

## **My Story** (posted July 18, 2006)

This is how I came to be a member of Al-Anon.

Alcohol was often present in our house when I was growing up - because it was so seldom imbibed! In our home, alcohol would last a long time, as it was used moderately and rarely. My father would drink an occasional beer and both my parents enjoyed wine on rare occasions. I bypassed alcohol throughout my high school years; I just wasn't interested.

In college, I drank to the point of drunkenness on a few occasions, and "experimented" once with marijuana. However I was not interested in alcohol or drugs and began to prefer the company of others who did not drink to excess or use drugs at all.

I met my later-to-be husband when I was in my junior year. He was a graduate student and serious about his studies. I took it upon myself to teach him to have fun! Our idea of "fun" was not typical of what comes to mind as college fun. Long walks and long talks began to head our list of weekend activities. We were definitely not the partying types!

We finished school and started careers. Marriage and later three wonderful sons followed. Alcohol did not seem to be a significant part of our lives at first - but when it was present, it didn't seem to stay around as long as it had in my family when I was growing up. If we had beer in the house it would be gone the same day or soon after. My husband never seemed to be drunk, and he didn't drink regularly. I didn't question his drinking. Not at that time.

My husband had orthopedic surgery and was prescribed pain pills. His pain continued and the prescription was renewed. Then, more prescriptions. He returned to work but continued to require medication for pain, in increasing amounts. Then, he and his doctor decided pain medicine should no longer be necessary and had the potential to become a problem, and he cut back on and then stopped using pain pills.

Whether it was set off by the pain pills we will never know, but it seemed that soon after, alcohol became part of every day. My husband would drink when he got home from work, and soon he was drinking through the evening, every evening. He began drinking through the day on weekends as well. Alcohol began to accompany our activities, and activities that did not include alcohol did not generate his interest any more.

Our family relationships changed. He seemed less interested in our children and their activities, and became irritable with me and with our children. Alcohol began to precede and accompany everything we did and everywhere we went.

I thought something must be terribly wrong, physically or emotionally, for my husband to drink the way he drank. I expressed my concern and my desire to help. I tried to be understanding and to find a solution for him. I tried to reduce his stress by being a perfect wife and homemaker, on top of the demands of parenting my children and maintaining a half-time job. I did not understand that he had a disease called alcoholism, and that I did not cause, could not control, and could not cure what was wrong.

As his drinking got worse, I was increasingly alarmed, and concerned for our sons. I did not allow them to be in the car with their father driving. I began to make excuses to them for their father's behavior, such as, "Daddy doesn't feel well today." Or, "Daddy had a hard day at work. He didn't mean what he said to you."

My husband sought counseling. He completed a course that was supposed to help him drink moderately, and for short periods he did not drink at all, but he could not seem to maintain sobriety for long. Each time he remained sober for a few days, my hopes would soar, only to crash even lower when he drank again. I can only imagine how he felt each time he tried and was unable to stay sober.

I issued ultimatums - "give up alcohol or else." He would agree to quit drinking, but his promises did not last long. My heart was broken, and my children were hurting. I considered separation, as the only recourse I felt I had left.

We entered marriage counseling, and our counselor recommended treatment for alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous for my husband, and Al-Anon for me. My husband completed an outpatient program for alcoholism, and began attending A.A. meetings. I attended Al-Anon to be a supportive wife. I didn't think I needed support - I just needed my husband to stay sober so things could get back to the way they were!

In Al-Anon, I learned that I did not cause, can not control, and can not cure my husband's alcoholism. I learned I am powerless over his disease and over his choices. However, I can make my own choices.

While I learned how to focus on taking care of myself and my children, my husband slowly began to engage in the A.A. program. His initial attempts at sobriety lasted for days to weeks, but he kept trying, and his periods of drinking became shorter and his participation in A.A. became stronger. He has now been sober for four years. It is through his own efforts and the help of his A.A. program that he has sustained his sobriety, but none the less I am so proud of him!

Although we have much to be grateful for in addition to my husband's sobriety, life is not perfect and never will be. I find that my Al-Anon program helps me not only in coping with alcoholism, but also helps me in day to day life. Attending meetings, talking with others in the program, and reading Al-Anon literature help me to put what I have learned into practice in my life. The Al-Anon slogans help me to stop and think before reacting to situations, and the Al-Anon Steps help me to be the kind of person I want to be. I have found more in the Al-Anon program than I came for, and more than I ever imagined!

We recently moved to the Ann Arbor area, and the meetings here are in some ways a little different than what I was accustomed to, but the Al-Anon program welcomes family members and friends of alcoholics anywhere in the world. If you are affected by a loved one's drinking, Al-Anon can help you as well!

(Anonymous)