

Uncovering the Beauty Within

My adult daughter was visiting me from out of state. Throughout her life, she has struggled with anxiety and depression. When I look at her, I see a beautiful, statuesque young woman, but her appearance shows only her outer protective shell, not the thick layers of fear, abandonment, need for control, and other symptoms of the family disease of alcoholism that encase the beautiful being hidden within.

I know this because I am an adult child of alcoholics. I understand her because I was her. I learned at a tender age to be hypervigilant and observant to try to control my out-of-control family life. My main control method was trying to make all the angry, depressed, sad people around me happy. Their happiness was my focus. My attempts to cope with my family situation created a protective shell made of hard, thick layers of dishonesty, distorted thinking, fear, anxiety, and self-loathing. By the time I was my daughter's age, my thinking about myself and others was warped.

I had no idea who I was, what I felt, or how to get the love and security I longed for. I sought to fill these needs in all the wrong places—self-medicating with alcohol; dating men who were alcoholics, addicts, or emotionally unavailable; and spending time with “friends” I wanted to please even though I didn't like them.

I attended my first Al-Anon meeting over 40 years ago. Before that, I didn't know that my mother, father, and sister were alcoholics. Having been planted deep in the woods of a

dysfunctional family, I had no way of knowing there were other ways of living in the world. But Al-Anon changed this.

During my early days in Al-Anon, I was my usual silent, sad, miserable self, though I kept a smile painted on my face no matter how awful, angry, and resentful I felt inside. I was so focused on everyone else I never thought of honestly looking at myself. But I heard over and over that “in this program, the focus is on you.” That idea was foreign to me. I had no idea that the security, stability, and love I longed for could never be found outside myself, which was where I was seeking it. Instead, it resided within me where my Higher Power was.

Al-Anon is the spiritual vessel on which I set sail all those years ago in my quest to discover what was hidden beneath the shell I grew to protect my heart. The meetings, literature, Steps, principles, my Sponsor, service, and friendships helped me navigate life in new ways and recover from the devastating effects alcohol and addiction had on my life. Today, the Al-Anon program continues to reveal those parts of my shell that still need to be removed to uncover more of the serene, joyful, beautiful me inside.

By Anonymous

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