

The Eye Opener

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Your Experience, Strength, and Hope via the Written Word

Serenity Prayer Mantra

We all have

different paths to recovery. I was very fortunate to be introduced to the AA program at a very young age. I had become romantically involved with a woman who I had been drinking with but now she was trying to stay sober and get custody of her son. I had been a daily drinker, spending every night in bars with drinking friends. My relationship with this woman progressed quickly and in no time we were living together. As a show of support for her need to stay sober, I stopped going out to bars and went to a few AA meetings with her. I could immediately identify with the feelings that people were sharing at meetings, and for the first time in my life I considered a different way of life - living sober.

It surely was grace that I was given at this moment in my life, when my drinking had reached a bottom and I was destitute spiritually and mentally, that I heard the message of recovery from addiction. I was open minded enough at the time, the fog lifted a little bit, and I was able to see how much my drinking and drug use was really the problem in my life.

Now sober for the first time in my adult life, I was trying to live without using alcohol to block out the

feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, anger and fear filled my thoughts. Now having some grasp of the first step, I needed to find a way to keep staying sober on a daily basis and cope with the emotions and thoughts that tore away at my peace of mind. Of course going to meetings, working with a sponsor, and connecting with other recovering alcoholics in the fellowship would be essential.

At some point I heard an amazing idea, that those negative thoughts that kept playing over and over in

GOD GRANT ME

the *Serenity* to accept the things I cannot change
the *Courage* to change the things I can
and the *Wisdom* to know the difference

my mind like an old tape could be erased and changed. I began with a practice learned in AA - when these thoughts would come up for me, I would start saying the serenity prayer, usually silently in my head and I would think about each part of the prayer. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. I cannot change people, places or things. I am powerless over those. The courage to change the things I can. My thoughts, my attitude and my actions are things I can, with your help, control. And the wisdom to know the difference, which really just means when I'm upset there is probably something I need to accept; thy will not mine be done. (p. 2)

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In my early recovery the Serenity Prayer became like a mantra that I repeated over and over and over again throughout the day whenever I was upset, stressed, angry, or resentful. Over time, I feel like those negative mind states, like dark taped messages, began to change. They had less control over me, and peace of mind came more easily. I feel like it took time and patient work, but now more often when I am feeling upset I have more of a buffer, time to pause and not overreact and make a difficult situation worse. For this AA tool and so many others I am so very grateful. Try it! It works if you work it!

~Glenn S.

Common Solution Group

was fascinated by drinking. I grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood in Queens, NY. There were bars on most corners. Irish bars, German bars and Italian bars abound. Down the street from my family home was a neighborhood German beer hall. I can remember from an early age I was drawn to the place. I would stare into the windows and see everyone having a grand time.

sight I qualified for AA that first night drinking. I went on to drink the same way, always seeking oblivion, for the next 16 years.

My troubles began quickly. I had 15 car accidents, lost 22 jobs, and went through two marriages all related to my inability to control my drinking. I first experienced AA in 1983. I attended for a while. After



A Bum No More

I am grateful to be

free of the obsession to drink alcohol. While my parents were not alcoholic, there was a long history of alcoholism in the extended family. My parents were immigrants from Ireland. I felt out of place, insecure and introverted. There was always this sense of isolation from the rest of the world. I had friends but I never felt "a part of."

Long before I took my first drink I

When I was old enough, I told myself I would hang out there.

I took my first drink at 14 years old. A friend and I stole a bottle of rye whiskey from his house, and we sat by the railroad tracks and finished the bottle between us going shot for shot. Needless to say, I was intoxicated, had difficulty getting home, got sick, and was extremely hungover the next day. When I met up with my friend, we discussed how great it was and how we couldn't wait to do it again. I quickly became a full-blown alcoholic. In hind-

the meetings I would go to my old haunts and drink soda. That worked for a while, but I didn't change people, places, and things.

I continued to come in and out of AA between 1983 and 1990. I always believed I would be able to control my drinking. I never got an AA sponsor, would arrive just as meetings started and bolted right after. People in AA would attempt to reach me but I wanted no part of the program. The God concept turned me off. I had no use for God other than foxhole prayers (p. 3)



like, "God please make that cop behind me turn right."

I finally hit bottom Friday of labor weekend 1990. I was in terrible shape. I knew I would die soon. My health was precarious. Toward the end of my drinking I was hanging out in lower quality places. I would make fun of the itinerant bums who would stumble into the bars and beg for money. They would be beat up, bandaged, and in rough shape. I could always find a way to convince myself I wasn't like them. The bums were the real alkies.

My last drink was on a three-day bender. At one point I fell flat on my face outside a bar and tore my face to shreds. When I came around that next morning, I

looked in the mirror and I knew I wasn't any better than the bums. At that moment I remembered from AA that members asked God for help. I got on my knees and cried out to God. The help came. I called the AA hotline in my area. An AA member asked me to go to a meeting. I went and met Allan and many other wonderful AA's. I was truly the most important person in that room. I got a sponsor that night. For the first time in my life, I listened to someone else and took direction. I found a Power greater than myself. My life began to change. I became employable. My kids came back into my life. Family relations got better, and they began to slowly trust me. The dam-

age I had done to family, friends, others emotionally, and financially was extensive. I never thought I would be able to straighten it all out. A long period of reconstruction was ahead. Through the 12 steps of AA I have been able to clean up my past and find peace most days.

~Phil C.

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Came. Came To. Came to Believe.

Last Sunday,

I was at the Essex 8:00 a.m. Step meeting on the Second Step. It was, as it is every week, the “perfect step” for this alc.

The phrase from the chapter that stuck in my head was, “those filled with self-sufficiency who have cut themselves off.” I’ve only ever read that line one way: as applying to before hitting bottom. My life while “out there” consisted of jackpots, one after another. Followed by drinking to bury my frustration, anger, remorse, and self-loathing.

Still, I thought self-sufficiency was the only strategy I had in my arsenal. And I’d bang my head against the next wall. Just like the last wall.

On this particular morning, though, I remembered the parsing of Step 2 – “Came.” “Came to.” “Came to believe.” It hit me that that exact thing happens to me every day. Twenty-three years deep into this journey.

Among the opportunities for service my HP has put in my life is the role of head high school football coach. My staff are quick thinking men of deep conviction who I would describe as “alpha.” Men who, while problem solving, come at it hard and believe themselves to be right. The catch is, sometimes they don’t agree on a best course of action.

And that’s where I – and this Second Step insight – come in. If I contribute anything, it is in identifying a collaborative middle ground. But even after years of doing it, it still isn’t easy. I carry within me a constant undercurrent of comparison to others (and coming up

short), of self-doubt, and a hesitancy-to-speak.

It feels like I used to feel when I was a kid and my two very violently alcoholic parents would argue. And the arguments would turn to physical battles. Terrifying fights over which I was powerless, yet for which I was the only referee available. God wasn’t answering prayers to make them stop, so I had to step in. Self-sufficiency, right? But only because I could think of no other choice.

As I thought about this last Sunday, it dawned on me that “self-sufficiency” wasn’t doin’ it. I realized for the first time in my sober life that I was cutting myself off from God every time I felt like I had to “manage” a conversation. I realized that “Came”, “Came to,” and “Came to believe” happens every day, multiple times per day. If I’ll let it.

We alcoholics really do have built in forgetters. We don’t just forget the painful outcomes of our past. We forget that God is always present.

That’s why I feel like I’m constantly “coming to” – often, right in the middle of an encounter. It’s like I remember that God goes before me, sits beside me, and has it all in Their Divine Hands. My job is to listen, to offer up the best I have to offer, and trust.

~Rahn F.

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