

# The turkey on the floor

By Martina N.

When I came to Al-Anon, I started reading everything about the program I could find. The greatest insight came to me from a story on page 111 of *From Survival to Recovery* (B-21)—what I call “the turkey on the floor story.”

In this story, a new Al-Anon member heard his mom pounding on his bedroom door the night before Thanksgiving. She said she needed her son to come down and make the dinner for the following day’s holiday guests, because the turkey was on the floor! The young man, remembering what he had learned in Al-Anon, answered – firmly but lovingly – that he needed his sleep and that he would help in the morning. Saying the Serenity Prayer, he successfully fell asleep. When he came down the next day, his mother had put the turkey and mess away. It was the first time in his life that his mom took responsibility for her actions instead of creating chaos and demanding that her son fix the problem.

I realized as I read this story that I would have gotten up, gone downstairs, prepared the whole dinner, and crawled into bed in the wee hours. I would not have realized that I was angry and resentful that my mother had forced me to do this late night clean-up and preparation for a huge houseful of guests

the next day. It became a touchstone for me to understand that I have the right to take care of myself, and to let my mother deal with her own messes.

*“It is a vivid symbol—that turkey on the floor—and it helps me remember that I do not have to pick it up!”*

However, wonder-of-wonders, I was not the only one who was helped by this story! My mom, who had decided at 80 that she had come from patterns of an alcoholic family, wanted me to read her a story one morning at the breakfast table. I had not marked the book, and when I started reading, I did not realize it was “the turkey on the floor” story! As I read, my mother leaned forward with her eyes wide-open, listening intently. She also had an “a-ha moment” almost identical to my own! She said, “Wow, I never realized that my mom forced me to pick up the turkey on the floor!”

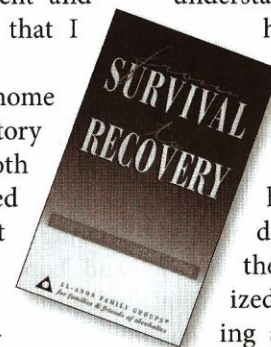
I did not tell her that this was the story that was the deepest touchstone for me at the beginning of my recovery. I simply realized that the patterns have gone on in families for generations, and that my family was no exception. My mother said,

“Thank you for reading that story. I always learn so much when you read to me!” I realized that as the eldest daughter, she had also carried the burden of resentment and submerged anger—and that I had too.

I have shared in my home group how much this story means to me, and how both my mother and I received such insight from it. It is a vivid symbol—that turkey on the floor—and it helps me remember that I do *not* have to pick it up! A man in my meeting said that, to him, it is “the engine on the floor.” He is a mechanic, and his

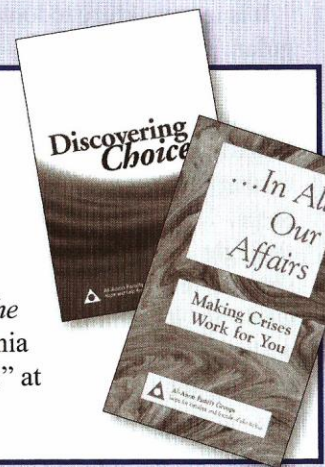
boss would often take an engine out and put it in the middle of the floor, just as he was straightening up at the end of the day. He was able to understand from this story that

he did *not* have to respond to the crisis his boss instigated at closing time. He was able to calmly tell his boss that he would come back and deal with this new task in the morning. He also realized that his boss was repeating a crazy pattern, without having any insight into it, and that it was not *personal*. He was able to hold his temper and change the pattern!



## How has Al-Anon’s Conference Approved Literature helped you?

Please share with us the ways in which *Discovering Choices* (B-30) and *...In All Our Affairs* (B-15) have provided insight for your recovery. Send your sharings by January 1<sup>st</sup> to *The Forum*, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617, Attention “CAL Corner;” at [wso@al-anon.org](mailto:wso@al-anon.org); or at [al-anon.org/members](http://al-anon.org/members).



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