

"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

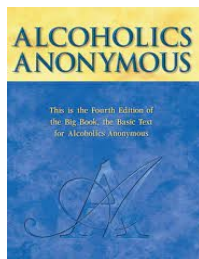
"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

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



"The Essence of Addiction: 'Joe B's' Story"

With Eddie B's Story Attached

This is the story of "Joe B", the toughest guy--by far--in the East Bronx, where I grew up.

It's the mid-summer of 1963, a long time ago, a moment seared into my memory forever. It was my very first rude exposure to the essence of addiction, a point in time, as sharp as the very tip of the needle resting on the rolling vein across Joe B's wrist.

Joe was the latest iteration of a long line of Italian masons, brick layers who settled in Manhattan and then migrated to the Bronx, hard workers. The joke in the neighborhood was that Joe had benefitted from those generations of hard work: he was born with little round biceps and a baby-six pack. And he was tough, very tough, the toughest guy in the East Bronx.

At this point in NYC there was a very potent type of heroin taking the lives of many: China White. Lou Reed, lead singer and guitarist with the Velvet Underground, put it like this in the 1966 hit, "Heroin": "When the smack begins to flow, then I really don't care anymore, about all you Jim-Jims in this town, and everybody putting everybody else down, and all the politicians making crazy sounds, and all the dead bodies piled up in mounds..."

At this point in the evolution of addiction treatment in our country we approached heroin addiction from a position of ignorance. What was available to people was a brief stay at "The United States Narcotic Farm", in Lexington, Kentucky. "The Farm" was basically a detoxification center, followed by discharge with no follow-up supports, by today's standards one of the most lethal prescriptions for people with Severe Opioid Use Disorder. And in 1963, there was no methadone, no suboxone, no drug counselors and no Recovery Centers.

On this mid-summer night of 1963 Joe B had just returned from his most recent stay at "The Farm", a little less gaunt than when he left us. Everybody was pulling for him. My friend Frankie and I were just riding around, listening to jazz on "Symphony Sid", a very cool radio station. And yes, we were smoking pot. I was 16.

There he was: Joe B was signaling us to pull over and pick him up. Of course, it was an honor: we pulled over.

We took him over to “Scupo’s” house, like he said, with our stomachs turning and our hearts pounding. We knew who Scupo was. Joe came out of the house walking quickly, something different about him, his right hand “cupped”, concealing something. Frankie and I both knew the same thing instantly.

We drove to a side street by a vacant lot with a streetlight, Joe in the back seat. Joe tied his belt around his left arm, right around his famous bicep, and a fat vein appeared, running across his left wrist. He carefully held his “works” in his right hand, his forefinger and thumb cradling the pacifier, the dropper resting on the insides of his middle-, ring-, and pinky-fingers.

He slowly touched the tip of the needle, at just the right angle, to his swollen vein. “Works” were the street-equivalent of the hypodermic needle back then. Works were the glass dropper of an eye dropper with the bulb of a baby-pacifier attached to the top, usually by a rubber-band wrapped tightly around the base of the bulb. The needle was attached to the end of the dropper with a “collar”, or makeshift lining to create a good fit, usually a thin strip of a dollar-bill wrapped around the end of the dropper.

Joe looked at the needle, its incredibly sharp point resting on his vein, the beveled opening like the mouth of the tormented subject in Edvard Munch’s “The Scream”... His eyes filled with tears, he began breathing deeply, and he began to cry. The toughest guy in the East Bronx was crying over what he was about to do. Joe was tough, but addiction was tougher...

And it took him, the same way it continues to take so many today...

It took me too, a few years later, in San Francisco, in 1967, I was 20. I let a “hippie” stick a needle in my arm and for the next seven years, when I wasn’t in jail or the hospital, I stole money and shot drugs. (I got my GED at Bridgewater State Correctional Facility in MA. I was in there for two years. I was Drug Addict # 369.)

It wasn’t pretty.

I stopped injecting drugs in 1973 and graduated from a Therapeutic Community in 1975, with what was called “Drinking Privileges”. I often say, “When you have a needle hanging out of your arm no-one notices the shot glass on the table...” I proceeded to develop full-blown alcoholism over the next ten years, and on July 22, 1984 I walked into my first AA Meeting and “got it”!

Something about the people in there made me feel safe enough to “get it”. They liked me; they didn’t judge me; my immense problems somehow made me one-of-them instead of alone and ashamed. I kept going back and one day led to another. I smoked pot for a little while and stopped that October. I will be in recovery 38 years this October! I’m 75 now, can you imagine that? ☺

Many of us die from addiction, now more than ever. I can honestly tell you that my life has been good. I’ve had a career; happily remarried 27 years ago; raised my boys who are great men today; traveled some; and helped some in AA and NA. I go to AA and try to live the best life I can today. Today I am happy to be alive. I know it’s not easy, I’d never say otherwise.

I hope my story can lend you a little support in some way... Eddie B



From Daily Reflections, p. 186 June 26

A GIFT THAT GROWS WITH TIME

For most normal folks, drinking means conviviality, companionship and colorful imanination. It means release from care, boredom, and worry. It is joyous intimacy with friends and a feeling that life is good.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 151

The longer I chased these elusive feelings with alcohol, the more out of reach they were. However, by applying this passage to my sobriety, I found that it described the magnificent new life made available to me by the A.A. Program. “It” truly does “get better” one day at a time. The warmth, the love and the joy so simply expressed in these words grow in breadth and depth each time I read it. Sobriety is a gift that grows with time.

I Needed Something

By Jan R

I knew I needed something. I got a clue from the fact that I cried a lot. I was not a happy camper. So, I spent the weekend at a Tony Robbins seminar where I learned how to make people do what I wanted them to do, as if I needed more of that skill. I took a class about how to talk in front of a crowd, because I thought I was shy. I joined a group that believed we are not here; we just think we are. That was the one I liked the best because I liked to escape and the idea of going to where I really belonged was very attractive. I wanted to be anywhere but where I was. I joined Adult Children of Alcoholics because I was sure whatever was going on was my stepfather's fault.

I was not in a relationship. I was sure that was really the problem, so I focused on finding my true love. And I read self-help books. I read a lot of them. I got more depressed. I withdrew from my friends and my family.

And I drank.

I loved to go away by myself for the weekend so I could do whatever I wanted. I went for long vacations so no one would know what I liked to do and where I liked to go and who I hung around with. I went dangerous places with dangerous people and did dangerous things.

And I drank.

But I was sure that drinking was not the problem. Drinking was the solution. I just needed to find out how to do more of it without affecting my job. You see, my job was my source of self-esteem. It was the only thing I did that I felt good about. And drinking was starting to affect that. My co-workers looked at me differently. You know the look. I thought they needed to relax and get off my back. Leave me alone, I thought. I'll be fine. But I wasn't fine. I cried more. I got angry. I looked around and saw how others were living. They had relationships, kids, friends, and they had fun. People didn't avoid them like they did me.

I had some friends that were members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Even though I was convinced I wasn't an alcoholic because I didn't drink all day, every day. For crying out loud, I had a job! Alcoholics don't have jobs. But I didn't know where else to go. So, I went to my first AA meeting.

A friend came up to me and asked me what I was doing there. He had never seen me drink. You see, I had two distinct personalities and most people only saw one of them. This friend had only seen my nice girl persona, miss prim and proper. I told my friend that I wasn't sure why I was there. I didn't drink every day, but when I drank, I drank more than I intended. I went places with people I had no business being with and did things I shouldn't do. I got up in the morning and always said that it wouldn't happen again. But it always did. My friend said "welcome."

That was my first AA meeting. My road to recovery has had some challenges. I had a hard time taking suggestions. But I didn't drink. The people in the rooms of AA were very kind and patient with me. For a long time, I tried to do it on my own. I insisted on it. Then one day I reached an emotional bottom and realized that even though I had not had a drink, I was spiraling down further and further. And I would drink if I didn't do something different. So, I got a sponsor, and I did as she suggested.

Now my life is totally different than it was. I am no longer crippled by fear. Above all else, I want to be sober. When I am sober, I show up for the people I love. I am no longer mean. Now I am one of those that say "Hi" when someone I don't know comes into an online or in-person meeting. I give out my phone number. I call newcomers and old timers. I want to pay back those who were so kind and understanding when I walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, who welcomed me and asked me to stay. I will be forever grateful to those who have gone before me.

Jan

IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT

Hi! My name is Marge and I am a Alcoholic. When I first came into the rooms of AA, I noticed a lot of picture frames around the room. In these picture frames were AA slogans." First things First", "Easy Does It", and "One Day at a Time" I was really curious about this " One Day

at a Time.” I wanted to find out just what it meant? And it became some what of a mantra to me later on.

My sponsor explained, that living “ One Day at a Time” meant to deal with each day’s problems as they come instead of worrying about the future. Take one day at a time and don’t expect things to change overnight. Easier said, than done. But I was willing to try! All you have to do IS BE WILLING!

She told me that anyone can do a particular thing “ One Day at a Time”, “ 24 hrs a Day” This particular thing was my drinking. When I hit my bottom, I was very young. All I ever knew revolved around drinking or getting high. That’s how I dealt with life and the feelings I felt. I didn’t like my life, the person I had become, the things that I did. I numbed the feelings with alcohol. But then the alcohol turned on me. I couldn’t drink without something bad happening. I couldn’t stop or stayed stopped. What was I going to do with the rest of my life? How was I going to live life without my crutch? I always looked at the big picture. It always seemed so overwhelming. It was very scary!

The people in AA explained to me that we put down the drink or drug “ One Day at a Time” , “24 hrs a Day”. Sometimes I would have to break it up into little chunks of time. 5 minutes, 1 hour, lunchtime, dinnertime, after the meeting, say my prayers, try to get some sleep. The next day in the morning , Ask my Higher Power to help me to stay sober today” One Day at a Time, just for today, 24 hrs a day” my head or thoughts would start talking to me, never anything good always negative talk. I would start to worry, feel ashamed of the things I did in the past, how I hurt my family, on and on. I would become overwhelmed with Fear. Then I would remember the voices of the people in the rooms of AA.” Don’t pick up the First drink”, “ if you don't pick up the first drink, you can’t get drunk”, “One Day at a Time” I would repeat those powerful slogans over and over. I don’t even remember how many times I would say them to myself. It became my mantra! A sacred saying, it helped me to calm down.

I just kept going to meetings, talking to my sponsor, working the Program of Action in the Big Book of AA, “ One Day at a Time” One day turned into two, two into three. Those “ One Days at a Time turned into months, years. The most important lesson I learned through practicing living 24hrs a Day is that I can do anything living in the present. Alcohol free! Drug Free! Thank goodness for AA. It has changed my life. And if you are willing, It can happen for you too!

God Bless



My Introduction to God

When I was a little girl I thought that if I fell down and scratched my leg God was punishing me for something bad I had done. I don't know if that's what my parents told me, but that's what I heard. So I believed that God was wrathful, angry, and punishing. I carried that belief as I grew up-and even to some months after coming to AA.

As I began my sober journey in 1973 our members spoke of their Higher Power as a loving God. So I, too, would speak of Him as a gentle loving God. I thought if they knew what I really believed they wouldn't want me around.

About 9 months in the program, I attended a meeting and listened to a man share his experience, strength, and hope. He had such a wonderful spirituality about him. I approached him after the meeting and told him I was looking for that spirituality, but thus far, I had not found it.

He asked me, “Donna, do you pray?” I replied, “Oh, yes. My sponsor tells me to pray. I pray everyday.” Again he asked, “How do you pray?” I said, “Well, it goes something like, 'Dear God, please give me (fill in the blank) and I want it between 2 o'clock and 2:30 on Thursday.” He smiled and said, “Ahh. You're forgetting who is the Master and who is the servant. “Gimmie God' prayers just don't work. Try this instead; “Dear God, what can I do for You now?” I hesitated, then said weakly, “Will this work if I'm skeptical?” He told me to repeat this prayer for the remainder of the day and listen to His message. When I go to bed tonight, to get down on my knees and thank God for the Blessed day. He also added, “Here's the kicker. You're probably going to think that this has all been just a coincidence, but get a good nights sleep – and you will sleep well. Then start all over again tomorrow, because we can't live today on yesterday's works.”

So on my way home I said, "Okay God, what do you want me to do for You now?" And immediately the thought came to me to go home and clean house. (Working on my inventory didn't occur to me at the time.)

So I stopped at the store to pick up a few cleaning supplies. As I checked out I noticed that the cashier appeared to be having a tough day. I said a few kind words to her and when I left the store she was smiling. I felt good about that.

In the parking lot an elderly lady was struggling to get her packages in her car. I assisted her and she smiled and thanked me. And I felt good about that.

Proceeding home the car behind me was tailgating, so I pulled over so he could pass me, and he waved -with all five fingers. And I felt good about that.

Once home I cleaned house. And my husband felt good about that.

For the rest of the day I kept saying that prayer, "What can I do for You God?" The things I did were nothing spectacular – just mundane, ordinary things for my family like kissing boo-boos and making peanut butter sandwiches, etc. But it truly was a gloriously Blessed day.

At bedtime I got down on my knees and thanked Him. As I did so, something came to me that this has all been a coincidence. But I did sleep well.

The next morning I began again, "Good Morning God. What can I do for You now?"

So that was my introduction to the God of my understanding. And my brothers and sisters help me each day to become better acquainted with Him. I am truly Blessed.

Donna M., Port St. Lucie, Florida

AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"In AA we have found that the actual good results of prayer are beyond question. They are matters of knowledge and experience. All those who have persisted have found strength not ordinarily their own. They have found wisdom beyond their usual capability. And they have increasingly found a peace of mind which can stand firm in the face of difficult circumstances."

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 104

"As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done." We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

It works—it really does. "

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 87-88

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