

# growing oaks



OAKLAND COUNTY  
AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2016



## Step Five

I have been reflecting on Step 5 in the past week. Probably because five different people I know within the fellowship (four of whom I sponsor!) are working on their fourth step inventories. I guess my Higher Power is providing me once again with an opportunity to develop a skill; this time, my ability to listen.

Something I heard some time ago at a meeting related to Step 5 has stuck with me. The person sharing said, "I think Step 5 actually has two parts. Part A is where I admit to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. But Part B is where I am on the receiving end of another human being making that admission." This got me thinking. The first few times I prepared to listen to one of my sponsee's fourth step inventories, I worried that I would "do it right." Would I hear the things that were important to my sponsee's growth? Would I have the courage to share my observations? Would I be able to not try to fix or analyze what was being revealed? Could I remain objective, loving and free of judgment? These questions swirled through my mind in the days leading up to my meeting with my sponsee and caused me to be anxious.

But, then it clicked. This was my sponsee's 5th step...not mine! My only role was to be fully present, to listen, and to allow awareness to emerge. So, I asked my Higher Power to help me simply be present and to allow me to listen in the spirit of compassion and understanding. That was enough preparation. For after all, I had grown up in a home affected by the family disease of alcoholism. And in that environment, I learned to listen with the purpose of protecting myself from potential harm. Now, with the help of Al-Anon and my Higher Power, I can listen in order to help another person become more aware of the things that are blocking them from living a happier and more serene life. For that, I am truly grateful!

**Therese S.**

## Need to find a meeting?

***You can find an up to date list of Oakland County Al-Anon Meetings at our website. (link at right.) You can email us at the newsletter or contact the office through the website for information on locations and times for Alateen meetings.***



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**[oaklandafg.org](http://oaklandafg.org)**

*Edited by Go After Your Serenity LGBT AFG*  
This is **YOUR** newsletter: Your articles and  
announcements are welcome! Please email to:

**[BroWCarey@wowway.com](mailto:BroWCarey@wowway.com)**

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**SUMMERTIME!**

# Trusted Servants

*For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.*

*Al-Anon/Alateen Second Tradition*

## 2015 BOARD MEMBERS

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**Co-Chairperson:** Theresa M. - tjmac1207@gmail.com

**Treasurer:** Mitch S. - mitch@mitchmaster.com

**Secretary:** Karen B. - kbartos@twmi.rr.com

**Members at Large:**

**Ruthanne O.** - rokun7@yahoo.com

**DeeZee** - denisez@sbcglobal.net

**Milena C.** - milenac0217@gmail.com

### VITAL TRUSTED SERVANTS

District 12 Rep:

Bill C. – BroWCarey@wowway.com

District 12 Alternate Rep:

Debbie D. - debdrop@wowway.com

District 14 Rep:

Michelle B. - obrillhart@aol.com

District 14 Alternate Rep:

Lynda E. - lynda\_easterday@yahoo.com

AWSC Liaison:

Heather D. – mason.H321@gmail.com

Alateen Sponsors/Contacts:

Mitch S. - mitch@mitchmaster.com

Alisa B. – alisabell422@gmail.com

Ron V. – rva59@aol.com

Office email: oaklandcountyafg@aol.com

Literature Coordinator:

Mike A. – mikeandrus49@gmail.com

Public Outreach Contacts:

Josie C. - connolly900@comcast.net

Therese Marie – tm@meettherese.com

Website Contact:

Karl W. – surcuitpac@aol.com

Newsletter Contact:

Bill C. – browcarey@wowway.com



**SAVE THE DATE!!!**

**ALANON & ALATEEN**

**ANNUAL FALL FUNDRAISER AND WORKSHOP**

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2016 9:00 AM-1:00 PM**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIRMINGHAM**



**"THERE'S A PLACE FOR US"**

**FOOD... FRIENDSHIP... ENTERTAINMENT...**

**GUEST SPEAKERS... ACTIVITIES... RECOVERY  
AND THE EVER POPULAR SILENT AUCTION!**

**MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW  
SO FOR NOW PLEASE SAVE THE DATE!**



## **Singers Needed!**

**Al-Anon & Alateen**



Fall Workshop (see flyer above) entertainment committee is looking for members of Al-Anon and Alateen to help us put on our show. We need soloists and chorus singers from both Al-Anon and Alateen. The show is not very long, and does not require great talent... just willingness to participate and have fun.

Contact Bill: 248-565-7605 (voice or text) or [BroWCarey@wowway.com](mailto:BroWCarey@wowway.com)



# The Bag



People who are not in Program often ask me why I continue to go to meetings if my qualifier has stopped drinking. I try to explain to them that for me, Al-Anon is not as much about the alcoholic or addict in my life as it is about my own personal journey with my Higher Power. I explain to them that I never leave a table without having learned something new. Of course, this leads them to ask if the meetings are like school, where we are promoted to the next “grade” (step) each year and are permitted to read progressively difficult literature until we reach the 12th Step and thus graduate. I love to see the incredulous looks on their faces when I tell them that I primarily read the same three books over and over. They don’t seem to be able to grasp that each time I re-read *How Al-Anon Works*, *Courage to Change* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* I am constantly struck by passages that are meaningful in a different way, depending on what is going on in my life. I know this is my Higher Power at work, giving me the tools I need and the knowledge I can understand when I am ready to receive it.

Last week was a perfect example of this. I was sitting at what was probably my 50th first step table when the words, “we intervene where it is inappropriate . . . and our misplaced concern for others becomes intrusive, meddling, resented and doomed to failure.” “We confuse controlling with caring because we don’t know how to allow others the dignity to be themselves.” Hearing those words for the 50th time suddenly brought me back to an incident with my daughter who is my qualifier. As I recalled my past behavior I realized that not only was my attempting to control my daughter intrusive but it was also dangerous. My “I know what was best for you” attitude could have put my daughter at risk for relapse or worse.

She had just returned from 30 days in rehab and while there she decided it would be best for her sobriety if she moved out of our house and into a sober living facility. Sadly I had been enabling her without realizing it, so I was proud of her for making this adult decision. It seemed like she was really serious about her recovery, so I offered to help her pack and move her belongings. Of course, instead of letting my adult daughter make her own decisions about what to take and what to leave behind, I began to assemble a small pile of things I thought she should take with her to her new home. I think that I let the years of packing her things for summer camp convince me that I knew best when it came to the practicality of deciding what should stay and what should go. I also think I wanted to “save” her from being embarrassed because she forgot deodorant or some other equally important personal hygiene product.

I scanned the room and saw the perfect bag to carry said essentials. I placed the bag on the bed so I could fill it later. As I went about my self-assigned task, I noticed that every time I turned away, the bag managed to make its way to the pile we had designated as trash. After more than a few such instances, I finally confronted my daughter and asked her why she was refusing to take such an obviously nice bag. After all, not only was the bag perfect in every way, I recalled that it had been a Christmas gift from her now deceased Grandmother. I could not imagine a world in which one would willingly discard such a lovely, expensive and valuable gift from a dearly departed favorite relative! Evidently rehab had done nothing to teach my daughter how to appreciate the important things in life!

Thankfully for me, rehab had taught my daughter more than a thing or two. For what could have been the first time in her adult life, my daughter had the courage to stand up to me and put her own recovery before the meddling and nagging that had defined our relationship of late. With surprising calm, my daughter informed me that, while she agreed that the bag was indeed beautiful, it also served as a trigger for her addictive behavior. It seems that the bag and its contents was the only thing that my daughter had taken with her when she choose to live on the streets to pursue her addictions. She knew that she didn’t need any such triggers as she tried to stay clean and put her life back together. In effect, she was figuratively and literally making a conscious decision to leave the destructive “baggage” of her old existence behind in pursuit of a new, healthy, addiction-free life.

Armed with this new information about what the bag represented, I quickly agreed with my daughter that

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the bag should NOT accompany her to the sober living house. However, it wasn't until months later, when I was struck with those aforementioned first step passages that I went home and retrieved the bag from the back of my closet where I had surreptitiously hidden it. I realized that all those months back I knew enough about the first step to agree to let my daughter leave the bag behind but I hadn't yet fully embraced the entire message of the first step. The part about not allowing others to make their own decisions was finally sinking in. I think that I secretly entertained the idea that someday, when my daughter was stronger in her program, she would come around to my way of thinking and be able to see the bag for what it was----a perfectly lovely, useful, expensive piece of luggage!

Thanks to being struck by that reading I now knew that the bag really had to go, no matter how nice it was. I opened the offensive satchel to clear it of its contents and realized that scattered among the random lotions and mismatched socks there was also the "rig" that my daughter had used to shoot heroin. It suddenly hit me that my daughter might have lost not only her sobriety but her life had she listened to me instead of her own Higher Power. I said a silent prayer of thanks to my Higher Power and vowed to truly embrace the first step and its teachings. As a good friend of mine once told me, "Your daughter has a Higher Power but you are NOT it." I am forever grateful for a program that has taught me that it is enough to take care of my own side of the street, but that trying to control others is not only unnecessary, but may be harmful to their own recovery.



**Madilyn G.**  
***Grateful member of Al-Anon.***

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## What it means to me...

On May 22 of this year, I celebrated two milestones. One of these was my birthday. I'm a bit less enthused about that milestone than I might have been in the past: I've noticed a definite correlation between birthdays and getting a year older! But the other milestone is one that means a great deal to me. It was on that day that I celebrated thirty years in Al-Anon.

I think that in order to fully appreciate how much this anniversary means to me, someone must have some idea of who I was before coming into this program, what my life was like. I was a busy and active person, but didn't have a lot to show for that activity. I had a long history of not being able to hold a job for very long. I seemed to dread going to work each day, and frequently feigned illness to stay home. I felt bad about that... but I felt worse about actually going to work!

I was also following closely in the footsteps of my family, unable to maintain a long-term relationship with anyone. My record at that time was three years, and that was with the alcoholic/addict who was the main catalyst for my seeking help in Al-Anon. But the average relationship seemed to be about six months. Of course, I had no idea why I was having such problems in that department. One thing I was sure about: it wasn't my fault! The idea that I might be doing something wrong was just not acceptable. Of course, in retrospect, I have learned that there was very little that I had been doing right!

I was an expert in manipulation and using guilt to get what I wanted, but would have had no idea how to simply ask for something I needed. In fact, I would have bristled at the suggestion that I should ever ask for help. I had very little sense of who I was as a person. I knew, of course, how my family saw me, because they didn't hesitate to tell me exactly what they thought of me. And while I put up with psychologically

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What it means to me...

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abusive behavior because I didn't know any better, I rejected their depiction of who I was as a person. The problem was, I didn't have anything to replace it with! So I existed as little more than a codependent extension of all of them.

My understanding of feelings was almost nil. In my family of origin, only two emotions existed: anger and fear. Only the privileged few were allowed to express anger. My lot had always been fear. The psychologic abuse I endured as an adult had been coupled with some physical abuse when I was a child. While not severe, it was unpredictable, which only served to make me more afraid. There were never any expressions of love or affection between members of the family. We hugged aunts and cousins when we got together, but it was more an act of obligation. It's not that we didn't love each other, but that we didn't know what love felt like, how to express it, or even that it should be expressed. One of the issues I encountered in early intimate relationships was that people seemed to expect that I would express my feelings both physically (a hug or kiss) or verbally. I thought that was an unreasonable expectation. It felt foreign and unnatural to me.

When I came to my first Al-Anon meeting at the strong suggestion of a dear friend who, at that time, had 15 years clean and sober in AA and NA, I didn't know what I was coming there for. All I understood at my first meeting was "Keep coming back!" But I did. After a while, I learned that I was coming for me, not for the alcoholic. After a year, having learned what alcoholism really was and what it looked like, I was able to look at my extended family and see what had previously been invisible to me: decades of alcoholism and addiction, covering the entire 20th century that I could trace.

A therapist who specialized in adult children of alcoholics told me she thought I didn't like or love myself. I didn't believe her, but in retrospect, of course I didn't. How could I? I had no idea who I was!

What have I found in Al-Anon? I have learned that my life is like a painting, but not completed. Program has taught me that the only person who can add to this painting is me. When I work the fourth step, I examine the canvas carefully: what is right, what needs work, what needs to go. And then I share my findings with another, with the God of my understanding, and just as importantly, consciously with myself. And I can make the necessary changes as I grow. Doing this has enabled me to know who I am. And being able to work on that has taught me to like, and even love, myself.

This couldn't help but make me a happier person. It also helped me to be more responsible. I was able to hold a job, and actually enjoy it, for years. I learned to treat others with dignity and respect, not guilt and manipulation. I learned to ask for help. I learned how to feel, experience, express and share my feelings. I learned it wouldn't hurt me to give a spontaneous hug to a friend or loved one. I learned I could say "I love you" without dying! (I was over forty years of age when my mother and I first exchanged those words, but now we do so regularly.) And thanks to this program, I have learned what is necessary to maintain an intimate relationship. That probably took the longest to learn, possibly because there is no cure for the effects of alcoholism: If you lined up thirty people and asked me to pick out the ones I think are attractive, I guarantee, I would manage to pick out the alcoholics and addicts. But I've gotten better, and am happy to say I have been in a happy and stable relationship for more than 16 years with someone who does not drink.

So I guess to summarize all this, in the past thirty years, Al-Anon has given me an identity, and the ability to enjoy my life. I can't help but be excited about that! Today, whenever I do any kind of service work, whether at the Group level or District level, or working with Alateen, it's because of that excitement, and because of gratitude, and a sincere hope that others will come to know the happiness, serenity and excitement I have found.

*Bill C.  
District 12 Rep.*