

Home at Last

“I had buried all the painful feelings I experienced growing up in my alcoholic family.”

I'll never forget my first Al-Anon meeting. The image is burned into my memory. It was in a large basement room of a church, and about 30 people were in attendance. The room was painted white, and the overhead lights shone down to brighten up the room even more. That color resonated with me; it looked so clean, fresh, and peaceful.

I was nervous about meeting a bunch of strangers, and I wasn't sure I wanted to be identified as one of “them.” I don't remember anything that was said, but I do remember feeling at home. At last! What a feeling—to feel at home, something I had been waiting for my whole life. I had never felt like I belonged or felt “at home” in my own household while growing up with alcoholic parents. And yet, I knew the feeling immediately once I experienced it. It was a feeling of complete acceptance, acceptance of exactly who I was at that moment.

At that first meeting, and for many meetings afterward, I cried. The first gift I got from Al-Anon was permission—permission to say no, permission to put myself first, and permission to cry. So, cry I did! I cried at every meeting for two years, releasing the pent-up tears I had not been allowed to shed as a child. I had buried all the painful feelings I experienced growing up in my alcoholic family: shame, fear, confusion, anger, disappointment, and more.

When I learned in Al-Anon that it was okay to have my feelings, they came pouring out as tears. No one ever asked me to stop or looked at me funny or shifted away from me in their seat. Instead, they let me cry. I am so grateful that the wise and wonderful people in that room knew I

needed to unburden myself. And I was amazed that they would support me through those painful early years.

I still cry at meetings from time to time when I am overcome with a personal difficulty or when a newcomer describes their turmoil and I can identify with their pain. The tissue box is always out, and someone always passes it to me. That's the definition of home to me: a place where I can cry and be supported and accepted for exactly who I am.

By Kate A., Michigan

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