

Today, silence is golden for me

By Susan T., Michigan

I cringed when I first came to Al-Anon and heard the words “silence is golden when you listen to your Higher Power.”

When I was growing up, my mother fell a lot. The truth was my father was a very abusive alcoholic. He would physically and verbally abuse my mother. Other times, he was funny, often joking and giving everyone and anyone anything they wanted.

“They would go for months upon months not speaking to one another.”

All that changed when I turned 12 years old. After one of those bad episodes, my mother told my father that if he ever hit her again, she would let his family know what was happening in our home. My father’s family thought he was the greatest and, at times, he was. They did not know what was going on behind closed doors and many miles away. I don’t think he believed her because he hit her again. She kept her promise and wrote a letter to the family informing them what was happening.

My sister was getting married that summer. My father’s family came in about three days early. They could have confronted him at any time prior to the wedding. However, they decided to confront him at the reception, after he had been drinking most of the night. When we got home, all hell broke loose. There was screaming and yelling, “Why did you tell my family that? It’s not true. I never laid a hand on you!”

All the puzzle pieces came together for me that night. I realized that my mother did not fall all the time—he was hitting her. I never saw the abuse, though I did at times hear it. Being young, I never put two and two together. That night, my life changed forever.

My father never laid a hand on my mother again from that point on. What he did do, however, is become mentally abusive. He would not speak to her. They would go for months upon months not speaking to one another. If she walked into a room and he was there, he would walk out. One year, they missed the full year mark of not speaking to one another by only two weeks. It would take a family tragedy to get



Photo by Sue D., GA

them to talk, crises with one of us six children getting into trouble, or vacation time.

For the teenager I was, the silence was horrible. I can’t imagine what it was like for my mother—a woman who loved this man and stayed with him through thick and thin—to be treated like that. She used to tell me that she wished he would go back to the hitting her because at least there was a honeymoon period and things would be good for a while.

I don’t know how long after this that my mother found Al-Anon. She would leave literature around the house for everyone to see and read. At times, she even offered to take me to a meeting, but my thought was “I don’t have a problem with it.” At times, I thought my mother was crazy for leaving the literature and wondered why she was doing it. The truth was she was planting a

seed for us children—and it worked. When I realized I had married a man just like my father, I remembered those pamphlets and remembered the Al-Anon name. When the time came, I knew where to go, and I did.

So you see, I did not like silence (the “bad silence” I grew up with) and wanted no part of it, or for people to tell me to be silent and listen to my Higher Power. But I learned that there is “good silence”—Step Eleven and listening to my Higher Power.

Silence is golden for me, and now after 14 years in the program, I welcome it. Step Eleven teaches me to be silent through prayer and meditation, to help keep me focused on my Higher Power, and to bring me through whatever it is I need to get back to me.

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