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CHAPTER ONE

Becoming Aware

It is said that we never get more than we can handle. This can be hard to believe as we watch the door slam shut on several years of marriage or sit in an emergency room with undeniably broken bones from the latest violent alcoholic episode. Sometimes we face up to a difficult situation at the first sign of trouble, but often we, who have been affected by someone else's drinking, try to pretend that the problem doesn't exist, or hope that it will go away. We may isolate ourselves, fearing other people's reactions. Or we avoid talking about it, believing that the situation will become more real if we name it out loud. We might want to be aware, to know exactly what is going on, but we also want to avoid more bad news. This is a form of denial. When we are in denial we perceive a situation to be so threatening that we adapt by denying it exists in order to survive. We make the best choice we can according to the world we see. Sometimes only a crisis can break through our denial. As the situation worsens, facing the truth often becomes the better choice.

At other times, awareness comes to us slowly and gently, and we have the luxury of relinquishing denial little by little, replacing it with the sense of security that

frequently develops in Al-Anon, regardless of our problems. Identifying with other members as they face their own truths, seeing the courage all around us, and being totally free from pressure to do it “the right way” encourages us to feel safe. As that feeling grows, long-buried awareness can begin to awaken within us.

For some, memories of an alcoholic’s verbal or physical abuse suddenly erupt into consciousness after being lost for many years. We may not welcome these memories; we may even actively resist them. Awareness can be very upsetting when it shatters our old ideas about ourselves and others.

Beginners are not the only ones who have difficulty coping with trying situations. Even longtime members, accustomed to relatively serene lives, may be reluctant to acknowledge the strain of a crisis. It’s easy to delude ourselves that, with enough recovery, nothing should bother us. On the contrary, as we recover, we begin to feel all our feelings and participate in life more fully. We often gain new insights and see things from other perspectives. When the focus has truly been taken off the alcoholic and we experience spiritual growth in Al-Anon, many of us begin to learn for the first time who we are and what we want. While this process often allows us to discover previously unrecognized assets and talents that greatly enhance our lives, we may also uncover areas of discontent. Some become aware of deep dissatisfaction with careers or finances. Others question moral choices. An honest appraisal of personal truth may allow a middle-aged father to accept that he

might be gay. It may encourage a homemaker to apply to medical school or tempt an attorney to leave a lucrative practice to write poetry. It is traumatic, to say the least, to be faced with such major discoveries.

Awareness can also be thrust upon us with staggering abruptness. Who wouldn't feel devastated by a loved one's suicide? Who wouldn't be gripped with fear upon discovering a lump in a breast or learning that a former lover may have exposed us to a potentially fatal disease? How many can respond gracefully when the process of aging makes once-simple tasks impossible to perform? The family disease of alcoholism can leave us feeling completely overwhelmed by such situations. We may have no control over our circumstances, and we may feel abandoned by those from whom we most crave support. But we do have choices. We can decide whether or not we will abandon ourselves. One way to honor ourselves is to allow the truth as we perceive it to surface, in its own way and at its own pace.

Reflections on Becoming Aware

Facing Reality

As the child of alcoholic parents, I learned at a young age that appearances were all-important. We were considered a model family and took great pains to keep it that way. But the picture-perfect image we showed to others had nothing to do with the way things really were. Life in my house wasn't very pretty—there were brutal beatings, vicious verbal assaults, threats, and intimidation. This reality was never discussed. Not only were we fooling others, we were also fooling ourselves. Denial was our lifestyle.

I remained in denial, even as an adult, until I found myself homeless when an alcoholic relationship ended. I had heard about Al-Anon before, but it took a desperate situation to get me there. I had nowhere else to go. My family had refused to help in any way, and I had no savings. I felt guilty, because I had known that this could happen and in my denial, had done nothing to prepare. I blamed everyone I could think of, but bitterness wasn't putting a roof over my head.

I shared briefly at my very first Al-Anon meeting, saying only that my alcoholic girlfriend had thrown me out. I was so embarrassed, so ashamed of what other people would think! I couldn't bring myself to mention that I was now sleeping in my car. Even so, I was relieved

to finally be telling a bit of the truth. I never expected anyone to understand, much less care about me, but people at the meeting were incredibly kind and supportive, so I kept coming back.

It has been a long, slow process to come face to face with a lifetime of denial. The shame that I learned in my alcoholic home made this difficult. I discovered a part of myself that felt so flawed and unworthy that I thought I deserved to live on the street. As I listened and identified with others in Al-Anon meetings, it became easier to admit the truth about my circumstances and my feelings. I learned that my situation had the effects of alcoholism written all over it. In time I was able to talk about living in my car, and when members of the fellowship offered assistance, I was able to accept it. Eventually I saved enough money to get a place of my own.

A wonderful Sponsor has helped me immeasurably. He encouraged me to “let time take time,” and guided me through the Steps. With his help I have begun to question my attitudes about myself and take a closer and less fearful look at my past. Through this process I have come to believe in a Power greater than myself. I am learning to trust that He or She will guide me to what is best for me. I cling to the slogans when the pain is great, repeating “Let Go and Let God,” “Easy Does It,” and “Keep It Simple” again and again. Sometime I even find comfort by repeating the Suggested Al-Anon/Alateen Welcome to myself between meetings. The disease of alcoholism is so much bigger than I am, and I have to practice remembering that I am powerless over it. Today

I feel so lucky, because I know that my Higher Power is even greater than alcoholism.

Coming to See Reality

I am one of the many who felt wrong from the very beginning of my life, born female when a male was desired by my alcoholic parent. I was also a dreamer. I escaped into my fantasy land where no one could hurt me, my parents loved me greatly, and the world was mine. But it was a lonely existence. I thought that if only I could die, I wouldn't have to put up with all that was happening in my life.

As an adult, my home was full of the family disease of alcoholism. The worst symptom was the abuse—physical, mental, and spiritual. Some of us gave this abuse, others suffered from it, and still others received it from one person and gave it to another. At one point, I made plans to attend an Al-Anon meeting. As I stood outside the door, I heard the Twelve Steps being read. Then someone else arrived, and I left, gripped with fear. Two years later, after more violence at home, I finally made it inside the room.

Slowly I have come to see reality. It is hard to look at me—the imperfect me—and even harder to work on me. But I am beginning to know the difference between fantasy and reality. Though I once thought I was wronged in my life, I know now that I wronged myself. I took my own rights away from me.

My first two years of Al-Anon were spent sorting, looking, absorbing, and germinating. I began to feel that

I could cope. Maybe I could be the wife and mother I wanted to be, even though my husband was still drinking actively. I had taken the first three Steps. I admitted I was powerless. I could see that my life had become unmanageable. I knew only my Higher Power could restore me to sanity, and I turned over my will and my life. I was beginning to understand that I had to open the door to Him. His door was already open to me.

Awakening from the Nightmare

Before I found Al-Anon, our home life was constantly disrupted by rows. Our eldest son was living away from home, having been “asked” to leave once again by my alcoholic husband.

Early one morning our house was surrounded by police. They were looking for my son, as there had been an attempted robbery at his previous place of employment by somebody answering his description. My son had been fired the previous week. I laughed shakily, “It won’t be my son, he’s far too sensible to do anything that silly.” Twenty-four hours later, after he was arrested, he admitted to armed robbery. One evening while awaiting the trial, I saw him being slapped repeatedly by my husband. I was pleading with my husband to stop, and our youngest was crying in the bedroom. Why was this nightmare happening? I had heard of Al-Anon, and right then and there I decided to attend meetings. What a relief it was to find people who understood.

I felt terrible remorse at seeing my darling, mixed-up son condemned to three years hard labor. How I wished

I had been more aware of his disturbed emotional state, that I had done things differently. If only I had come to Al-Anon earlier. Eventually I learned to let go of past regrets and to be grateful for the understanding I achieved after I did reach Al-Anon. With God's help I won't repeat past mistakes. We have been blessed with another son, who is now learning that Daddy is sick but still loves him dearly.

Our eldest son was paroled after 18 months. Miraculously, he's started a new life, has a job, and is engaged to a nice girl. We have a better relationship now, as I "Let Go and Let God." I can't imagine where I would be today without the help of Al-Anon.

Changing a Pattern of Denial

During my teenage years, my sisters and I were molested by one of my father's employees. When we told my mother about these incidents, she was shocked and angry. We thought she would take care of the situation. Within a few weeks, however, we realized that our parents were not dealing with this child molester. We were left to fend for ourselves.

My husband did not drink when I married him, but when he did start drinking the disease progressed rapidly. Although my husband did not physically abuse the children and me, we were emotionally and verbally abused. At age four, my son was very withdrawn and fearful, and my two-year-old daughter would not approach her father. All my fears from youth returned and I became immobilized. Through the grace of God

I found Al-Anon. It took more than two years in the program before it occurred to me that I had become like my mother. I was not accepting the responsibility of protecting my children from emotional and verbal abuse. I prayed for wisdom, guidance, and the courage to change the things I could. With the help of my Higher Power and some special Al-Anon friends, I gained the courage to leave my husband for a while. It was a difficult, painful, and lonely time, but Al-Anon helped me through it.

Since then my husband has achieved sobriety in AA. The children are no longer afraid of him. We are trying to grow as individuals, in a family built on love, acceptance, and trust.

Facing a Painful Past

When I was 19 years old, I started dating. I wanted a man to love me and get me out of my parents' home. When I became pregnant, I was ashamed and very afraid. I was positive I was pregnant, but my alcoholic boyfriend convinced me I wasn't. I started taking the birth control pill. I don't know how many pills I took.

Soon after that, I had a miscarriage. I was horrified! When my boyfriend finally arrived, he was too drunk to realize what I was talking about. I thought I was responsible because I had taken those pills, and I felt like a murderer. Today I know this is impossible—the pills could not have been the cause. At the time, however, I didn't know any better. I had no one to talk to about it.

My boyfriend became my husband. I felt I had to

marry him because I had killed his baby.

Al-Anon helped me to look at my miscarriage objectively. I told members of the fellowship what had happened, and they understood and loved me anyway. Then one night I had a flashback. My mind took me back through the horror of that night when I was 19 years old. I have heard in meetings that if we don't face something when it is happening, we will have to face it later in order to deal with it. When I went through my miscarriage again, I called a friend in Al-Anon and she loved me through it. I saw the blood. I felt the fear. I experienced the pain. I then realized that I can forgive myself for something I did so many years ago. I can forgive that young girl who was so frightened.

Breaking the Isolation

I wish there were more men in the program. I sometimes feel like an ambassador for my gender, and I feel uncomfortable with that role.

I know several men in the fellowship who grew up with alcoholism, as I did. They have helped me understand and accept the isolation that I lived with and even cultivated. Feeling closer to these people, I have come to feel closer to myself. Hearing the struggles these men have had establishing intimacy in their lives and making room for their feelings, I have been able to be gentler and more understanding with myself. The presence of men in Al-Anon has helped remind me that alcoholism affects us all without regard to gender or background. The gift of serenity is available to everyone.

Overcoming Denial

Anger, bitterness, fear, rejection, and inadequacy were the feelings I fought so hard to deny throughout the 26 years of my marriage to an active alcoholic who had numerous affairs. Delusion became my way of life. I forced myself to see him as I wanted him to be, not as he really was, and to maintain the appearance of the “cute little couple” we were so often called. I convinced myself I could live without feeling anything, the only way I knew to stop the pain.

It took many months of Al-Anon meetings before I felt enough trust to share about this. I first needed to believe that my husband’s behavior was not a reflection on me. The Serenity Prayer was a great source of comfort and guidance. I hated the past and wanted desperately to change it.

I have made peace with the past by realizing I cannot cure the problems my husband has that caused him to make these choices. When I long to change my husband, I can remember the Al-Anon slogan, “Let It Begin with Me,” and turn my attention to my own attitudes. When old feelings haunt me, I quickly make a gratitude list. I find this a great way to banish ugly thoughts and feelings. From many years of misery to three challenging but oh-so-fulfilling years of recovery, I am changing my life with the help of Al-Anon, the program of hope!

Listening to Inner Awareness

I found out that my alcoholic husband had molested a young girl only when the case came to court. At first

I was angry, hurt, and in shock. But the biggest problem has been my anger at myself because there had been warning signals that I hadn't heeded. I had pushed aside my feelings, thinking they were not worth anything. Through Al-Anon, I am learning to trust that my feelings do have some basis in reality and are worth listening to. I really believe we all have our own answers within ourselves and can find them with the help of our Al-Anon program and a Higher Power.

Living in the Present

I remember the lonely nights, the long waits, wondering who he was with and what he was doing. I remember how my suspicions were aroused as his advances to other women became more publicly aggressive. These fears were somehow tempered by hearing only what I wanted to hear and by believing because I so wanted to believe.

Intent on creating the marriage of my dreams, I chose to set aside all the tell-tale signs of the *today* I was in. I saw them as the hard times I must ride through in order to reach the promise of a better tomorrow.

Alcoholism, the family disease, progressed. The hard times continued to get worse until I found Al-Anon and my attitudes began to change. The Al-Anon program, the people in it, the meetings, and an active Sponsor help to remind me who I am, where I've been, where I am right now, and that I need to be open to whatever may come tomorrow. Security—or my search for it—is no longer my base of operations. I can see that nothing

in my life has ever been forever. The good and the bad pass. I no longer have to live in the unreality of a tomorrow I've already scripted but which may never come to pass.

Healing by Sharing

. . . So, tell us about your life just before coming to Al-Anon.

. . . Well, it was truly unmanageable—ugly. I had a lover who was drinking and drugging; he was also in denial that I had the AIDS virus. And I was not exactly handling my AIDS diagnosis in a healthy, positive way.

. . . What did you hope to get from Al-Anon?

. . . Actually, I just wanted to get the strength to leave my lover—and as soon as possible. It was quite a shock when I heard the suggestion not to make any radical changes in my life for six months!!!

. . . So what did you do?

. . . I hung in there, one day at a time, and then a miracle happened. My lover hit a bottom, and although I only had a few meetings behind me, they were enough to prevent me from reacting to him the way I had in the past. He started a Twelve Step program three days later and stuck with it. Then we hardly saw one another and when we did we were invariably at home making program calls. But our love was strong enough. We realized we were both making dramatic, positive, healing changes in our lives, and these changes, although frightening and sometimes painful, could give our relationship new and exciting dimensions. Today we have a

much more honest, trusting, loving relationship.

. . . So you're grateful for what you've learned in Al-Anon?

. . . In more ways than I can say. When I joined Al-Anon, I never thought for one minute that it could possibly affect how I felt about living with the AIDS virus. But when I apply the program to all aspects of my life, miracles can happen. In Al-Anon I've learned that I have choices in my life. These choices apply beautifully to surviving and thriving with the AIDS virus. It took a while for me to pluck up the courage to share about my health status. I had to know that I was in a safe environment. Once I had shared, amazing inner healing began, and I had an incredible outpouring of love and support, even though not everyone is comfortable hearing about it. I choose not to dwell too much on the doom and gloom side of AIDS, but more on the joy of being alive and appreciating the gifts I have. Today I am the happiest person I have ever been—and just for today, that is enough.

Awareness and Shame

My dreams for my children were shattered the day my daughter said, "Mom, I have something to tell you that you aren't going to want to hear." Then she told me about being sexually abused by her brother. My shame was enormous. I am a religious professional and a counselor, and these things weren't supposed to happen in my family. Somehow the Higher Power I had come to know in Al-Anon, the One who cared, came through for me

at this time. I knew we had been given this burden and we were strong enough to handle it. I got on the phone immediately and began contacting my Al-Anon support system. I felt suicidal and homicidal. After all the time and energy spent recovering from alcoholism's impact on the family, this new trial just didn't seem fair. I railed against God about the injustices of life. Yet I was frequently moved to tears by the non-judgmental acceptance and support I received.

Within 11 days our son was out of the house. The decision to press charges was made—he was in total denial of his actions. The whole family began to receive counseling. Also some touching, beginning moments of healing were experienced by our daughter, and our son entered a psychiatric hospital. My Al-Anon friends carried me through these early, agonizing days and beyond.

Our son has been diagnosed as having brain damage. Finding appropriate help for him is arduous and exhausting. He falls through the cracks of so many systems, and not everyone is willing to accept a child molester. My daughter dips in and out of depression and is currently having difficulty in school. Al-Anon members love me and remind me of the courage it takes to handle a situation like this with dignity and maturity. With their help, I have been able to deal with teachers without being overcome with shame.

Doing a Fourth and Fifth Step on all this has been extremely painful. I continue to struggle with my shame. I question what is enabling and what is accepting the things I cannot change. There are no easy answers, but

my Higher Power has sent others to me with similar experiences to help me apply the principles. With the help of the Al-Anon program, I am coming to accept life on life's terms and find some serenity in the midst of the pain.

Facing My Own Unacceptable Behavior

Through Al-Anon I have recently become aware of how abusive I have been as a result of living in an alcoholic situation. In my own fears, as well as insecurities and frustrations at not being able to control the alcoholic, I have lashed out verbally at my children in name-calling, in irrational hysterics over something as simple as a spilled glass of milk, or in rigid demands for “perfect performance.” This awareness has helped me to learn not to react in anger, to stop and think, and to live my life one minute at a time if necessary. Al-Anon has helped me work toward a calmer and more serene life, with more respect for myself and for others.

Letting Go of Denial

By the end of my first year in Al-Anon, I felt a peace I'd never experienced before. When my brother was killed while driving drunk, however, Al-Anon became my lifeline. I discovered I had developed a deep faith that, when tested, remained as solid as a rock. During this time I came to really believe that alcoholism was a disease. I was able to forgive my brother for the slip that caused his death after five years in AA. I learned the meaning of “powerlessness” and “acceptance.”

I had learned in Al-Anon to look for opportunities for growth in every situation. This attitude allowed me to gain many spiritual riches from the pain I was experiencing. Only I had the power to turn my pain to gain.

Six months later I was able to admit for the first time that my father was an alcoholic. In admitting this fact, I felt I was betraying my family. I discovered first-hand what a strong hold denial had over me and how it kept me from growing. I am grateful that the merry-go-round has stopped and that I have gotten off in time.

Abandoning Perfectionism

Somewhere in my life I had accepted the idea that I must be perfect or I was nothing. I spent all my time trying to be the perfect wife, mother, daughter, and student. I felt that the only thing keeping me from being perfect was the alcoholic in my life, who shamed me by sleeping with other women and by forcing me to assume all financial responsibility for the family. As time went on I accused him of having an affair with every female he knew. I made a bigger fool of myself than he ever could have done. I filed for a divorce in a smug, self-righteous way, but after he was gone, I came to the bitter realization that I still was not perfect. The awareness was shattering. I felt all alone, angry at the entire world, and that it would be better if I were dead. Fortunately, some very wise Al-Anon members sensed the depths of my despair. They called me when I couldn't call them. They let me cry on their shoulders, and when I told them my deepest secrets they didn't shudder, but hugged

me instead. It was the people in the program who kept me from going under. I was not able to see how the Steps could help me with my life, but I sensed the hope, and that is what I held on to.

Today I can accept myself for what I am because I know that whatever happens, I have a Higher Power and a group of people who will love me anyway. Today I can let people see me cry. New-found courage and honesty have helped me see the role I played in the break-up of my marriage, and my husband and I are currently living together once again. It is not easy and I don't know what the outcome will be. I do know that if I take it "One Day at a Time" and live the Al-Anon program as best I can, everything will come out the best possible way, which is close enough to perfect for me.

An End to Denial

Denial gradually slipped away during my first year in Al-Anon, but when my alcoholic boyfriend ended our relationship "for the sake of his recovery," all remaining denial went up like a curtain, leaving me deeply shaken. Something inside me knew that facing reality, with all its broken dreams and disappointments, was the only way to heal. Just exactly when I needed it, a longtime member of Al-Anon was put in my life, like an angel. She walked me to meetings and, at a time when every phone call felt like a terrible imposition, constantly urged me to call. She told me how inspiring it was for her to watch me go through this process. At the time, I thought she was just being nice, but now, some years

later, having been on the other side, I know she was sincere. It continues to amaze me how much courage surrounds me in Al-Anon. It is a great privilege to be able to share in it on either side.

Progress, not Perfection

At a workshop on the problems of longtime members in Al-Anon, everyone mentioned the unwillingness of newer Al-Anon members to accept that those of us who have been around a while can still hurt. Likewise, some longtime members think they cannot be sick or have any emotional problems—or at least they must not let anyone know it if they are.

I faced this particular obstacle some years back when I had a paralyzing depression. I was afraid that if less experienced Al-Anon members knew about it, they would think Al-Anon didn't work or that I was some kind of failure. I know now that the Al-Anon fellowship is in the hands of God, not of any person, and that you only expect progress from me, not perfection.

Sometimes I think I hurt more now than I did in the early days, because the more I am aware, the more I feel. Of course I have tools now to help me handle the pain. I don't suffer as long and I don't suffer alone. Still, I feel like saying sometimes, "Tell me again how happy I am."

The longer I am in the program, the harder it is to find people who are where I am in my spiritual journey. To me, this is not snobbery—oh, how guilty I had been feeling about this!—but only fact. Nevertheless, when I get in a rut in Al-Anon, I try to remember that a rut is

a grave with both ends knocked out. I can climb out if I don't want to be buried.

Replacing Fantasies with Self-Worth

Today I recognize that in the past I had chosen people I thought I could control, care for, and fix. I unknowingly chose people who would emotionally abuse me to confirm my poor self-esteem, and reject me so I could feel sorry for myself (poor me, I always get hurt). If someone tried to get too close, I shut down. I turned cold. I was afraid of getting too close or being loved because deep inside I didn't feel worthy. I lived in a world of fantasy, always wishing, dreaming, and hoping for what I myself could not give or accept.

In Al-Anon I am learning about me and how to own and change my behavior. As I do, I feel better about myself. Today, as a result of going to meetings and being willing to be honest, I have some self-worth, and don't need to live in fantasy. My life gets better when I take responsibility for just me. Today I will mind my own business and keep my focus where it belongs—on me.

Ending My Isolation

When my alcoholic husband left, it was as if someone had pulled a cord and I didn't have anything or anyone left—not even myself. I was in trouble, totally frightened, and alone. I was a victim with no choices, going nowhere fast. I crawled into Al-Anon.

One of the first things I heard was that it was okay to come any way I was. Many mornings I could barely get

up. It was okay if I just attended the meeting and sat there crying. It didn't matter if I was a mess. Meetings broke my isolation. I got phone numbers and realized that the choice was mine whether or not to be alone.

Recovery in Al-Anon required continually making decisions. I had lots of choices and I hadn't been taking responsibility for them. Things didn't just happen to me; I let them happen by not being an active participant. But I didn't have to do anything until I felt ready.

Today I have some clarity. If I didn't have Al-Anon, I'd still be wishing things were different. Longtime Al-Anon members talk about "Live and Let Live." To me this means that the way to a serene life is to live my life to the fullest and let other people live theirs.

Recognizing a Destructive Situation

I know I was fearful of rocking the boat of a potentially suicidal husband, but there was also a lot of denial on my part about how urgent and destructive the situation was. I had tolerated his abusive treatment of the children for a long time. I was pretty casual about my Al-Anon meetings, attending only once a week. My son would come to me saying that Dad had hit him with a shovel. My husband would say he had barely tapped him. I was so confused I could not put "First Things First." I got as upset over my husband growing a beard as I did about his screaming at the children. In time, the things I heard in Al-Anon began to sink in, and my denial broke down. I began to see how destructive the family situation had become, and I made a serious commitment to working

the Al-Anon program. I went to a great many meetings, got a Sponsor, and worked the Steps. The slogans helped me so much! They were simple enough to grab onto, even in the midst of my confusion.

Things are so much better today, and I am grateful for what Al-Anon did. However, I wish I had chosen a total immersion in the Al-Anon program right from the beginning. My children are doing well, but I can see the scars. I still have work to do on forgiving myself. I know I did the best I could at the time.

Becoming Aware of My Powerlessness

I felt I was doing really well in Al-Anon. After all, my husband did go in for treatment. Didn't that mean I was doing something right? Well, he went, but stayed only two days, and my sickness reigned. I would take the truck keys and hide them, keep the checkbook at work so he couldn't write checks, and call throughout the day to be sure he was sober. None of this kept him from drinking. I couldn't control his life nor mine.

One night there was a wreck. I was devastated, but thanks to the little bit of Al-Anon I was able to grasp, I made it through the night. I realized that he couldn't control this disease and I had to leave it alone too. When I fully gave up and let my Higher Power take over, I began to relax. I had to be put in a powerless situation before I realized that I had no control over alcohol or the alcoholic.

Could I really trust in Someone greater than myself? Just at this time I read something that helped me begin

to “Let Go and Let God.” It said:

“Dear _____,

Thanks, but I don’t need your help today.

Love, God”

During the next few weeks when I felt I needed to give God a hand, I would take out this sheet of paper and read it. You know something? He’s really done great without my help.

Awareness Came When I Was Ready

I was in such delicate shape in the beginning that if the Al-Anon fellowship had been confrontational or dictatorial, I would not have made it. I could easily have been pushed off the edge. I only began dealing with issues when I was ready and able. I believe this is why my Higher Power waited until I had two years of Al-Anon recovery to reveal to me that my father, stepfather, brother, first husband, and many others in my life were all alcoholics. I needed to be gently loved back to life and given the time I needed to listen, relate, and apply what I could.

I have found that the same tools I used to heal from the effects of alcoholism are very useful in other situations I experience. In working on difficult relationships, I begin by applying all Twelve Steps to the relationship. The excellent questions in the back of Al-Anon’s book, *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage*, help me approach the relationship one Step at a time and also to take an inventory of my role. My Sponsor helps me to see where

my problem areas lie. Then I do what I can to make my part of the relationship better. This may involve making amends, or perhaps changing my behavior toward the person—more detachment, compassion, or communication; less involvement, or whatever. Healing is likely when I surrender the relationship to the Higher Power and become willing for it to be different. It is no surprise that most often I am the one who changes, not the other person. In time, as I work my program, there are occasionally changes in someone else, too. Could it be because I have let go and am minding my own business?