

I put myself at the top of my 'shame list'

By The Planter, Georgia

Until I came into the Al-Anon program about six years ago, I was ashamed of my alcoholic family—my father, brothers, uncles, and aunts. I blamed them for their behavior. I'll never forget when I brought a guy I liked to my house and he said, "Are you sure you weren't adopted?" He was serious. We never went out again.

When I was 16 years old, I ran away from home and never went back. I maintained a distant contact with my family, through Christmas cards and birthday gifts. After all, I had left behind three brothers and a sister. I was the oldest. Only through God's grace and mercy did I get through school, including college. And I was fortunate to have great jobs and successes beyond my dreams.

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But there were always feelings of guilt, broken-heartedness, and anger that I did not understand until I went to Al-Anon. As a result, my family of origin put up with my dis-

respectful, condescending lectures every time we talked or I visited. And my wonderful husband of 20 years put up with my "woe is me" attitude, and an anger that I was neither aware of nor acknowledged. I did not realize how sick I was.

Then at the age of 48, I cried to a very dear friend whom I had come to trust about my pain regarding my family. Here I was living in a mansion, while one of my brothers is serving a life sentence in prison. Here I am with three wonderful children who were privileged to go to private school and special sports camps, while another brother's three children cannot even have friends to their home to play because of his sexual offender charges—alcohol related, of course.

My third brother is still living on the street and relapses between drugs and alcohol because he does not forgive himself for killing a man while in a drunken stupor. My sister has been in horrible, abusive relationships, with so much tragedy in her life that the grief and sorrow were at times debilitating for everyone.

I thought all this was my fault; if I had stayed home and not run away, then maybe my brothers and sister would not have ended up like this. I even had an uncle who killed his own brother while drinking, playing

Russian roulette with a loaded gun. At one point of my life, I wanted never to get married and have children, fearing that this disease would be passed on to future generations.

I went along when my friend, whom I have great respect for, told me she had been going to Al-Anon for many years and invited me to a meeting. This simple invitation and my willingness to trust changed my life. "Attraction rather than promotion."

At first, I was so ashamed of myself and the way I had treated my alcoholic family and friends. Now, I am no longer ashamed—of them or me. That is so incredible and affects so many parts of my life and my ability to encourage others. More importantly, it is changing the way I

react to my immediate family. These changes have helped me enjoy what I have now. I can still cry for my siblings, pray for them, or talk to them, but I no longer feel the anguish. I no longer have to let it poison the people I am living with—my own family. I get to know what it is like to have healthy relationships filled with love, trust, and respect.

It is not perfect and there are challenges as always in life, but I thank God for giving me the tools to use and equipping me with so many wise counselors and friends. Al-Anon has brought me closer to God and helped me to know I have a teachable spirit. Recovery is truly possible for anyone who chooses to trust Him.

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