



NATURE COAST JOURNAL

MAY 2020



I'm Dean and I'm an alcoholic. Our stories disclose in a general way what we use to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. I find it difficult to put twenty-three years of drinking and almost thirty-six years of sobriety in a general way. I didn't want to be an alcoholic, I didn't want to come to these meetings, and I didn't want to be one of you people, yet here I am. My last drink was May 9th, 1984.

We grew up on the wrong side of the tracks. I just didn't know that there was a difference. Everyone was poor and everyone drank. My father was a mean drunk and never needed much of an excuse to dole out an ass-whooping. All I ever remember was that I was no damn good and was never going to amount to anything. I learned about love from the back of a hand, a belt, or anything close enough to swing. Having the police and/or fire department at the house because of one of my father's drunken bouts or because he passed out and caught a couch, chair, or bed on fire.



When I was nine years old there was a father and son softball game and I was really looking forward to it. This was the time I could do something with my dad, and he'd be proud of me. Only thing was, I was either too young or too small or whatnot. All those feel-

ings of being unloved, unwanted, and no damn good hit hard. I wandered over to the beer keg and starting drinking, and I got drunk! I ended up in my own world and I felt good. I have no idea what happened at that game and I didn't care.

That night I got sick, I got *really* sick. All my father said was "you think that's bad wait until the morning." It didn't matter. I didn't care how sick I was, all I cared about was that drinking had made me feel better and I knew from that moment on I was going to do it again. It was like a switch went off inside me.

I did farm work as a child. In those days you needed a 'green card' signed by your parents if you were underage. I picked fruits, potatoes, cabbages, and baled hay along with the migrants that came north seasonally. Over the years I washed dishes, waited tables, cooked, tended bar, went to school to learn about computers in 1970-71, worked construction, dug ditches, built houses, poured concrete, and even had my own mason business where my phone number was at a local bar. I labored on highway maintenance projects, learned to operate a multitude of construction equipment, went to school nights and weekends to become an engineer (I was educated, just not licensed, and designed scaffold, jacking, and pulling systems for repairing bridges), became a Supervisor, worked Emergency Management, and retired with 30 years in (*continued on page 3*)...

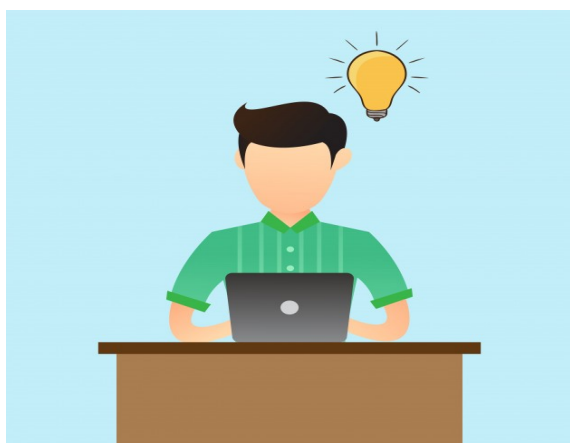
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Steps | Traditions | Concepts

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Tradition 5: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Concept 5: Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.



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(continued from front page)... NYSDOT managing bridge maintenance. I accomplished most of those when drinking. Always going from job to job due to my need to drink. I slept on the streets, in hobo jungles, abandoned buildings, bridge abutments, and the Oldsmobile Hotel. My drinking took to me places that made life interesting, to say the least. I just didn't care.

By the time I was thirteen I was a daily drinker. If I wasn't drinking, I was wondering where my next drink was coming from. I ended up in jail that year for drunk and disorderly. I was glad there were bars between me and my mother that night. At sixteen I was arrested again. Because of my attitude, I was court-ordered to Mental Health where they decided that better living through electricity would improve my attitude. It did, just not for the better. Jails were commonplace. It provided safety, food, clothing, and a place to stay. When times and money got really tough, I sold myself so I could drink. There wasn't anything I wouldn't do to get drunk.

In my senior year of high school, I was released from a ten-day sentence at the County Jail the same day we were having yearbook pictures. Of the 107 classmates, I have a grey square above my name. The jailers thought it would be funny to give me half of a haircut when they released me. At one time I was facing 38 years in State prison for felony drug sales. Drugs didn't do for me what alcohol did, and what I learned back in the '60s is that where there were drugs there was alcohol, and I had a drinking habit to support.

I fell in love with a pair of legs and got married for the first time in 1976. I proposed to her two years earlier when I came home drunk and fell up the stairs. I figured she'd quit bitching that night about my drinking. She did that night, but I never quit my drinking. In October 1979, I became a father. My wife gave birth to my second daughter on Little Christmas; January 6. The same week she was born I walked out on the family. My drinking was more important than being a father, a husband, a homeowner, an employee. It was more important than anything.

The months following are a blur. I know I moved into my mom's rooming house. I lived in a small room and shared a bathroom with four other men. I ate my mother's food when I was there to eat, drank her beer when it was in the fridge, and stole her bingo money, blaming it on my brother in law. I don't even remember working much. Had I not been employed by the State of New York I would have been unemployable.

May 8, 1984, I remember. I had been drinking all day. It had started off by drinking at work during a DWI seminar, continued into a long lunch at the bar, and ended at my favorite watering hole. Next thing I know it's 'last call'. No matter how much I had been drinking I still hurt. All the guilt, the shame, the degradation, the frustration, the hate, the humiliation, the remorse; it was all still there. I grabbed a six-pack for the ride home. I cracked that first beer of the six-pack, took a few swallows and I thought, "enough is enough". I was so bloated I couldn't drink anymore. I chucked that can out and the other five followed. They say you can't scare an alcoholic. I was scared that night. I knew if I continued drinking it was going to kill me, and if I quit drinking I was afraid I was going to die. I hadn't gotten a few miles down the road and I wanted to find that six-pack. I took a good look at my life and I didn't like what I saw. I didn't know what to do So I prayed. "God help me! God help me!" I went back to my wife that night. I told her my drinking had 'gotten out of control' and I needed to do something about it. I promised her I would make a call in the morning.

I talked to a man from the Employees Assistance Program that morning and explained my situation. He asked if I'd be interested in going to Alcoholics Anonymous. I said, "God no, I'm not that bad". Four days later the next thing I saw was a sign saying 'Welcome To The Grounds Of The Willard Psychiatric Center'. That's where I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous. That first day I walked down the stairs to the rec room, a little old black man was standing there saying something about Cleveland and something about miles and I agreed with him. Cleveland was many miles away from there. Two weeks later I realized it was his name, he was introducing himself to me.

My second day in I went through withdrawals and DTs without *(continued on page 4)*...

(continued from page 3)... reporting it. The staff was quite upset but I explained to them that it had been going on for years. I always thought it was a passing bug or flashbacks from some of the drugs I did in the '60s.

Sometime during my stay, we were talking about why we were there. Most were court-ordered, some of their employers had sent them, some to get their families back. I remember raising my hand and stating that I had come in there on my own. The counselor yelled "BULLSHIT", he turned around and wrote four letters on the blackboard. The letters spelled out the word PAIN. He said, "*this is what got you here you little shit, and don't you ever forget it.*" It was then again I remembered again how terrible my life had been due to my drinking. I remembered the promise I made to myself the night my father had been dragged from the house by the local police department, never to return again. At thirteen I promised myself I was not going to be like my father. I looked at myself and realized I wasn't like my father, I was worse. I no longer hated him, but I hated myself for breaking a promise and never able to see the person I had become.

We were taken to AA meetings on the outside once in a while, and people from AA were bringing in meetings occasionally. We were told about the disease of alcoholism, talked about Alcoholics Anonymous; about the importance of a sponsor, getting a home group, working the steps, all that crap. If we talked about God I didn't listen. I had gotten a temporary sponsor on one of my 'weekend passes'. Larry M. was a guy I use to drink with and he up and disappeared. I always thought he was in jail or had died. There he was, sober for two years in an AA meeting. Around July or August, I was released from the institution and I started going to meetings. The problem I had most in AA was that they started with a prayer, ended with a prayer, and mentioned God a bit too often for my likings.

I grew up Roman Catholic and enjoyed Religious Instruction, the church, and all its teachings. But when my drinking began to get the worst of me, I began to see the worst in people that showed up on Sundays and took it out on the church. Then I decided that if God wanted my destiny to be a drunk, then I was going to be the best drunk I could be, and we parted ways.

My first Home Group was the Lyons Monday Night Group. It wasn't my favorite meeting, but it was close enough to where I lived that in case my car died, I could walk to the meeting. We didn't have multiple meetings back then if you wanted a meeting you had to leave town to do it. After showing up to the Monday meeting fairly regular I was asked to make coffee for the meeting. Of course, I came up with every excuse there was except, including my hours at work were going to change and I probably wouldn't be able to make the meeting for a while. The real reason was I was thirty-two years old and didn't know how to make coffee. They told me to make the coffee until my hours changed and they'd find someone else to do it. They gave me the keys to the church and a little bit of money and for the first time in a very long time, someone has trusted me with a little bit of responsibility. I know at that moment I stood taller and walked prouder than I had in a long time.

Around that time I abandoned Larry, my sponsor, because he did nothing but complain all the time. The job, the house, the wife, the kids, the car. I wanted to hear about things getting better. I appointed a guy named Vic to be my sponsor. He was a guy that just enjoyed life not drinking. One day when I had a really bad day, I drove to his house and I had been crying, wearing sunglasses so he couldn't tell. I said, "Vic, they say you don't drink and go to meetings things will get better. They're not better." He asked, "Did you drink today?" and I said "no." He said, "Then things are better." Even today I have to remember to keep it simple. That for right now, right now, everything is okay. Well, Vic ended up going to Montreal for the 1985 International Convention and didn't return for a few years.

In the meantime, I was having all kinds of problems in life and knew I needed another sponsor. I made a list of all the men in AA and put down all the pros and cons that I could think of. Finally, I did what I had been told in the institution, find the guy you like the least, and ask them to be your sponsor. That guy was Dick K. and I hated him from the first moment I (continued on page 7)....



Those Crazy AA Slogans Set Me Free

By Steve N.

PART II

In the 1940s, IBM was using the word THINK as a motto/slogan/logo for advertising and an AA member in New York decided to have Think printed at the bottom of some cards he was mailing to AA groups. When he received his order back from his printer the word Think was printed upside down three times on the cards. He liked the way the mistake looked and mailed the materials the way they were.

The slogan caught on. Think Think Think was the AA slogan featured on the inside back cover of the February 1957 Grapevine issue and became one of the 9" x 12" slogan cards in AA meetings.



Think, Think, Think:
Think....about what you are about to do.
Think....of what you are doing.
Think...of what you have done.

About ten years ago, I was really looking at the poster for the first time. I had probably saw it maybe 500 times, but was really seeing it for the first time, so I asked my favorite old timer, who was sponsoring about 6 men. "What does it really mean?" And his simple response to me was, "that it only means, that we can think through a thought, or compulsion of picking up a drink, if we can think it through, like remembering how we got here, and where that first drink always take us; then for today we have a chance to stay sober."

It made sense to me because I never thought it out before... just acted on the first thought. That's why the slogan for me is not just "THINK."



Here's an old saying that has special, strong meaning for us. Simply stated, it is this: Above all other concerns, we must remember that we cannot drink. Not drinking is the first order of business for us, anywhere, any time, under any circumstances.

This is strictly a matter of survival for us. We have learned that alcoholism is a killer disease, leading to death in many ways. We prefer not to activate that disease by risking a drink.

Treatment of our condition, as the American Medical Association has noted, "primarily involves not taking a drink." Our experience reinforces that prescription for therapy.

(continued on page 6)...

(continued from page 5)... In practical, day-by-day matters, this means we must take whatever steps are necessary, at whatever inconvenience, not to drink. *-from Living Sober Chapter 13 page 32*

A.A. taught me that the meaning of “first things first” is simply a way to keep sobriety front and center. Without abstinence, all the other problems can’t be “fixed.” For alcoholics, the “first thing” is not drinking. In my drinking days life had no order, only chaos. At least First Things First gave me a start to order. Keeping this phrase in mind also helps me fight off a common excuse to go back to the bottle. It helps me fight off the pity party and the depression that comes from not being able to repair a relationship or get a job or any of a thousand things that can go wrong in my life. Sticking with the “first thing” means that *no matter what else is going on* I won’t drink. Period. This has to be the most important thing because without it, nothing else will change.



“One day at a time” is a simple reminder to stay in the present moment.

One Day at a Time is found in A.A.’s Big Book on page 85, where Bill Wilson reminds us that “what we really have is a daily reprieve,” he wrote, “contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.”

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln once stated: “The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.”

In the Gospel of Matthew (6:34), it is written: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Hemingway summed this up well by stating “Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today.”

Time and time again, some of the greatest philosophers, spiritual leaders and others remind us that 99% of the things we worry about never happen. Yet, we spend so much time trying to deal with all of life’s problems at once and this becomes overwhelming and creates anxiety. Some of us become paralyzed in fear, while our mind is busy focusing on all the “what if’s.” The reality is that the majority of our stress, anxiety and worrying are unnecessary as most of tomorrow’s problems can be dealt with...well...tomorrow.

In one of my early meetings I complained that I could not conceive of not drinking for the rest of my life. I was told the story of Bill Dotson (the famous man in the bed). Bill and Bob asked this question, ‘You can quit twenty-four hours, can’t you?’ Dotson said in a recorded talk. “I said, ‘Sure, yes, anybody can do that for twenty-four hours.’ They said, ‘That’s what we’re talking about. Just twenty-four hours at a time.’ That sure did take a load off of my mind. Every time I’d start thinking about drinking, I would think of the long, dry years ahead without having a drink, but this idea of twenty-four hours, that it was up to me from then on, was a lot of help.” That’s me. I thought I could do it for 24 hours. I stopped thinking of the long dry spell of the rest of my life and the broken promises to never drink again and concentrated on today. It works for me.

Continued in Part III next month...

(continued from page 4)... heard him talk to me. He had heard me complaining about all the stuff I abandoned Larry for at a meeting and he turned to and said point-blank, "God gave you 50 chances to grow and you blew every one of them!" Well, I ate a lot of crow the night I asked Dick to be my sponsor. When he said jump, I almost had to ask how high. He had asked me how long I'd been sober, and I told him about four years, and he asked me where I was on the steps. I told him I had done them all. He asked me about my 4th and 5th steps and I told him I did a 'mental' fourth step and when I shared at meetings I got rid of the 'stuff' a little at a time. He asked about the 8th and 9th step and I told him that I knew who I had hurt and by not drinking was my way of making amends. He didn't like any of that. He decided we were starting over and told me to bring my Big Book to his house that Saturday.

That Saturday I read out loud the Preface, the Forewords (there were only three at that time), the Doctor's Opinion, and the next 64 pages to *This was Step Four*. We talked about every chapter as I finished and what it meant to me. We got down on our knees and read the *Third Step Prayer* out loud together, a few times, until I felt it and started crying. He dragged me through the next eight steps, helping me along the way. When I did my 4th Step I started in blue pen and a yellow legal pad, he said 'by the book'. The book says *We place them before in black and white*. When I did my 5th Step, I started reading my lists. He said, "what's the book say?" Page 75 says *When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk*. And it was a very long talk. Hours later and I was sitting home feeling poorly about myself Dick called wanting to know what I was doing. He told me to read the bottom of page 75. And yes, he helped guide me through Steps 8, 9, 10, and 11. He helped teach me to talk to God and listen to Him. After all these years I am still in contact with Dick. I still feel the same way about him as I did when I first met him, but Dick saved my life. Dick tore apart my ego and I learned a little bit about humility.

Life hasn't always been easy. Six years sober and selfishness, centeredness came back, and my marriage ended. I was living above a bar and although drinking was no longer an option, I wasn't sure I wanted to live. Dick told me to get a new home group, a new sponsor, study the Big Book, work the steps. Pretend it was my first time in AA. As I was living in an old trailer in a wooded lot out in the middle of nowhere, I would wake up and watch the sunrise over a stream-fed pond and thanked God for what little I had. At night I would sit at the dining room table and watch the sunset and thank God for what little I have. That's when the real miracle happened. Dean made peace with Dean, and Dean made peace with God.

Over the years I've been involved in Corrections/Institutions, PI/PCP, served as Secretary/Treasurer, GSR a few times, DCM when our Area voted to approve the Fourth Edition of the Big Book. I've always had a home group until recently, and the Sober Sand Gnats is the best damn home group I ever had. I've gone through a few marriages, spent a year in the hospital, mostly alone except for AA, for a medical condition that still plagues me today. I retired and moved to Florida in 2014. I still serve AA, go to meetings, I trust God, keep 'my house' clean, and help others. Sometimes those 'others' is me. Being involved in service isn't about helping you. It's about me staying sober.

Over the last few years, I've encountered a lot of animosity towards me. And all I know is what the book says. *"We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended, we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one."*

Thank You,
Dean B.

Upcoming Anniversaries

MAY 2020



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