

"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

WELCOME TO

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

An Alcoholic or Not?

One of the things I miss most right now is being able to facilitate meetings in correctional institutions. Going to the Rutland jail had become the highlight of my week even though it is almost an hour from my house. I finally began to understand that it is in giving that we receive. It is in helping another suffering alcoholic that we stay sober. In fact that is

how AA started. So lacking the opportunity to go to a meeting at the jail, here's my story.

I grew up in an alcoholic home. My father was an alcoholic and my mother struggled with prescription drugs on and off. My father had periods of being dry but never got sober and died of the disease at the age of 63. My mother eventually got off drugs and lived the last several years of her life clean. She lived to be 87.

I started drinking when I was about 15 years old. The first time I drank I got pretty drunk, knowing all too well what alcohol was doing to my father. But that was just the start. I was a "periodic" drinker, indulging mostly on weekends. During the week I responsibly attended to my school work. I wasn't an A student but took my education seriously. I got my driver's license when I was 16 and used to brag that I learned to drink and drive at the same time. Then I started smoking pot. It was rare that I didn't use alcohol and pot together. Being drunk and high was the ultimate emotional escape. I didn't realize it at the time but this was a way to escape the feelings of depression, isolation, and shame associated with growing up in an alcoholic home. After graduating high school I was fortunate enough to go to college. That's when my drug and alcohol use skyrocketed. Still drinking mostly on Friday and Saturday nights, all I could get was more, more, more. Shortly after starting college I began to wonder if I was an alcoholic-- not because bad things happened to me when I was drunk but because I could never get enough. My depression reached new lows despite having drinking friends and acquaintances. Most of my partying was on campus which fortunately kept me out of my car when drunk. Despite the nagging question of whether I was an alcoholic, I continued to drink and use.

After two years of college I realized I needed to decide on a career. The university I was attending did not have a course of study in the career I chose, so I transferred to another college. The academic demands of the profession I chose were extremely time consuming and difficult. So when the weekends arrived I "needed" a temporary escape through alcohol and pot. I lived off campus which meant a lot more drinking and driving. Why I never wrecked a car is still beyond me. Just dumb luck I guess. Around this time I started going to Alanon to deal with

my father's drinking. That helped a lot but it didn't stop me from drinking. Go figure. Where I went to Alanon meetings there was almost always an AA meeting at the same time. After about another three years of drinking I decided to go to an AA meeting just to check it out. The room was filled with old guys (about the age I am now), thick cigarette smoke, and lousy coffee. I recall people sharing about all the horrendous things that had happened to them because of drinking. There were car wrecks, broken families, time in jail, lost jobs, and more. I decided this wasn't me. Hell, I hadn't even had a real job yet. In hindsight, I was comparing their stories to mine rather than identifying with the feelings associated with those events. So I drank for another year before I found myself drinking alone one afternoon on the front porch of my apartment. I hadn't done that before. This was a new low and illustrates how progressive the disease is. A couple of days later I went to the AA meeting across the hall from one of my regular Alanon meetings. To say I felt enormous shame and embarrassment is an understatement. But the first thing someone said to me was "welcome, we've been saving a seat for you." I thought, how did they know? They never saw me drunk! But they did. At that meeting I said all I wanted to know was if I was an alcoholic so I could control my drinking. I was told I was in the right place to find out but I had to stop drinking first. I didn't understand that at all. What did one have to do with the other? But I agreed to stop anyway despite being scared to death that if I did, what remained would be an empty eggshell ready to crack and crumble to pieces. My identity was so connected with my drinking I had no idea who I really was. When I started to identify with the feelings others shared around their drinking I realized I was an alcoholic and there was a good person beneath it all. That was in October of 1978. I haven't had a drink since.

So what happened since then? Well I moved a few times, saw several therapists, got married to the first woman I ever had a meaningful relationship with, got divorced 20 years later, and kept going to meetings no matter what. Even in sobriety I've had plenty of bad days but realize today AA is my first lifeline. I got a sponsor and started helping out at meetings by making coffee, cleaning up, chairing, and occasionally being a speaker. Many years later I still do these things and I still have a sponsor. Then I took a service position as the GSR (General Service Representative) for my home group. That brought me to District and Area AA meetings where I met more folks in recovery I never would have met. But when I started going to the Rutland jail about three years ago my sobriety took a leap forward. The reason I got interested in this was I was very moved by a young person who shared at an Area meeting about getting sober in jail, how much AA meant to him, and how grateful he was for the people from the outside who attended the meetings at his jail. Had I never taken that GSR position this would not have happened.

In closing I'll just say I believe I'm one of the luckiest people around. I was spared almost all the catastrophic events common to most heavy drinkers, and my life has gotten better one day at a time. I have real friends now, something I thought would never happen. When I need help I know what to do: call another alcoholic and, or go to a meeting. I can even think of someone other than myself, something I was incapable of doing before I got sober. I still struggle with that but as the Big Book says, we strive for progress not perfection. I'm still a human being and by definition, imperfect. My journey through life continues today with the support of AA anywhere I go. I attend a meeting almost every day not because I need it, because I want it.

Tyler



From Daily Reflections, p. 289: October 7

DAILY MONITORING

Continued to take personal inventory...

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 88

The spiritual axiom referred to in the Tenth Step--"every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us"--also tells me that there are no exceptions to it. No matter how unreasonable others may seem, I am responsible for not reacting negatively. Regardless of what is happening around me I will always have the prerogative, and the responsibility, of choosing what happens within me. I am the creator of my own reality.

When I take my daily inventory, I know that I must stop judging others. If I judge others, I am probably judging myself. Whoever is upsetting me most is my best teacher. I have much to learn from him or her, and in my heart, I should thank that person.

Hello, my name is Christy M, and I want to share my experience, strength and hope with you. I know it isn't easy to face the future when you have no idea what lies ahead, or when you feel that everything can and will get worse. Yes, it can, but it doesn't have to. Not if you are willing to learn and stay honest, open minded and willing to work the AA program. This is my story about what brought me into the rooms.

My drinking career began when a boy I liked in high school started bringing a flask of brandy whenever we dated. I had been to parties where people were drinking heavily and dropping like flies, but this kind of drinking seemed civilized. No big gulps, just steady sips. I liked it and, on every occasion, I looked forward to the time the flask came out. In that time period, I did get plastered on beer at least once, but that was a different guy and music was playing, and I'm sure some of you are familiar with this story. But the boy I liked dumped me and I was off and running. My drinking was with guys more than girls, probably because I couldn't con the girls.

Eventually, like so many of us, I "took a hostage." I married him at age 19, and my life went downhill. Exposure to drugs complicated everything, but alcohol was my drug of choice. I took too many chances. I was always going places where I wasn't safe and taking risks with relative strangers. In a couple years, the hostage and I got divorced. No children or property, so we split our last hundred dollars and parted ways, by "mutual consent."

Then I wanted to get sober. The problem was-- I didn't know how. I didn't know anything about AA, so I lasted six months and then got involved with another man, who was a serious drinker. This led to another marriage that lasted a long time, with two beautiful children; but I never grew up emotionally. Finally, it took my mother getting sick for the first time in eighty years to make me realize that I had no tools to cope with the days ahead, when our roles would be reversed and she would need my care.

Between panic attacks and knowing I needed help for my alcoholism and being afraid to seek it, I closed the door on a happy life and opened the one marked depression and self-loathing. I was shaking so badly I couldn't write my own name. Finally, the moment of clarity came. I didn't want to live that way any longer. When I stopped drinking at home, I went into withdrawal and ended up in the emergency room, leading to a detox center. There I felt at peace. I was safe from myself.

At my first AA meeting, they were reading The Doctor's Opinion and it made sense. I started my experience of 90 meetings in 90 days and felt better after each one. I found there was a Higher Power of my Understanding, and I could trust. I felt I had a commitment to that Being, and I was able,

with that commitment, to last 24 hours without a drink. Life began to change. I started to relax and joined a woman's Big Book study meeting. They gave me my first service positions, as treasurer and then secretary. I grew calmer around my family and at my job. Self-respect was returning

Now, my gratitude toward AA and my Higher Power is deep. I like being kind to people, and making use of the tools. I am convinced that each and every one of us can have a personal relationship with our Creator and the people in our life. We can feel like we belong here on Earth and understand that we each have a unique and important journey. So, let's travel the adventure AA offers together.



They say the early days are the hardest, but to me they were amazing, a time when I was more alive and more fierce than I'd ever been before.

Since this was not the first time I'd tried to stop drinking, I had a lot of "bad" experience to learn from. I had four painful months of orbiting AA to really feel the full effect of white-knuckling. I went to a meeting, usually, sometimes. No more, no less. I arrived just at the start of the meeting, sat in the back, did not speak to anyone, and shot out the door as soon as the last breath of the Lord's Prayer was said. I believed I hated everyone here, but the truth is I was scared. I felt like everyone could see me, and that everyone was looking at me. I felt dirty, and hungry, and full of rage. And I was embarrassed. Everyone looked like they had it all together, like it was the best day of their life. A room full of bright, shiny pennies. And I had nothing, and felt I was nothing. There was nothing on the inside, and certainly nothing on the outside. I was sleeping on a bare floor, with roommates who wanted me gone. I was on thin ice at work, and wasn't wanted there either. I had no friends, only people at the bar. I had distanced

myself from my family. I had a life that consisted of nothing but drinking, so to just remove the alcohol and not replace it with anything left a gaping hole I could feel the wind blow through. Having to go through an entire day, day after day after day - conscious - was too much to face. I felt defeated before I even got out of the gate. I didn't know how much I needed to be doing, all I was doing was going to some meetings - sometimes. I didn't talk to anyone, and I didn't listen to anyone. I didn't have a solution.

There are two slogans which perfectly capture my life at that time: "You can't heal a sick mind with a sick mind", and "The same person will drink again". I remained sick, and I drank again. And again.

After four months of this dismal existence, I woke up one morning to find I'd been drinking. And as utterly hopeless and distraught as I felt at that moment, I could never have imagined what was about to happen in my life. Because that was the moment I received two incredible gifts: Willingness and Desperation. For the first time in my life, I was willing to go to any lengths to stay sober, just for one day. And I knew for the first time that it was going to be another person who had to tell me what to do, and so I was going to have to talk to people and I was going to have to do what they suggested.

Right from the very start I got a sponsor, and I memorized her phone number. There were no cell phones in those days, we had to get phone numbers and know them. I called her everyday because that's what she told me to do, and she told me how to fill up my days. I went to several meetings every day (sometimes 3 in one day), and I didn't even have a car. I got on my knees in the morning and asked God to keep me away from a drink, and I got on my knees at night and thanked Him for a day of sobriety. The first days all I did was go to meetings, but after a while I was able to read the Steps or the Traditions, and help put out chairs or pickup ashtrays. When I'd been sober for three months, I started chairing my home group meetings, and believe me there was no funny business in one of my meetings (I was a little rigid in those days). I got a job in my home group, buying the supplies for the meeting. I went to a local restaurant supply store because that was the only place that sold large quantity coffee, cups, sugar. I had a key to the meeting, and when I showed up at my home group with those supplies to put away into our foot locker, I felt like I had a real purpose. I felt like they were depending on me, and I knew I was not going to let them down. When I was about six months sober, I got a car and then I started going to meetings in surrounding

towns, and to District roundups and Big Book studies and anything else that was happening in AA. I was able to give women rides to meetings from the local detox (I was an alumni). I went to the Friday night meeting at a local treatment center (also my Alma Mater). Back then the chairperson was often chosen according to who showed up at the meeting, so whether or not you were a member of the group they might just give you the book and ask you to chair, and so I chaired other meetings, too. Lots of them. We all knew who'd been sober and who was new, and we all got involved. The local AA community was broad and inclusive. And even though I was still a loner on an individual level, I was connected to the structure of AA. I went to group business meetings, and sometimes they got pretty heated! There were a lot of strong-minded Alcoholics, and we were each sure we were absolutely right. But learning how to disagree with each other and still get the work of the group done, taught me a lot. It taught me it didn't matter what I thought, as much as what I did. I took the suggestion that I ought to have no new romantic relationship in the first year and that cleared a whole level of drama off my plate. It freed up my time for service to my home group, AA events in the surrounding area, women's twelve-step intensive weekends, and anything else I could find in AA. It cleared my head for getting deep into the Steps, the best I could at that time. My sponsor was my closest ally and mentor and I hung onto her for dear life, and she believed in me far beyond what I believed in myself. She showed me how to do everything, as I walked through life for the first time sober.

The night I received my one-year medallion, I was gripped with panic. I was at my home group and there were about 30 people there, and as I stood to receive my medallion I was suddenly struck with fear that I had slipped and just didn't remember when. I couldn't believe that I had really done this. I couldn't believe I hadn't cheated, not even a sip, not even once. But I hadn't. And in that moment, when I realized that I had done something exactly right for the first time in my life, I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and profound appreciation for God, and for AA. And so I kept on going. I started sponsoring other women. I gave them rides to and from meetings, and spent hours sitting in the car talking. I introduced them to other women, and encouraged them to get active in AA. I gave my phone number to the local hotline and to the local detox. And I stayed sober.

Years have passed since those first days, but the things I am doing today are all the pretty much the same. I have a sponsor who I speak with regularly, and she really knows what's going on. I have a strong connection to a higher power, and I know that the quality of my life depends on practicing Steps 3, 7, 10, and 11 constantly. I am an active member of my home group, I chair meetings, set up and greet. I attend group business meetings, and participate in the sometimes uncomfortable discussions. I have a service position and a service sponsor. I give women rides to meetings, buy them a cup of coffee and spend time really talking to them. I read AA literature of all types including those pamphlets you see in the racks at meetings, I talk to AA friends on the telephone (voice, not just text), I go to A.A. workshops. I've participated in the service structure at the group, district and area levels - and still do. I have attended our Area's annual convention for many years, and the joy of seeing other sober friends from all around our state as well as the surrounding areas is indescribable. Because I've been active in AA, my world has become full and vibrant, and I know so many people who really care for me, and for whom I really care.

I got married and raised a family in sobriety, and our family has changed over the years. My husband and I divorced after a very long marriage, and have remained the closest of friends. Our kids have grown and found their own paths. I've had lots of jobs over the years, and for the past 6 years have been in a job I really like and that I'm pretty good at. I practice the Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts in my daily family and work life, because I've been given our legacy of recovery, unity, and service. I can only change myself, but in changing myself with the all the tools available to me in AA, the world around me becomes magnificent.

No matter how long I am away from a drink, I am still an alcoholic. I take lots of sober actions each and every day, because I know this to be true: the same person will drink again, and yesterday's sobriety won't keep me sober today. I never want to be the same person, and Big Book tells me I have to "grow in understanding and effectiveness", not find a comfortable place and settle in.

My sobriety is the single most important fact of my life, but when I put it first there is time and space for everything else. May I never lose my focus.

Lisa



AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

“ We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.

We alcoholics are men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic *ever* recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals--- usually brief---were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.”

p. 30 , Alcoholics Anonymous

Remembering your last drunk

“Drinking for us no longer means music and gay laughter and flirtations. It means sickness and sorrow.

One A.A. Member puts it this way: “I know now that stopping in for a drink will never again be-- for me--- simply killing a few minutes and leaving a buck on the bar. In exchange for that drink, what I would plunk down now is my bank account, my family, our home, our car, my job, my sanity, and probably my life. It's too big a price, too big a risk.”

He remembers his last drunk, not his first drink.”

P. 51, Living Sober

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