

What I didn't understand at my first Al-Anon meeting

I walked into my first Al-Anon meeting after my boyfriend had his first relapse. Tears that hadn't stopped in days were running down my face. I wasn't wearing makeup and my hair was tied back just to keep it out of my face. I brought my boyfriend's Sponsor with me, a longtimer who had more than 20 years of sobriety under his belt. He was the only person I could think of to call for help; he showed me Al-Anon.

I remember walking into the room knowing that these people were going to tell me what I needed to do to help my alcoholic boyfriend get back on track. I shared what had happened: he picked up drinking again after being sober for two and a half years and was now in jail. I waited for someone, anyone, to tell me their secret since they all were either nodding their heads or smiling. One lady turned to me and said, "Keep Coming Back." Another person said, "Welcome."

What was going on? Why wouldn't they tell me what to do? I sat there crying even harder. My boyfriend's Sponsor didn't say anything; he just patted my back as I was doubled over in pain and confusion. Why were these people not telling me how to fix the problem? Couldn't they see my pain? Didn't anyone care?

I got angry. I stood up and proceeded to let everyone know that I thought they were mean and hateful people for "keeping" their little "secret" to themselves, apparently thinking I wasn't worth knowing it. Once I had given everyone in the room a piece of my mind, including my boyfriend's Sponsor, I stormed out determined to fix my alcoholic boyfriend without their help.

I spent the next four years going to open A.A. meetings, learning the Steps, and reading everything I could about alcoholism and addiction. I talked to men and women in recovery and listened to their stories. I became somewhat of an expert on this horrible, destructive disease that was eating up my soul.

During this time two things happened. My boyfriend and I got married, and he had six more relapses.

By the time I came back to Al-Anon, I was so broken and empty—all I could do to go on was breathe. I was dead inside, and no one could see it. I had no hope, no joy, no feeling of self-worth. I was drained and tired. I had tried to "fix" the alcoholic only to destroy myself in the process.

I walked into my second Al-Anon meeting not so much with the hope of help but with the fear of not getting it. I walked in prepared to kill myself and had the means to do so. I didn't know what

to expect, but I knew that I couldn't continue living in this pain anymore. Something in the back of my mind kept telling me that if A.A. works for them, Al-Anon could really work for me.

I didn't yell at anyone; I didn't double up in pain and confusion, I just sat there crying and listening. Some of it I could relate to, some I couldn't. Then I heard someone say that "I" didn't cause it, "I" can't cure it, and "I" can't control it. All of sudden this huge weight was lifted off my shoulders. It wasn't my fault! A very small glimmer of hope started to form in my mind, and I wanted more.

I went to that meeting wanting to rid my life of this agonizing feeling but left wanting to come back. Over the next several months I went to meetings every week, bought and read literature, talked with others, found a Sponsor, and got into service work.

In the beginning words couldn't describe the pain I was in. Now words can't describe the peace I'm in. My worst day in Al-Anon far outweighs my best day without it. Today, I understand serenity, I appreciate suggestions, and I have hope. I've accepted the alcoholic for who he is because now I know who I am.

By Angela L., Washington