

"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 people 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



Hi, I'm an alcoholic and my name is Suzie. My sobriety date is October 8, 2011. I have a sponsor who has a sponsor and I have sponsees. I still go to meetings almost every day to maintain my sobriety and emotional balance. I came to AA for my drinking but I stay for my thinking!

I'm one of 5 kids in my family. My parents didn't drink very much but my maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother were alcoholics. My grandfather died of alcoholism at age 60 as did my mother's brother at age 40. I still remember the day my uncle died. I was 9 years old and it was the first time I saw my mom cry as she called our relatives with the news.

I grew up partying with my siblings. Drinking was normalized in my family – we surrounded ourselves with people who drank and partied like us. We also used pot and cocaine. My using really took off in college. I thought everyone blacked out and threw up! My freshman year roommate ended up being a drug dealer so I tried a lot of other drugs too. But drinking was the constant for sure. I attended UCONN and to this day I cannot smell Yukon Jack (our drink of choice) without gagging!

I managed to graduate and then got good jobs, all the while partying most nights. But I always made it to work the next day so never considered that I had a real problem. As my use continued, I found myself with people and in situations I certainly would not have been in if I was sober. Shame and guilt started to weigh heavy on my "good Catholic girl" upbringing.

At some point in my mid 20's I took myself to an AA meeting. I have no idea how I even knew AA existed. I remember crying the whole meeting after I said "I'm Suzie and I'm an alcoholic". I bought all the books they offered me and took all the phone numbers, and I never went back to AA for 30 years. But I moved all those books with me as I tried many geographic cures.

I became a controlled binge drinker. I could stop for days, weeks and even years (when we were trying to conceive a child). But eventually the stars and

moon would align and I'd go on a major binge, then be sick the entire next day and swear off again.

I think it was the phenomena of craving that finally got me back to AA. As a highly competent, successful person in many areas of my life (I had the husband, kid, house, car and career), it bothered me that if I took one drink I really craved another. Sometimes I could stop at one or two and other times it was another blowout.

I was also a sneaky drinker, always obsessing over how much I was drinking and worrying if anyone was noticing. I stole sips off other people's drinks when they weren't looking or finished their drinks when they left any in their glass or bottle, because for an alcoholic, we know we never have enough. Kinda gross!

I got a DUI in my early 30's. I had a backlight out and was pulled over. The cop smelled the beer on my breath and breathalyzed me, even though I passed all the roadside tests. I lost my license for 30 days and had a probation officer. I was humiliated and contrite. I mostly stopped drinking and driving after that, but I didn't stop drinking.

Eventually I got honest with my doctor who sent me to an AA meeting. I went home after the meeting and had 2 glasses of wine to prove to myself that I wasn't an alcoholic. It took me one more year to finally surrender.

I remember when I first read the Big Book. It was such a relief! I finally knew what the problem was. I got a sponsor after a few months and started working the steps. It was such a blessing to have someone who I could reach out to at any time and get real with, who didn't judge me (she usually laughed at me, even when I was distraught and crying, helping me to see the humor and insanity in my behavior!) I did service work chairing meetings and organizing women's retreats.

I love AA. It has such a big tent for us all to come together under with compassion, understanding and love. I have learned so much about myself and how to navigate life on life's terms, accepting what's outside my hoola hoop, letting go of resentments and outcomes, forgiving myself and others, recognizing my part in my problems, owning my behavior and making amends when necessary and walking away if need be.

All these things are lessons learned over my 10 years of sobriety, and I'm certainly still a work in progress. I call it the blessing and the curse of AA – I see my actions and then I have to do something about it. I always had a conscience but now I had to pay attention to it!

I ended up getting divorced in sobriety and was able to walk through that heartbreak with grace and dignity (mostly because I listened to my sponsor and did some major restraint of thumb & send!) So life hasn't been all rainbows and unicorns since I got sober, but it's far better – and easier – to negotiate with the help of my fellow AA's, the 12 steps, and my sponsor. I am truly forever grateful. I now understand how some people introduce themselves as grateful alcoholics.



From Daily Reflections, p. 330 November 17

OVERCOMING LONELINESS

Almost without exception, alcoholics are tortured by loneliness. Even before our drinking got bad and people began to cut us off, nearly all of us suffered the feeling that we didn't quite belong.

— AS BILL SEES IT, p. 90

The agonies and the void that I often felt inside occur less and less frequently in my life today. I have learned to cope with solitude. It is only when I am alone and calm that I am able to communicate with God, for He cannot reach me when I am in turmoil. It is good to maintain contact with God at all times, but it is absolutely essential that, when everything seems to go wrong, I maintain that contact through prayer and meditation.

Learning to Raise My Standards

I forget exactly where I heard this, but it applies to me: “I got to the point where my behavior was getting worse faster than I could lower my standards.”

I started drinking as a teenager, and now believe I was drinking alcoholically by the time I left high school at 17. My principles - the standards I held myself to, never progressed beyond those of a 17-year-old while I was drinking, and that went on for a pretty long time, until I was 40.

I think it's generally true of us alcoholics that while we are drinking - before we decide it's time to make a change for the better in our lives- we rarely make serious attempts to become better people - at least that was the case with me. To the extent I had standards, they were something like: “Well, I'm really not that bad.” “There are lots of people worse than me.” “Someone else in my position would probably do the same.” That's not to say I didn't frequently feel ashamed of my behavior, that I didn't, in moments of humiliation, say “I won't do that again”. I did this constantly - promising to do better after letting myself and my family down.

I did all the usual things to try to change my patterns of drinking in the vain hope it could be controlled - drank only beer, only martinis (don't ask me why) - tried various combinations of alcohol with or without other substances. It's said that alcohol is cunning, baffling, and powerful - certainly that was the case with me, and I was becoming more and more baffled at my own behavior - I couldn't predict what I would do after starting to drink, and couldn't understand why. It didn't help that I had frequent blackouts or “brownouts” (forgetting lots of little pieces of a day), so I couldn't even remember what I had done.

I was disgusted with myself.

Finally, in desperation, I came to AA, having exhausted all of my own ideas on how to beat the drinking problem. What immediately struck me about the people in AA was that they knew what they were talking about. They drank the same way I did, with the same results, couldn't beat it on their own. I noticed that these folks in AA had some qualities I didn't, for starters: 1) Honesty - they were able to speak about what was important in their lives, truthfully. 2) A sincere desire to help others, especially other alcoholics. They said that this quality in particular was key to staying sober.

In the 28 years now since I joined AA, I've never had the need to take another drink. My process of self-improvement since those first days has been slow - nothing dramatic. But each time I attend an AA meeting and pay attention to the example of others, I get a spark of inspiration - an encouragement to do better.

Tom



I'm not what an alcoholic looks like

I grew up around alcohol and what I deemed to be alcoholics so I assumed I would never become one. I was wrong. I also thought that all my education, good deeds with volunteering and “being a good person” I would outwit alcoholism. I never wanted to be like “them”, those people who were drunks or unable to “get their lives together”, according to my judgement of all of those people.

But the bottom line is that alcoholism doesn't really care what I think, or feel or do, as long as I keep showing up and drink. Alcoholism has one desire for me, to drink. In drinking it only wants to see my self destruction, no good can come of serving the request of alcohol for me. I didn't know that for many years but now I am so sure of it, nothing can convince me otherwise.

My story is one of elusive and early treated alcoholism and I am so grateful. When I first started going to meetings of AA and identifying as an alcoholic I thought that I hadn't really “done enough” to qualify to be there. I hadn't checked the boxes of the stories I heard; I hadn't gotten a DUI, I hadn't been arrested, I hadn't become destitute or homeless, I hadn't lost a marriage or my children. It is important to note that some of those things I didn't have to lose, I was 28, single and didn't have all the “things”. Also only someone who is an alcoholic actually thinks they need their life to be more messed up to qualify for being in AA, I was that sick.

My drinking history was rather short but had plenty of experiences to point me to AA. When I started to drink I didn't know how things would end. It could be a quiet experience, fun times with friends and off to bed, no consequences. Or it could be loud and dramatic, causing people around me to be uncomfortable and want me to just leave. The next day was often about putting pieces together with

other peoples' stories and returning phone calls to apologize. Those times were demoralizing and shameful. I had always wanted alcohol to help me feel part of the group, part of the moment, enjoying it the way I saw others enjoying it. While that happened initially and sometimes, but more often than not, I was left the next day with regret and remorse. I wanted to feel better, I wanted to not feel how I felt and I wanted alcohol to be my solution.

On May 13th, 2005 I attended my first AA meeting because I felt I had no better options and I was miserable. I had "stopped" drinking the previous August after a dramatic and friendship ending evening with alcohol, drugs and words that could not be taken back. I had hoped by stopping drinking I would solve my problems. Unfortunately untreated alcoholism can be as much of a hell as active drinking and I spent 9 months learning that lesson.

After that meeting I didn't fully embrace AA, I went to a few more meetings over a few weeks before I really started in earnest. That took meeting the person who became my sponsor and starting to work the Steps. I was enveloped in the arms of AA in my community and I am certain that saved my life and kept me in the middle of AA, which is the safest place to be.

It took me a LONG time to really feel at home in AA and until I did, I faked it. I pretended to be a perfect AA and while that isn't ideal since we want to learn to live a genuine and honest life, I do think that helped me. I've learned that some of my character defects, such as people-pleasing and "fake it till you make it" can serve me. In the case of early sobriety in AA, it saved my life.

Through my initial years of AA I made wonderful friends, attended sober activities, tried dating sober, eventually met my spouse and got married. My life continued to get better and better. I have racked up many of the "things" that I wanted and would be afraid to lose should I decide to drink. I know that no matter what the only way I can keep staying sober is to stay in the middle of AA and try to be of service to another alcoholic.

My life today looks like a story I could never have written. I have a family and a happy home. I have a rich professional career and financial security. I have friends who are my family and I have AA at the center of it all. I go to at least 4 meetings a week, I call my sponsor and try to talk to them at least once a week and I talk to someone who is sober in AA every day.

While I am not perfect by any means, I do one thing right every day when I do not drink no matter what. I never thought that I could become an alcoholic because

I was too smart or pretty or successful, but I am alcoholic, a sober alcoholic and grateful every day.

Kristy



“Qualifying “

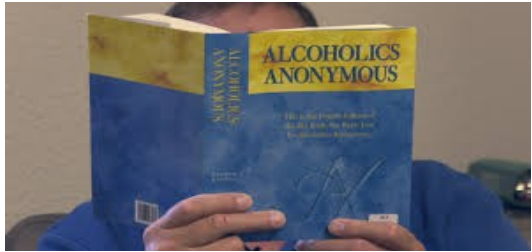
When chairing a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous you are asked to make a statement that tells the group what makes you “qualified” to sit in the chairperson’s place. It is a chance for self-examination, reflection and opening up.

Recently, in my “qualification statement” I shared with the group what I have come to see as a defining moment in life of sobriety: ***“3 years ago, with my wife quietly crying next to me, I stood in a courtroom before a judge and declared that I am an alcoholic. I took full responsibility for all charges I was facing and pled guilty”.***

Just 6 months before, I had crashed my car on a clear, bright winter morning on I-89 in the Town of Richmond. As a result, I had my first DUI and an appearance in court before this judge. Since then, I had remained sober, completed a 5-week residential alcohol treatment program in New Hampshire, and had been attending AA meetings daily. I had a home group and a sponsor.

Halfway through that 5-week residential treatment program, when facing a burning desire to drink, I got down on my knees and begged God for help. I was desperate. God gave me the help that I asked for in that very moment., and He gave me so much more. The obsession to drink was lifted but more importantly, a new clarity was born: ***I knew that to stay sober, I had to take responsibility for what I had done.*** It was a scary, uncertain situation, but unless I faced it openly and honestly before God, my wife, my AA community and before this judge, I would drink again.

With the help of a sponsor, I have learned something very important about my alcoholism. I now understand that I am an alcoholic and that it is not my **fault**. BUT, I also understand that it is my **responsibility** to treat my alcoholism as the disease that it is. I do that by going to meetings, working the steps, and reaching out to other alcoholics every day.



I started drinking when I was very young. My brothers and I took sips from our father's beer as young children. I had my first mixed drink at thirteen. I drank every chance I got through my teen years and was a daily drinker in my twenties. Eventually I became a blackout drinker and realized that things were getting out of control. I remember confiding to my best friend (and drinking buddy) that I needed to get control of my drinking because I didn't want to become an alcoholic. I still enjoyed drinking very much. I felt that if I said I was an alcoholic, I would need to do something about it (or even worse...give up the drink). Alcohol had become a priority in my life.

Around the age of forty, I sought help to stop drinking after conversations with my doctor made me realize that my drinking was creating multiple health problems for me. AA was suggested right from the start. But I first saw a behavioral therapist, then I tried an intensive outpatient program with substance abuse counselors through the hospital. The suggestion to try an AA meeting continued to pop up.

I tried going to a couple AA meetings in the town I live in. I didn't like them. I felt like an outsider and not part of their group. I didn't know how AA worked and was not ready to find out anything more. As I was leaving one of the meetings, a woman gave me a small card with the Serenity Prayer on one side and on the other side she had written her name, phone number, and a note saying "Call anytime". I took the card and put it in my wallet. I didn't call her.

For the next five years I continued to try controlling my drinking while attending substance abuse counseling. I had periods of sobriety but continued to relapse over and over

again. Next came what I consider to be my rock bottom while on a vacation in Florida. I was finally ready to try AA again. I had not been able to solve my problem on my own. I came back to AA and admitted that I was powerless over alcohol. When I got back home and went to a meeting, I found the woman who had given me the card with her name and number on it five years earlier. I had kept the card in my wallet the whole time. I asked her to be my sponsor, joined a home group and took a service position—making coffee before the meeting. I was fifty years old. My sponsor guided me through the twelve steps of AA. I became an active member of my home group and developed a network of sober friends in the AA program. I had a slip and relapsed after eleven months of sobriety. I was honest about the relapse and began working the steps again.

Today I have four years and eight months of continuous sobriety. I keep coming to meetings because of the fellowship, support, understanding, and accountability the group provides. I try to say hello to the newcomers and make them feel welcome, hoping they will continue to come back and work on their recovery with the help of AA.

Julie

AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"The last fifteen years of my life have been rich and meaningful. I have had my share of problems, heartaches, and disappointments because that is life, but also I have known a great deal of joy and a peace that is the handmaiden of an inner freedom. I have a wealth of friends and, with my A.A. friends, an unusual quality of fellowship. For, to these people, I am truly related. First, through mutual pain and despair, and later through mutual objectives and newfound faith and hope. And, as the years go by, working together, sharing our experiences with one another, and also sharing a mutual trust, understanding, and love— without strings, without obligation—we acquire relationships that are unique and priceless.

There is no more aloneness, with that awful ache, so deep in the heart of every alcoholic that nothing, before, could ever reach it. That ache is gone and never need return again.

Now there is a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and loved. In return for a bottle and a hangover, we have been given the Keys of the Kingdom. “

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 276

(Read the whole story! **Keys to the Kingdom** starts on page 268.)

Step 10, p. 93 Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

“We can try to stop making unreasonable demands upon those we love. We can show kindness where we had shown none. With those we dislike we can begin to practice justice and courtesy, perhaps going out of our way to understand and help them.

Whenever we fail any of these people, we can promptly admit it—to ourselves always, and to them also, when the admission would be helpful. Courtesy, kindness, justice, and love are the keynotes by which we may come into harmony with practically anybody. When in doubt we can always pause, saying, “Not my will, but Thine, be done.” And we can often ask ourselves, “Am I doing to others as I would have them do to me—today?”



Got a story for this newsletter?

Looking for stories of recovery to be included in this newsletter. Please send to:

area70corrections@aavt.org

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 and women in A.A. Who have put their drinking problems behind them and now lead “normal” lives of constructive, day-by-day sobriety.

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