

Easy Does It

By Ben Jacques

I was a new arrival at the Al Anon meeting, and at the information table I selected one of the bumper stickers for my car. In Old English script, it said: Easy Does It.

I put it on the back of my little sports car, and from time to time, driving on the highway, someone would pass me on the left, look over, and wave.

They knew where it came from, as it is one of several themes—slogans, if you like—in twelve-step programs.

I started going to Adult Child Al Anon meetings when I found I needed help with the emotional turmoil engulfing me from substance abuse in my family of origin. There was so much pretense, so much denial. I realized it was making me sick.

My ACOA meetings, which I attended for many years, helped me understand how alcoholism and addiction affect families over generations. The stories I heard, night after night, were all different. Yet they were all the same. They were stories of disconnect, manipulation, dysfunction. But they were also stories of hope.

With others, I began working the 12 steps. I picked up the little blue daily reader. The slogans, so flat before, became three-dimensional. One Day at a Time. Let Go and Let God. First Things First. Keep it Simple. Live and Let Live. The Serenity Prayer became a gift I would repeat to myself, knowing that the wisdom I needed to navigate life and relationships would come in time.

I learned that it wasn't my job to fix others, or to figure everything out. I learned that not every event had to be a crisis. That listening need not involve reacting. That waiting, sometimes, would lead to a solution.

At the meetings I found humor as well as pain. Time heals all wounds—and wounds all heels, someone would add with a chuckle.

You're never too old to have a happy childhood, someone else would add.

Meetings brought me a sense of peace. And they also taught me how to socialize in a healthy way. I remember going to a party with my Al Anon friends, feeling wonderfully relaxed and at home. None of us held a drink in our hand.

Twelve-step programs aren't for everyone. But if you'd like to try Al Anon, I suggest attending more than one group. You'll know when it's a good fit.

There are a range of twelve-step programs in the Stoneham area, including AA and NA. You can find times and locations on the resource page of the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition at <http://stonehamsac.webs.com/>.

Whether you are abusing drugs or alcohol, or have been affected in unhealthy ways by those around you—12-step programs offer wisdom, support and healing.

Ben Jacques is a member of the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition.