

# Growing Oaks

Oakland County Al-Anon Family Groups

Autumn, 2024

Autumn is a time when many folks enjoy visits to Fall festivals. One thing featured is often a maze, created in corn fields, or made with hay bales. Some are very long and elaborate, twisting and turning, maybe with some dead ends. I went to one where there were benches to sit and rest (probably for seniors like I was at the time).

How does traveling through a maze become a metaphor for one's journey into recovery, resulting in a changed life? What's similar? What's different?



1. We can choose to enter a maze at a Fall festival. Choosing when - day and time -, with whom, going when the weather is good and we have the right clothes. So, how did we begin Al-Anon in the first place? Did someone invite us? Hand us a book? Tell what it was like for them? Maybe it wasn't a choice, just recognizing how our life had "become unmanageable". (Step One) Maybe we were unsure with seeing new faces, smiling and welcoming. Going to my first Al-Anon meeting was a bit daunting, since no one was there. I did eventually find a wonderful home meeting.

2. Discovery, surprise, many emotions and thoughts. What is similar to a maze is only seeing what is directly in front of you. Stepping forward and getting only to the next turn. Taking one step at a time, sensing the next turn will be revealed when you get there. Maybe you'll be with others (think group members), maybe with an encouraging guide (think sponsor).

3. Navigating the path. Ever see children run through a maze? Laughing and smiling until maybe they get lost? Some, usually adults, hollering at them to slow down? Other kids tell-

ing them to hurry up? Might there be someone who went through a similar maze before and knows more about how a maze goes? I sometimes wonder as I see a newcomer at a meeting, tearful, if even wanting to share at all? Hearing what seems to be a comfortable comradery, laughter even? I watch the newcomer hear the words "keep coming back," and see a slow growth emerge, even if unsure of the alleged "serenity" at an unknown end. With a maze, the fun and adventure may be in not knowing the path, enjoying the journey.

We have a path - well, Steps actually. Twelve of them. If we go to a familiar place, an apple orchard, a community festival, a farm, this year's maze will be different. So also when we review the Steps. I heard someone say "running up and down the Steps" is the way we grow. Always. Never once and done, especially with the middle steps, even the scary 4th Step. I'm writing this in the month of September, ninth month, 9th Step as some folks work the program. Another scary Step. "Made direct amends to such people where ever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Step 8 prepares us, making lists and becoming willing.

I heard a lot of new and familiar words at the Tri-County Conference this past weekend. Lots of smiles, jokes, laughter and some tears as folks shared their journey through the maze of recovery. Mostly I found myself smiling a lot and seeing validated both newcomers and folks who have been in Al-Anon for many years, even decades, like me. Gratitude for the warm fellowship inside and the beautiful Autumn day outside.



- Shirley B.

## OPENING OUR EARS BEFORE OUR MOUTHS



*How difficult is it? What do we do with a multi-tasking mind, asking it to stay in the present and really hear what someone is saying? Avoid preparing a response before the person stops talking? Allow silence? The following are two shares about listening, particularly at meetings:*

Listening. I find it difficult to speak freely about myself. Therefore sharing at AI-Anon meetings is challenging and I spend most of my time at meetings trying to listen. What I have learned is that actual listening is not just waiting for your turn to talk, but rather a skill that needs development. I try to visualize what the member is sharing, to practice empathy for their sufferings, and extract wisdom from their experiences. When I was in grade school, I had a teacher who would opine; "all humans have a physical deficiency, we cannot learn the thing when our mouths are open". Taking this lesson to heart, I prefer to just listen. When I do share, I want to be insightful or at least coherent, but often I need just honesty with the group and myself. Our common idiom, is that "there are no musts in AI-Anon" so sharing is always optional. On occasion, a member will share an unpleasant experience that is reminiscent of a situation from my

Growing Oaks is a publication of:  
Oakland County  
AI-Anon/Alateen Family Groups  
P.O. Box 155  
Keego Harbor, MI 48320-0320

Editor: Shirley B.  
Articles and Announcements  
are welcome! Email to:  
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past. Initially this share pisses me off as my distant memory resurfaces that I had buried long ago. Upon further reflection, these memories are never really buried and they continue to affect my personality and reactions. I am grateful for all AI-Anon members that share, for we have similar challenges in life and to hear other's express their experience, strength and hope is reassuring to me that I am not alone and that there is a path to serenity. My hope is that by continuing to attend meetings, we will find that we are not alone and that all of us struggle to stay on our own paths to serenity.

Regards, Ken D

*(additional share on page 3)*

**Trusted Servants** ...Our leaders are but trusted servants - they do not govern. (Tradition 2)

### 2024 Board Members

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(second one needed)

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**Monthly meetings virtual and in person. Pilgrim Congregational Church, Adams Rd. north of 16 Mile, Bloomfield Hills. First Saturday at 9:45 am**

## How do I find a meeting?

- Zoom meetings (ID and password provided)
- Hybrid meetings (both virtual on Zoom as well as in person)
- In person meetings

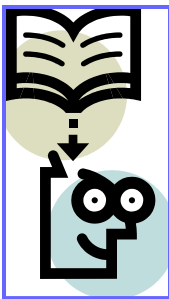


**For updated list, please check: [oaklandafg.org/meetings](http://oaklandafg.org/meetings).** See special meeting flyers on our website under Events/flyers.

## Best Way to Get Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL)

To order: email [Oaklandafgliterature1214@gmail.com](mailto:Oaklandafgliterature1214@gmail.com). Melissa can only accept cash or checks at this time. Books and other literature can be picked up at the monthly District 12 and 14 meeting. You may contact Melissa to make other arrangements.

Thinking about how to carry the Al-Anon message to others? (Step 12) How about, as an individual or group, donating a book to a church, school, lending library or community center near you.



## Mark Your Calendar

Several groups will schedule special events, such as anniversary meetings, pot lucks, or meetings with special speakers or topics.

Please consult our website for current day, time and location of these events.

Up coming one-hour workshops at **11 a.m.** following our in-person District monthly meetings at Pilgrim Church. First Saturday.

Oct. 5 - My Talents, Gifts in Service

Nov. 2 - Keeping Recovery in the Holidays

Dec. 7 - Meditation: Hearing Voices

Jan. 4 - Sponsorship

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Words often mask what a person is really trying to say. Grow awareness of the emotions invoked in ourselves as the other person speaks. Like the body, emotions don't lie. Appreciating our own triggered emotions from more deeply listening to another, we can better guess at what lies under their words. This is the territory of open-hearted communication. We may have defenses to not appreciate the emotions of either ourselves or others.

Along with all the chatter going on in our minds while another is talking, truly listening takes practice, and lots of it. Try it. I bet you will feel drained after the conversation as much energy is required to more deeply listen. However, heart-to-heart listening and communication can correspondingly be energizing to one or both individuals in a conversation. More genuine communication can also be a heart-breaker. Whatever the case, we'll come to better understandings with true listening.

Sue Fabian

*Additional words on Communication: Speaking Another Language.*

"Her vocabulary was different from mine. She'd say, 'Come watch TV with me.' I wanted her to say, 'I want to be with you tonight because I love you.,' because that's what I wanted to hear. It was several months before it occurred to me that we didn't use the same words to say the same things. I don't know why this came as such a shock to me. We had met and courted in our mother tongue but I became aware of this difference in expression as I went to meetings and listened. I knew I didn't feel bad if members said things using their own terms, and yet, I felt unhappy because this woman I loved didn't say what I wanted to hear. I began to translate: When she said, 'come watch TV with me,' she was really saying, 'I want you to be with me.' After a while I was able to get the message..."

*From Living with Sobriety: Another Beginning (P-49).page 38.*