

Inside Al-Anon Family Groups

Discovering Our Collective Recovery through Archives

“You’re welcome to take pictures if you’d like,” the Human Resources Manager said as she guided me past the display cases in the lobby of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

“Many members do.”

Why in the world would I want a photo of an old typewriter, cassette tapes, and some floppy disks, I thought to myself. Begrudgingly, I snapped a few pictures, intending to share them with my past Area Delegate, the only Al-Anon member privy to my application for a Staff position at the World Service Office (WSO).

Little did I know that within a year, I’d find myself enthusiastically taking photos with my WSO colleagues and other Al-Anon members at Lois’s (and Bill’s) desks at Stepping Stones, their home in New York, which in 2012 was designated a National Historic Landmark. Given my previous professional experience, I understood the immense effort required to attain such a significant designation. At Stepping Stones, I also witnessed firsthand how a historic site and its artifacts could attract individuals who felt deeply connected to its history.

In the same way, the WSO Archives plays a crucial role in upholding the 501(c)(3) Public Charity status of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. (AFG, Inc.), by permanently retaining tax-exempt status records, determination letters, and organizational papers (like articles of incorporation, Bylaws, and Board minutes). Housing a diverse collection of materials, including written records, photographs, audio recordings, and other ephemera capturing the

essence of Al-Anon's journey since its inception, the WSO Archives preserves the experiences and lessons learned by those who have walked this path of recovery.

When I attended my first Al-Anon meeting, I was solely focused on my personal recovery and had a limited understanding of the global fellowship and the WSO. At that time, my Al-Anon experience was limited to my home group. Listening to others share their experience, strength, and hope at meetings and reading their stories in Conference Approved Literature (CAL) made me feel less alone. Knowing that others had been on a similar path with their loved ones' drinking issues nourished me on my own journey of recovery. However, as I kept coming back, read more CAL, and attended more and different meetings and events, I gradually realized that Al-Anon extended far beyond the boundaries of my home group. Service became a transformative force in my recovery, unveiling more facets of the worldwide fellowship.

For members like me, the WSO Archives serves as a repository of hope—an enduring testament to the strength and resilience of individuals who have faced the challenges of being affected by someone else's alcoholism. In addition, the WSO Archives actively supports the mission of AFG, Inc. to carry the Al-Anon message to as many people as possible. Beyond working with WSO Staff and Volunteers and responding to members' queries, WSO Archives also cooperates with researchers, writers, and professionals, making Al-Anon's history accessible to a wider audience while always ensuring member anonymity is protected. This helps raise public awareness and validates the efficacy of the Al-Anon and Alateen program.

Today, I fully appreciate the significance of that old typewriter and those cassette tapes and floppy disks, and I understand why members want to take photographs of them. Being a part of the Archives Team allows me to help showcase the power of shared experiences and the healing fostered by the Al-Anon fellowship. The display of archival materials in the WSO lobby celebrates Al-Anon's legacy, highlighting the story of the clearinghouse and its service to the fellowship. By preserving and presenting the collective wisdom, experiences, and growth of the Al-Anon fellowship, WSO Archives keeps the doors of Al-Anon open for all its members—past, present, and future.

By Heather S., Associate Director—Community Relations

Visit al-anon.org/archives for more information about the WSO Archives and to access some of the items in our collection.

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