

The Eye pener

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Your Experience, Strength, and Hope via the Written Word

Finally, I Gave AA a Try

My name is Brendan, and I'm an alcoholic. I got sober at 41 years old, after 22 years of heavy, daily drinking.

My mother grew up in an alcoholic household and warned me often from an early age that if I drank alcohol, I would likely be an alcoholic as well. I heeded my mother's warning through high school, never picking up a drink, but I was depressed, anxious, lonely and angry, and I had no solutions on how to deal with these emotions, so I kept them bottled up inside. I felt apart from others, like the world was conspiring against me. I was often asked, "Why can't you just be happy?" or "Why are you so angry?"

By the time I made it to college, the appeal of alcohol and those who consumed it was too great, and at age 19 I had my first drink. I experienced relief, ease, belonging, and what felt like happiness. It didn't take long for alcohol to become a part of my daily existence - I got caught in a cycle of fear, guilt and shame, and the only solution I could see was to continue drinking.

By my early twenties, I started asking myself if I was an alcoholic, but because in my mother's eyes that was the worst thing someone could be, I stuffed the answer to that question deep down. I certainly didn't

share the fear with anyone, and if ever someone dared to question my drinking or suggest that I had a problem, I promptly cut them out of my life so that I could continue on unabated.

In my thirties, my daily drinking gradually increased, as did my binge drinking. I regularly blacked out after a night of drinking. My wife would sometimes question my drinking - suggesting that maybe I take it easy for a bit. So I would - I'd take a month off of drinking. Or I'd limit myself to two drinks per night. Or pledge to only drink with others. Or only drink when I was happy.

I was sure that the only answer to my problems was finding a way to control my drinking. When I could control it, life felt good. Unfortunately, those periods never lasted long, and as soon as I'd broken any one of my rules of drinking, I'd be right back to where I'd started. (p. 2)



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I felt helpless. I knew I couldn't go on like this, but I also didn't believe a life without alcohol would be worth living. And from what little I knew of AA, I didn't think it'd work for me, a lifelong atheist.

After seeing a close family member hit rock bottom with alcoholism, knowing that I was headed there myself, I decided to give up drinking. But I wasn't feeling any better. The solution I'd always had to my problems was no longer an option, but my problems were still there.

So finally, I gave AA a try. I learned that it wasn't a Christian organization, that it wasn't full of sad and lonely people. That if I worked hard at it, I could have what I saw in others - I could have a spiritual experience with a higher power, and feel OK for the first time in my life.

Working the steps of AA with a sponsor has given me a life I never could have imagined. I am learning to clear away the wreckage of my past, and actually live life in harmony with myself and others.

~Brendan

Early Bird

A Moment of Desperation (And Grace)

I cannot remember a single point in my entire life prior to sobriety that I did not feel sad and misplaced on this planet. It seems as though I was born into this world with a permeability to all things; one therapist told me that I was "porous." This sensitivity placed me at high risk for taking on pain that no child is equipped to handle while also failing to develop a healthy sense of self. It's no wonder I needed something to dampen my sensitivity and numb myself so that I could survive in my own skin. It is my belief that alcohol in a way helped me survive until I could find my way into AA.

I am hardwired to live in scarcity and fear. As one of my favorite authors said, it's as if there is only so much pie to go around, and when I watch other people get a piece of the pie, it leaves less for everyone else. In my 20s, as I watched the pie get smaller and smaller, my fear and sadness grew. Pervasive fear rooted in unworthiness was (and is) paralyzing.

The end of my drinking was unceremonious. I was renting a room in a house full of drunks (conveniently close to bars!) in Houston, Texas. I had somehow managed to make a respectable living as an engineer, but the wheels were starting to come off the cart. My world kept getting smaller and darker. I contemplated suicide on a regular basis. Alcohol led to me to behave in ways that were incongruent with the self I wanted to be. I really believed by the end of my drinking it was not my destiny in life to be happy, to have a family, or to be loved. (p. 3)

**First
Things
First.**

A series of moments of honesty and grace led to the slightest crack in a door that God used to send me on this journey toward recovery. In a moment of desperation (and grace), I had reached out to an old friend and the subject of drinking came up. I knew nothing about alcoholism but did admit I had “been drinking a little.” She suggested I find a psychiatrist, and in my attempts to find one, I unknowingly ended up in the office of a doctor who specialized in substance use disorders, and I “accidentally” ended up in an IOP program. That’s where I learned about AA.

I knew nothing about AA and initially felt ambivalent about their plan. However, I somehow managed to hear enough that resonated with me. I was not ecstatic to be in AA at first, but I had some sense that I would soon succumb to, and be crushed under, the weight of my depression and despair, which made me just desperate enough to take suggestions. Today, I always smile when the 3rd Tradition is

read— “the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking”-- because without a single desire to stop drinking I managed to get (and stay) sober for almost 15 years now. The steps saved my life, and AA provides the support structure to enable me to comfortably live in my own skin.

~Lindsey T.

Early Bird



A Different Kind of Release

I was sitting

on the floor of a bathroom, my friends above me asking if I was OK. How did I get here? How long had I been there? Why were they asking me if I was OK? The last thing I remembered was drinking a plastic cup of beer from the keg and talking to people from my school that I never had the courage to speak to before. That was the first time I got drunk. I was 16.

I don’t remember a chunk of time from that party, and I don’t know what I did to concern my friends. What I do remember is (p.4)

Early Bird Meeting (Closed)

7:30 a.m.

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format varies | wheelchair accessible

the incredible feeling that the alcohol gave me – a strong sense of belonging and of being part of the group as well as the courage to be myself and interact with people. This was magical – alcohol released me from the anxiety and fear of not fitting in that had always plagued me. The fear I had about the black-out was not enough to keep me from drinking again. Alcohol clearly was the answer to my problems!

I chased that feeling of release from myself for the next 20 years. I drank to escape my feelings of inadequacy; I drank to release social anxiety; I drank because I was fearful; I drank because someone treated me badly; I drank to forget the bad things I did; I drank because I felt free. At some point things changed, and I drank because I had to. Once I started, I could not stop and often experienced black-outs. My drinking prevented me from being truly there for my friends and loved ones and being in a real relationship with other human beings. I was able to maintain and even excel in my employment, but everything else in my life was falling apart. Alcohol had me trapped – I couldn't not drink, and I couldn't stop drinking once I started, but I also couldn't imagine a life without alcohol. I needed a release from the grips of alcohol, but at the same time, I thought this meant that I needed to learn to drink normally.

I started trying all of the tricks that I've since heard many AAs share. Never drink before 5:00 pm; always have something to eat before having a drink; stop drinking liquor and only drink wine or beer, and then only beer; therapy; drinking a glass of water after every drink, and on and on. None of it worked –

I always ended up drunk, and surprisingly to me, my drinking got worse.

Desperate and empty of all hope, I was given the gift of reaching out for help. I went to an AA meeting and had the willingness to listen to the suggestions of the sober people in the room. The tiny bit of willingness I had was enough for me to start my journey of sobriety. I got a sponsor and started reading the Big Book. I found I had a desire to not drink and started accumulating some sober days. As I started working the steps, my life started getting better, and amazingly, I wasn't drinking – I didn't even have the desire to drink! How had this happened? I went to a meeting every day, I read the Big Book, I called my sponsor and other alcoholics, I prayed to my higher power every day, and I was released from the obsession of alcohol.

As I have continued to work the steps in my life, one day at a time, I have experienced release from my character defects: fear, anger, self-seeking, self-pity, loneliness and apartness. This is not a "one and done" solution – I receive these gifts when I continue to work the steps in my daily life. I came to AA to be released from alcohol and AA gave me the miracle of sobriety and so much more! I am so grateful for AA and for the chance to have a life much better than I could have ever imagined.

~Meghan P.

Early Bird



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