

"A NEW FREEDOM"

area70corrections@aavt.org

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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! An A.A. member asked for stories of recovery for a newsletter. I first came into the rooms of A.A. when I was 25 years old. I was not looking for recovery, for God's sake. I wanted to help the man who got me pregnant and I later reluctantly agreed to marry. But a not-so-funny thing happened. The members were talking about things I had done in my drinking, like having black-outs. I had no idea that the absence of time during my drunks were called blackouts. I was not

pleased that there was a prospect that I could be suffering from the progressive, fatal disease of alcoholism. I didn't want to be an alcoholic. However, the disease didn't care what I wanted or didn't want. I was a dutiful slave who went where there was booze, who had it and when they wanted to go.

A year later I had to give up. I haven't had a drink since and decades have passed. I was embarrassed to go into my first A.A. meeting. I knew my life was over. I had dropped out of college drunk. Studying science and alcohol do not mix. Getting a master's degree would have been an impossible dream.

I struggled most in sobriety when trying to go it alone. I told God to get lost. I depended on A.A. members to tell me what to do and listen to my mournful tales of my life. I found a wonderful, patient sponsor whom I had for over 40 years until her death. The only time she hung up on me was when I called her at 4:00 in the morning and said, "F--- everybody." Evidently she took it personal.

My first year of sobriety I was told to bring the body and the mind would follow. I did that. I perhaps missed five or six meetings the first year. I had two babies and I was poor. Not only did I need a babysitter to go to work but I needed another one for each meeting I attended. I cried at meetings. It felt like someone was sticking a knife in my heart and twisting it. I hated all the masculine references in the Big Book like him, his, etc. I told myself that this program is not for me. It's for my dad and my brother. Thankfully, week after week, I remained sober. I celebrated one year of sobriety, then two and it has continued. Between drunks actually, a female AA member taught me to write a gratitude list. I quickly retorted that I had nothing to be grateful for, even though I still had my life, my two beautiful little children, etc. She said, "Are you sitting on a chair?" and when I replied that I was, she said, "Write that down." That woman had a young son dying of a disease. Fast forward many

years and my gratitude lists in the evenings numbered over 100 things I was grateful for.

When I was three years sober nightmares of a sexual nature started. Many more years passed before I could deal with being molested by a drunken step-father and possibly my mother. I was able to take part in support groups for incest survivors and even started one in Wisconsin. I flew to California to meet many more survivors in recovery from sexual abuse. I would not have been able to do that if I was drinking.

I have been so richly blessed in sobriety. I have met thousands of friends in AA, attended three international A.A. conferences in the U.S. and Canada to the tune of 40,000 at each one, finally did earn a master's degree and now try to help other people in trouble with their drinking and drugging. Those two little kids grew up and used more than their share of illegal drugs and alcohol. I seek refuge and support in Al-Anon. My sponsor used to remind me, either God has or has not removed their drinking problem. I still can't control what they do or their disrespect at times against me. God willing, I won't drink over it.

I try to meditate every morning. I turn Reiki Bird music on on my computer. My dogs know that they have to be quiet when they hear that. Then I read pages 87 and 88 from my Big Book where it says, "We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. (only I change the word 'such' to 'any' --it's a suggested program!). I continue, "We ask especially for freedom from self will...then I skip to "...if others will be helped." That's where I pray for my kids and two adult grand kids. I always ask for their safety. I may pray for people I'm trying to help.

I think I've gone on too long.

Serena

From Daily Reflections, p. 264: September 12

I AM RESPONSIBLE

For the readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts, and to take responsibility for the well-being of others at the same time, is the very spirit of Step Nine.

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 87

In recovery, and through the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, I learn that the very thing I fear is my freedom. It comes from my tendency to recoil from taking responsibility for anything: I deny, I ignore, I blame, I avoid. Then one day, I look, I admit, I accept. TIF freedom, the healing and the recovery I experience is in the looking, admitting and accepting. I learn to say, "Yes, I am responsible." When I can speak those words with honesty and sincerity, then I am free.



One of the ways I know I'm an alcoholic is that I see and hear recovery themes in various forms of media. Song lyrics, movie dialogue, books, websites, etc. Those not in recovery might miss these sometimes subtle catch phrases or references, but I see them. Bigger than Dallas.

Recent example – I was watching a documentary on the life and times of Gordon Lightfoot. I call him "Gordo". He's a singer-songwriter from Canada. If you've never heard of Gordon Lightfoot, it's probably not your fault. He's old as Fuck.

Anyhoo, the movie starts off by talking about what a brilliant lyricist and songwriter Lightfoot is. In that regard, he is often compared to Bob Dylan, another super old dude. Next, the film moves on to what a rich voice with great range he commanded, unlike Bob Dylan. He was also a musician with a formal education in both reading and transcribing written music. All nice, but nothing to do with recovery.

The really cool part of the story starts when Lightfoot begins talking about his weapon of choice – the 12-string guitar. You see, the 12-string guitar is more difficult to play than the standard 6-string guitar. That's why not many folks play the 12-string. It takes a lot more strength in the fret hand, because you have to hold

down twice as many strings. Many beginners, when trying out the 12-string for the first (and last) time, are like, "Fuck that. Back to the 6-string". The alternative is just much easier, especially in the beginning, as the guitarist is building up strength in their hand.

Another difficulty of the 12-string guitar is that it's really easy to hear when it's out of tune, and it happens all the damn time. You see, unlike the 6-string, the adjacent strings on a 12 are exactly one octave apart. And the adjacent strings get strummed together on a 12, because they are so close in proximity. That's why 12-string guitarists are often seen constantly tuning their instrument, sometimes even mid-song. Because it's difficult to keep in tune, and requires constant vigilance. It's a total pain in the ass.

So the question was then asked. Why would anyone play the 12-string guitar? And Gordo says, "It's richer. It's fuller. Yes, it's more difficult in the beginning, but once you've mastered it, it's so much more rewarding". And that's when it hit me. That's when I heard the recovery metaphor.

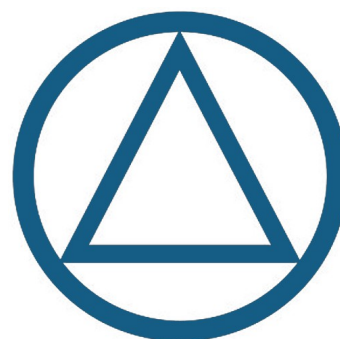
After I lost my job, I made the decision to lose alcohol, since alcohol was the reason I lost my job. And I knew it was going to be difficult to not drink. Especially in the beginning. But it was something I had to do. If I wanted to keep my next job, and family, and health, I had to quit drinking. The alternative, continuing to drink, would have been a lot easier. Just like a 6-string is easier to manage than a 12-string. Especially in the beginning. But nothing really valuable is easy, right? If it's simple, anyone could do it, and it wouldn't mean much.

The second thought that struck me in Gordo's tale of the 12-string is where he talked about how easy it is to go out of tune, and how it required constant vigilance. Same with my day-by-day approach to sobriety. One day at a time. Pay attention. Don't get complacent. Be where you're supposed to be, and do what you're supposed to do. For me, that means go to meetings, talk with other alcoholics in recovery, and don't put the the damn stuff into my body.

Why would I do something that is more difficult than the alternative (in the beginning)? Why would I engage in something that I have to babysit every damn day? Because, like Gordo said, it's a more rewarding experience, once you've mastered it. It's a richer, fuller, and better life. And it's not just me talking shit, either. If I could, I would sample a million alcoholics in long term recovery, and I would ask them, "Are you sorry that you made the decision to stay sober all of your years? Do you regret your decision to get and stay sober? Do you wish you had gone back to the bottle, big time?"

If I could do that, I don't think a single person would tell me that they made a terrible mistake getting and staying sober.

Even though it was difficult in the beginning, and requires constant attention. I think every single person would say that they are truly happier and healthier as a sober alcoholic. And here's the kicker – I got nothing to gain here. I'm not trying to sell you vitamin supplements or some shit like that. I got no angle. Your decision to stay sober (or not) really doesn't affect me. I'm just telling you how it is. Take my advice, or don't take my advice. The choice is yours. Just like the choice of a richer, fuller, healthier, and happier life. The choice is yours.



A person from my home group has been making an announcement after every zoom meeting that they are looking for people to share their story in a newsletter, since during COVID, meetings in correctional facilities have been discontinued. I heard her request for 18 months, but somehow I never felt she was talking to me. I heard her request today. What changed, I don't know. Here is my best attempt to share what I know about how life can change for the better. There was a time that I was confused, empty and alone-- no meaning to my life and no way out. Heck, I just wanted to stop drinking, but I have gotten so much more.

I've known I am an alcoholic probably since I was 15 years old. I can vividly remember the warm feeling I had as the alcohol entered my body. I was transformed from a shy, self-conscious girl to a confident, fun-loving person. That craving and obsession went on to dominate my life for the next 40 years. Towards the end I drank just to feel normal. My world got smaller & darker. I knew it would kill me, but I couldn't stop. Alcohol trumped everything, my husband, my kids, my job, my self-respect. All the while I kept telling myself I

wasn't hurting anybody but myself. I was consumed with shame and guilt.

I had tried to quit drinking again and again, but I couldn't do it. I would come up with excuses to justify my drinking. I would feel pathetic and weak and hate myself for it. I felt there was no way out. No way to find any happiness. Fear could not motivate me. Hating myself could not make me quit. Therapy did not work. The only thing that motivated me, I realized much later was love, unconditional love, and I found that in Alcoholics Anonymous. There I found a solution.

When I came into the rooms of AA and stopped pretending to be just fine and started admitting to myself and others that I struggled; I felt something I hadn't felt in a long time-- Hope. What an amazing feeling! It was like that dark hole I could feel in my soul was being filled with positive energy and unconditional love.

Before AA, I saw myself as a victim of circumstances. AA helped me see that I was the one who made a mess of my life--nobody else. I alone made the decisions that led me to the brink (and the drink). These were my choices. I had to accept responsibility. It was by admitting my pain and facing my emotions; embracing my vulnerability and humanity that I found the courage to change. Finding the courage for me was finding my Higher Power. It was hard for me to understand that there was a higher power inside me.

The first thing I had to do was put down the drink. I had to empty out the toxic mess I had become. Next I had to ask for help. But that wasn't the hard part. The hard part was accepting the help. I learned to work the steps, ALL the steps. There are no shortcuts. I had to work through the pain, not avoid it. I couldn't do this without the help of a sponsor. Then I had to pray. I had to pray to whatever Higher Power I could believe in. If you don't have a Higher Power, you can pray to mine. His name is Howard. You know, as in, "Our Father who art in heaven, Howard be thy name".

Once AA gets in your head, there's no turning back. Go to meetings, read the literature, work the steps, talk to another alcoholic. Practice gratitude every day. Do these things and life will start to get good. You will never be alone again.

Every single one of us has magic inside us that can transform our lives and the lives of others. Believe in it! Use it! Fill

your life and the lives around you with wonder. You are worth it!



AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

“ It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.”

p. 66, Alcoholics Anonymous

Tradition One

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

“Those who look closely soon have the key to this strange paradox. The A.A. member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles. If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift; he sickens and dies. At first he goes along because he must, but later he discovers a way of life he really wants to live. Moreover, he finds he cannot keep this priceless gift unless he gives it away. Neither he nor anybody else can survive unless he carries the A.A. message. The moment this Twelfth Step work forms a group, another discovery is made—that most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. Realization dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the Fellowship. He learns that the clamor

of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not.

p. 130, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions



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