

“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

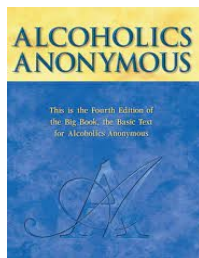
“ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

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



Could be Worse

It could have been worse for me. No, it SHOULD have been worse for me.

See, the things that were supposed to happen to alcoholics just were not happening to me. No DUI's, no lost jobs, no legal woes, nothing.

Sure, I had been pulled over a couple of times, and I had transferred job locations on multiple occasions, and maybe a couple of incidents with child support collections – not to mention missing work and getting behind on bills. But those things happened to everyone, right?

At least that is what I told myself. As long as I believed it, it didn't matter what it looked like to the rest of the world.

But life was getting more difficult as time went on and little things kept happening. My hands began to shake in the morning. I had some issues remembering what had happened the night before. Friends were asking how I was doing – those that were still around. Being on call for work presented challenges with timing my drinking for when I might have to report for duty, and when I missed the mark, just a little, my co-workers on several occasions mentioned that perhaps a breath mint would be a good idea for me. The guy who filled the propane tank wanted cash before he would bring fuel.

And relationships, well my track record there spoke for itself. Two failed marriages and a tumultuous current situation that was not getting better. My parents and my son were never sure when, or if, I would be in touch.

Still, it could have been worse. At least that's what I told myself.

Then one day it was.

Coming out of a blackout after being escorted out of a bar by a friend on a night no different than a hundred nights before, something snapped. A realization from seemingly nowhere hit me that I could not go on like this. I know now that that was one of several divine interventions that changed my life. I can't say why that particular night was any different or that my life immediately improved, but I do know that the bottom I hit on that night was the entrance to a new dimension of existence of which I could not have dreamed existed.

And all I had to do was to ask for help, to quit trying to figure out everything myself, and to trust that there was a better life for me. That all presented a huge risk and re-arrangement of my thinking and attitudes toward life, people, and a power greater than myself. None of that was possible until I could let go of my self will, my need to feel I was in charge. That was not easy.

For me that began with a stay at an in patient treatment center where I learned that what I had was a disease and that while there was no cure there was a solution that would allow me to live a sober, meaningful life. That was a start for me but it took more to reach a state where I was comfortable in my own skin, where I could live life on life's terms, and where I could be useful to myself and even to my fellows.

From that beginning I found Alcoholics Anonymous and in so doing I found a solution.

I would love to say that all I needed to do was to walk in the doors of that first AA meeting and all was immediately good. That is what I expected, but it turned out that there was more effort required on my part. After attending meetings for a while and getting involved with a home group I began to see improvements in my life. I no longer felt like the other shoe was about to drop or that I would never be able to get along in the world. The people I met were genuine folks, willing to share with me how they were able to apply in their everyday living the steps and principals that are the tenants of the AA way of life. That was helpful, but I still needed to make the effort to follow through with their suggestions. This was aided by my desire to have what they had, and by my desire not to return to my previous way of living. It was through working with a sponsor that these things came about for me.

My life today is one I could never have even dreamed of having. The promises of AA are coming true for me – as long as I continue to apply the steps and principals in my everyday life. It is a life second to none and I would, as I often hear in the rooms, not wish for the best day I had while drinking to replace the worst day I have now. Life still happens, the challenges and tragedies that befall the rest of the world are not spared me, but I now have a way to deal with whatever is put in front of me.

For that I am grateful.

Howard H.



From Daily Reflections, p. 102 April 3

ACCEPTING OUR HUMANNESS

We finally saw that the inventory should be ours, not the other man's. So we admitted our wrongs honestly and became willing to set these matters straight.

AS BILL SEES IT, P. 222

Why is it that the alcoholic is so unwilling to accept responsibility? I used to drink because of the things that other people did to me. Once I came to A.A. I was told to look at where I had been wrong. What did I have to do with all these different matters? When I simply accepted that I had a part in them, I was able to put it on paper and see it for what it was—humanness. I am not expected to be perfect! I have made errors before and I will make them again. To be honest about them allows me to accept them—and myself—and those with whom I had the differences; from there, recovery is just a short distance ahead.



Hi,

My name is Tracy and I'm an alcoholic.

My story is not typical, though I don't know if anybody's really is. I didn't end up in jail. I didn't lose my job. I didn't lose my house. I never got a DUI, though I deserved many. I did however lose my soul.

I went through four decades of living as a greedy, self seeking, selfish alcoholic. I created a huge wake wherever I went. I pretty much wiped out all the people that were brave enough or foolish enough to love me. Those included three husbands and my two beautiful children. I'm sure I lost friends along the way too, but those really didn't matter to me. The only people that mattered were those that helped me get buzzed and stay buzzed or made me feel that what I did was ok. That I was ok. I grew up in an upper middle class family, had my first sip of alcohol at 8. I would sip left leftover drinks at my parents cocktail parties. My father was alcoholic, as was his father and his father before him. My mother was hospitalized for anxiety and depression from the time I was three years old till I was 5. I pretty much was destined to get this disease. It really does not care what kind of family you come from. My family was broken. For as long as I can remember I was the "fix it kid", the one that went around covering up my dad when he passed out and his junk was hanging out his boxers, picking his face up out of his dinner plate, shutting the windows when the fights began. From the outside we looked like a normal family who had it all together. Not so much. I tried alcohol very young but didn't get drunk the first time until I was 13. And I got drunk almost to the point of not recovering. I learned that alcohol can stop the voices in your head and stop the bad feelings in your heart. So I became a regular drinker by 14-15 yrs old. My drinking really escalated in college. I was a blackout drinker. I just had a call from my old college roommate to tell me that one of our suitemates husbands had died the other day. She started talking about our college days. Saying you remember this and you remember that. I couldn't remember any of it.

Any reason was a good reason to drink in my family. Sadness, joy, fatigue, celebrations, even having a yard sale was an occasion to drink. We always fought each other and got nasty when we drank, so I'm not sure why we thought it was a good idea. I got married to the first nice guy who had asked me at age 28. I was a horrible wife and cheated our first year of marriage with a construction worker building our house. My first husband was a wonderful guy, still is. And I broke his heart. We had a beautiful daughter and we divorced by the time she was a year old. Then I married another young guy

who I also cheated with on my first husband. Well, actually I got pregnant first. He was much younger than me, so I waited two years to marry him. We were married seven years and he cheated on me with a doctor I worked with. It was devastating being cheated on though shouldn't have been a surprise, but to my self-centered alcoholic brain it was! I was usually the cheater and did not like how it felt. We had a beautiful son together.

Career wise I was a Registered nurse, very well thought of at my job. I worked in the emergency department, where I could get my daily fix of drama. I would get wound up at work and then need to wind down. For 10 years I stayed single and "raised" my two children just like an alcoholic would, exposing them to a variety of boyfriends and my horrible dictatorship style of mothering. I worked extremely hard at my job to give them what they wanted, but never gave them what they needed, which was a sober, attentive mother. At 62, I am still making amends to them on a daily basis. They are now 29 and 33. If you have the chance to get sober while your children are young or before you've had children, you are truly blessed.

I met my third husband and we had a long distance whirlwind relationship., got married six months after knowing each other, or barely knowing each other. By the time we moved in together, it was obvious to him I was an alcoholic and obvious to me, he, a non drinker, was an anger addict. A codependent match made in heaven. Learn what codependency is if you don't know, it will help you understand your disease. That marriage lasted nine years. But during that time, through the grace of God and AA I got sober. I didn't find God in AA, he had always been in my life. I was raised Catholic and had a strong faith. I just never gave him the reins. Never allowed him to be in control of my life. As any good alcoholic, I had to control everything. I tried a million times to quit on my own. Would string together a few days, sometimes even two weeks of physical sobriety. One night, after drinking heavily, my third husband was taking my girlfriends home so that they didn't have to drive. I went to use the bathroom and fell on the bathtub. Injuring my left leg and knocking myself out. When I woke up, I called my husband. He unfortunately

put me on speakerphone in the car with my girlfriends. I proceeded to berate him and call all my girlfriends horrific names, that they left me here and that's why I fell, etc. You know the script. I tried to hang up the phone but I couldn't. I heard them all talking about me very concerned and with love. I laid on the floor in tears and I asked God to remove this obsession with alcohol from me. That I would do anything if he would take it away. The next morning, my girlfriends came back for breakfast. I humbled myself in front of my husband and my closest girlfriends, told them I had a problem with alcohol, that I needed to quit and asked for their support. They gave it fully, 100%. They were all normal drinkers. I'm now 6 1/2 years sober. It has not been easy, but it is BETTER. I was fully present during the death of my father and my mother. I am present for my children, though they don't reach out as much as I wish they would. I can't blame them. They are still making sure that it's safe to do so. My third husband and I have divorced, but are slowly making amends with each other. God has humbled both of us in the 2 years we've been apart.

People with alcoholism/addiction come from all walks of life, all races, all colors, all belief systems. The things we share in common are the things that no one sees. The brokenness. The despair. The thoughts of suicide. The hopelessness. The obsession. I hope this story helps someone. At least maybe to know you are not alone and that there is a solution. I got sober the only way I know to do it, one 24 hour period at a time. Sometimes it was just one hour at a time. Believe it or not, stopping drinking is the easy part. Learning to live with your thoughts and feelings in this crazy world is the tough part. Trust that there are people that have been through *exactly* what you are feeling and they can help you. They helped me. God bless you.

Love, Tracy

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Lighter Today

I've been sober since December 29, 2018. I was living in Boston back then. I started attending the Saturday night meeting called "Sober is Better" in Roslindale. Meetings in Boston often raffle off books - Big Books, Living Sober, other AA literature. At my first meeting, I didn't know why there

were raffle tickets on each metal folding chair. I thought there must be some kind of fundraiser. I listened to a few speakers' stories - I wasn't sure why these people were the ones to speak. One of them made me emotional when he talked about how he didn't cry when his mom died but he wept and wept when his dog passed away. He was the kind of guy that didn't look like he cried - not in front of anyone.

At the end of the meeting, someone my age - late 20s - went up and started calling out the raffle ticket numbers. There was silence after the first few. After three blanks, he looked me straight in the eyes and said "You're new?" How did he know? I nodded, and he handed me a Big Book and said "Congratulations." After the meeting, I thanked him and he said, "Read it."

Shortly after that, I joined the group. One of the older guys with 30+ years told me to because "Even if I couldn't walk, the meeting was downhill from my place so I could slide on my ass to a meeting."

I learned where the speakers came from. In Boston, speaker groups will trade commitments. They send a handful of group members to speak at our meeting, and we send a handful to speak at theirs. As one of the group members with a car and a license, I started driving some other group members around and joining for these commitments. I didn't have 90 days yet, so I couldn't speak. Besides, I had the fear of God in me getting up to speak in front of everyone.

This guy Rob with 30+ years, Rob of the "slide on my ass" wisdom, was carpooling with me to a commitment. We'd planned to meet as a group at Dunkin Donuts in Roslindale Village, but everyone else bailed. After our commitment, where I heard him tell his story, we were driving home and he said "So you got a sponsor yet, kid?" and I said "No." He said "Pull over" and I kind of got a rush of adrenaline as I pulled over the car.

He said "You know I've got things I always thought I'd take to the grave. You don't have to tell anyone anything, not yet." I was tearing up just having him call me out with how afraid and bottled up I felt. The alcohol had been like a plug behind my eyes.

"I can tell you're afraid," he said. "I know a thing or two about fear." At this point I was staring out the driver door window so he couldn't see me tearing up. He didn't care. He just said what he had to say:

AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

“My wife killed herself a couple years ago and left me alone with five kids. I don’t share this shit up there,” he said, thumbing out the window like the meeting was right outside the car. “My youngest one has learning disorders; my oldest one is an asshole. I wake up afraid every day, thinking about tomorrow and every damn day after that. But I learned that when I’m afraid, I’m thinking about myself. And when I’m thinking about myself, I can’t be a good dad today. So listen, you’ve just gotta get started and think about today. You don’t have to tell anyone anything. When you do have to, you’ll already be ready. And the best part is, you won’t even know how you got there! Alright, keep driving.”

I drove us home basically crying, but it was okay. I heard what I needed to hear. And then pretty quickly, I got it in my head that what I needed was to move to Vermont. When I got to Vermont, I asked another old-timer how to get a sponsor, which was on its own a big step for me. He said, “You just kinda ask someone. It’s not a big deal.”

And that’s what I did. When I started working with a sponsor, we took it a day at a time. I didn’t have to spill my guts. And a few months later, after kneeling on the sidewalk in the snow praying together, after writing some inventory, we sat down to do my fifth step.

The first thing he said was “So before we begin, is there anything you left out or were planning on leaving out?” And there was. And I told him about it, crying.

When I left his apartment that day, I felt 10 pounds lighter. Two years after that day, I still feel like I coughed up a piece of lead I used to carry around.

Every once in a while, something I did when I was drinking or when I was trying to substitute my drinking makes me feel an incredible sense of shame. It’s like I wake up and my heart has turned back to lead. But pretty soon - usually after praying, after a meeting, after speaking to someone from the program - I feel it gradually melt away.

If that doesn’t work, I can always think of one of two things: sitting in that car with Rob that day on the way home from our commitment, or doing my fifth step with a sponsor I trusted.

Those two things always remind me that whatever I did was yesterday, whatever I’m afraid of is tomorrow, and so long as I’m active in my sobriety today is as fine a place as I can be.

“We thought “conditions” drove us to drink, and when we tried to correct these conditions and found that we couldn't to our entire satisfaction, our drinking went out of hand and we became alcoholics. It never occurred to us that we needed to change ourselves to meet conditions, whatever they were.”

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 47

“Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 46

KEEP COMING BACK! IT WORKS!

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