

Chapter 01

Ann: My name is Annie. I am an alcoholic. I'm going to tell you the story of my drinking and my sobriety in a short form. My first part is what it was like. I grew up in a very normal family, I thought.

I didn't know my parents were alcoholics until late in my 30s, probably, because my parents didn't drink. They were dry drunks at the time. So there was no drinking in my house until I was 15. I did not drink in high school. I drank very little in college. But when I started working after college, I hit the ground running. I thought it was wonderful. I worked for an attorney that, every Friday night, we had a drink and discussed everything we'd done wrong. And it was a scotch and water, and it tasted awful.

At first, I was pouring it in the tree sitting next to the chair I always sat in. But after a while, I started sipping it, and it made me feel a little bit better about making my date later so I could sit and be chewed out. So I ended up getting taller and smarter, and I found that alcohol just made me feel better. I've heard people say, "You could leap a building at a single bound." That's kind of how I felt.

I worked for lawyers. I thought they hired me to tell them what to do, and boy, did we like to drink. We partied a lot. I married one. And when I divorced him, I thought that my drinking had increased because of him. Truth was, my drinking had increased because I'm an alcoholic. As the years went by and I got into more trouble – and I say trouble – I've never had a DUI, I've never been to jail, but I started taking – I changed my friends, that was one thing. I started hanging out with people who drank like I did, and my original friends did not drink like I did.

And then the people I changed to, they didn't drink like I did, so I had to change my friends again. My jobs changed. I would leave a job when I could tell that they were starting to think about letting me go because I wasn't coming in on time, or maybe I was hungover or whatever.

And eventually, I just couldn't work.

I could not take a job and promise that I would be there the next day. And that created a problem for me, and I sold things. I sold typewriters and jewelry and Rolex watch and all kinds of stuff. But I still thought that there was something I was doing wrong. If I just drank right, then it would work. I ended up in a treatment center and drank on my way out of there. And I went to AA, and I went in and out.

I would quit drinking for a month, and then when things got good again, I got a new job, I would go back and start drinking again because I thought that if I just did it right, it would work. The drinking, for me, was not a stopping problem at that time. It was a starter problem. I kept starting again once things were good.

Well, the bad part kept getting worse. And I ended up going to a treatment center in California, and it was wonderful. And I really thought they had a magic wand, and I learned a lot about myself.

And when I came back, I went to AA. But I got drunk again, and this time I could not stop. And I had to be hospitalized, and I had alcohol poisoning. And I came out of there back into AA, and that's where I got sober. That's when I got sober.

Before that, I'd been in and out of AA six times. This was my sixth sobriety date, and I still have that sobriety date today. And it's been over 31 years now. So I was going to AA, and I was still shaky. I was scared to death. I didn't have a job. I didn't know what to do. I just started showing up.

And in all those times I'd been in and out of AA, they kept telling me things like, don't leave before the miracle happens, and, you know, let live – “Live and let live,” and “Let go and let God,” and all these cheesy sayings.

I'd ask somebody, how long I had to go to these meetings – and they said, until you want to go to these meetings. And I thought, well, that'll never happen. And I'd hear people say, “I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic.” And I'd say, “Well, that will never happen either.” But, you know, about 10 days into that new period of recovery, to my first real recovery, I had a spiritual awakening.

And I was saying a prayer. I was kneeling at the crib of my nephew, who's now 30-something. And I just said, "God, I can't do this. I don't know what to do. I need help. Please help me."

I'd already gotten, you know, this alcohol was out of my body, but I knew my mind was trying to kill me. And my heart just knew that I was on my own, I was in trouble. And all of a sudden I had this sense of... these are the words, I didn't hear the words, but this is what I felt like:

"Nothing is going to happen to you ever again in your life that you have to drink over." And that was it. And I had been at the point where I had to drink over everything. Good, bad, indifferent.

"Nothing is going to happen to you ever again in your life that you have to drink over." And that has proven true for me.

That is what happened.

So I started listening in the meetings. And I started talking to women. And I was offered a job at a women's recovery home as a daytime house mother. And I got to cook for these women that were detoxing. I got to do their laundry and take them to meetings. And, oh, my gosh, it was like looking in a mirror every day.

They'd come downstairs detoxing, wanting pills or whatever they were on. This place took everybody, not just alcoholics. And when I say I'm an alcoholic, alcohol is my drug of choice.

But I used alcohol in many forms, as did a lot of people my age. But it was whatever I might be doing that was available to change how I felt, I was drinking with it at the same time. So I worked at this little place. And it was here in the town I live in.

And it was wonderful. It was the best experience watching the lights turn on for these girls. I worked with a sponsor. She was my sponsor for 18 years. She knew how stubborn I was. And she would say things like, "Perhaps you might want to."

She never told me what to do because she knew I'd do the opposite. She was a lovely woman. And she probably is one of the many people that saved my life. I had problems with the God stuff in the big book. Because my experience

with denominations is that they're man-made power structures to control people.

And I have a problem with thinking that some other religion is going to hell because they don't believe what somebody else believes. So I was really happy to find a God of my understanding.

A good and loving God who is not judgmental of people because they don't all believe the same.

And I was able to craft something that, for me, has been very, very comforting. A lot of things have happened to me in the last 31 years. I had a wonderful career as a legal assistant. I was a closer for business deals. And that was really fun. Got to travel. My boss was a recovering alcoholic. So that was pretty neat. We got to have little meetings in the office.

We'd close the door and talk about God, which is the word I use. I call God, God. That works for me. You can call your higher power anything you want. I really am big on the natural stuff, the Native American nature – how God is through nature and is God. I got to do that.

I married a man in the program. I was his fourth wife, and I was blessed to be his fourth wife.

And we got sober together, but we didn't do it the same. He walked into AA and said, this is where I need to be. I came in kicking and screaming, and so I had a different journey. But we walked parallel, and we built a life.

There was a lot of struggle for us, and our sponsors and our friends got us through. It was amazing how much we have laughed sober. You hear so much laughter in meetings. In the beginning, when I first started going to meetings, I really had a hard time. It took me about a year to settle down and go to places that serve liquor. I really had a hard time. My husband – he wasn't my husband then – but he was around. We were friends.

He didn't have that problem because he was not physically addicted to alcohol, but I was. And then that went away with time. I don't mind being around alcohol. If I'm there for the right reason, it doesn't matter because I'm not there for the alcohol. I'm there for the company.

About seven years ago, he dropped dead on a golf course in Texas where we were living. And I was really amazed. I didn't want to drink. I wanted a cigarette

because I quit that too. And the people in Texas and the people in Oklahoma, the recovery people, rallied around me in a way that was amazing.

He was resuscitated – I'm sorry, I left him dead on the golf course – he was resuscitated. He had to have open heart surgery. And to tell you the truth, he never came back the way he had been. But then he developed cancer, and he passed away a couple years ago.

And the journey that brought me back home to the people of my recovery community, my original recovery community, to be here for my mother when she died, my best friend when her son died, and that best friend when she died, and my old boss when he died, has just been amazing how I haven't wanted to drink through any of these things.

These have been the hardest things that I've ever had to go through, and I haven't had to go through them. I've done them with the program and people. Now, I can't tell you that I've done them well, but one of the things I've done is a lot of meetings. And through the pandemic, what happened was they created a lot of online and telephone meetings.

And like today, I did a 7am meeting every day. There's a meeting, and you can do it on conference call, or you can do it online and see everybody, or you can do it on the phone and have your coffee without anybody seeing you and do a meeting every morning, 7 o'clock, great way to start your day.

There are meetings online now all over the world. The pandemic has opened up doors that we never thought of. You don't have to call AA anymore. You can just go online and put in AA, and you can find stuff. You can go on Facebook and find them.

There's just meetings every day. I've spoken on an international women's meeting, which was really neat. The accents were a lot of fun. The thing that has been interesting for me is that it talks about, in the back of the book, about spiritual experience.

And I thought, okay, it talks about the fact that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial.

We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty, and open-mindedness are the essentials of recovery, but these are indispensable. I had heard that it was all about God, and you had to believe in God to go to AA. I'm telling you that it's spirituality and not God. Thank you very much for letting me share with you.

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