

In Santa Cruz, I know how different taking meetings to the Blaine St. Women's Minimum Security jail is from taking a meeting to the women at the Main Jail, which is maximum security. It can be like night and day. But what I learned at the conference is how different taking meetings into the prisons can be from taking meetings into the jails. This is more like apples and oranges. The most obvious difference is the stability of the population. Since the jails have a rotating set of inmates, meetings at the jails is more like a beginner meeting. In the prison, there can be more longevity. And I know that there are other issues, but until I have gone into the prisons, I will not be able to completely articulate them.

Most of the conference was taken up with a series of workshops regarding the various kinds of institutions in which Al-Anon takes meetings. The workshops included meetings at Soledad and Solano Prisons, a professional panel of drug and alcohol counselors, and professionals who work with alcoholism in the family. There was a lunch discussion about getting meetings into juvenile hall. There were some dynamite speakers including a prison lifer who was released after 22 years and a lot of hard work in the AA program. Also, there was a couple who spoke – the man had been in prison, the wife worked an Al-Anon program and spoke about it.

At the end of two days, I could not believe all that I had learned nor all of the wonderful Al-Anon and AA people that I had met. I encountered so much HOPE that I left on a cloud. I am looking forward to the 2013 conference in Foster City, near the San Francisco airport.

**Laurie B, Institutions Coordinator District 23**

*NCWSA Institutions Conference Committee presents the*  
**42nd Annual Hospital and Institution Conference of  
 Alcoholics Anonymous With Al-Anon Participation**  
**“Sobriety Inside”: April 5, 6 and 7, 2013**  
 Crowne Plaza Hotel, Foster City, CA

*For more information contact:*  
 NCWSA Institutions Coordinator David B. (831) 275-0684 or david.8723@gmail.com

## AL-ANON NEWS

### Al-Anon from your Desktop:

World Service Office: [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

Northern California Area: [www.ncwsa.org](http://www.ncwsa.org)

District 23's own webpage: [www.ncwsa.org/d23](http://www.ncwsa.org/d23)

Online Meetings: [www.ola-is.org](http://www.ola-is.org)

and so many more – if you google Alanon, you'll find lots of us.

### Next District 23 Speaker Meeting/Potluck Dinner

Friday, February 15, 2013

5:30 Potluck Dinner, 6:30–7:45 Speaker Meeting with AA, Al-Anon, and Alateen Speakers

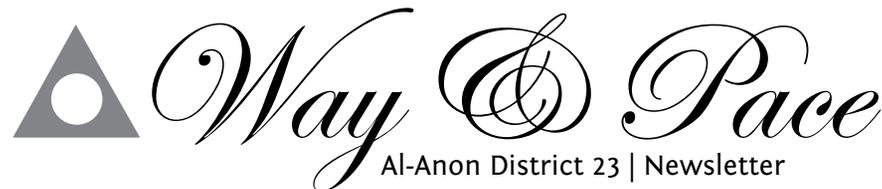
Quaker Meeting House, 225 Rooney St., Santa Cruz

Way & Pace is produced by and for the members of the 23rd Al-Anon District, which serves Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. It is distributed on the third Saturday of every other month to coincide with the District meeting. Your stories and Al-Anon related announcements are gratefully accepted.

**Please submit via email: Petra (Editor) at [district23wayandpace@gmail.com](mailto:district23wayandpace@gmail.com)**

Articles published at discretion of editors. Articles may be edited to fit the space.

NOTE: This is a local newsletter, not Al-Anon conference approved literature. We invite all members to submit material for publication. The opinions within do not necessarily reflect those of Al-Anon or District 23.



## SPECIAL ISSUE: Institutions

### I would not trade this experience for anything

When I retired in March 2012, I thought that I would challenge myself to some Al-Anon service that I had not yet experienced. Among the choices was service in the Santa Cruz County jails by chairing and being secretary for meetings in those sites. I contacted Farrell who was the Institutions Coordinator at that time and who had begun this form of service in our district. Farrell asked if I wanted to come as a one-time visitor to a jail meeting, but I already knew that I was comfortable inside jails, so I skipped this phase. I filled out the forms for my clearance, went to the orientation at the jail and went on vacation. When I got back from vacation, my clearance was completed and I started going inside with the men at the main jail and the women at Blaine St. Fortunately, I was always accompanied by Georgia or Farrell, who had lots of experience. Pretty soon, I began to realize that leading these meetings was very much like running any other kind of beginner meeting.

Indeed, these meetings really are like beginner meetings, since most of the attendees have never been to Al-Anon before, or have only been to meetings in the jails. They come to their first meeting because it is a meeting that is available. They often don't understand the difference between AA and Al-Anon, and that is the first item that has to be explained. The standard meeting format helps to differentiate the programs significantly, and the job of the secretary is to try to facilitate the understanding of this difference. However, these are beginners. We can not and do not expect them to understand all of the nuances of Al-Anon immediately. Fortunately, one of the gifts of the program for me is to expand my tolerance of imperfections in meetings and of beginners. Not a meeting goes by lacking interesting, challenging and surprising events.

I have been in Al-Anon a while. I know how devastating the family disease can be. But the stories that I hear in jail take that devastation to a whole new level. I have yet to meet an inmate who does not have the family disease, even if they just come to the meeting to get out of their cell. All but 2 of the people that I have met there are adult children of alcoholics. Al-Anon has a big responsibility to make our program available to these people, most of whom have never heard of Al-Anon, and don't know what being an adult child of an alcoholic means.

There are two safe topics for me to present at a meeting. Even if they are all new to Al-Anon, and are alcoholics, they will respond and stay in the Al-Anon focus if we talk about "taking care of ourselves" and "boundaries". Most of them have not a clue of how to take care of themselves, and they don't know how to have a boundary, but they will fall all over each other to get a chance to talk about it. They are thirsty and the message is like cool water, at least for the hour that they are there.

Many of you know me, and know that I do not cry easily. But the night that I told a group of 9 women that sexual abuse can be very much a part of the family disease, and that many of us in Al-Anon know the pain of sexual abuse, I heard some stories of family disease that included sexual abuse that caused me to cry to whole way home. This service is not for sissies.

Still, my Higher Power certainly knew what she was doing when she sent me off to the jails. I would not trade this experience for anything.

**Laurie B, Institutions Coordinator**

**You don't have to drink to suffer from alcoholism. There is help for you in Al-Anon and Alateen.**

To find a meeting or information about Al-anon go to: [ncwsa.org/d23](http://ncwsa.org/d23)

Al-anon Answering Service (831) 462-1818

## 41st Annual Hospitals & Institutions Conference 2012

As the Institutions Coordinator, I was expected to attend the Northern California Council of Alcoholics Anonymous Hospitals and Institution Conference with Al-Anon Participation in May 2012 in Redding, CA. I was the only person from Santa Cruz who was able to attend, but I was quite excited to have this new experience, which I intuitively knew would be like no other I had had in the program.

I easily found my motel near the conference center and headed over to the conference-AA at one end of the compound and Al-Anon at the other. The Redding Al-Anon groups were wonderfully hospitable, and we began the conference with a regular Al-Anon meeting. But what we really wanted to hear about was which institution each of the others was taking meeting into, and how that was working. Slowly over the weekend, it began to dawn on me how new this kind of outreach is to the community. Taking meetings into the prisons only began in 2009, though the groundwork for this was laid over the previous 3 years. There have been meetings in some jails in the San Jose area for a while now. However, Santa Cruz is the only other county in Northern California that has meetings in the jails. WE ARE CUTTING EDGE! Many people at the conference wanted more information from me about how that had happened and how it was working. Those specific questions will be addressed at the next conference in 2013.

*Continued on back* 

### I was ready to start giving back

I have been doing service in the jails for more than four years now. It is a big part of my recovery. I learn just as much from the people I meet as they learn from me. I am very grateful to the member who started the Al-Anon Institutions program in our area. For both of us, that first tour of the jail was difficult, knowing that our loved ones were once locked inside that facility.

I think another hard part of working with a local institution in a small community is that we often see these folks in the newspaper before we see them in one of our meetings. Anonymity is an important part of our program. We do not discuss their crimes in the meetings or divulge their identities outside the meetings. We really mean it when we say "whom you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here".

For the inmates, this can be very challenging. A story shared in a meeting can be used against them back in the cells. They have to develop trust and understanding among themselves. Many of them, both men and women, have formed groups and support each other between meetings. The literature we provide is a critical part of their progress.

As I look back, I can now see that I agreed to do this service for a few reasons. One is of course my experience with the jails and the people close to me – drunk driving and domestic violence to name only a few. But more important is the way I felt about myself. I believe that I was under the impression that the people in the jails would be less likely to judge me, which is always one of my greatest fears. Well the truth is that they probably start taking my inventory when I hit the door! The only difference now is the way that I deal with it. And finally, I was at a point in my program where I was ready to start giving back. I wanted to do service and for some reason this was what called me.

Through this service, I've had the opportunity to meet so many members, to work at the district and the area level, and to become more familiar with the books and pamphlets. This has helped me learn so much. And as I learn I am able to share that knowledge with the members of these special groups who are so eager to learn about our program.

It thrills me to see one of them in a regular meeting. They always express their gratitude for bringing the meetings into the jails. And I always tell them how much I appreciate them, because I see the program truly working, in their lives and in mine. I challenge you to try this service. And as I always joke, I would love to see you in the jail!

Georgia, Santa Cruz, CA

## I am not alone

When I was little, I felt that if I was really good, didn't get in trouble, got good grades and was helpful, it would help my Mom be happy. I tried so hard but my Stepdads still were mean, still abusive to her and us and "bad stuff" still happened. I went to 12 different schools between California and Virginia. My Mom would tell me in the morning before school to go to the office and get the records for myself and my little brother and meet her out front. She would arrive with the car packed and we would spend the next three days driving back across the country to "get away from him". I am one of six kids but none of us lived at home for very long once we were teens. Five of us had different dads – all abusive alcoholics. The best thing I can say about my father is he wasn't a pedophile. The best childhood memories I have are when it was just my Mom, my little brother and me. Mom would work twelve or more hours a day and I would take care of my little brother, the house and cooking. We often would be in bed before my Mom got home. I remember once a week or so we would go to get a shake and talk. I still smile when I think of those times. My Mom was neither an alcoholic/addict. She was the child of an abusive alcoholic. She was a chronic enabler. She died in my arms 18 years ago from lung cancer, two days after her 54th birthday. She did the best she could. I love her still and every good quality I have I owe to her. I left home at 14 years old.

I put both my kids in Alateen. My ex-husband went to Al-Anon. I never knew I would benefit. The first Al-Anon meeting I attended was like angels singing from the heavens. I never realized how affected my entire life has been. I never thought of myself as controlling. I just thought I would always be a misfit in society. For the first time I felt like I truly fit in. The way the language is written in the literature gives me the opportunity to take a compassionate look at lifelong behaviors that really don't work. I've gone from hopeless to confident.

As I write this I'm waiting for the H&I meeting. We get two per month. I have been attending 12-step meetings for almost 18 years. Because I never felt a part of, I never lasted more than a few years without a relapse. My latest one landed me here where I've been for three months. I'm fighting my case and if I lose I am looking at several years in prison.

Al-Anon means more to me than any other meeting that we have. Tonight I'm bringing three ladies who are excited to go for their first time. All I did was hand them some pamphlets.

I am currently an inmate at the county jail. Because of Al-Anon, my future looks brighter. I get to learn about my disease and work on myself. I am not alone. I do fit somewhere. I am forever grateful to Al-Anon H&I. Tonight I get a paperback "How Al-Anon Works" to take back to the dorm. My name is Sheila and I am grateful!

Sheila, Inmate in California

## Thank you, Al-Anon

What Al-Anon means to me...Al-Anon means a lot to me cuz 3 lovely ladies take time out of their busy schedules to come inside this facility to share their most dark experiences with family members or personal experiences dealing with alcohol or drugs and how it has affected them. It means that these women have a heart that pumps blood just like mine, their feelings matter to me a lot cause they risk coming here, not just that but they share with us that probably nobody else knows and they trust us to know about their experiences. Al-Anon helps me stay focused on my higher power and not have urges to crumble under pressure when life seems too much to bear. It reminds me of how easy life can change in a manner of seconds if I were to become wrapped into the daily stress and aggravations the jail embeds in a person. I'm constantly looking forward to Al-Anon to release some of my tension and frustration. I take in consideration that Al-Anon helps a person look deep down in our hearts and use what it has to offer us to regain self respect, respect from others and our family, friends, the organization itself, even brings families back together and could also give me an opportunity to be a guest speaker once I'm not in jail house issued clothes one day in the future. I respect and appreciate everyone's interests and participation.

Thank you, Al-Anon, for taking the time to listen to all you've done for me.

David, Inmate in California

Share your experience, strength and hope or any Al-anon related news to:  
Petra (Editor) at [district23wayandpace@gmail.com](mailto:district23wayandpace@gmail.com)