

Tradition Eleven: Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.

Tradition Twelve: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

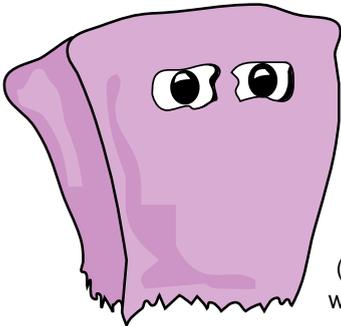
Anonymity

By Mary Lou M., Associate Director of Public Outreach—Media

What makes anonymity so important that Traditions Eleven and Twelve both mention it?

My dictionary defines anonymity as follows: “The quality or state of being anonymous.” And anonymous means: “1: having or giving no name <an anonymous author> 2: of unknown or unnamed origin <anonymous gifts> 3: marked by lack of individuality or personality.”

There is a lot of “having or giving no name” in Al-Anon. Although many individuals work on our Conference Approved Literature, no names appear as authors. In meetings most members introduce themselves by first name only. We gather as equals, from unknown or unnamed origins until we get to know each other in Al-Anon. But we all know that the third definition doesn’t apply—because Al-Anon members have plenty of individuality and personality!



Anonymity within Al-Anon

Families and friends of alcoholics often come to Al-Anon meetings full of fear. It can be reassuring that they don’t have to reveal more than their first name. As we grow, we learn that we have the right to choose our own level of anonymity in meetings. As our Table Anonymity Card (S-9) reminds us, “Whom you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let

it stay here,” we learn to keep the confidences of other members.

Anonymity within the fellowship includes allowing members to keep their name, profession, or other personal information private. When I was fairly new in Al-Anon, a member came into my workplace to visit a friend. She began telling other members where I worked, violating my anonymity and my trust. I shared with her as lovingly as I could how I felt. I am grateful I did not let that experience stop me from pursuing my recovery. Today when members learn that I work at the World Service Office, they often want to tell others. I tell them what a member shared about a year after the office moved to Virginia Beach, “When the staff members started coming to our meetings, we were somewhat intimidated. But we learned that you’re here for the same reasons we are!” We come together with a common bond—we have all been affected by alcoholism.

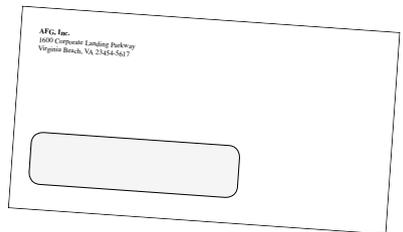


Each member is free to share as much or as little personal information as is comfortable. I know that my “comfort zone” in this area grew as I did in my recovery. It can be very helpful to share our last names with fellow members in our group. If a member is hospitalized, it’s going to be hard to visit or send a card if all we know is a first name.

It is never appropriate for members to speak as professionals in an Al-Anon meeting. When we talk in meetings, we share our personal experience of being affected by someone else’s drinking.

Anonymity in Al-Anon Service

Trusted servants at all levels facilitate communication by sharing their full names, addresses, and phone numbers with each other and the World Service Office. We protect the anonymity of these members in correspondence by putting “AFG, Inc.”—not “Al-Anon” or “Alateen”—on the envelope.



Anonymity outside the Fellowship

The Eleventh Tradition is very clear that we maintain personal anonymity in the media. This means that when writing or speaking *as an Al-Anon or Alateen member* in publications, TV, radio, films, or on the Internet, we do not reveal our full name or allow our face to be shown. This assures potential newcomers that their anonymity will be protected, and that

as Al-Anon/Alateen members we do not present ourselves as “official” spokespersons or experts. Most reporters and interviewers will understand this requirement and honor our request.



In any communication outside of the fellowship that is not for publication or broadcast, it can be advantageous to give our full names. This adds to our fellowship’s credibility and does not violate Tradition Eleven. Medical professionals, attorneys, judges, spiritual leaders, educators, and others we may want to inform about our fellowship will be more responsive to a letter or message from “Betty Smith” than from “Betty S.” When we use our full name in contacting the media, with the condition that it not be published, it also adds credibility. Again, members must assess their personal comfort zone. When I was fairly new in the program, I was coordinating a radio interview with some other Al-Anon members. I had a difficult time convincing the producer that “Mary M.” was a reliable source to insure that his guests would show up! It probably would have been better if someone more comfortable giving a full name had arranged this.

Another View of Personal Anonymity outside the Fellowship

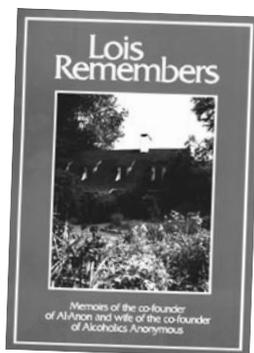
There are Al-Anon members who say, “I’m proud of my recovery. I don’t care about my personal anonymity. Why can’t I talk about it in the newspaper or on TV?” Well, the answer is, you can! Let me repeat a phrase I used earlier regarding anonymity in the media—**“when writing or speaking as an Al-Anon or Alateen member.”** When we identify ourselves as an Al-Anon or Alateen member, we do not reveal our full name or allow our face to be shown. However, as long as we do not disclose our Al-Anon or Alateen membership, we can reveal our identity! Let me show two ways a newspaper story could be written. Neither of these situations violates Tradition Eleven:

Betty S. knows firsthand the difficulties of living with alcoholism and has been a member of Al-Anon for 15 years. She says, “Al-Anon saved my life. I grew up with an alcoholic mother and married a man who drank. I was so consumed with what they were doing. I had no life of my own and was miserable. Al-Anon helped me learn how to take care of myself and gave me wonderful support through all the tough times.”

Betty Smith knows firsthand the difficulties of living with alcoholism and has been a member of a Twelve Step program for 15 years. She says, "I grew up with an alcoholic mother and married a man who drank. I was so consumed with what they were doing. I had no life of my own and was miserable. In my recovery, I've learned to take care of myself and I've gotten wonderful support through all the tough times."

A Few Final Words on Anonymity

Anonymity has many layers. As a spiritual principle, it assures us that we are all equal in Al-Anon, and that we have the right to reveal as much or as little to whomever we choose. However, the future of our fellowship depends on our continued growth. As our cofounder, Lois W., shared on page 194 of her memoir, *Lois Remembers* (B-7):



"Let us not mistake anonymity for secrecy.

"The degree of anonymity we practice is a personal matter. Most of us, I believe, do not wish to be anonymous within our own Fellowships. Anonymity here hinders our availability to help our fellow members.

"Also, if AA and Al-Anon groups do not let the public know of our presence, . . . we block ourselves off from those in need.

"The stigma of alcoholism still is strong. I believe it to be one of the responsibilities of our Fellowships to try to remove this stigma. To act as if AA and Al-Anon were secret societies only increases the idea of shame. . . .

"Alcoholism is growing at a tremendous rate, and we AA and Al-Anon members want to do all we can, within the Traditions, to aid the recovery of alcoholics and their families."

Inside **AL-ANON**

Statement of Purpose

"Inside Al-Anon" presents news, policy, and commentary from volunteers, staff, and readers sharing experience through service.