

"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

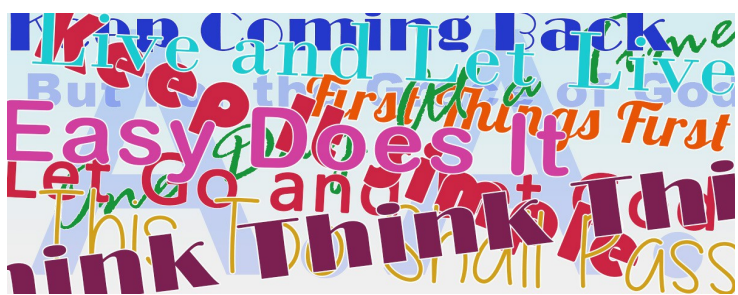
"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

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



I remember being out back with the old man, up on his piazza (porch). I was six, maybe seven years old. We sat around the chrome and Formica kitchen table he had back there. We sat under a canopy of thick, lush beautiful grape vines which were overburdened with an overabundance of succulent grapes. He grew these

grapes himself. It was a hot time, Summer in the city. It was maybe 90 degrees that day, but it was real cool and shady under there.

The old man poured a tumbler glass full of his deep dark red wine that he had made himself. He would grab a peach that was perfectly ripe and the size of a bocce ball and cut thick juicy, dripping wedges with his long razor sharp stiletto. He would soak the wedges in the wine. He would then pluck out a dripping slice with his strong fingers and say, "tephano." We would eat the peach and drink the wine. We could have been sitting on a hillside in Calabria, but we were only a half mile from the runways of Logan airport.

I could say it started out pretty benign, innocent, even beautiful but got ugly real fast.

My grandfather was and alcoholic and I was too. I was like a moth to the flame. I always drank more than I intended and drank against my will, especially during the last 5-10 years of my drinking. Like I hear said in the rooms, I didn't get in trouble every time I drank, but whenever I got in trouble I was drinking.

It was a nightmare really, alcohol, other drugs, gambling and outrageous behavior when I was drinking. 3 DWI convictions (but drove drunk all the time), wrecked cars ruined a marriage, endangered my child, arrest, horrible hangovers, etc.

Good news, I didn't kill anyone out there. I went to treatment and found the rooms of AA. I still had a big ego, false pride and terminal uniqueness, however. It took me a while to truly surrender and ask for help, even though I was soul sick. I didn't get a sponsor right away, a home group, prayers, in the morning and night, a minimum number of meeting per week, etc. All things I do now to maintain my sobriety.

I am blessed and grateful. I love being sober. I have learned to love going to meetings and trying to practice the principles in all my affairs.

It was only the GRACE of my higher power that kept me sober in my early days when I was trying to do it Steve's way. I have tools now to deal with life on life's terms. Gratefully yours, Steve M



From Daily Reflections, p. 259 Sept. 7

"OUR SIDE OF THE STREET"

We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do. His faults are not discussed. We stick to our own.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, pp. 77-78

I made amends to my dad soon after I quit drinking. My words fell on deaf ears since I had blamed him for my troubles. Several months later I made amends to my dad again. This time I wrote a letter in which I did not blame him nor mention his faults. It worked, and at last I understood! My side of the street is all that I'm responsible for and — thanks to God and A.A. — it's clean for today.

The Disease of Self

It has been said alcoholism is the “disease of self.” This could not be more true for myself. Being the oldest of 5 didn't help that. Among my siblings, I was always the first in line for anything. When I started drinking and using drugs, that only got worse. It was only after getting sober I learned that my self-centered world was part of the disease. In this case it is the thinking part of the disease. Alcohol and drug abuse were merely an external manifestation of the problem between my ears. This is why we say “I came for my drinking and stayed for my thinking.” For this alcoholic it was a way to avoid the feelings associated with this misguided thinking: depression, isolation, hopelessness, low self-esteem, and feeling different from other human beings. I thought the world revolved around me yet few if any of the things I wanted out of life were coming my way. This is a recipe for the feelings just mentioned. Worse yet, these feelings haunted me on a daily basis, creating a self-perpetuating cycle which took me further and further from a solution. I had heard these tapes so often in my head that I came to believe them. It wasn't until being sober for many years that another AA member pointed out that all thoughts are not true, they are simply thoughts.

So now what? How was I to sort out what is true and what is not? For starters I don't recommend being your own

psychotherapist. Having a sponsor and using him works much better. This was one of the first steps toward getting out of myself and thinking I had to come up with the answers. I have been very fortunate to have had wonderful sponsors over the years. When I approached my current sponsor with “I feel depressed” or “I'm not good enough,” he would usually ask if I had reached out to another member of the program to see how they were doing. My next impulse was to punch him in the nose which fortunately I've never done. This reaction illustrated my resistance to what he had suggested and underscored my lack of willingness to consider options other than what I thought I needed. Yes, that hurt my ego big time because I knew he was right. Nevertheless, my brain still tried convincing me that in my current state of mind, helping someone else was impossible and certainly would have no effect on how I felt. Now there's a thought that was simply not true, yet my resistance to the alternative was incredibly strong.

Despite having had a good education, I have been a slow learner in AA. Fast forward many years and I found myself as the General Service Representative (GSR) for my home group. This meant attending district and area business meetings, something I was really not interested in. But I take commitments to any position seriously and went anyway, often sharing a ride with a new person in my life, my “service sponsor.” Almost without fail, I would dread going on the way there, and was glad to have gone on the way home. This was my introduction to service work and one of my first experiences getting outside of myself. An added bonus was that both myself and service sponsor had common interests outside of AA which helped create a real friendship. I was no longer alone!

At a “Full Area Assembly” six or seven years ago I heard a young guy talk about getting sober in prison. He had been sober for ten years. This had a profound effect on me. He emphasized that had others from the outside not brought a meeting into the prison, he would not be sober today, and may not have even been alive. A short time later I contacted the volunteer coordinator at the local jail and went through the required background check and orientation required of all volunteers. I began attending a Thursday evening meeting at the jail which much to my surprise, became the highlight of my week. It wasn't long before realizing the only difference between the inmates and myself was not getting caught. That was a real eye opener. Furthermore, I met other AA volunteers from areas other than my home town. I was not alone! What struck me most about attending the meetings at that jail was the gratitude expressed by those attending for simply having shown up so the meeting could take place. That made me feel pretty good.

Then along came COVID. This shut down all AA meetings at the jail. Within a short period of time I felt a hole in my sobriety. I really missed that meeting. When the pandemic began to ease, I looked for other jails and prisons where I might go to carry the message of AA because it was apparent the jail I had been visiting would not be open to volunteers for a long time. I found a prison in another AA district nearby. There had been no AA meetings there since well before COVID. The new meeting has been up and running for just over a month and has been well attended from the start. The hole in my sobriety is being filled by new faces. Once again, the gratitude expressed by those attending has been notable. In response I usually share that the men attending have helped me stay sober more than they realize. It is by "giving it away" that I reap the benefits of AA. My sponsor was right. Reaching out to another recovering member of the fellowship is one of the best ways to quiet the false thoughts the disease runs through my brain on a regular basis.

Looking back, I had no idea what a profound affect attending that one Full Area Assembly would have on my sobriety. Helping others is what AA is all about. In fact, that's how it started, one alcoholic sharing his experience, strength, and hope with another. May your road through sobriety be filled with abundant opportunities to help others.

Tyler



Hi! Everyone

My name is Marge and I am a alcoholic. Today I woke up and I wasn't sick. I like to say that every morning to remember and keep my memory green. For 11 years I woke up every day feeling sick, shaky, not remembering what I did or said the night before. Waking up with no money in my pocket, nervous, depressed. Fearful of everything and everyone. I saw no way out, no solution. I thought I was going crazy, insane, sometimes I just wanted to end it all but was too afraid to do it. One day I asked, for help! I stuck my hand out to another woman in AA. It was the hardest thing I ever did, to get honest for once in my life and admit to another person I didn't have the answers. I didn't know what to do and how to clean up the mess I was in. This woman shared her

experience with alcohol! What alcohol did to her! I never thought about what alcohol did to me, I always thought about what it did for me. Alcohol had turned on me! Before I thought that alcohol was my friend, that was a big mistake. It destroyed everything that was important to me, my family, my friends, I didn't know how to be a person. I was a animal!

This woman shared her experience, strength and hope. She asked, me to take the experiment! Just give AA a try. Keep an open mind! Don't pick up the First drink! That I was a very sick person and that I had a disease. But I was not a disgrace! AA has meetings all over and at all times of the day. They even have zoom meetings now. You can go online and read the Big Book of alcoholics Anonymous. I got a sponsor, went to as many meetings as I could. Got phone numbers of other women in AA. Used the phone when I felt like drinking. The love in the rooms of AA felt like nothing I ever experienced before. I was not alone any more. I was surrounded by people who understood. My sponsor took me through the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and showed me the program of recovery. The 12Steps to recovery! I encourage all who are reading this right now to put your hand out, Ask for Help! You won't regret it. I don't! I Don't know where I would have ended up if I continued to drink. I don't even want to think about it. I lived in a very dark place back then. AA turned the Light on for me and it can for you too.

Thoughts to consider....

Courage is the willingness to accept fear and act anyway.

We tell our stories to each other and we manage to stay sober when we attend meetings and help other alcoholics. A few years ago I attended some AA visits to Comstock prison in New York. It was an unforgettable experience. A man told me that his big fear was not knowing if he would be able to keep sober when he got out. That was probably about 5 years ago and I still pray frequently for him. When I looked into his eyes I saw Jesus Christ.

My own story is not all that exciting but there should be something helpful in it for someone who is in prison even though my own prison experience was sending people to prison during the 10 years that I was a judge. Whenever I was assigned to a new county my first

activity was to visit the prison. I often had bag lunches with staff persons at the local prison.

I had a good home and a happy childhood. My father was a judge and all I wanted was to be like him. When I graduated from Law school I clerked for a judge in Jersey City. I moved to Vermont after 10 years as a lawyer in New Jersey. It was what they call "the geographic cure" because my life in New Jersey was getting worse and worse from my drinking. When I drank I could not stop and gradually my life became miserable. I could not live without alcohol. I tried many times and many ways to quit but always ended up drunk and usually doing terrible things.

Nothing changed in Vermont. It just kept getting worse. One of the many experiences was driving off a bridge in an open jeep unbelted. I was catapulted through the air and landed on rocks in a river. My seventh child was born that night and I had to go next door to borrow a car to take my wife to the hospital. I swore that night "never again" but about 30 days later I was back at it -drinking and doing things just as bad and progressively worse.

I went to AA in 1976 and discovered the concept of "one day at a time." It worked; I quit drinking and soon after I quit going to meetings. I picked up again in 1981- "Just drinking beer." I would sit at the bar drinking beer and feeling sorry for the poor alcoholics who were drinking shots and beer. Yet they all went home at about 10 and I usually ran out of mischief about 2 or 3 in the morning and staggered home stinking from drunkenness and other things I prefer not to put in writing even though this is anonymous.

After 6 months I hit the bottom having done all the "not yet's" of my previous drinking life. I went back to AA and this time I did it their way. Meetings every week sometimes two or three in a week. I got a sponsor and started working through the steps. After two years I was appointed a Vermont Judge and served in that office for 10 years. I went to meetings almost daily and basically became a new man through AA. The combination of what I learned in AA and what I learned as a Judge led me to my real career which turned out to be Mediation which I did for 24 years and just recently retired. I go to a meeting almost every day and I practice the principles of AA in all my affairs.

I have a strong desire to get involved in the prison ministry of AA and that is why I have written this story

My name is Art and I am an alcoholic with 41 years of continuous sobriety.



AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Why all this insistence that every A.A. must hit bottom first? The answer is that few people will sincerely try to practice the A.A. program unless they have hit bottom. For practicing A.A.'s remaining eleven Steps means the adoption of attitudes and actions that almost no alcoholic who is still drinking can dream of taking. Who wishes to be rigorously honest and tolerant? Who wants to confess his faults to another and make restitution for harm done? Who cares anything about a Higher Power, let alone meditation and prayer? Who wants to sacrifice time and energy in trying to carry A.A.'s message to the next sufferer? No, the average alcoholic, self-centered in the extreme, doesn't care for this prospect— unless he has to do these things in order to stay alive himself."

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 24

"No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master."

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 8

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