

Chapter 01

Annie: Hello, my name is Annie, and I'm an alcoholic. I'd like to spend a few moments to relay my story of my alcoholic experience and recovery. So I'm going to talk a little bit about what my life was like, what happened, and what it's like now.

Giving those information, I wanted to let you know that it kind of started –I was an only child born to a 16-year-old mother and an alcoholic father who was away at sea. I never met my father, so it wasn't until many years later that I found out that he was, indeed, an alcoholic.

I had the traits of what I found out to be alcoholism at a very early age. I was like an actor on a stage. I wanted to be in charge of everything. You know, it was all about me, all about me. And yet I never, as hard as I tried, I never felt so much a part of – I can remember with playmates kind of standing on the outside of the circle wanting to fit in. Always in class, the first one raising my hand, wanting to be paid attention to.

Being born in the conditions I was in, I was shuffled around a lot, so I really didn't have a lot of direction or discipline. I feel many times I raised myself on my own. That created, later on I found, a lot of fear and resentment. I didn't know. I thought I was fearless. I thought I could handle everything because that's what I was made to do.

So fairly normal childhood, although I was very immature. I started school at a very young age and was kept under a tight rein until I went off to college. Well, when I went off to college, that was when it was time for me to do what I had always wanted to do, always wanted to fit in and be a part of. That was when I took my first drink.

So I was 18 years old. I had accepted a ride home from college for the weekend, and the boy that I was riding home with, I knew he drank beer and so he stopped and got a six-pack and asked me if I would like one. And my first reaction was, “No, I've never drank beer. I don't think I should do that.” But he encouraged me to just try one.

Okay, you know, I wanted to be that grown-up college gal, so I tried one. And wow, I can't even tell you what that was like. I look back now, but I can certainly remember it was my first drink. It changed the way I felt about myself. When I got home, I was courageous enough to, you know, face my family like I was all that, you know. So the beer changed my perception of how I fit in. It gave me a sense of ease and comfort. It made me feel good on the inside as well as on the outside.

And, you know, my image – that's what I grew up with – the era I grew up in, the 60s, was... it was so much about material goods. As long as I looked good on the outside, you know, I was good. When I wasn't so good, my family didn't believe in getting therapy, even though I knew I needed it.

But I grew up in that era of, if you recall, the self-help books. So I used a lot of self-help books during my late teens and early 20s because I knew that there was just something not quite right about my thinking.

But I didn't know that it was related to a disease. So these are the things that happened. I went to work for a major oil company, had a good job, had the apartment, the car, had friends, had the social life.

Well, along with that social life, of course, came social drinking. That was a big part of business world – the oil industry – was the Friday night happy hours. Then those Friday night happy hours became more frequent days of the week to drink.

You know, I never really paid consequences. Oh, I might have had a few minor car wrecks, but never went to jail, never lost a job. I kind of knew that I had a drinking issue. Many times I would be able to not drink so much, maybe only drink on weekends or try to control my drinking.

Well, I won't drink in the morning. Well, I will only drink when I get home from work. But drinking was so much a part of everything I did. Those were the days of the nightclubs and going out around Tulsa and going to the discos, etc.

And, of course, to be comfortable at the disco, I had to have drinks before I went. You know, I had to be ready when those social occasions came up. Everything went fairly well. But, you know, that put me into drinking for literally 30 years – 30 years of drinking and trying to control it, and controlling it somewhat.

The oil company I worked for sold their business to another data processing firm, and I got early retirement at 48 years old. Okay, I'm 48 years old, I'm on my own, I have no children, no spouse. What an opportunity for someone who likes to drink. No responsibilities. Responsibility had always been an important part of me controlling my alcohol consumption and controlling my behavior. I was taught to be extremely responsible for my actions, to show up on time, to do what I was asked to do.

So all of those values were still there. But what happened was, you know, I started turning from a functioning alcoholic to one that was starting to become dependent on others. And to me, that was a start of something that I found out later was my life had become unmanageable.

You know, when you learn more about the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, you know, I found out what was really going on with me. I found out about the disease of alcoholism.

Those 10 years, I took a job doing seasonal work. So I got an RV and I traveled all over the West. I traveled to Alaska and back. You know, from everyone else on the outside, I had the dream life. I thought I had the dream life until it started to be a nightmare. Being able to do what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it – and drink like I wanted to drink became a serious issue.

I had always been into physical fitness and thought I was mentally fit, but I knew I was spiritually unfit. So I thought, well, I'll start looking for opportunities to be involved with perhaps a religious community or a community where we could talk about our issues and our problems. So I started going to a number of meetings of different types, but not meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous because I didn't know about Alcoholics Anonymous.

I found out about Alcoholics Anonymous by reading the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, which was on my friend's library shelf. I was staying at her home. I had my place rented out, and I was reading the stories in the back of the book.

There are stories about people, I think 42 stories about people that recognized their alcoholism and wanted to recover from it. Basically, what it was like, what happened, and what it was like now. And I related to those somewhat, but I still could not find my way into the doors.

Actually, I can remember driving up to many meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. I could look them up in the phone book or call their central

service, but I could never get in that door. That was what was happening to me.

I was 58 years old. Now, mind you, that's 40 years of drinking. Fifty-eight years old. When you get that age, I started thinking about what the rest of my life would be like if I continued to live the kind of life I was living.

I was very unhappy with myself. I had always been very uncomfortable in the company of other women because I never felt like I measured up. I didn't think that I had the skills that they had and the personality that they had because I was not a homemaker.

I was not a wife. I was not a lot of those things that I put them on a pedestal and measured their worth by.

So, therefore, I felt very worthless. But I knew that I didn't want to live the rest of my life whatever it was, feeling the way I did – feeling horrible on the inside, feeling morally bankrupt, feeling embarrassment.

I was very involved in my community, a very active volunteer, and I was starting to not look so pretty in those situations. I was starting to act out. I could not control how much I drank, and when I couldn't control how much I drank, I couldn't control how I acted, how I treated others, how I presented myself.

So, time to change. This is what happened: I decided to ask for help. I woke up one Sunday morning after a Saturday night, and I said, God, help me. Now, I did not know a God. I would have described myself at that time as agnostic. I knew there was something there, but I wasn't sure what it was. But I said, God, help me. I was sincere about it, and I was heard. I was heard.

Later, I found out, by what I could identify as a higher power, the God of my understanding. But I didn't know those things then, but I knew that I could call for help. I got out the phone book.

We had phone books back then.

I looked up Central Service, and I called Alcoholics Anonymous, and I said, I need help. I have a drinking problem. The lady on the other side, that was on a Sunday night, she said, "Can you make a meeting tomorrow night?"

I said, "Yes, I can." So, she gave me the meeting location, told me the time of day, told me to show up. You know, I really didn't have any misgivings about that. I was so desperate to change my life. So, I show up at the meeting. I go in. I see people that look just like me. I don't know. I thought I would see people that I see under the bridge. I thought I'd see people that I saw in the streets, homeless people, etc.

Yes, there are some souls like that, but we also have doctors, lawyers, school teachers, people that I had done volunteer service with, people that we smiled at each other like, oh, I know you. So, to fit in, the first thing they do is go around the room and they identify themselves as alcoholics.

Well, being one who wanted to fit in, I said, I'm Annie. I'm an alcoholic.

Wow, it was like a chill went down me, and I fit in. I knew I was in the right place. I listened carefully to that entire hour. I heard what Alcoholics Anonymous was about. Someone read the 12 steps. Someone read the prologue. Someone read what we call the promises. I was able, in that hour, to feel that I had an opportunity to completely change my life. The last thing that I heard at that meeting was, keep coming back, and that's what I did.

Now, that was December 1, 2003. So, here I am, going on almost two decades of a life beyond my wildest dreams. My primary purpose today is to stay sober and help another alcoholic to recover. That can be done just by the discipline, by an outline that I have now of my daily life, because I only have a daily reprieve from the disease of alcoholism. Knowing it's a disease, not necessarily a moral issue.

It can create moral problems, but it can, and it will never go away. I will always be an alcoholic, but I can address it and keep it at bay one day at a time. So, each morning, I have opportunity to pray to stay sober that day, and each night, opportunity to thank my higher power for helping me stay sober. I had the opportunity to be very involved in women's meetings in Tulsa. I think that's so, so very important. All meetings are important.

I go to international women's meetings, where I recently heard one of the speakers say, you have to be willing to be uncomfortable. You know, that was what kept her sober, because we find that we drink to change the way we feel.

So, if I can be uncomfortable and reach out for help, then I have a chance to stay sober one day at a time. I want to invite anyone who has related to

something I had to say today to contact your local Alcoholics Anonymous. I even have attended meetings when I travel.

I'm able to do a lot of vacationing and seasonal work. And before I go, along with what do I pack, what am I going to do, I find out where the nearest Alcoholics Anonymous meeting is going to be, because I need those daily meetings, Zoom meetings, in-person meetings. Meeting makers make it. So, I wish the very best future for you. Be sure and contact Alcoholics Anonymous. Thank you.

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