CONTINUING OUR JOURNEY AFTER LOSS
(We Still Belong)

This booklet contains writings from members who have lost their loved ones due to the disease of addiction or others who have been affected by this loss. We are all affected by the loss of our loved ones, whether it is physically, mentally, or emotionally. The hope is this booklet will be of benefit to the entire fellowship, not just those who have physically lost their loved ones.
This booklet is dedicated to the members of Nar-Anon who have lost someone they love due to the disease of addiction.
MISSION STATEMENT

The Nar-Anon Family Groups are a worldwide fellowship for those affected by someone else’s addiction. As a Twelve Step Program, we offer our help by sharing our experience, strength and hope.

VISION STATEMENT

We will carry the message of hope throughout the world to those affected by the addiction of someone near to them.

We do this by
• letting them know they are no longer alone;
• practicing the Twelve Steps of Nar-Anon;
• encouraging growth through service;
• making information available through outreach encompassing public information, hospitals, institutions, and websites; and
• changing our own attitudes.
INTRODUCTION

There are no words to describe the pain of losing someone you love to addiction. There are also many ways to experience grief. The process is personal and individual. Each person grieves in their own time and in their own way. This booklet is not meant to be a guidebook for grief, nor is it meant to tell you how to feel or how to grieve. These stories are written from the hearts of those who have suffered and lived through the loss. They are shared to let members know how Nar-Anon has helped them through the grieving process and that meetings will always be a safe place to reveal their feelings and receive strength through the journey. Once addiction has entered our lives we will always be affected by it whether the journey takes us through death, divorce, or recovery.

Some members share their questions and concerns after the unthinkable happens. Do I still belong? Will they still accept me in my group? Where do I belong? Keeping the focus on ourselves, not the addict, in our meetings may help all members feel more comfortable, including those who have lost a loved one.

All members who shared their stories are still attending Nar-Anon. Some are doing service. All are sharing their experience to help and support others. The members who have shared here tell their stories, their healing process, and how Nar-Anon helped them work through each day or each moment. Even though their lives have changed forever, there is now a new kind of normal. As the stories explain, we never lose hope, we have a spiritual kinship, we still belong, and this is not the end.
Observing the Loss of a Loved One

I cannot begin to imagine what it would be like to lose someone I love to addiction. Though addiction is a powerful disease, recovery is a powerful tool. What I can share with you is my experience, strength, and hope in observing the support and love that comes from being in a Nar-Anon family and supporting a member who has faced this difficult situation.

A member of my home group, who had been working the program for two years, came into our meeting the other night and began to share his story. His daughter had been released from jail three days earlier. Though he wished it to be so, and hoped it would happen, she did not decide to enter a rehab or accept help. He ended his story by saying he had received a call that morning from the coroner.

Those of us in the meeting were, of course, devastated for him and no words could begin to express our feelings beyond the compassion we felt.

He always came to the meetings alone. His wife did not attend; however, she sent her heartfelt thanks to all of us for the comfort that had been given to her husband during the past two years. He had come to his Nar-Anon family for strength and courage to face the days ahead.

We state in our meetings that we are a family – that you may crawl into the meeting, but you can walk out; we are a group of people who loved you before you ever walked into the room. What a wonderful, powerful, amazing program this is; even through death we can lean on each other and find strength and comfort that is indescribable. Isn’t it amazing one of our first thoughts when the unthinkable happens is, “I need to be with my Nar-Anon family”? Other family members and friends, even though they do not attend, can see the miracles that happen in the lives of those of us who work the program.

I am so grateful to my Higher Power that I have found this new family. I am grateful I stayed until the miracle happened. I am grateful that in some small way I can be a comfort and strength to a member who faced what we all keep in a very secluded spot in the back of our minds, hoping it never comes to pass.
Coming Full Circle

It’s been four years today since my daughter died, for the final time. I say this because it seemed like I had lost her several times over the years due to her addiction. My sweet and bright young girl, who showed so much promise, grew up to be someone I never could have imagined she would be.

She went away to college and it was there she became an addict. She also suffered from major clinical depression and the combination rapidly destroyed the life she had planned for herself. I did everything in my power to find help for her but nothing seemed to work. She was on a path of self-destruction.

I remember the evening of my first Nar-Anon meeting. A close friend told me she had heard about Nar-Anon and offered to take me to a meeting. I said, “No, not tonight” because my daughter was home and I was hoping to be able to spend some time with her before she disappeared again. My friend left and I went to speak with my daughter. We were sitting on the front porch and I was telling her how much I loved her and wished I could help. She turned and looked at me with vacant eyes. She said she was going to leave and catch a bus out of town. What I saw in her face, her eyes, was someone who was already gone. To me, that was the first time I felt a part of her had died. The daughter I knew was gone. I went back into the house and called my friend and asked if she would take me to that Nar-Anon meeting.

As soon as I entered the room of my first meeting, I felt at home. I was with people who truly understood the pain I was going through. I did not come to Nar-Anon to save my daughter. I came to Nar-Anon to save myself from the unbearable pain I was going through. At this first meeting they let me pick the topic and I chose acceptance. I needed to learn how to accept this horrible disease that had taken my daughter away from me.

I made new friends in Nar-Anon, got a sponsor, and worked the steps. Little by little I found a new life for myself. It took me years to really learn how to let go. I had come to my daughter’s rescue many times, and then needed to step back. My Nar-Anon family was always there for me, supporting me and my efforts to work a program that would teach me to detach with love.

I believe service work was a big part of my recovery. I became involved with my group, area, region, and served as a delegate and board of trustee member. I also became involved with several world service committees. My life became so full that I stopped focusing on my daughter’s life and really focused on my own and how I could help others going through the same thing. I married a man I met in Nar-Anon. We both had daughters who were addicts. Working a program of recovery became my way of life. The beautiful part was that my daughter saw me grow into a new woman of strength and she finally admired me for making a life for myself that was not solely focused on her.

I am thankful that I had 11 years in Nar-Anon before my daughter died. I cannot imagine how I would have coped without it. The first year after she died was the worst. I had major doubts about my Higher Power. I found it hard to believe there was anything out there at all. It hurt to hear others talk about their addicts when mine was gone. I continued to attend meetings, worked the program, and stayed on my committees. I kept saying I am going to fake it ‘till I make it. With the love and support of my family and Nar-Anon friends, I continue to live a life filled with love, joy, and sorrow. Not a perfect life, but a real life. I still really miss my daughter, and always will. At times I find it hard to believe she is really gone. I try to keep the good memories close; the ones of her when she was younger before she became an addict.

I will always be grateful to have a program that helped me find recovery and to appreciate that life will never be perfect but it will be as good as I can make it. I never would have found Nar-Anon if I didn’t have an addict for a daughter. So we come full circle.
This is Not the End

My wife and I have two sons, the oldest is 27 and our youngest will be forever 21. We started attending Nar-Anon meetings hoping to find a way to help our younger son realize the things he was doing were ruining his life. We wanted to help fix him. Our lives were hectic and out of control. We were constantly fighting with our son and then fighting between ourselves.

I was angry with my son for many reasons; the loss of material things, his laziness at home, and his disrespect. I blamed him for causing us to learn how the legal system worked; from arrests to booking, to understanding the process of the court systems, and working with lawyers and district attorneys. We became familiar with the jail system; putting money on his books, visitation times and restrictions, mailing magazines and books, getting jail-approved eye glasses, and of course, the expensive collect phone calls. These were things I thought I would never experience.

While our son was in jail, we kept attending Nar-Anon meetings, learning how to work on ourselves, and setting boundaries. By working on myself, I stopped lecturing and started to really listen to him. He and I were able to talk more and set boundaries we both would work on. During this time my wife and I celebrated our one year birthday in Nar-Anon.

Soon after our celebration, and only six days following our son’s release from jail, he died in his sleep. It was unexpected and shocking. Things were looking positive and then he was taken away. It wasn’t fair.

Our Nar-Anon group provided us with extraordinary support. They were the therapy which helped us get through this tragedy in our lives. I cannot imagine how we would have handled our loss without their incredible support.

We found out later he had a bad heart, and his death was not drug related. We truly believe he had seen his bottom, and things were going to be better.

We have continued to attend meetings and share our story. This helps others understand death is a real possibility. We tell them to enjoy the good times, cherish the positive moments, and live one day at a time. I am thankful my son exposed me to Nar-Anon. I have started working the steps and will continue on this journey. What we experienced is the worst thing that can happen to any parent; however, it was not the end for us.
Finding Gratitude after Loss

When you have an addict in your life, there is always a gnawing fear that you will lose them to death because of their addiction. It seems to lurk around the corner. When it hits you, it is truly unexpected and like getting hit with a ten pound sledge hammer right in the pit of your stomach.

My son was killed in an auto accident three weeks shy of his fortieth birthday. He was travelling to Northern California to get away from the environment of drugs and non-achievement. He was a passenger in a car driven by a recovering addict going ninety miles an hour when a tire blew out and he was thrown from the car. The coroner's report said he was drug free. From conversations I had following the incident, I determined he was sober for the eleventh or twelfth time in thirty years of a life that was dominated by drug use. My last contact with him was the morning of his death in a phone call to me saying, "Hello, Pop, I'm doing okay. I am going up north for work. I love you, Pop." The next words I heard were from a sheriff at my door who told me of his death and the accident that killed him.

My first reaction was total disbelief, and then it was "what do I do now amid all the pain and anguish as the realization of the loss sinks in?" Then there was a period of numbness until the funeral and mourning period that immediately followed.

How do you deal with the loss? How do you let go of the spirit? How do you siphon out all the bad memories and retain the sweet memories you shared in life preceding death. It's like a deep wound that will eventually heal, leaving a scar that will be there for the rest of your life to remind you he will always be with you.

Over twenty-one years of living with my son's addiction, my wife and I found the ability to cope and achieve some serenity by being part of a Nar-Anon family group. We had moved to a new community two years before my son’s death. There was no Nar-Anon meeting in the area and many times I had considered starting a family group.

I started a group as part of my Twelfth Step work. Over the years I discovered that by giving back I was getting back. It helped to bring up the grief I had buried. It allowed me to heal the pain from the loss I was feeling. Now I have a good feeling when his name is mentioned. Yes, I do miss him, but I know now that I learned so much about myself by having him in my life. I thank him for all the good he gave to me. Nar-Anon has enlightened me and given me a positive view of the life I now live. I am thankful for all I have, and the good memories we shared.
How the Twelve Steps Helped With the Loss of My Son

Eight years have passed since my son died and I still cannot talk about losing him without tears. I’m grateful to my sponsor who shared her experience of recovery with the help of the Twelve Step program.

My First Step
I was powerless over my son who died and his addiction. I lost control of my life.

My Second Step
I came to believe there is a Power greater than me and this Higher Power can restore me to sanity.

My Third Step
I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him.

My Fourth Step
God, please help me take an honest and fearless look at my feelings over the loss of my son. Did I suffer needlessly after the death of my son? How did my health suffer? I overloaded myself with work, I couldn’t concentrate, I cried often, and did not say no when I wanted to. The relationship with my grandchild suffered because of expectations I placed on my role as a grandmother. My daughter-in-law left for a different city and I had no contact with her or my grandchild. How did I react to this? I cried, prayed, joined Nar-Anon, and worked the Twelve Step program with my sponsor. I became active in service work, practiced the spiritual principles, and changed my relationship with my other children and myself. I have two more sons, thank God!!!

What feelings do I have regarding the loss of my son? Powerlessness, resentment, anger, self-pity, sadness, rage, guilt, feelings of abandonment, meaninglessness, hopelessness, dullness, pain, and fear for my children.

What prevents me from moving on with my life? My defects in this situation: low self-esteem, dependence on other people’s opinions, distrust of God, distrust of myself, self-will, poor judgment, fear of disapproval, self-pity, anger with myself, disapproval/non-acceptance of myself, guilt, and lust for power (playing God by trying to control everybody and everything).

My Fifth Step
I share my defects of character with God, my sponsor, and my home group. I am ready to share my recovery experience with others.

My Sixth Step
Higher Power, I am ready to ask You to remove my defects of character: low self-esteem, dependence on other people’s opinions, distrust of God and myself, self-will, poor judgment, fear of disapproval, self-pity, anger with myself, disapproval of myself, non-acceptance of myself, and a lust for power (playing God by trying to control everybody and everything).

My Seventh Step
Higher Power, I humbly ask You to remove my shortcomings. Help me to overcome my low self-esteem and my dependence on other people’s opinions. Higher Power, I ask You to help me with my distrust of God, distrust of myself, self-will, and poor judgment. God help me let go of my fear of disapproval, self-pity, and lust for power. I ask You to free me of feeling guilt, anger, disapproval, and non-acceptance of myself.
My Eighth Step
Higher Power, I ask You to help me become willing to make amends to myself, God, my son, my other children, my granddaughter, my daughter-in-law, and all others I have harmed.

My Ninth Step
How can I make amends to myself? I can love myself and look at my creative talents. I can work the program, carry the message to others, and take care of my needs in all areas of my life.

How can I make amends to God? By practicing the first three steps and Step Eleven. Every morning I write in my journal. This keeps me in contact with my Higher Power. I will pray for the continuous awareness of His presence in my life.

How can I make amends to my son who is no longer alive? I can make amends by caring about my granddaughter and daughter-in-law. By finding time to call, invite them to my place or spend vacations together, I can improve our relationships.

How can I make amends to my children? By being attentive and spending quality time with my children, I can make amends in a loving way.

My Tenth Step
God, I ask You to help me admit my wrongs when I take my daily inventory so I can promptly make amends. This helps me keep my side of the street clean.

My Eleventh Step
I use the Serenity Prayer as a meditation for my Eleventh Step. I ask my Higher Power, “Help me to understand Your will and grant me the power to fulfill it.”

My Twelfth Step
How can I practice the principles in all my affairs? I can carry the message to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

When I work the Steps in different situations it becomes easier for me to breathe and live! Humility comes when I turn everything over to my Higher Power.
Life Changed Forever

My son’s addiction took me on a life-altering journey which led me to feelings of anger, frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, fear, and obsession. This resulted in my stress level going through the roof. I felt lost and was moving toward depression. I asked myself, “Why is this happening to me?” If I was being honest, I was in the throes of insanity.

A friend at work suggested I attend a Nar-Anon meeting. In Nar-Anon I finally came to understand that addiction is a disease, just like cancer and many other disabling diseases. For more than two years I was reluctant to accept the truth for what it really was, my son was an addict. I was the father of an addict and would be until the day I die. Up to this point, I judged, criticized, and tried to control my son’s bad choices and behavior. This kept me in a defensive mood, always reacting with resentment and a pompous attitude. It was not easy to love the addict when he was choosing active addiction. I was consumed by feelings of anger, disappointment, fear, and betrayal. All the hopes I had for him had been shattered. I was so emotionally wrapped up in holding him accountable for his choices and actions that I was unable to make the connection; I had to change my point of view regarding the truth. The addiction was the cause of my son’s struggle.

Accepting the truth allowed me to change my entire outlook toward my son. We built a new relationship founded on my program with new boundaries such as, “My program doesn’t allow me to do that anymore.” I was staying out of his business and he was attending his own recovery meetings, working toward sobriety. I accepted his addiction as his struggle in life.

My challenge got easier by attending meetings and hearing the experience, strength, and hope others shared. I saw in real time the pain members were going through as they openly shared their stories, many with tears on their faces. I also saw the progress others had made and the smiles of victors, not victims. As my awareness of addiction grew, I became stronger and my outlook toward my son improved in spite of his situation. I especially locked onto a nugget that a member at the meeting said, “Never take away their dignity; they are still human beings.” I learned I can hate the addiction but I will never stop loving my son.

I stopped and reflected, if it were not for Nar-Anon meetings, I would have continued a destructive relationship with my son. I would have had so much guilt when he passed. Instead, Nar-Anon allowed me to build a renewed relationship with him several years prior to his passing. When my son died, the support I got from the members of my group was beyond words. They provided emotional support and attended the internment in great numbers. You cannot begin to imagine the gratitude and solace I felt by their presence. It allowed my broken heart to begin healing.

In Nar-Anon I learned to move from a love/hate relationship to loving my son in spite of his addiction. For me Nar-Anon is about the meetings, the members sharing, and the readings from the SESH book. It can be experienced by anyone who has the courage to enter these rooms with an open mind and heart. I will forever be grateful for the changes in my life resulting from Nar–Anon’s Twelve Steps and its members. It has made me more compassionate and wiser in the understanding of addiction and its impact on a family. It has energized me with a willingness to serve and pass on the courage, strength, hope, and serenity that was given to me.
Healing through Fellowship

This was not the life I had envisioned, being married to an addict, caught on the roller coaster of highs and lows. Many times I questioned whether what I was doing was right. Should I stay or leave? Why was I staying? Was it out of fear? I doubted myself, my decisions. Was I enabling? Was I prolonging the consequences? I was always trying to anticipate, control, and be prepared. I worried all the time that he would die and then there were times I wondered if it would be better if he did. I felt ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, sad, glad, relieved, hurt, anxious, overwhelmed, and devastated. This is what brought me to the rooms of Nar-Anon. I found peace, serenity, understanding, and love from a group of strangers I would come to call my friends. Friends who understood me and my life as no others could - friends who would support me through this devastation.

Like many of you, I suffered losses in my life; loss of dreams, sanity, money, hopes, sleep, even the loss of a stillborn child. All the worry never prepared me for the loss of my soulmate, my husband. My story is a story of hope, a love that would never give up. We had just celebrated his 53rd birthday and our 34th anniversary. Yes, he still suffered from addiction, fighting his demons, but he worked his program and I worked mine, though neither one of us as much as we should have. Nonetheless, the program gave me peace. He had been incarcerated, hospitalized, in and out of rehabs, and now he would pay the ultimate price - death from an overdose.

As I write my story it has been two years to the day that my husband died from addiction. I never anticipated coming home and finding his cold, lifeless body in our home. My first thought was an overdose, even though there was no evidence to support it. I was overwhelmed and then my nursing instincts kicked in. I called 911 and started CPR. I did everything possible to revive him with no success. I had always realized death was a possibility. I thought all the years of anticipating and worrying about him dying from addiction would have prepared me for it but when it finally happened, I was overwhelmed. Several months later the autopsy report confirmed my suspicions.

Of course my family was there to support me through this difficult time, but it was my Nar-Anon family who helped me to heal. They understood what it was like to live with addiction. They made me feel welcome even though my life had changed. They encouraged me to continue coming to meetings, sharing, and working my program. I am extremely grateful that through addiction I was able to find myself in the rooms of Nar-Anon. This was where I was able to find the God of my understanding, the God I thought had deserted me. This is where I was able to put the pieces of my life back together. I am so grateful for the tools I learned in my years in Nar-Anon that got me through the most difficult time in my life.

So although my life has changed drastically, I have learned to live again. I know there is hope and serenity for all of us who have been devastated by addiction.
Spiritual Kinship

My son was an addict. It was a nightmare when I realized he was using drugs and needed help. Next came hopelessness, shame, and fear. I never believed this terrible thing would happen to me. At that time I only thought of how I looked and what people were saying. Shame! I didn’t understand how to help my son. I started to look for a rehabilitation center to treat him. Eventually I found a center where we were informed about the Twelve Step program. I started to attend Nar-Anon meetings and everything started to change.

Even though my son lived nearby, we had not been close since he was a teenager. We did not have an inner spiritual kinship. Nar-Anon and my Higher Power helped me reconnect with my son. As we became closer, I grew to love him unconditionally. We began to talk on different spiritual topics; how to accept life, how to get to know ourselves. With his help I became closer to God and to my understanding of a Higher Power. I remember a conversation we had when I learned that for a long time he had not been happy with his life. My heart trembled. I am grateful he was so open and honest with me. He had such an understanding of God. I was amazed he was able to feel, understand, and think of a Higher Power in such a way. That was a conversation full of marvelous spiritual warmth. Thanks to my own spiritual changes, I could feel this with him. This was a special time of happiness.

Just before his death, my son recommended a book to me in which the power of prayer was described in detail. Every time I open it, I am comforted by how my son could feel so deeply and realize such spiritual things! He opened another door to my understanding of God.

When I have difficulties, I am grateful my Higher Power gave me a gift by granting me the opportunity to see my son find a spiritual path while he was seeking recovery. He is no longer here but my spiritual kinship with him continues through my Higher Power, my memories, and my spiritual development.
We Still Belong

Our son’s years of active addiction were a terrifying roller coaster of chaos and sadness for my wife, our family, and me. Nar-Anon provided the relief we needed to find serenity and a better way to live, no matter what our son chose to do with his life. During the year of his amazing recovery from the disease of addiction, he found a job, a place of his own, and a new, loving girlfriend. Meanwhile, we continued to build our Nar-Anon tool-belt. We needed this to sustain us against the ever-present possibility of his relapse and the impact it might have on us.

Following our son’s year of recovery and sobriety, he had a terrible relapse, which rapidly took him back to the awful ways of addiction. This time, it ended with his death from a drug overdose the day after Father’s Day. Our family was devastated and felt as if we had lost him for a second time, first to his addiction and now to his actual death. The grief was beyond overwhelming.

The morning my son died was the day my home group meets. Our family and friends flooded our home with love and support, but I desperately needed to be with others who understood the ultimate fear and impact of addiction on a loved one. My son was gone and I wondered if Nar-Anon was still the place I could find the unconditional acceptance and support I had experienced up to this dreadful turning point.

I went to the meeting that night, apprehensive but desperate. Not only did the group turn out in force, but they somehow already knew of my family’s loss. They greeted me with love, hugs, tears, and the Nar-Anon miracle of support I needed so badly in the worst moments of my life.

It has been several years since we lost our beautiful son. It has not been easy. My wife and I continue to attend Nar-Anon meetings. We are encouraged by the ongoing experience, strength, and hope that only Nar-Anon can offer in such terrible tragedies. We continue to serve the fellowship and have progressed to the point where we can support others who have experienced the devastation of addiction. Nar-Anon continues to help us find the miracle of recovery, even in our darkest hours. Our Nar-Anon friends made it clear that not even death could separate us from their loving embrace. Keep coming back!
My Recovery Journey

My first husband and I were together for almost thirty years. During the early years I saw him use whatever drug would fill his need. Two and a half years into our relationship, he hit bottom and knew he needed help. When he was ready, he started attending meetings, relapsed once, and became a recovering addict.

As my husband became active in his program, I realized I needed recovery for myself. A Nar-Anon meeting was nearby. I attended, found a sponsor, and started on my recovery journey. I found just because the addict is in recovery, life does not become a bed of roses. Nar-Anon became a way of life to help deal with problems and situations. Both our programs involved a lot of service. Through the years, we had two children who grew up attending meetings and recovery events. They grew up, we grew older, and our recovery activities changed to a slower pace.

My husband started to feel like he was coming down with something, maybe the flu. This continued for a few months and he was hospitalized due to internal bleeding. The doctors told us there was an anomaly in the liver tests. Things progressed quickly; we received the diagnosis of primary liver cancer and within two months he passed away.

It would be years after his death before I returned to Nar-Anon and worked my program as if my life depended on it. At the time, the bills were draining everything I had, and I felt I needed someone in my life to talk to, not just my children. I wondered if I was still eligible to attend Nar-Anon since there was no apparent addict in my life. I decided to go to meetings because I knew the recovery I found before the loss was something I wanted again and I knew I needed a place to share. Being free to share and listen to others’ stories helped restore my serenity.

As the years passed, I found my desire for a lifelong partner was renewed. How does one go about dating when you’ve not had to date for 30 years? The question I kept asking was whether I could even get along with a man who was not in a recovery program. I was concerned I would be attracted to another addict, but I didn’t know if I wanted to even consider it. I began to look forward to talking to one particular friend. Long story short, I called him one snowy morning and told him my feelings. Within six months, we married and have been for eleven years. We have gone through more trials than most marriages go through in twenty years. I know I can find the strength to confront each problem in my life with renewed courage from working the steps with a sponsor and living the traditions in my life.

After losing my first husband, I had a tendency to withhold a part of myself from caring for others. It was not so much a desire to protect myself from being hurt, as not wanting to witness someone else’s pain. This became something I needed to work on in my recovery. I worked through this using the same methods we tell the newcomer; go to meetings, get a sponsor, work the steps, and do service. My sponsor helped provide focus. I am working the steps, doing service work, living the traditions, and sharing my experience, strength, and hope with others. I have followed a path that led to another chapter in my recovery life, one with much deeper meaning and more honesty than was ever in my life prior to the loss. I have learned to take responsibility for my happiness and to keep Nar-Anon recovery in my life.
Never Losing Hope

“This isn't happening...This isn't happening!” Those are the first words I remember uttering to myself after I somehow got up off the floor and began aimlessly walking in circles in my kitchen.

“I am just like them.” These are some of the first words I remember uttering to myself during my first Nar-Anon meeting several years ago.

The pain and fear that brought me to Nar-Anon had lessened over the time I spent in the fellowship. I did what was suggested. I kept coming back. I got a sponsor and worked the steps with her. I took on service work and did my part to carry the message to others. Because of these things I know my life became manageable. I grew personally as well as spiritually. The relationship with my addicted loved one had changed and became a real relationship again. I learned to truly love my daughter and ceased trying to change her. I had accepted her as she was. I had supported and encouraged her attempts at recovery. I had learned to still love her and keep hope in my heart even when her attempts failed. Our love could now withstand the storm.

I thank my Higher Power and this fellowship every day for showing me a better way to live. I am grateful that I took that leap of faith and tried something new. I cannot imagine that I would still be here.....living that is....if I had not followed the path I was offered during that first meeting.

My daughter’s choices and her disease took her places I never wanted for her. In the end it took her from me.....she is gone...forever.

How can I survive this? How can I fix this? How can I accept this? How can I keep living? Why? These are some of the same questions I had when I first found the rooms of Nar-Anon when I was battling her addiction, before I had any recovery. After her overdose death, I had these same questions again....only now they were about me and how I was going to cope with her death.

It was a while before I could go to a regular meeting. My sponsor and other Nar-Anon friends surrounded me with love and support. I found it hard sit in a meeting where some members complained about their loved ones. How could they complain? At least they had their loved ones!

I was not sure I still belonged. In recovery I accepted her disease. It felt completely different to no longer have a choice about acceptance, but I had no other option. I could not do anything... ever... to change this.

Complete re-entry into Nar-Anon took a few months. Today I know that it was by the grace of my Higher Power and the help of others that I began to see that the literature was correct. There is no problem too great to be overcome by the working of these steps.

I have utilized the steps to deal with her loss. I accept others are where they are in their recovery and I am where I am supposed to be. I don't have all the answers and maybe I never will. We don't all have the same experience, strength, and hope. We are all the same though, learning a better way to live. I do know that I can have a good life, although not the good life I imagined years ago. For me, it is about the journey of finding a different kind of good. It is about never losing hope.
Tradition Three

The relatives of addicts, when gathered for mutual aid, may call themselves a Nar-Anon Family Group, provided that as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of addiction in a relative or friend.

Many members share how they felt isolated and alone before coming to Nar-Anon. They found it hard to communicate with others due to a false sense of shame and guilt. Losing someone to addiction can bring back feelings of isolation, even in Nar-Anon. Meetings and Nar-Anon friends can help members continue to find support after the loss of a loved one. The last part of Tradition Three states “The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of addiction in a relative or friend.” What does this mean? This tradition does not specify whether the addict is active or in recovery, if we are still in a relationship with the addict, or even if the addict has died.

We, the family or friends of those with addiction problems, once affected can never remove the effects of addiction from our lives. We come to Nar-Anon thinking we are going to change, or help the addict, and soon learn we are powerless over others and can only change ourselves. Those who have suffered the loss of someone they love are deeply and profoundly affected. Many of us kept the secret of our addicted loved ones and soon learned Nar-Anon was a safe place filled with people sharing the same fears. We learn how to live one day at a time. After the loss, whether through active addiction, relapse, or even death, we may begin the relentless search of what we could have done differently. We are reminded we could not have controlled the outcome for the addict. It was never a matter of love. Through the love and compassion of our group we learn how to go on with our lives.