challenges, two Assembly registrations, an Assembly skit on Communications – complete with Viking helmets, food at the Relationship Workshop, supported the Chair of the Gratitude Brunch, and, by the time you read this, a spirituality / Step 11 workshop! Life happens, and some who joined us on this path were not able to continue at this time. I hope they will be back with us when life permits. The GRs made this district happen. They tested the waters of service, immersed themselves in the ocean of service, and furnished the District with a solid foundation for the next group of officers.

To spend time walking through Al-Anon Service with these individuals is beyond words! They have enthusiasm and love for Al-Anon. This is one group – just say when and where and they are ready to help. They are phenomenal, one and all. ***Harriett T.***



On November 27th I will celebrate five years in Al-Anon and I am not sure how I survived so long without this great program. I learned that to have the program work for you - “you must be willing to give it away through service. I started by being GR for a group that had only three members. After attending my first District Meeting, I found myself volunteering to take over the position of Newsletter Coordinator. I had always loved writing and this became a labor of love for me. Then a few months later the position of Phone Watch Coordinator became vacant and (you guessed it) I volunteered again.

After a couple of years my home group was looking for another GR & Alternate GR. A new GR was selected but since she was having medical problems I told her that I would back her up. Unfortunately, her health deteriorated and I stepped up to the plate from Alternate GR to GR again.

Another year went by and the current District Secretary resigned so the current District Representative asked me at a District meeting if I would fill the position. After discussing this with my Service Sponsor I was voted into another service position. I recently resigned from all my service positions so that I could focus on starting a home business. It is now time for other members to discover just what SERVICE can do for them.

I am grateful that my Service Sponsor led me into service but I am more grateful to the alcoholic that led me into the Serenity of Al-Anon. ***Brenda W.***

Thanks to all who contributed to this issue...Have you something to share?

Please feel free to email the editor - nettles1@hotmail.com

Next issue theme: Changing the things I can....



Alateen Sharings of Gratitude

Preteens share their thoughts about the program

I am thankful for Alateen in more ways than anyone can imagine. When I first started coming to the meeting, I didn't think that it would help me with my problem. Boy! I was wrong. After a few of the meetings, I realized how much it was helping. I was becoming happier and started to deal with all of my problems. Now, my life is a lot better. It's better than it could ever be. Thank you, Alateen! **Sally**

I have been in Alateen for about five months. I did not even know that Alateen and Al-Anon was even there for me. I thought about it and I thought "Wow, I am so grateful for Alateen to be there for me!" Thank you Alateen/Al-Anon for always being there. **Chloe**

I have been in the program for five years now. And I am really grateful for this group and my friends that have helped me in the program. I'm thankful for the steps and traditions.

I am really happy that my brother was there for me, through my parent's divorce and my dad's drinking. The program has helped with my other brothers' drug problems. It has helped me realize that it's not my fault.

I'm really happier now that I'm in this wonderful program! Thank you for this program! **Jenny**

Before Alateen I thought I was the only one with this problem. Before I came here, I didn't know alcohol problems were a disease. I just thought that my parents drank and I was emotionally abused. I didn't understand that my parents loved me (but now I do) and it was just the alcohol doing this. I have learning many things from this program that I wouldn't learn if I didn't come to the meeting.

I started to talk about it with my granny, (a recovering alcoholic) and she said I should express my feelings here. It's meant to help. On of the best things to do in life is to face your feelings. Kids have bad influences and feel they are the ones doing something wrong. Just because my parents drank doesn't mean I should live in an emotional jail. I have learned to love my parents for who they are, and to live and let live. **Izzy**



*To let go and let God take over is not to give up,
rather it is a positive act of faith...*



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Relationship Workshop

Healthy Relationships

Learning to Love Yourself

January 13, 2007 9:00-4:00

The Physicians Conference Center at INOVA Fairfax Hospital
3300 Gallows Road
Fairfax, VA

Virginia Beach 39th Pot Luck Anniversary Dinner

January 27, 2007 7-9:00 p.m.

Old Donation Episcopal Church
Virginia Beach, VA

Nansemond Winter Workshop

Getting Better in Al-Anon by

Working the Principles

February 24, 2007 8:30-3:30

Bring finger food or bag lunch
Cradock Baptist Church
Portsmouth, VA

Virginia Al-Anon Convention

Soaring with Serenity

June 8, 9,10

Natural Bridge, VA