

The Eye Opener

Vol 21 No. 1 – March 2021

Your Experience, Strength and Hope Via the Written Word

I'VE FOUND FAITH, STRENGTH, AND A SENSE OF SERENITY

My sobriety date is October 22, 2007. I

have a sponsor and she has a sponsor, and so on, ad infinitum. Sometimes I imagine what that would look like: a sobriety family tree that goes on forever and that is constantly growing and changing. That's the wonder of AA: a massive group of people connected by an invisible thread of sobriety, fellowship, and the 12 Steps. And we all have one thing in common: we are alcoholics.

My story isn't unusual or exciting. I knew for years that I had a problem with alcohol; I drank a lot when I was a teenager and in university and always seemed to not want to stop when the party stopped. As soon as I took a drink, I was thinking of the next one and the next one and the next one after that. I was able to drink "normally" for years, but would have the occasional party or wedding where I let myself go. I always felt guilty afterwards, and people always told me "don't worry, everyone was drinking." But I knew better. I knew that if I let myself go, I would drink myself to death.

As we say in AA, don't take the first drink. When I took that first drink, I wanted that feeling to

continue forever, that sweet place where I was floating, where the kids were occupied and not underfoot, where I felt warm and happy and free, where I didn't have to face myself and the character defects that were ruining my marriage. The drinking ticked up in my late 30's when I was a mother of young children, when we drank wine every night with dinner. I would have my 2 and 1/2 glasses, then be frustrated for the rest of the night. I covered it up well, but soon I would start sneaking vodka before my husband came home. I knew then that I was on a downhill slide that knew no end.

Grace happened. I found recovery in the form of a knowledgeable therapist who finally made me look at my drinking. I'm forever grateful for her. And now 13 years later, many if not all of the Promises, which I did not understand in the beginning, have come true. I have a life second to none. I've found faith, strength, and a sense of serenity that has allowed me to face my fears and do things I never thought I could do. I've changed my life completely, and in doing that, have become a better mother, friend, wife, friend, and now, a teacher. All it takes is one foot in front of the other, one meeting after the other, listening to other alcoholics and reaching out when you need a friend. I want AA always to be there, and for that I am responsible.

~ Joanne B.
Burlington, VT

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

A.A. HAS BEEN THE KEY

I knew my drinking was alcoholic long before I attended my first A.A. meeting. Self-awareness didn't help me stop though. I had to damage my career and lose friends as a result of my drinking before I found the willingness to do anything about it. I tried to stop on my own, but I knew after 24 hours that I would drink again without help. I needed the support of A.A. to not start drinking again, one day at a time.

Since I found A.A., and got over my initial tendency to compare myself to people who had reached lower bottoms than mine, I've never really doubted my alcoholism. The first step came easy to me. I'm three-quarters Irish. I was born thirsty.

As a new-comer, I threw myself into A.A., attending multiple meetings per day, and taking advantage of the 'meeting after the meeting' at local coffee shops. I needed to be babysat by A.A. women to get from one meeting to the next without drinking. Beyond not-drinking, the A.A. steps gave me a framework for living. It became my religion, practiced in the basements and rec. rooms of a variety of churches. The people I met became my people.

But I have struggled with doubting my need for A.A.. At times, I've questioned whether my time and energy could be better put to living a fuller life instead of sitting in repetitive meetings. I've judged old-timers who I thought were attending too many meetings, rather than using their sobriety to expand their experiences. I wanted to socialize with non-alcoholics. I branched away from A.A. in sobriety.

About 3 years ago, my higher power intervened to show me, after 18 years of not-drinking, how much I still needed A.A.. I lost my marriage and my mother within a span of 6 weeks. Life seemed so difficult that I began muttering to myself, "one hour at a time," like a mantra. Suddenly, A.A. meetings were the best thing I had going on. After many years of avoiding meetings, I was not only remembered by a surprising number of people—my people!—but I was welcomed back with open arms (pre-covid, when hugs weren't just virtual).

For the past 3 years, A.A. has been the key to overcoming my double-whammy-loss. And it works! I don't think about suicide as a retirement plan, I have a new, fulfilling job, and I've improved my relationships with humans through step-work with the help of my sponsor. So to the newcomer who may feel overwhelmed by the

wreckage of your past: I hope the pain that got you to A.A. will help you keep coming back.

Today, I don't try to apply actuarial principles to my time in A.A. meetings, or anyone else's. I'm still at risk of feeling too good to go to a meeting on any given day. But I plan to stay active in A.A. this time, for better or worse. The community of A.A. is my higher power, doing for me what I know I cannot do for myself.

~ Sarah P.
Living Sober Group

THEY ACTUALLY CARED ABOUT MY WELL BEING

It was 2014, and my first Tinder date was meeting someone for coffee at lunch time on a Saturday. She seemed interesting, and even though my money was gone and my lease was coming due and I would have no way to renew it, my relationships were mostly gone or ruined, I was alone thousands of miles away from my remaining family and friends, a date seemed like the best use of my time. Especially if I could give the impression that I was put together. I wasn't looking for a way out, or hoping that she would invite me to move in, consciously. But I did often think

about getting a lucky break. ‘The’ relationship, or meeting the right person at the bar was going to fix everything. That’s what I had been banking on for the past two years, when my drinking adventure was first funded. It hadn’t happened yet, but maybe this was the day.

She mentioned that she was an alcoholic, and had been sober for over twenty years. I laughed and related, because one of my parents is an alcoholic. I joked that it should be called a-holes anonymous, and she laughed. She invited me to hear her speak the next day at a meeting, and I considered it - in part because I couldn’t reveal a drinking problem of my own, so the idea had to appear harmless to me. Also because I would surely hear some sort of juicy story that would save some dating time.

We both enjoyed ourselves, and she went to listen to a sponsee’s 5th step. I knew that was some sort of confession, not much else, although I had been to a handful of AA meetings in the past. Three by coercion, one by choice, and I knew that the program was not for me.

It was lunch time, and a Saturday, and sunny - all good reasons to start drinking. So I drove to my favorite local spot and read my book and drank a beer. Then I had another and struck up a conversation with a woman at the bar. We were equally thirsty, and ended up following each other to at least one more bar.

At closing time, I was suddenly lucid, pulling shards of glass out of my mouth. I was with a group of strangers, and we were being asked to leave. As I walked into the fresh air I had the clear thought that I couldn’t do this anymore. It was different than the regretful morning-afters, which I would always change my mind about by five or six pm.

I went to her meeting and listened. I was still drunk and receptive to her challenge to go to thirty meetings in thirty days. The second day I couldn’t find a parking spot at my bar, so I found another meeting and started counting.

A few days later, when I really considered stopping drinking, I was terrified, so I knew it was likely something I needed to do.

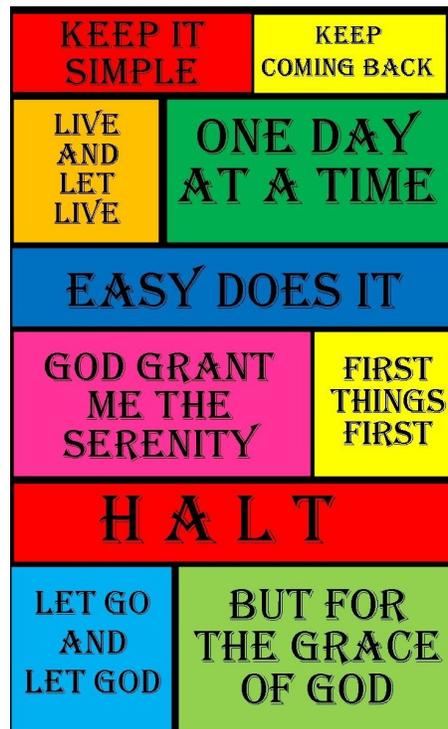
I found an early morning meeting full of happy people with better color than anyone I had been seeing in the bars. And none of them wanted anything from me. They actually cared about my well being. That was my start in AA.

~ *Anonymous*
Burlington, VT

HOW I STAY SOBER DURING A PANDEMIC

The time is 1981. The place is *Bangkok, Thailand*

Late one afternoon, on Dec. 1st, 1981, I attended my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. It was there that the seed of hope was planted in me. There was no pandemic then, but the first week we arrived in Bangkok, there was a military coup. Planes and helicopters were flying overhead dropping propaganda. The Bangkok Post printed photos of troops, armored tanks and soldiers depicting a great show of strength and force. My daughter and I were in lockdown in a hotel and weren't allowed to leave. There was a travel ban at that time. No one was allowed into the city or out of it. Not understanding much Thai, we really didn't know what would happen next. Fear and anxiousness were both familiar feelings. Life



seemed uncertain each moment, it felt surreal.

In that first meeting, I surrendered to a new beginning, a new way of life.

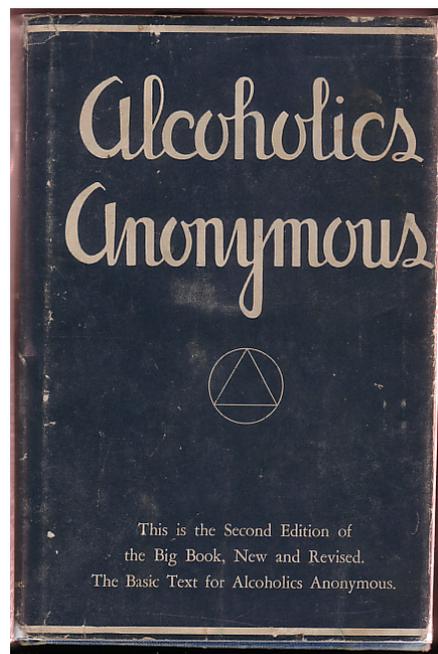
I had a moving spiritual experience through the honest sharing, the welcoming spirit and the unconditional love in that meeting. I found my Higher Power there. I cried with relief. I felt I had come home at last. These were people I could relate to. They told me I could stay sober just for today and that I might never drink again. I believed what they told me. I learned that God was good, orderly direction and that God worked through people. I was introduced to the Twelve Steps of recovery, a set of principles that I could learn to live by, taking one step at a time, caring and sharing with another alcoholic. I was not alone anymore.

At first, I compared my drinking experience to others and was told that it was not about how much you drink or when you drink; it was about what alcohol does to you and the people around you. I was asked “are you willing to go to any lengths to stay sober?” I felt that willingness completely. I wanted what they had, a new way of life without using alcohol. My obsession to drink was removed. I learned my primary purpose was to stay sober and help other alcoholics.

I learned that alcoholism is a progressive life or death disease of denial and isolation. It is a three-

fold disease of the body, mind and spirit. Being an alcoholic didn't make me a bad person. I was a sick person trying to get well. In AA, I found a new way of thinking.

Fast forward to the present, 2020. I am living sober in a global pandemic that feels surreal. Thanks to the patience and instruction of my wonderful daughter, and folks in the program, I now attend Zoom meetings on my phone and computer. Through being a sober woman, I have the desire and



willingness to learn something new each day. Through Zoom, I attend a meeting with my sponsor Sandy in St. Stephen, New Brunswick Canada. I have gone to the Open group in Fredericton, N.B where I was a member for many years. I reach out to others through phone calls, texting, taking a walk, giving

support and sponsoring women who have reached out to me for help. We have done step studies over the phone. One morning I zoomed to a meeting in New Mexico, another time to Nova Scotia, Canada. I am thrilled to have this zoom technology where I can attend meetings and see the people's faces. I consider it a daily blessing for sure during this time of the Covid pandemic. I have a daily structure of prayer and a quiet time in the morning. I practice using my hobbies that I developed during these years of sobriety. I have made a quilt for my grandson and I do lots of sewing projects along with playing my keyboard, writing letters and journaling.

I always remember that there is nothing like the disease of isolation called “alcoholism”, which separates us from being present to ourselves and our families, living in remorse and guilt, in fear and denial of reality, with hangover mornings, feelings of helplessness and the yearning for a new life. In sobriety, we experience the joy and gratitude of living.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, I thank my Higher Power, the God of my own understanding, my dear family and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous in my daily life. I choose to wear a mask and follow the protocols of our state. I have the

willingness to try to live in the solutions, to zoom to meetings, to practice good orderly direction, and to help others every day. We remember, we are not alone anymore. We are all in this together. Because of my continual spiritual awakening, there is life on the inside now. Always, we begin again each day. Today, I have a grateful heart. Thanks be to God, to my wonderful AA family here and across the country and the world.

Keep the faith!

Blessings always.

~ *Janice W., 6/28/1981*
Early Risers and Promises Groups

TRUST GOD, CLEAN HOUSE, HELP OTHERS

When I was getting sober, it often seemed that my ability to cope with life was below the average person's, and that my problems were incomprehensible and overwhelming. I felt alone and hopeless. I've heard speakers at meetings say that they felt that everyone else had gotten an instruction manual for life, but they had not, and that was how I felt. I watched as my peers were in successful relationships, on fulfilling career paths, healthy and secure, while I was experiencing one painful alcohol - driven disaster after another.

Luckily for me, the only thing I needed when I got to AA was willingness - and I had just enough to stick around and let the fellowship and a sponsor guide me along the path to a "new freedom and a new happiness." I had a spiritual awakening as a result of working the steps, and I was shown how to practice AA principles in all my affairs.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a big practice opportunity, to say the least. It has brought up some very strong doses of difficult feelings - fear, anxiety, frustration, powerlessness, anger, exhaustion. It has taken away the routines and simple pleasures of my AA life - the meetings, the meetings before and after the meetings, the hugs, the eyeball-to-eyeball rigorous honesty conversations.

At the same time, this challenge has activated the AA infrastructure that is now programmed into me, creating new inspiration and connections. And I have come back again and again to this bedrock certainty: my primary purpose is to stay sober and to help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. This conviction guides my choices and clarifies my path.

"Trust God, clean house, help others." This is Dr. Bob's summary of the AA way of life; this is my path, and I can follow this path right here in the middle of the pandemic.

First - "Trust God." How do I do that? Fortunately, this doesn't say "Define God." So, I can stay away from figuring out what God is and simply trust that God is and take actions that reinforce this trust. I ask for help in the morning and give thanks at night, and in between, when I notice that I'm disturbed, I ask for guidance and remember that God, not me, is in charge. I have made a little progress with this over the years and am getting a little better at it. It helps to have sponsees call with their struggles - I can tell them to trust God and then remember it myself.

Second - "Clean house." I've been sober a pretty long time, and it is astonishing that there can still be so much clutter that I never noticed before. I need constant work on this one - formally in step work and informally, like when someone gives me some "helpful" feedback about something I really need to look at but don't want to. This will keep me busy during COVID!

Third - "Help others." A lot of people (Normies) I know have felt powerless to do any service during COVID because their usual volunteer opportunities aren't safe. For me, I have been able to be active in my home groups - chairing meetings, speaking, reaching out to newcomers, serving as treasurer, attending group conscience, offering support to my groupies, staying close to

sponsees, etc. And I know that I could do much more. What a gift!

Instead of feeling like I have less ability to cope, I feel like I have more than many people I know - I have a design for living, a Higher Power, and a world-wide fellowship to help me through the pandemic. Lucky!

~ Anonymous

LIFE IN A PANDEMIC!

Ha! Sobriety in a Pandemic! Both these statements seem unbearable. Back when I was actively drinking, the sounds of a pandemic were magic words to my alcoholic mind. Does this mean I am forced to go nowhere, stay home, isolate and nobody will find out what I'm doing? Sounds like a dream for a brief moment. Then I go back to the last few years of my drinking career. I attempted to master the art of isolation and hiding on a daily basis, which only led me down a road of pain, depression and shame. Drinking in isolation was how I lived so much of my life outside of work and raising two teenagers. The agony of trying to stay sane for them was hard enough. Every waking hour, every morning began another day of fighting to not take that first drink. Over the last 20 years, I've had countless attempts at sobriety

and only few successes. I am approaching two years now and the thought of starting over, the thought of the emotional weight of this disease is unbearable to even want to attempt to go back to. Trust me; sober days have been hard but not nearly as hard as the last few years of my drinking. I would have to say, staying sober in the Pandemic may have saved my life. The effort to get to a meeting when I could barely get out of bed some days was so much easier. I just opened up my phone and got on a zoom call. If I wasn't feeling presentable I could turn off the video and listen. Being a part of something was what helped me, even when nothing sunk in. The voices of the folks I hear every morning Monday-Friday at 8am were there. It gave me a sense of home and belonging. It gave me a drive to come back each day, one day at a time. I got some service positions during the pandemic cause my desire to stay sober was so strong. I'm actually not sure if it was my desire to stay sober or desire to not drink that pushed me more. So that's what I did. Like they say, get in the middle of AA and you will be just fine. I tried to speak up when I was down and listen when I could. A wise AA member said, "it's not what you get out of AA, it's what you give." I'm trying to give as much as I can, but I know on the days I can't and don't feel strong enough, those are

the days I receive. You see, putting down the drink is just the beginning of the wonderful process of sobriety. The second part involves a little work, trust and willingness to let go of control. I've tried to stay sober my way many many times over the years. I've tried sports, meditation, acupuncture, relationships and much more. The problem was, I kept drinking and all these "solutions" were a form of control. The pandemic at first felt hard to come to terms with but over time, the most important thing I needed to focus on was my sobriety and emotional well-being. I sure wasn't going to control a global pandemic. AA gave me a safe place to cope with this global change and a community that supported each other. So I began to learn to sit with whatever emotions come in and give the will over to the universe. "Thy will, not mine be done." What a gift to have this program during a time like this. I'm so grateful.

~ Chip
Early Risers Group

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