

“A NEW FREEDOM”

area70corrections@aavt.org

OCTOBER 2022

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



That's My Story

It was 4 o'clock in the morning when I woke up in bed all covered with broken glass. Last thing I remembered was getting kicked out of a bar, driving home, and going to bed. I was homeless and housesitting for a former teacher living on the third floor. I looked out the window and could see my old station wagon in the driveway. I could see in the

streetlight that the windshield was smashed in. Thinking (not too clearly) that someone had done that to my car, I called the police. They came and arrested me.

Apparently, there had been a double hit and run on the other side of town – two parked cars. At the station I blew a point four. I confessed, though I really didn't remember anything, and was sent to the hospital for glass in one eye. My lawyer suggested I attend an AA meeting or see an alcohol counselor before my court date. So that's how I appeared at my first AA meeting in 1983; 29 years old, patch over one eye. It was a little room filled with old men, cigarette smoke, and talk of God. I left before the ending prayer and decided to find an alcohol counselor instead.

He asked me to try not drinking for 30 days. I thought I did, but the truth is I quit for three weeks and realized if I could stop drinking for three weeks then of course I could stop for a month – so why wait? With that alcoholic logic I drank for another 13 years wrecking more lives and cars and forgetting I had ever been to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

At the age of 42 I found myself living in my mother's basement and drinking every night at the seediest bar in town. I was an elementary school teacher. I would drink until the bar closed, find someone to go home with to drink some more – often the bartender. I would drive home after the streets were quiet, with one eye open to keep the center line from going in two directions. I was so relieved to pull into the driveway. I would just pass out and awaken to the morning light and birds chirping. Hopefully I had time for a shower and a cup of coffee. Usually, I would vomit up the coffee then head to work. I had “get the red out” eye drops and mouthwash in the car.

One morning the union president called me into her office and told me I reeked of alcohol, and it wasn't the first time she had noticed. She said she was concerned. Did I need some help? Those simple declarations and question put me on the road to recovery. She didn't ask if I thought I needed to quit drinking. She didn't ask if I

was an alcoholic. Either of those questions would have shut me down. I was able to say “yes” I could use some help. I was 42 years old and living in my mother’s basement. I enjoyed playing music but couldn’t get to a gig without being too wasted to play well, if at all. I enjoyed the company of women but couldn’t maintain a relationship or even line up a date.

It was December 6, a Friday, and I found myself promising the school system alcohol counselor that I wouldn’t drink until I got to residential treatment that Sunday and I would go to an AA meeting that evening. I met a guy in the supermarket parking lot, and he took me to a meeting. But it was a closed meeting – for alcoholics only – and I still deluded myself into thinking I was NOT an alcoholic. Luckily when they read the preamble, I heard that the only requirement was a desire to stop drinking, and since I had agreed to not drink that night or the next I thought that phrase allowed me to stay.

In treatment we read the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and it was in those pages I discovered that I WAS an alcoholic after all. What a wonderful revelation! It came in two parts. First, I noticed that I had the same “symptoms” as these alcoholics. Then I realized that that’s what alcoholism is – those symptoms! Whenever I decided I shouldn’t drink on a particular occasion, I ended up drinking anyway. To me it just seemed like I changed my mind. And once I started drinking, I had no control over the amount I would drink. Again, it never seemed like a loss of control – just a decision to have another and another and another.

Fortunately, that respite from drinking, those mere ten days in treatment, gave me the ability to honestly appraise my drinking behavior over the years. I could see how alcohol really had control of my life and had limited my potential for success and happiness. Being someone who despised authority, I realized that it was alcohol who had had years of authority over my life. I turned my anger toward booze and made the decision to jump into AA with both feet and all my earnestness.

I started off great. My work gave me an extended vacation, so I was able to attend two meetings a day. I found a temporary sponsor. I’d call him up and ask how he was doing. Then, in a phone conversation with my first ex-wife, she asked if I was the kind of alcoholic who could never drink again. What?! Is there a kind that can drink again? Maybe I’m that kind! It was scary how easily my mind snapped back to finding a loophole that would allow me to drink. And that fear led me to find a tough sponsor who led me through the steps at a steady pace. Twenty-five years later he is still my

sponsor and I have a joyful and extremely satisfying life. And I thank AA with action in service and pass on the hope and program to my sponsees.

Jim T, Vermont



From Daily Reflections, p. 296 October 14

A PROGRAM FOR LIVING

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. . . . On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. . . . Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, p. 86

I lacked serenity. With more to do than seemed possible, I fell further behind, no matter how hard I tried. Worries about things not done yesterday and fear of tomorrow's deadlines denied me the calm I needed to be effective each day. Before taking Steps Ten and Eleven, I began to read passages like the one cited above. I tried to focus on God's will, not my problems, and to trust that He would manage my day. It worked! Slowly, but it worked!



Growing up in the leafy suburbs of Atlanta, I was fortunate enough to experience an idyllic childhood. Neighborhood barbecues, drinking out of the garden hose, playing freeze tag until the street lights came on; I believed in Santa Claus until I was 10 and everything seemed safe and magical. Our house was at the top of a cul de sac and was the de facto gathering spot for our neighbors. My dad kept everyone’s drink of choice on hand for impromptu cocktail hours, and to me, drinking truly

meant conviviality and companionship. We couldn't wait for our parents to have a few extra cocktails because it meant we would get to play outside longer and the rules were relaxed. I never saw anyone get drunk, alcohol was a social lubricant and it seemed harmless and fun.

I was a very sensitive and studious child, even at a young age doing well in school and having teachers like me was important. In high school, drinking was the furthest thing from my mind. My best friend and I were so excited to get to college and were consumed with college visits and standardized test scores. In college, my dorm mates would beg me to come to bars and parties, but I was often studying. I remember one night bringing my backpack to the local bar and setting up at a high-top table, looking over quiz notes while everyone else enjoyed discount pitchers.

I don't remember my first drunk, but over a course of about six months or so, drinking suddenly started to appeal to me. Maybe it was because I was a college senior, maybe it was because I was nearing the legal drinking age, but within what seemed like the course of a few weeks, I suddenly began to enjoy alcohol.

And then I enjoyed it too much.

This enjoyment quickly turned to a mental obsession. I learned that it's not necessarily the amount one takes, as it states in our Big Book, but the thinking that surrounds alcohol that distinguishes an alcoholic. I couldn't wait to get to parties where I knew alcohol would be served, and I kept a close eye on everyone else's glasses, always concerned that there would be enough alcohol for me.

My favorite kind of drinking quickly turned to isolated drinking. Even at 21 when everyone else was out in bars and clubs, celebrating being of legal age, I loved to drink at home where no one could monitor or criticize my drinking.

The amazing thing about my alcoholism was how fast things changed for me. My last semester of college, I barely went to class at all. I got a part-time job in a bar, and my entire group of friends changed. In 2000 I moved to New York City. Thus began a cycle of poor performance, irresponsibility, lost jobs and friends, and the endless turmoil of alcoholic misery.

I was never a drinker who celebrated alcohol. The entire time that I drank, I was trying to stop drinking, or control and enjoy my drinking. The problem was, as I later learned in the apocrypha of AA, it was impossible to do both. The story I always tell that best summarizes my drinking is that I would wake up late, hungover and rushing to work. I'd stop for a pack of cigarettes, a seltzer water and a bag of snack mix to soothe my

stomach, and drag myself into the office. I would swear to myself all day that I wouldn't drink that night, but inevitably I would find myself getting out at the subway stop where there was a bodega that sold beer and a liquor store, where I would stock up on alcohol and do it all over again.

I went to my first AA meeting in 2001, in Brooklyn NY. I walked in and immediately experienced the welcoming warmth and friendship reminiscent of my childhood. I loved AA immediately, and truly enjoyed the meetings, the dinner gatherings, the dances and AA softball. I felt like I was part of a community at last. The problem was, I wasn't yet ready to stop drinking. The other problem was, I didn't tell anyone about it. After a year and a half dry I inevitably drank again, teaching me the lesson that while I may stop drinking alcohol, the disease of alcoholism continues to progress in me, and when I pick up a drink again, it's as though I had never stopped.

By 2005 I was living in Providence, RI. I worked in a bar (which was not the career I had been planning that night I sat in the bar in college and crammed for a quiz while everyone else drank around me!) and the bartender would bring me my first drink of the day with a cocktail straw in it, because my hands were shaking so badly that I couldn't pick up the drink. She never said anything about it, and her kindness and tact have always stayed with me. Even though we were allowed to drink while we were working, I still got in trouble for being drunk, and at the end I couldn't even make it to work in a bar where you could drink on the job! I had bills piled up and I was afraid to open my mail. I couldn't pay my rent, and was a few weeks away from being homeless.

My circumstances were dire, but this wasn't what brought me to the rooms of AA for what I hope is the last time. Though I had used plenty of other drugs along the way, at the end of my drinking I only drank alcohol. At the age of 31, I was fully physically dependent on alcohol. I kept a bottle of the cheapest rotgut by my bed, since I knew that I would wake up in the night seeing and hearing things that weren't there if I didn't have a drink. I would sweat and my heart would pound out of my chest, and I experienced isolation and terror that truly could not have been worse had someone had a gun to my head. It being New England where they have strict liquor laws, I was often forced to drink mouthwash if the liquor stores were closed. Alcohol was no longer a luxury, it was a life or death necessity.

On December 6, 2005, I woke up and experienced a moment of clarity. Nothing particularly special had happened, yes I had no job, yes I was about to be homeless, but the clarity was born of a sudden and intense desire to be sober. It was also born of exhaustion. I felt like I couldn't keep fighting anymore. I could barely shower much less find a new job and a new place to live. I was lying to everyone, and my great obsession was how I could commit suicide so that I could end my alcoholic misery and torture. Ending my own life seemed to be the only solution.

On that day I walked to the Salvation Army. I truly was ready to go to any length to get sober. It was cold and snowy, I was on foot, but I just didn't care. I ended up at a treatment center, not the Salvation Army after all, but the true gift was the desperation I felt. For someone who grew up in a loving, safe family, with swimming lessons and handmade Halloween costumes, safety, stability and security, the distance I had traveled in my 10 years of drinking was unfathomable.

I came into AA truly beaten by alcohol. We were not a religious family at all, and I thought that a higher power was for weak people. But when I got to AA, I decided that I was not special. I had been given so many gifts in life and had enjoyed every privilege, but the rules of alcoholism still applied to me. So when everyone else circled up to pray, I prayed too. When they said to go to 90 meetings in 90 days, I did. Even in my darkest days and nights of drinking, I always felt that I was some sort of special, magnetic star, but I realized that there is nothing special about me at all. And that all I had to do to stay sober was literally do what everyone else was doing. I think this is called humility, and I'm so grateful I was given this early gift of realizing that the rules truly do apply to me too.

I was so grateful to be sober in my first year that sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and just lie there, marveling over my good fortune to be clear-headed and free from chemicals. I wouldn't say I was on a pink cloud, but the relief from the alcoholic torment was constantly with me.

In sobriety, I realized that I had to change everything about me. My entire drinking career I had gotten by on my (quickly dwindling!) looks and charm; I lied, cheated and manipulated. When I realized early in sobriety that if I wanted to be sober I had to do more than just put down the drink, it was terrifying. I honestly did not know how to be any other way, and I did not know how I would stop taking shortcuts through difficult situations and just dealing honestly with people. But slowly but surely, through working the Steps, sponsorship and rigorous meeting attendance, I started to become the woman that I believe God intended me to be. I developed wholesome interests like distance running and tennis.

My first husband was my tennis partner. He too was sober and we embarked on a mature relationship, with boundaries and respect. We were married and I thought that was all there was to the program; you lead a quiet, uneventful life, try to help others and keep your side of the street clean. When I was sober about 8 years, my husband passed away suddenly. I realized that being sober does not guarantee health or consistent good fortune.

Fortunately, I had also discovered service in Alcoholics Anonymous. The day my husband went into the hospital, I was elected our Area Secretary. So I knew that even as I grieved him, AA needed me and I was so grateful for two years of consistent AA commitments. I also had so many friends in service and though I was very lonely at times, I never was truly alone. A few years later I lost my father, who had become my best friend in sobriety. I talked to him almost every day, we loved to travel together and he was a huge part of my life. My instinct on the night that he died was go to a meeting. I wasn't even worried I was going to drink, I just wanted to sit at the back of a meeting and listen to another alcoholic's problems. AA doesn't remove your grief, but it gives you a way to get out of yourself and plenty of opportunities to direct your thinking to someone who may be suffering more than you.

I am happily remarried now, have a career, a family that loves and respects me, and countless friends both in and out of the rooms. I know that life is unpredictable and that is scary sometimes. But I've always kept a service commitment, always kept a sponsor, always kept sponsees and continue to practice and rework the Steps in my daily life. My purpose here isn't to make myself happy, as I thought all those years of drinking. It is to show others that you can get through just about anything with the help of AA.

Actually, I think you can get through anything at all.



My Rock Bottom

I used to tell my ex-wives, yes there is more than one, that I would rather be dead than quit drinking. In a sad, tragic twist of ironic fate, it would not be my death that ended my alcohol abuse but the death of another at my hands. A victim of my reckless-criminal behavior, beloved by family, friends, co-workers and the community, who was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and died because of a DUI fatality I had caused.

I was the living-breathing definition of a “functioning alcoholic.” I maintained a successful professional career earning six figures and living a life of travel and leisure that most only dream of. At the same time and over the course of decades prior to this calamitous axis, I had racked up more than my fair share of DUI convictions, four of them over the course of 20 years. It was the only trouble I ever had with the law but auspiciously dodged any serious punitive consequences. I traversed the legal system by hiring expensive, elbow-rubbing attorneys who delivered my narcissistic feed, keeping me out of jail and evading felony conviction.

I had been warned repeatedly, to no avail. Not only by the judiciary but by those closest to me, including my younger brother. He had racked up an equivalent number of DUI's at a relatively young age. Being a commercial airline pilot with no desire to be ousted from his profession, he embraced sobriety, becoming a devout member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Subsequently, he began to suggest that there were profound troubles brewing on the horizon for me and as long as I continued to abuse alcohol I would eventually hit my “rock bottom” with, unfortunately, inherently devastating consequences to ensue. His cogent foresight became my living reality.

I pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 10 years minimum with an “indefinite” probation sentence on the backend. Taking the life of another, inducing unbearable guilt and shame while living a decade of life incarcerated, had delivered me to that rock bottom. It was time for me to embrace the tenets of living life sober and Alcoholics Anonymous had well documented credentials in that particular arena.

My first AA meeting behind the razor wires didn't go so well. Most of my co-convicts laughingly mocked those who attended, barking out the standard insult “AA is for Quitters” as we gathered at the day room exit on our way to the meeting. When I spoke at that first open meeting I was chastised and admonished after sharing my reading

thoughts. The crosstalk was not extinguished. Half of those in attendance appeared to be there for reasons that had nothing to do with sobriety. Instead, they were there to pass contraband and buddy-bro hookup with those from other living units. It didn't work for me.

A year later I attended my second meeting and didn't forgo a single one, not for eight years, not until Covid struck, denying the AA volunteers access into the facility. In those eight years of weekly meetings I experienced a tranquility and peace of mind rarely found in those forensic digs. I uncovered a renewed sense of purpose and the roadmap to a life of living sober. Those meetings were well managed and brought together a like minded group whose sobriety was a clear priority.

I am now a firm believer that sobriety, applied to anyone whose life is being negatively impacted by drugs and or alcohol, will change their lives for the better. Significantly better. AA can provide the help needed in order to navigate the inevitable challenges and pitfalls inherent to that transformation. The challenges in life that compel us to drink and drug will never disappear. Accepting and successfully overcoming those challenges are more likely to happen when we are living life in a sober state of mind.

I never thought I'd like living sober. I'm here to assert that it is actually a whole lot better.

And I am now a truly free man, released from prison and discharged from probation. My sobriety, now lived for 11 years, 9 months and 8 days, is my most valued asset. Nothing and no one is going to take it away from me. I only wish I had lived it just one day earlier, likely sparing the life of another and the family not suffering in prolonged pain. We just never know where our rock bottom is until we hit it.

AA works-if you work it.

HOPE

I've stood amongst the party crowd, the smiles from wall to wall.

I've known the pain in lonely bars, that held no smiles at all.

I've shaken the hands of mighty men, in hope that they might care,

and shook in the hands of morning death, been sickened by
it's stare.

Past friendships I have built on words, with futile oaths
meant well,

then praised such bonds with friendless men, who shared my
desperate hell.

Though I cannot dwell on the past, yet with me it must stay,
to realize much worse could come, should I not live this day.

Now new friends, one the living lost, like me have been
reborn,

they've taught me how to love again, to mend my soul once
torn.

They quietly talk of hopeless times, then talk of hope in time,
we're grateful for our freedoms, though guilty of our crime.

These friendships can't be taken, in love we learn to give,
for us now – love is action, and giving is to live.

I'm learning how to give today, to share what I have known,
and learning how to love myself, for I am not alone.

With friendship we can make it, as we battle day to day,
for we've found a friend, His name is God and He too walks
this way.

Written 12/27/76 – Sober 115 days

Rick P.

AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

“But upon entering AA we soon take quite another view of this absolute humiliation. We perceive that only through utter defeat are we able to take our first steps toward liberation and strength. Our admissions of personal powerlessness finally turn out to be firm bedrock upon which happy and purposeful lives may be built.”

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 21

“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.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 30

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