

Thus was Anne's role in shaping Al-Anon. She was not "the front person"—she left that place for Lois. But her steadfast presence was a critical buttress that supported Al-Anon's fledgling operation through its earliest years.

In her steady, unassuming way, Anne made tremendous impact. Yet it was an impact she never claimed or flaunted, always crediting the Higher Power for every forward step, every success, every sign of progress. She and Lois were like twin sisters in this regard, and their unwavering faith in the Higher Power must have helped immeasurably in getting Al-Anon off the ground. A friend recalls:

"We talked quite a lot about spiritual things. We felt we had entities overseeing us, overlooking us, taking care of us, helping us, guiding us."

There is a story of Anne's later years that fairly captures her role in Al-Anon. By then she had moved to Santa Paula, California, onto the property where her daughter and son-in-law lived, and had there a small cottage all to herself.

She was by this time in her eighties—and not well. As a safety precaution, her daughter had a spotlight mounted on Anne's little cottage, which Anne would turn on every morning to signal "I'm OK" to the other house. The morning that signal light did not go on was the morning that she passed away.

For Anne, Al-Anon was like that light. It was a beacon that illuminated her path and signalled to the world "I'm OK!" The fact that it was she who did so much to accept the light of the program and to carry it forth simply eluded her. In the end, she put it this way:

"I always felt I got more from Al-Anon than I ever gave."

That comment rings true to Al-Anon members today—we, who are privileged to partake of the program Anne and Lois developed—we, who so often feel Al-Anon gives us much more than we can ever give back.



Anne was a handsome lady, about 5'6" and of average weight. She dressed casually in attractive "country style clothes" and wore a favorite cape for fall days. Anne was born in

Brooklyn, New York on November 9, 1899. She died in Santa Paula, California on February 24, 1984.

ANNE'S FAVORITE POEM

*One spoke a kindly word today
When my need was sore.
He had no way of knowing quite
The heavy weight I bore.
But at his understanding word
A candle's lifted spark
Flared warm and goldenly to light
My way across the dark.*

*Dear God, so vital was that word
I, too, would seek them out
Who wander lonely through the night
Of fear and grief and doubt.
Speak through me, Lord, that I may say
The word to free and bless,
A gentle word, a word to light
The road to happiness.*

Grace Noll Crowell

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.

Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization or institution; does not engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.

The Suggested Preamble to the Twelve Steps

For additional Al-Anon History:

- B-7 LOIS REMEMBERS
- B-12 FIRST STEPS: Al-Anon - 35 Years of Beginnings
- A-4 Lois W. and the Pioneers (two 1-hour cassettes)
- AV-1 Lois' Story (rental information desired)
- P-11 Lois' Story - Al-Anon from the Beginning

For information and catalog of literature write:

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Al-Anon Family Groups

Anne's Story

Co-Founder Al-Anon Family Groups



Anne B. was a quiet, self-effacing woman who never could quite admit to the importance of her own role in co-founding Al-Anon. Yet it was she who was among the first to spearhead a "family group" in her own hometown. And it was she who pioneered Al-Anon's now-major work with institutions, being the first to contact prisoners and offer help for them and their families.

Anne herself had been a prisoner of sorts for many years. She was born a sickly child, with, by her own description, every childhood disease, including diphtheria. Her sister died of heart disease when Anne was eight. Anne then contracted St. Vitus' Dance, a nervous disorder from which she slowly recovered. Anne later recalled:

"As a child, I feared the dark, animals, thunderstorms, and such things that are too great for a small, fearful mind. As I entered the adolescent age, my fear transferred to people and I stayed in that channel."

How did this sickly, fearful child grow into a co-founder of Al-Anon, now an international network of 30,000 family groups (including Alateen), with an impressive selection of books and other literature, and meetings worldwide?

The answer is "step by step." The first formal step was taken in 1951, by which time the AA Foundation had accumulated numerous letters from family members of alcoholics. AA was busy enough on its own, so Bill W. proposed that his wife Lois set up a companion organization to AA's General Service Office. Daunted slightly, Lois turned to Anne, her friend and neighbor, and together they created what is known as Al-Anon today:

"Lois asked me to help her, and I did. I was her Little Man Friday. For eight months, we worked in an upstairs room at Stepping Stones. We answered those first letters, we had our first pamphlet, (Purposes and Suggestions) printed, compiled a card system. By the end of that first eight months, we had \$43, a pamphlet to distribute, and one piece of office equipment—a stapler."

Anne and Lois had become friends through open AA meetings which, at first, Anne had attended for her husband, not for herself. "I thought I was the injured one," she said in retrospect, "that I did not have a fault. But then I realized he had an illness, alcoholism—and I had an illness, fear." It was then that Anne focused her attention on her disease and her life began to take shape.

"I worked the program backwards," she later confessed, "starting with the Fourth Step. I took an inventory and realized I had this fear back as far as I could remember. I realized that fear, not alcohol, was my problem, that my husband's alcoholism only intensified my problem."

Anne learned to turn to her Higher Power, and her fears were lessened. "The Twelve Steps are a steep and hard climb," she wrote, "but they opened the door of my prison. I was released." And, as so many Al-Anon members have discovered since, Anne found herself literally sprung free.

The person who emerged from her own imprisonment was quiet and gentle, a presence more than a personality, described by those who knew her as "not spectacular or particularly colorful, but definitely there." It was Anne who got the speakers to lead Al-Anon annual picnic meetings—and Anne who spoke at large gatherings as Al-Anon

gathered momentum. On the podium in 1952 Anne said, "Look at me—from a shy, scared introvert, I am standing here facing a large group and not TOO nervous."

How did this amazing transformation happen? For Anne, the change came through the guidance and strength of the Higher Power. She wrote, "I learned to listen to the voice, the power greater than myself. I found self-trust, which is strength, and it led me to possibilities."

Thereafter, Anne says she tried to stay "in tune" with her Higher Power, taking an inventory every night before she went to sleep and attending Al-Anon meetings regularly. "If I miss, I find I do not sleep as well. If I gave up this method of living, I might get smug and go back to the same old ways. It is as important for me to keep in touch with the Higher Power and associate with those who are seeking the same path as it is for the alcoholic to go to meetings and see his associates."

She developed the habit of *noticing* the Higher Power at work in her life. One example is from those early days at Stepping Stones, when Al-Anon was in what Anne used to call "its first upstairs room." (She noted this because Al-Anon was later similarly located upstairs at the old 24th Street Clubhouse and she loved to add her personal observation that "most all AA rooms seem to be upstairs, and some in seventh heaven.")

In those early Al-Anon days of 1951, the expenses were many and mounting fast—with no visible or foreseeable source of payment forthcoming. Anne recounted vividly and often what actually transpired, noticing, of course, the unmistakable hand of the Higher Power:

"Just as we were wondering how we were going to get reimbursed for the paper and the stamps, what should appear but a check from a member in Lynn, Massachusetts—our first voluntary contribution. And soon other money came in. Without asking for it!"

She had already learned from past experience that the Higher Power has a way of working things out. At Al-Anon's participation at AA's International Convention in 1955, she looked back on the first time she received proof of the Higher Power at work:

"Before my husband found his way into AA, I had gone to our family doctor, who referred me to Wilbur S. Wilbur S., I was told, ran what the doctor described as 'a meeting for a bunch of drunks.' So I got up my courage and contacted Wilbur S..."

The very next day, Anne's husband, of his own accord, came to her tearfully. He had been on a binge and, mentioning it for the first time, said, "I don't know what I am going to do about this drinking..." Anne later wrote, "I felt that it was fate, that I had been told what to do just the day before."

That experience became branded on her brain—and was probably another of the many steps Anne took toward capable, caring competence with a style all her own. Consider her gentle tenacity when an early member of Al-Anon decided to leave the Al-Anon fellowship after her husband's death. Anne immediately picked up the phone, talked with the woman for quite a long while—and then put Lois on the line. Needless to say, the woman did not leave Al-Anon—and, in fact, remained active for many years thereafter.