



I can remember feeling ambitious, waking up excited about my day, having loads of energy. I don't know when all that slipped away. Now it's all I can do to pull myself out of bed. I barely keep myself or my children washed and fed, and then only out of a sense of guilt or embarrassment. I didn't see it coming. I just slowly lost touch with the part of me that was able to care, and I don't have a clue how to find it again...

Everyone thought we were the perfect family. We always looked so good and behaved so beautifully in public. My friends used to say they wished that they could have my life instead of their own. I had so much to be grateful for. But something about my life just wasn't right. I couldn't put my finger on it. I just knew I wasn't happy...

It almost broke my heart to see my son spending his 21st birthday in jail, but there was nothing I could do about it. He's really a good guy, but he's had such bad luck. He gets in trouble all the time, and it's usually not all his fault. I let him live at home and try to give him everything he could want, but trouble just seems to find him. I would do anything for that boy, stay home with him, get him an apartment of his own, find him a job, take care of him, anything, if only it would help. I'm sick with worry...

My mom drinks too much. When she gets drunk, she calls me names and sometimes she hits my sister and gives her a black eye. But she's really great when she's not drinking, you know, and I love her a lot. If I got better grades and kept my room cleaner, she wouldn't be so miserable and have to drink. I tried staying out of the house more often so that she wouldn't have to see me and be disappointed, but that made her drink even more. She even came to the basketball game at school and dragged me out by the back of the neck in front of everybody because she thought I was trying to shame her. She said I was out doing bad things with boys and now I can't go out at all. I didn't want to go back to school, but she said she'd kill me if I didn't. So I go. Everybody makes fun of me or feels sorry for me. So I come home right after school. I don't mind so much if it will help my mom not to drink. But sometimes I just want to crawl into the closet and never come out...

I feel like there must be some secret to happiness, something that everybody else knows and that I am supposed to know as well, and if I could just figure it out, I would feel great about my life. But no matter how hard I try, I just can't find the answer. I've tried everything—church groups, social groups, therapy, biofeedback, psychics—and I think I've read every self-help book ever written... you name it, I've looked for answers there. Sometimes I've found a little comfort, but nothing that ever lasted, nothing that ever really changed my life. I feel like something is missing, like something is wrong with me...

I'm so tired of everybody always being so angry. My parents argued all the time I was growing up, now my wife is on my back, and nothing I do is ever good enough for my kids. If only I had different people in my life, maybe I wouldn't feel so lousy all the time. But I can't seem to leave. I had an affair for a while, thinking that I had finally found someone who would treat me right, but once I got to know her better, I realized that she was just as angry and bitter as all the rest of them...

I don't get it. My husband claims he's an alcoholic. I don't know what he's up to, but I'm sure he's no alcoholic. He doesn't drink any more than anybody else. Everybody we know drinks.

And he still has a good job. He's clean, well-dressed, successful, the life of every party. I think he's doing this to make me look bad. If he loved me, he wouldn't humiliate me like this. That's the real problem. He doesn't love me anymore...

None of us comes to Al-Anon because our lives resemble the "happily-ever-after" of fairy tales. We come to Al-Anon because we are grappling with an assortment of problems. We hope to find some answers, but doubt that there is any hope to be found anywhere. Other people's stories seem so different from ours that we may not recognize that we have anything in common with one another. But whether we realize it or not, there is a common thread. Each of us has been affected by someone else's drinking problem.

At first, for a variety of reasons, we may not be aware of any drinking problem. We may come to Al-Anon at the urging of a counselor, judge, treatment center, or friend, certain that we are in the wrong place. Many of us believe that we know the real problem with our friend or relative—and that it has nothing to do with alcohol. We identify the problem as a bad temper, immaturity, too much or too little religion, lack of will power, bad luck, the wrong boss or the wrong friends or the wrong city, the children, the in-laws, physical illness or disability, financial irresponsibility, or any number of other things. When it is suggested that the underlying problem may be alcoholism, we balk. After all, alcoholics are dirty, smelly, deranged bums who live on the street and have lost everything they once cherished. Or at least this may be what we've always believed.

In reality, many alcoholics have jobs, homes, families, and untarnished images of respectability. Their drinking may not be readily apparent, or it may seem barely noticeable compared to the problems that often result from or go hand-in-hand with the drinking—the violence, financial and legal problems, insults and excuses, unreliable and irresponsible behavior. Besides, if everyone in our lives drinks to excess, alcoholic drinking may seem perfectly normal. For those of us who never even knew the drinker, recognizing the true nature of the problem can be even more difficult. We may have been affected by the alcoholism of a grandparent or distant relative whom we barely knew, or by relatives or friends who have been