

## Daughter of an alcoholic, anonymous

Contributed by Anonymous  
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Before I knew what it meant to be an alcoholic, I knew of the compassion that was shown to me by alcoholics from the time I was just a few months old. When I was born, my mom and dad were in their early twenties, living in Northwest Portland. In that stage of their life, their days of partying were behind them, but my dad would still go out to bars, as was the lifestyle of hip twenty-something Portlanders in the 90's. In these first years of my life, my Dad was in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a support group for recovering alcoholics who wanted to achieve sobriety. By the time I was two, my parents had split up and my dad had committed to becoming sober for good. On the days I spent with him, we would go to meetings together; people came to recognize the young man and his young daughter.

Quickly, I made friends among the regulars: a quiet young woman with long, lank hair that fell to her lower back who would greet me with a small smile; a kind older man with a potbelly who taught me how to blow bubbles with the Trident bubble gum that he always kept in his left pocket; and my dad's sponsor, who, over the years, has become an uncle to me, both in Portland and from Afghanistan, where he has been stationed for the past year. I developed many close relationships with these people who shared the disease of alcoholism.

"A.A. is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism" reads the AA mission statement. This, as well as the rest of the preamble, is read at the beginning of each meeting, after the group recites the Serenity Prayer. After the preamble, another person will read "How It Works," followed by the "12 Traditions." Both of these documents are short summarizations of basic principles that AA is based upon. If any sobriety birthdays are celebrated, commemorative bronze coins are awarded, with Roman numerals etched in the center for each year of sobriety. Meetings differ, but all those I have attended share this common opening. Then, individuals come up to the podium and share their experiences, strengths, and hopes with the group. Often, people are brutally honest, sharing their emotional struggles and the difficulties they faced trying to succeed in spite of their alcoholism. Sometimes, people break down at the podium in front of the group, overcome with emotion.

Alcoholics Anonymous is like a second family to many of its members. To some, it is their primary family, because many have lost parents and relatives to the liver problems and general ill health that stem from alcoholism. Though I am not technically part of the program, I feel like AA is, at the very least, a tight-knit community of friends who share similar experiences. At its best, it is something much more. This is because, on a very basic level, the men and women in the program are united by common struggles and the understanding that comes with them.

In my experience, I have seen that the kids of my age who have heard of AA dismiss it as God-oriented, and therefore not as effective for atheists. I can see why they may think that, but they are misinformed. Though God is mentioned in the Serenity Prayer, and "a power greater than ourselves" is affirmed to be a guiding force to sobriety in "How It Works," the vast majority of members have no strong religious affiliation with the program. Indeed, some who have gone through the A.A. and worked the steps have concluded that there must be a higher power of some sort, but there is no rule that members believe in God or even "a higher power."

If someone asked me how many meetings I have attended in my life, I wouldn't be able to give a definite number. Most likely the number would rank in the hundreds. I have been blessed to have many kind and generous people influence my family and myself. Through AA, my loved ones have found in themselves the desire to lead better lives and through that influenced and encouraged me to attain my own goals. I owe much to AA, but more still to the determination and compassion shown to me by my father and the other people who have worked the steps.

As of late, the old solace I used to feel within AA has become strained. As I grow older, and the gradual influx of newcomers increases, I feel as though I no longer have the protection of being my father's daughter. At 17, many have already discovered they have problems with alcoholism and I notice, with some discomfort, that on the occasions I do attend meetings, I am sitting behind a kid my own age. Lately, people have asked me if I was an alcoholic; once I was almost asked to share my experience with alcoholism up at the podium. It is not as if I would be ashamed to be up there, admitting to a dependence upon alcohol, but luckily, it has not been an issue for me. Alcoholism has not touched me personally, although in the future, it may. Alcoholism has been proven to be at least partially hereditary; Gene Erwin, PhD, of University of Colorado Health Sciences Center contends that "alcoholic consumption is influenced by combination of environmental and genetic factors." So far, I've been lucky enough to not feel the urge to drink excessively. Hopefully, I'll never have to go through the kind of trials my dad did.

Looking back upon the time I have spent in AA with my dad, I am happy that I was able to share the experience with him. It helped me to understand where his immense dedication and sense of integrity comes from. Alcoholics Anonymous truly strips you down, and forces you to realize your fears, in order help you overcome them. Listening to people speak at the podium is like becoming a part of their struggle as well as their successes. The night my dad celebrated 10 years of sobriety, he recalled at the podium that there was a point when he knew he would die if he did not quit drinking. He said when he realized that; he knew he had to get sober, so his daughter could have her father in her life. I teared up a little when he said that. For me, it just reaffirmed how grateful I am.