At the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, four or five young people who had recently "graduated" from Alateen joined Al-Anon, the adult version of their program. In Alateen they had explored the impact that alcoholic and co-alcoholic parents and living in an alcoholic household had on their lives. Upon entering Al-Anon, they were suddenly faced with the concept of learning to live serenely in a dysfunctional setting. We can only guess at the inner turmoil *this* presented to these young adults, not to mention their being afraid to displease the parent figures around them in Al-Anon.

Alateen must have taught them well how to get their own needs met. They formed their own Al-Anon meeting which they named "Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics". Meeting at the Smithers building in Manhattan, this group used the Al-Anon greeting and closing, but "winged" the rest of the meeting.

At the same time there was an older member of Al-Anon and AA who had turned his sharing focus to the impact his "ancient history" in an alcoholic home of origin had on his adult life. Tony A. was about fifty years old then. Cindy, a member of the "Hope for Adult Children" group, heard Tony and asked him to be a guest speaker at her group.

Tony A. went and shared his experience, strength, and hope on the characteristics he found he had in his adult life due to growing up in an alcoholic home. The new Alateen graduates were in their early twenties, while Tony was a half century old. Yet, the differences in their ages dissolved with the shared background, experiences and feelings. There were tears and laughter, and a sense of belonging and understanding that transcended their years. They identified with Tony and he stayed with the group. After six or seven months, instead of the increasing membership they had expected, the fledgling meeting had dwindled to three or four people. The meeting was about to fold.

Something rather powerful in Tony motivated him to invite members of Alcoholics Anonymous to join the little group. Some of them, after all, had alcoholic parents of their own, didn't they?

Seventeen members of AA showed up that next week. At the following meeting there were 50 people. At the next there were over 100 AAs. The somewhat radical Al-Anon meeting was on its way with a lot of help from some very good friends.

The group then established, some of the members formed another meeting at St. Jean Baptiste Church. Tony A. chaired that second meeting called "Generations". He also attended the "Hope for Adult Children" meetings during this period.

"Generations" was not affiliated with any organization. For about six months they operated with no format. Members of that group vehemently encouraged Tony to do something – to formalize, to legitimize – anything to establish the group.

So Tony sat down at work the following morning and in two hours jotted down 13 characteristics of the fellowship. He said of the experience, "It was as if Someone Else was writing the list through me".

Tony worked near Chris, who had offered to type up the list so he ran it over to her. She typed up the 13 characteristics. Then Tony realized he'd forgotten to add that little piece about fear, reflecting, *No, they'd never "admit" fear. Excitement. Yeah, Better. They'd accept excitement….*

Tony wrote the characteristics. He also wrote the solution. Chris edited the solution (things like "God" became he/she/it in the transformation).

When Tony read the characteristics a the next meeting, one of the members – Barry – said, "Hey, that's my laundry list!" That list of characteristics has since been called "The Laundry List".

This was the official beginning of ACA (ACoA). No one quite remembers the date of this most auspicious occasion, but who'd have expected these humble beginnings to become a worldwide movement to stop child abuse from the inside?

"When we began, "Tony said, "there was a wonderful feeling of mutual love, empathy, and understanding".

They did try working with the AA Steps at the "Generation" meeting, but most of the early members felt these steps did not apply to them.

About that time a lady visiting from Houston asked for a copy of the Laundry List. She took it to Texas to begin a meeting there. A gentleman by the name of Jack E. was moving to California. And then there was the lady from Switzerland….

At the "Generations" meeting one evening in late 1979 or early 1980, two ladies approached Tony at the end of the meeting. They were from the General Services of Al-Anon and invited the "Generations" group to join Al-Anon. The only real stipulation was that the meeting had to discontinue using "The Laundry List". The Generations group unanimously agreed that they would not give up their "Laundry List". This was the beginning of the movement away from Al-Anon.

In 1979 there was an article published in *Newsweek* about Claudia Black, Dr. Stephanie Brown, and Sharon Wegscheider (now Wegscheider-Cruse). It was the very first nationwide announcement that the family dynamics in an alcoholic household could and did cause life-long patterns of dysfunctional behavior. That article was, in essence, the second piece of ACA literature. With the tremendous acceptance of the family systems concept in mental health through the daytime talk show hosts, the literature from outside the program blossomed. For a beginning program with a crusader overtone, there was general enthusiasm from the fellowship to accept the use of outside literature.

At this time AA people were looking at Tony like he was a little crazy. It seems he was advocating a departure from the AA Steps. In 1978 or 1979 he wrote some Steps with the help of Don D. that he felt were more fitting for the victims of abuse. These Steps encouraged taking the inventory of the parents and indulging oneself in self-pity for being a victim (now referred to as "grief work"). Tony couldn't see the logic in the idea of being "restored to sanity" since restoration means to be given back something we once had, and coming from sick homes, we didn't have any sanity to begin with.

Keeping in mind that Tony was a concurrent member of AA – which may explain the one hundred friends who saved and established the "Hope for Adult Children" meeting – he felt the Twelve Traditions of AA were limiting for this particular program. He never saw the use of AA's Traditions for Adult Children.

Similarly he didn't feel the concept of anonymity is as important in ACA as it is in AA. "Anonymity is needed so we don't talk about other members and their stories," he said. "I feel that personal anonymity can be broken on any level – press, radio, etc. After all, anonymity can be a sick family secret rather than healthy".

Tony begin to feel he was being put into the position of an authority figure, something he never wanted to be, saying "I was terrified of authority figures and becoming one. An authority figure to me can be a perpetrator". He also feared the impact of all the attention on his own recovery. So he turned over the meeting and stayed away from the program. When he returned for a visit, there was a hush over the room when he entered. It was a heady ego-rush, but he was as concerned about his own recovery as well as the program's having individuals "greater than" others. It just didn't feel right. So in 1981 he became a drop-out and attended Al-Anon in the interim.

As he left New York in 1981, some of the women in the "Hope for Children" ACA group formally asked Al-Anon to adopt the format the literature of ACA/ACoA. This is why there are ACoA meetings in Al-Anon today not affiliated with the ACA World Service.

When Tony A. moved to Florida he was asked to start a Tuesday night ACoA meeting at Bethesda-by-the-Sea. He had started a few meetings before that in the area, but that's the meeting that survived. Then another meeting sprang up in Delray, another in Sarasota, then one down in the Keys, followed by Orlando….

In 1985 Tony got a call from an ACA member, Marty S., out in California. Apparently someone else was publicly taking credit for the Laundry List. Marty encouraged Tony to come out of anonymity to establish the legitimate "founder" of the ACA program. Tony himself never claimed to be *the* founder of ACA, instead accepting the title of Co-Founder, giving credit to the four or five members of the original "Hope for Adult Children" meeting. But he *is* the person who penned the original characteristics that define our fellowship.

A former stockbroker in New York, Tony A. was counseling indigents at the same time he was continuing to be a stockbroker in Florida. In 1988 he went to work for the Palm Beach Institute and began to write *The Laundry List*, a book that was published in 1991 outside the ACA program.

I never expected ACoA to become a worldwide program when it began. We were working on trying to keep a little meeting going back then. The first time I got a glimpse that ACoA had national or international possibilities was when Barry said to copyright the Laundry List. He did foresee this. But I had no idea. I felt the Laundry List should be anonymous at that time and never copyrighted it.

The concept of "Adult Child" came from the Alateens who began the "Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics" meeting. The original members of our fellowship, who were over 18 years old were adults, but as children they had grown up in alcoholic homes. "Adult Child" also means that when confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood.

There are three parts of me, the Higher Power, me, and Little Tony. I have to love Little Tony, my Child within, if I'm ever going to unite with God. Little Tony is my connection to God. I learned this from a Hawaiian Kahuna teaching. Several months afterwards, I heard about the "Inner Child" work beginning in the therapeutic community.

I don't feel qualified to talk to organizations. When we started the "Generations" meeting, it was an anti-organization. I do hope ACA continues having an open literature policy. My wish for the fellowship is to use the original Laundry List and the new ACoA Steps written in 1990 in my book for the victims we are.

This program is about learning to love myself and then others unconditionally. We are not God-connected if we don't. Trust has to become a process and love is a process. When I can trust and love me, I can trust and love others.

I think we have to become as little children. Feelings are the spiritual path of an adventure to know God. Our goal is God.

Tony A.
October 5, 1992

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