

My parents drank and entertained a lot which I thought was normal so there was always booze. My parents also were very active in the community and traveled often, so I was sent off to camp or unsupervised most of the time. My earliest memory of romancing the drink was in the summers and my mom had everything with vodka. I especially liked Tom Collins mix and couldn't wait to add vodka.

When I was 15 I went to a private co-ed school in Maine and pot became my daily drug. We also drank Boons Farm and got drunk and sick. By that time things began to get strange; I was a teenager without parental guidance which caused behavioral problems and rebellion. I didn't have any concept of the real world such as taking classes for a job or any goals. I fell in love young and thought I was in Heaven. When that ended at 19 I began a downward spiral. I didn't have any coping tools to help with my emotions. But I did have alcohol. I choose all my friends who drank and drugged like me, for the next 15 years that became my life. I put myself in danger and never thought about it. No matter where I went my alcoholism came with me. My days were filled with the obsession to drink, never thinking of any consequences to my actions.

In 1991 I had a DWI which was a blessing as I went to alcohol counseling and began to understand the disease. So finally I became sick and tired being sick and tired. I felt horrible and had a hard time in relationships, and I couldn't stop drinking on my own. I also began lying about my drinking.

I came into AA and I happened to live only a couple blocks away from Brown Bag. My Higher Power was already working to help me. I knew NOTHING of recovery or AA I had never heard of Maple Leaf Farm and never went to a rehab. I never planned on getting sober; I didn't know what it was. I just wanted to drink and not be hungover! I was a hot mess and was a poster child for step 1- I didn't have a problem admitting I was a drunk. I didn't know how unmanageable my life really was. With step 2 I also knew I was insane and it says a Higher Power will remove that. I had the gift of desperation and just keep coming to meetings. I was surprised how happy and good people looked, but what's with all the lingo? That took me a while to grasp. Basically everything in life I learned in AA after 6 months. I jumped into the middle of AA and made sobriety a priority in my life.

I heard drinking is not an option no matter what. I worked

hard with a sponsor and had to act "as if." I was told to go to the same step meeting every week and the same BB meeting. I got active in service work and became friends with other alcoholics. And my life began to change. I was able to have fun without drinking. The obsession was lifted early on. I also did Al -anon in the beginning and joined a gym. When I was drinking I could just barley function. Today I'm able to reach my hand out and live the responsibility statement. My life today is totally different. Being sober has allowed me to take leaps of faith and do things that I never did before. I have confidence, high self-esteem and a great job. I have never missed a day of work and have healthy relationships.

Sobriety has given me the right tools to cope with life today, and no matter what life throws at me drinking is not an option. Peace.

~Jane S.
Brown Bag Group



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The Eye Opener



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Your Experience, Strength and Hope Via the Written Word

WHAT IS AA?

Is it an organization? Is it a club? Is it a fraternal society, civic group, cooperative, corporation, course, circle of friends?

By definition AA is a "fellowship".

As stated in our Preamble "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women 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 Daily Reflections points out: "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women united against a common, fatal disease. Each one of our lives is linked to every other, much like the survivors on a life raft at sea. If we all work together, we can get safely to shore." (Daily Reflections, January 10).

The life-raft analogy is very important. As one saying goes: "I get drunk; we stay sober". The

"we" is found in all aspects of the Fellowship: meetings, sponsorship, service work, and various area and regional gatherings of AA members, and now in on-line communications, AA pages, and forums.

"The journey to find God and to do His will one day at a time began with the first word of the First Step...'We', There was power in numbers, there was strength in numbers, there was safety in numbers, and for an alcoholic like me, there was life in numbers. If I had tried to recover alone I probably would have died. With God and another alcoholic I have a divine purpose in my life. I have become a channel for God's healing love." (Daily Reflections, May 22).

As Bill's Story notes (Alcoholics Anonymous, pg. 15) "We commenced to make many fast friends and a fellowship has grown up among us of which it is a wonderful thing to feel a part."

And the key to the way this Fellowship of ours works is AA

unity. It is so important particularly for an egomaniac like me who when he put down the drink in 2002 came from an organizational, "club", "group" world which was often divided into factions, cliques, personalities, partisanship, and internal rivalry where even the stated purpose of such enterprises was frustrated by personal ambition, disagreement, agendas, and gain.

When I came into AA I saw a spiritual organizational purpose which transcended anything I had experienced in any other type of meeting or group. Indeed, AA states that each group is a "spiritual entity". Embodied in the "Fellowship" was principles before personalities and a unity which is necessary for personal survival and sobriety but enabling my AA fellows and myself to realize "The Promises" coming true.

The overriding quality that enables this special "fellowship" is AA unity which "is the most cherished quality our Society

THE ARTICLES CONTAINED HEREIN ARE PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF INDIVIDUAL'S EXPERIENCES.

THEY DO NOT REFLECT THE OPINIONS OR POSITIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EYE OPENER COMMITTEE OR A.A. AS A WHOLE

has...We stay whole or AA dies." (Twelve and Twelve, pg. 129.)

"I know that the Fellowship is ready and equipped to aid each suffering alcoholic at all crossroads in life. In a world beset by many problems, I find this assurance a unique stability.

I cherish the gift of sobriety. I offer God my gratitude for the strength I receive in a Fellowship that truly exists for the good of all members." (Daily Reflections, February 27).

One can be in a room full of people who differ in many ways and, indeed, may have disagreements on many "outside" issues but put them together in the rooms of AA, one can find a spirit of fellowship and any and all "differences" fade to insignificance. Of course like the "life raft" there is the overriding aspect of survival but in our collective effort we have found a pleasant commonality, friendship, and, yes, fun.

As the Big Book says: "We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny". (Alcoholics Anonymous, page 164)

~Dennis McM
Brown Bag Group

MY SAVING GRACE

Why did I ever agree to write something for the Eye Opener? I fear that I have little to say. Yes, I am

an Old Timer but I have no clear idea how AA works. Then, too, I did most everything wrong in my early years of sobriety. Even today I can appear a bit unorthodox to stalwart AAs.

I never expected to get sober, never dared to dream I could stay sober. I was helpless and no human power could help me. Unable to live without alcohol, I drank my way through a few years of AA meetings.

I had lost everything and was in a state of complete demoralization. Close to death, my saving grace was my powerlessness. I was too beaten down to resist the gift of sobriety. Surrender was my only option. I take no credit for my many years of sobriety. I did not get myself sober nor do I keep myself sober. A drink is still an arm's length away and the only thing between myself and a drink is my Higher Power.

For the first twelve years of my sobriety I went to at least one meeting every day. The years passed and sobriety allowed me to have my own business, a house, and a partner. *Seemingly* important things took over my life. I still went to meetings but I had no sponsor, no sponsees, and few AA numbers.

Sobriety was obviously not my first priority and so it all came tumbling down. At twenty-five years sober once again I lost everything. The first time this happened I was given the gift of sobriety and the second time I was given the gift of spiritual freedom.

In recent years I have become more diligent. I no longer take my sobriety for granted. Alcoholism is a progressive disease whether we are drinking or not. Today I focus upon letting go of old ideas. It was always about what the world has done unto me. Now it is about what I do unto the world. The search for beauty is a large part of my spirituality and today I find it in ordinary life.

Know that I wish you a long, slow recovery.

~ A Grateful Alcoholic

ACCEPTANCE IS THE ANSWER

As a newcomer, I want to know what to do to stay sober and feel better.

Don't drink ✓ Go to meetings ✓ Get a sponsor ✓ Work the steps to the best of your ability ✓ Do service work ✓ Identify instead of comparing ✓.

"Sobriety was obviously not my first priority and so it all came tumbling down."

Wait. What? I hear alcoholics compare programs, meetings, step work, spiritual experiences and the value and relative merits of snacks and brewed v. instant coffee and creamer v. 1/2 and 1/2 all the time.

A happy, joyous and free old-timer shared the story of kneeling, knees touching his sponsor's, and of them saying the 3rd step prayer together. When he did that with his sponsor and later with his sponsees, a lightness of being washed over them both. It's been suggested to me to say the 3rd step prayer first thing every morning for the rest of my life and that this practice is my third step work.

I've been told that when you are struggling, share your experience with another alcoholic. I've been told countless times that newcomers should take the cotton out of their ears and put it in their mouths.

I've read "And the psychiatrist [...] but they haven't helped our alcoholism, except in a rare few instances." (AA p308). I've read "Probably every recovered alcoholic has needed and sought professional help of the sort AA does not provide" (Living Sober p23).

I've come to believe that I am an alcoholic, behave as an alcoholic and have lived my entire life alcoholic in every way. Recently, in response to a cry of feeling apart from the fellowship at a meeting, it was suggested that

maybe I should try a different 12-step program.

And when I feel that my program is insulted, demeaned and belittled, when I feel that I am being wronged, I am to remember, "We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick." (AA p66). Am I the only newcomer that feels battered by the fear that "I'm doing it wrong" and "I won't stay sober unless..." and resentful towards those who I project my fear on others as condescension?

What am I supposed to do until my step work matches my need? I know, do more step work. It has been suggested that my perceived suffering is a product of taking myself too seriously, of self-pity and a lack of a sense of proportion. It has been suggested that I will have little peace until I learn to let go and turn these defects of character that drive me, these resentments that give others power over me and the fears that drive them all, over to my Higher Power. Scant solace as I struggle to learn to how to use the tools the program offers and as I work the steps to the best of my (imperfect) ability.

But I've come to believe there is a solution before the solution, that my Higher Power has left me a message, not to make the pain go away but to offer me the panacea of acceptance.

"And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I

am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation—some fact of my life — unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake." (AA p417).

I don't need to compare, don't need to feel better and don't need anybody's program but mine. I'm just where my Higher Power wants me to be, doing what my Higher Power wants me to do, with the sponsor I'm supposed to have. My sponsor, who I love, is taking me through the steps the way that their Higher Power wanted their sponsor to take them through the steps. All I must do is the work in front of me. All I must remember is that acceptance is the answer.

~ Dave W.
Brown Bag Group

TOOLS FOR LIFE

R recently celebrated 25 years of sobriety, which was inconceivable in the beginning. I grew up in Burlington to a well-educated, business family. There's a large age gap in my siblings with me being the youngest. Right from the get go I felt as though I was a mistake or burden. The sad part was I had a very fortunate childhood with lots of opportunity.