

"A NEW FREEDOM"

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Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

AA Preamble

"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

THE only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

THERE are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

OUR primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety." AA Grapevine

Grand Finale

Today, I have so much to be grateful for! I bought a house a year ago. I have a career in an organization that I helped build from the ground up and that helps people in early recovery with a place to stay. I am leasing a new truck that came with four miles on it. I have money to pay my bills before they are due and I have a little money in the bank. Most, if not all my relationships (Family, friends and dog) are doing amazing. And are you ready for the grand finale? My connection with God is indescribably wonderful.

Would you believe that before all of this, I was couch surfing? Couldn't keep a job for more than 90 days? Living paycheck to paycheck (When I had a job) and that all of it went to booze? Didn't have a license because of DUI and fear? If I needed money I would run to Mommy or the Girlfriend of

the month and mooch off them? All my relationships were in disarray? Drunk tanks and jails were a normal thing in my life? And are you ready for the grand finale? The only connection I had with something greater than myself was the bottle.

I am sure you are asking, how did I go from the mess to the well dressed? It's called Alcoholics Anonymous! You may be saying now (like I did), "meetings didn't work for me, I end up drunk". And you may be still right! If I just go to meetings, I WILL DRINK. That might not be other Alcoholics Anonymous members' stories, but it is mine. See for me, there is way more to Alcoholics Anonymous than attending meetings and thank God for that. If I was stuck in a room with people that talked about getting sober and staying sober (or not being able too) for the rest of my life... and that was it... I would drink! I need something more because I have a disease that desires and needs more. For me, there are three things about Alcoholics Anonymous that makes my life fulfilled.

First: The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. What the practices of the steps has done for me would be hard to convey in its fullness in mere words. But some of the important pieces of the pie are- Rebuilding connections with family, seeing what is blocking me from becoming a successful person in life, having and maintaining a relationship with a God of my understanding.

Second: Being an actual member of Alcoholics Anonymous. What does that mean? For me, attending meetings (I do four a week), having a home group (attending the same meeting every week and going to the group conscience), and doing fellowship with people in AA. I need to have people in my life that I can do all the fun stuff I was missing out on while I had a drink in my hand.

Third: Giving back to Alcoholics Anonymous. I used to (and sometimes still do) think if I always did what I wanted and get my way, I would be happy. Truth is, I am the happiest AFTER I have given my time and energy in helping others. I spend a great amount of time in giving back to others. Having a service position in a Home Group, District, Area or Young people's conferences is a

must for me. Also, spending time one on one with someone looking for a way out has been one of the most freeing and satisfying service out there -that I have found.

So, if you are looking for a way out, if you are sick of living the way you are, I HAVE A SOLUTION! Are you ready for the Grand Finale? It's called Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA Quote of the Month

“Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.” Alcoholics Anonymous p. 30



When I was a teenager, I had a lawyer who helped me out so many times with drug, alcohol, and driving charges that one time he asked me not to pay him and that I attend 5 AA meetings instead. I thought this was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I proceeded to go to the local homeless shelter where NA meetings were held. I was an 18-year-old middle class male who had gotten in trouble a lot, experimented with lots of drugs and drank too much. However, I was not like “these” people. After two meetings, which I left to drink and use, I made the sound decision that I did not have a problem like them. I did not need to proceed with finishing the other 3 meetings; although I said I would. At that point, what I said had very little meaning or value. I didn't attend another meeting for almost two years.

Fast forward two years, I had accrued another charge, been incarcerated for short period of time, and had a near fatal overdose which landed me in the hospital on New Year's Eve 2010. I found myself alone with no one coming to visit me. My parents were disappointed once again and I had no idea what to do. At the time, my best thinking led me to call someone and have them bring me something to “ease the pain” before returning home to have a conversation with my parents. I could not bear the thought of having to have that

conversation sober, so I did what I knew best. I changed how I felt. When I was discharged from the hospital, I returned to my parent's house and proceeded to have a conversation with my father outside with the intention to lie my way into another chance. When I was asked what I was going to do, I said the first honest thing I had said in a while. “I can't go back to school and I don't know how to stop using.” I was more shocked by my answer than my father. Having been the person I was, my parents had a laundry list of resources of people to call for therapy or help. One of them picked up and I landed in an inpatient facility the next week.

At this treatment center, I was reintroduced to the 12 steps and we went to AA and NA meetings every night. This time, although showing up as a group in the van from the treatment center, I saw myself as no different from the others because I became just like those folks I judged years ago. I realized that my life was unmanageable, and I was powerless over drugs and alcohol, that was my first step. I also believed that there was a power greater than me which would return me to sanity. I wasn't sharp enough to realize that meant I was insane. I discovered that later as the fog lifted.

Unfortunately, I was so consumed in myself and wanting to change how I feel that I did not follow the suggestions of getting a sponsor or not engaging with a girl in the treatment program. Thus, I managed to use on an outing while a resident at the treatment center and landed myself another 2.5 weeks in treatment. However, it was exactly what I needed. At that point I became willing to turn my life and my will over to a power greater than myself. At that time, the power was my counselor in treatment and nature. I was convinced that their power was greater than mine.

After 60 days in residential treatment, I ended up in a halfway house in Lenoir, North Carolina where I resided for about 10 months and got my first sponsor. I proceeded to go through the book of alcoholics anonymous and work the steps of the program. I did not go to AA to find God or make friends, but I got both. My understanding of God has grown, lessened and changed over times and my friends have stayed with me, passed on or fallen off the path. My relationships with my family have returned, my word has value, I experience true joy daily, have a wife who loves me, and I am the father a beautiful baby girl. I got more than I bargained for. Not to mention, in my first year of recovery I went to nearly 400 meetings, so I think I have finally made up for those last three meetings I did not attend at the Lawyers request. Through the power of God, the twelve steps and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous I have not

only stayed sober since February 6th, 2011, but I have a life beyond anything I could have ever made up.

Letter to a prison group:

"Every A.A. has been, in a sense, a prisoner. Each of us has walled himself out of society; each has known social stigma. The lot of you folks has been even more difficult; In your case, society has also built a wall around you. But there isn't any really essential difference, a fact that practically all A.A.'s now know.

Therefore, when you members come into the world of A.A. on the outside, you can be sure that no one will care a fig that you have done time. What you are trying to be-not what you were - is all that counts to us." Letter, 1949, Freed Prisoners, p. 234 As Bill Sees It

A Lost Soul No More

Hello, I am an alcoholic and my name is Maureen. I knew I had a problem at age 13 from the first time I tried vodka. I ended up breaking my arm. It didn't stop me though. I was with my younger sister and She said "you're drinking too much.", I didn't care. I liked the way I felt. That was the first seed to my alcoholism. That seed grew bigger and bigger as the years progressed.

I was a pretty good kid. Always helping neighbors, friends, and my family. But as I got into my 20's I

liked alcohol more and more. My only goal in life was to work and go to bars. I loved the bar scene. I received a DWI then and was requested to attend an AA meeting, I had no interest in attending but went. I did not want to believe I had a problem with alcohol and I certainly did not want to not drink.

In my mid 20's I met a nice man where I worked. I had dated many men before him all with problems like me or so I thought. This man was nice and he was different but I didn't realize it. I did a lot of bad things before I met him. We alcoholics do that you know. The king had us.

I thought moving to a different state with this man would change what was going on with my life, my crazy family and me.

I married this man. I thought I was happy but deep down I was miserable. I realized I had made a mistake moving but I was not a quitter then. I stuck out the new job and training. I hated every minute of it and let my husband know it. I blamed him for everything. It wasn't his fault I realized after I got sober. I was the one who said yes to all these drastic changes.

I drank on and off, mostly on while married to him for 20 years. My drinking made my personality change into a person I did not want to be and that was happening more and more often than not. I was sent to Employee Assistance Programs many times and rehabs.

It wasn't until after these 20 years of drinking that it was getting progressively worse. I was missing a lot of work. I managed to bank sick time so I felt entitled to call out when I wanted. I wanted to stay home and drink vodka and watch TV. I wasn't eating much and losing weight which I thought was great because I didn't want to get fat. My husband had said to me," if you keep this up your going to die. I can't help."

This reminds of one of the three pertinent ideas mentioned at the end of How It Works. No human power could have relieved our alcoholism that god could and would if he were sought.

One day after I was caught at work with liquor on my breath they sent me home. I woke up the next day and something inside me said I can't do this anymore. I went into the living room and said to my husband "I need help." I had never really wanted the help. That was my denial all the time.

I went to AA the next day. A kind women gave me her number. She is my sponsor still today after 10 years of One Day At A Time sobriety. I was afraid to call her, of why I don't know, but I was so willing to want to get better. I called her and that began my journey with her. We read the big book, did the steps, and I called her everyday the first few months. She also suggested I do 90 meetings in 90 days, get a home group, do service work, and get phone numbers and call people

I realized after working with her the craving of the alcohol went away. I still had a thought of a drink but did not feel the urge to run out to a store and stock up. I thank my higher power everyday for taking the obsession away from me.

I did need to make changes in my life to insure myself against a drink. I changed the people I hung out with, bars, party's, or anything that may encourage me to drink again.

The first 6 months weren't easy but calling my sponsor everyday, going to coffee worked for me. I also pray in the morning and at night thanking my higher power for being sober and help another human being.

It was a very lonely world before I came to AA. We are all lost souls and this is where I found mine.

I've had 10 years of sobriety with the same man I married. I asked him why he put up with me. His answer was, "I have faith in you."

AA has given me faith in myself I never knew I had. I may not be happy all the time in sobriety but am happy to be sober.

If you really want this you can have it. You need to be willing, honest, patient, and kind to yourself.

It's up to you to feel better if you choose to and you don't have to be alone doing so.

Grateful. Maureen

Leaning on A.A. in New York

In the summer of 2014, I was living in Istanbul and made plans to spend October in New York. My older sister became seriously ill in Vancouver, so I bumped up my schedule to see her first. Unfortunately, she died before I could make it over. Now I would spend a couple weeks in the city, fly to Vancouver to clean out her house and hold a memorial service, then return for a few more weeks in New York visiting family and friends.

I flew to New York and stayed with Pat, an old AA friend. It had been 17 years since my last visit to New York and the first things that hit me were the ancient ironwork on bridges and the incredible violence and noise of a passing elevated train. I got over those quickly enough, but what hit me next took more effort: red neon liquor signs outside and beer ads on the subway. These were pushing buttons I'd almost forgotten about. I realised that I had a long drinking history in New York and very little sober time in the city.

It shocked me to feel uneasy about drinking... perhaps it came from being emotionally raw. Even though my sister had suffered from Type I diabetes all her life and could have died any time, her death still hit me hard. People in and out of A.A. assured me that everyone gets torn up by the death of a close family member.

Meeting Makers Make It

My program tells me to increase participation in A.A. when the going gets tough. Now I needed meetings. Fortunately, I was in one of the birthplaces of A.A., a great city with dozens of meetings a day. Doing public information service with the Continental European Region (CER) of A.A., I had long wished I could attend some of the conventions held around the Continent, whether in Costa del Sol or Berlin. Now I would have my very own urban A.A. retreat.

I went all over Manhattan, sometimes 'qualifying' - from Perry Street to Central Group at St. James Church on the Upper East Side, from the Mustard Seed to the Upright Citizens Brigade, from Tribeca to a Brazilian church on W. 59th Street to the Fearless Group at All Souls Church on Lexington. From Sobriety in the Square to Metropolitan Group to St. Bart's noon meeting, where a woman recognised me when I said I was from out of town. "Are you my cousin, Michael?" Yes, it was my cousin, whom I hadn't seen in more than 30 years.

One of the first meetings I attended was the Central Group. A Haitian woman shared her 38 years of experience, strength and hope. Dignity, love and justice were her message. She said, "I'm a Haitian, well assimilated into American culture, but my heart is in A.A. first of all." This 75-year-old woman's story embodied the universality of the alcoholic experience to me, for her life and feelings sounded just like what I had heard in Zurich in June from a 25-year-old Polish woman - two generations apart, raised on different continents and in different cultures, yet sharing the same disease.

In the middle of my trip I flew to Vancouver, dealt with my sister's house and organized a memorial service - huge gifts of sobriety. And A.A. was there in the Pacific northwest for me same as in Istanbul, Stockholm or Rome.

Back in New York, my friend Pat told her story at the After Eight Group one evening. She concluded by saying that through her 27 years of sobriety she learned that no matter how hard or softly she leans on the program, A.A. is always there when she needs it. I could identify with that!

One of my strangest experiences came at the corner of Spring St. and Lafayette in Soho. Waiting to meet

a friend, I noticed a boarded-up storefront on the corner – the sign advertised a new bar, Blackbox, New York’s only bar for on-duty airline pilots. It took me a minute to figure out that it was a joke ad touting a smartphone app for finding new bars. Fortunately, I am no longer a customer for such an app.



I am grateful to the city’s members for making sure the hand of A.A. was there for me. I always mentioned CER service when sharing my story and people were always interested to learn how English-speaking A.A. works in Europe. Many New Yorkers told me that they had found meetings via our website when traveling.

Michael K.

Bennington, Vermont

New to AA?

Only you can decide

If you seem to be having trouble with your drinking, or if your drinking has reached the point where it worries you a bit, you may be interested in knowing something about Alcoholics Anonymous and the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. After reading this, you may decide that A.A. has nothing to offer you. Should this be the case, we suggest only that you keep an open mind on the subject. Consider your drinking carefully in the light of what you may learn from these pages.

Determine, for yourself, whether or not alcohol has truly become a problem for you. And remember that you will always be most welcome to join the thousands of men

Do you think you have a problem with alcohol? Do you want to stop drinking, but find you cannot quit entirely or you have little control over the amount you drink? If you answered yes to either of these questions, there are a number of ways Alcoholics Anonymous can help. For confidential support, please contact us.

Call the 24-hour help line closest to you now

- (802) 447-1285 – Bennington – **District 7**
- (802) 257-5801 – Brattleboro – **District 8**
- (802) 864-1212 – Burlington – **District 2&11**
- (802) 388-9284 – Middlebury – **District 9**
- (802) 229-5100 – Montpelier & Morrisville – **District 4**
- (802) 775-0402 – Rutland – **District 6**
- (802) 281-3340 – St. Albans – **District 1**
- (802) 334-1213 – St. Johnsbury & NEK – **District 3**
- (802) 885-8281 – Springfield – **District 10**
- (802) 295-7611 – White River Junction – **District 5**

For meeting information in Vermont, go to aavt.org