

Chapter 01

Mike: Hi, my name is Mike. I am an alcoholic. You know, man, saying I'm an alcoholic – I swore up and down for the longest time. I was never going to be an alcoholic and when I get in my story, you'll kind of realize that.

When I grew up – I grew up in a family of it. Dad was an alcoholic mom was an alcoholic and Later years my brother turned into one. Mom and dad never really drank together. They always

drank separately. I always say that dad took the night shift and mom took the day shift. And shift change was hell. Sometimes, but, like what happens in the most alcoholic homes, they got divorced and split up.

We all went our separate ways and dad, because of that, started doing some Looking into doing something about his drinking. Otherwise, he was probably gonna drink himself to death. He was never one of these feel good kind of guys or “I'll just catch a buzz” kind of guys.

Every time he drank he drank for oblivion either pass out or blackout and he knew it was killing him he ended up getting sober and he did that with going to Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn't know much about Alcoholics Anonymous at the time and all I knew that Dad wasn't drinking and we eventually moved in together.

So my attitude of alcohol always from the start had been a negative one, you know I'd seen what it had done to my family. I'd seen the havoc that it caused and everything else. Until I had my first drink sufficient enough to catch a buzz, right? I don't think a lot of people remember their first drink or their first buzz.

But I can remember it just like I was sitting there today. Just as clear as anything. Me and some friends went walking down a dirt road – I don't know what kind of Oklahoma country boy, farm boy – I'm walking down a dirt road and we stole a couple of six-packs out of one of the dad's fridges and I think I probably had two or three down me.

And all of a sudden it just felt like the world had changed and I know that sounds a little bit dramatic but all of a sudden I felt more comfortable around the guys I was with. I felt a part of the guys I was with. I felt a little bit taller. I felt a little bit funnier. I felt a little bit freer, and for a guy like me, when has that something – just off take some at that night, I thought I'd found a solution and that happened at the age of 12.

For me that night it instantly changed things and in my mind. I kind of equated that to that works or that's a solution. I can't say that I started drinking alcoholically right after that. I have several friends that you know say that they were an alcoholic from the very start from the very first drink they did it.

I probably – myself probably fall in the more of the progressive illness and it was a long progression for me. But I do remember the distinctness of catching that first buzz and thinking “Man. This is it. This is where I wanted.” and I never did put too much time between that drink and my next, you know.

So going along I – you know – grow up teenager partying, you know on the weekends hanging out with the friends and all that kind of stuff and alcohol continued to do that for me. It was an answer. You know, I – I was the party animal.

I always probably compared myself to Bluto an animal house in high school. That was pretty much me. And you know, I I ended up meeting my high school my high school sweetheart a

few years later. We ended up getting married. You know, after that after I settled into married life I thought “Well now I'll just be a normal drinker. I'll just be – I'll just drink on the weekends.” and that worked for me for a long time.

I would – I go to the weekends and you know, I get to the weekend and it was Friday I could let my shoulders down. I could pop the top on a beer or you know make me a mixed drink and I could just feel the tension start to roll out of my body.

And I drink a little bit and sometimes I would do really – drink too much and do stupid things that if you give anybody enough alcohol they're gonna do stupid things Those things happen to me But I just thought “Well, I just drank too much that night.” and always just chalked it up to that I'll do better next time.

Well, that rocked along for... My marriage ended up lasting for about six and a half years. When we got divorced, I don't – you know, my progression of alcoholism. I don't think it was off the charts. I was still a “normal” abnormal drinker, I guess, is probably the best way to put it.

But you know, I was a guy that liked to drink, you know the priority in my life I always felt that I could shelve it to do whatever I needed to do. But once I got divorced, you know, the – really the gloves came off. The reasons for being the family man or that kind of stuff. So it was party central, you know. I got sober well, I – I got social.

I like to say I'd only drink in social settings. But man, I got social a lot, you know, I go out on Monday night. It was always a Monday night football game somewhere. Tuesday night, you know, I'd usually catch a happy hour somewhere. Wednesday night, I joined a bar pool league just to be in the atmosphere. Thursday night, you know, Thursday and Friday nights were always good honky tonk nights.

So you could always go out and have a good time then and it was all around the weekend

And there's no reason not to drink on the weekend. Sunday night – Sunday football and you know all the corroborate around it, but I found that I was being social just for that stigma of “I didn't want to be a home drinker” and there were times I could table it and I could shelve it and there were good periods of, you know, managing my drinking and there were periods where there were unimaginability in it, but it always seemed to do – it still had that powerful effect over me.

It absolutely changed the way I felt, the way I thought, and then what I did. And I liked the way I felt, and I liked the way I thought, and I liked the way I did. And the only way I could get that was by consuming alcohol. I used to say that – I used to walk around like just stiff – I'm doing a little gesture here – but you know, I was just tight from the shoulders to the tips of my toes. By pouring that first drink in there, I could feel the muscle starting to relax in my shoulder and start going down my back and all of a sudden I could stretch my legs out and cross them.

And then all of a sudden my toes would unfurl. And that's what alcohol did for a guy like me, you know it – pretty normal abnormal drinking as I like to classify it. But there was one night I didn't get in a whole lot of trouble with my

drinking. There is one night that I was, you know, I'd left the bar and I – I actually told myself that I was going to be good this night. Went out and had a few drinks at a local pub and got in the car and drove home and just had a couple wasn't even really feeling the effects of it when a cop pulled in behind me and hit the lights and walked up to the window.

We went through the sobriety check and he actually told me “Because I don't think you are, but you might be close.” and took me down to the station and booked me in and I blew right at the legal limit like a .08. Which, for a guy like me that liked to drink, .08 wasn't very much. But something happened to me in that jail that night.

That night I swore that I was gonna do something about my drinking problem that I'm going to quit drinking. You know, the embarrassment, the shame, and – and just the trouble of getting – losing my license and being in jail where I didn't belong or I didn't want to be you know, I made a firm resolution. That you know, I'm gonna stop drinking.

Fast forward to the next morning, I get released. And as I'm walking out of that jail I'm sitting on the curb waiting for my ride to come pick me up. Thought comes to my mind: “It's the Friday before Memorial Day weekend, right?” You know, I'm sitting there thinking, “You know, maybe I'm making too big a deal out of this drinking thing.” And this is sitting on the steps in front of the jail I'm thinking this.

“You know, my problem wasn't really drinking. My problem was that cop or my problem was

drinking and driving. But the problem's not drinking.” So what I do is, by that afternoon I was sitting on the banks of one of our lakes for Memorial Day weekend and I was just as drunk if not more drunk than what happened when I got arrested that night.

But I was resolved to the fact of you know, I had found the solution: it's just not to drink and drive. I'm gonna fast forward a little – a few years. I would go out with my drinking friends. I'd catch the happy hours. I'd do all that kind of other stuff.

But it seemed like there towards the end, probably say the last 10 years of my drinking, that when I went out with people I would always go too far. I would always have the drink that was too much or I would do and say the wrong

stupid thing, or I would make somebody mad or piss somebody off and, you know, hurt the people I was around.

But anyway, I realized that you know, everybody around me was drinking so it was normal. One night, I might have the issues and somebody else might have the issues the next night. Well fast forward about a week later I remember I went to a Billy Joel/Elton John concert really excited about this concert and I think I ended up spending \$300 on two tickets and had a nice date for it.

And of course we had to pregame. I had to pregame before the concert so we went out and I drank a few drinks at home and then went out to the bars and pubs make sure that we got there early enough before the concert and got our drink on. And I remember sitting in the arena that night and really excited for that concert and the curtains went up the lights came on and I went out and I woke up when the lights came back on and the curtain closed.

I don't remember anything of the concert. The lady that I brought to that concert with me had gone – was not there anymore and didn't remember a thing of it. And fast forward a few days

I pull into the driveway of my house or pull around the corner in my neighborhood and there's a bunch of cars there in my neighborhood, in my driveway.

I thought “Well the party’s on.” and I walk in. I walk in the front door and it's all my drinking friends and everybody's hem and haw and not looking me in the eye. And you know, about two minutes into this I can realize what's going on. This is what they call an intervention or what I thought it was an intervention. I had a lot of solutions pointed at me that night or thrown at me that night. Most of those solutions were: “If you would drink like we do” or “If you'd only do it on the weekends” or “You would lay off the hard stuff and only drink beer or wine, you know, you might do it.”

So the thing that I really – I learned out of that was when I was around my drinking friends, I would drink like them. Usually that wasn't sufficient enough for me but I would go home and I had always finished off that drink in the way I wanted to finish it. And that progressed into a daily habit and then all of a sudden the luxury of alcohol had slipped away from me and it became a necessity at this point.

The only time I ever felt normal was the time I would pick up a bottle or pour alcohol on top of it. And then all of a sudden I kind of realized that I was doing the same thing that my dad was doing early on. I was drinking for oblivion I was drinking to just quiet everything or just numb everything out.

Well, I can say for the next five years of my life that it was absolute hell on earth. The anxiety, the depression, the misery, the loneliness, the isolation. All that was really starting to catch up to me and the only – the only solution I had for any of that was by pouring more alcohol on it and there at the end.

I knew I shouldn't be drinking because I was starting to have mental effects and it was starting to have physical effects. I didn't know how I would ever get that normal feeling again unless I drank. And then the cruelest thing that happened was the alcohol stopped working for me. You know, the effect started to go away but the anxiety the loneliness the despair the depression. In in one of my drinking friends was – I had considered a hopeless drinker. He got sober and had been sober for about 10 years. At This point in time I knew that I – I didn't even like the guy that I was looking at the mirror at... I wanted to change and I was curious.

And I tried – I tried the regimented things. I tried, you know, limiting how much I drink and the last five years was just, you know, I would set out to have three and I'd end up having six or I end up having set out that "I'm gonna be done by this time in the night so I can get a good night's rest" and next thing, you know, it's three o'clock in the morning and I'm staring down having to go to work again.

So all that kind of compounded on me in a short time. But this guy had got sober and I wondered how he did it. I knew that he went to this thing called Alcoholics Anonymous, but I didn't really know much about it.

I knew it worked for my dad and I – I knew it would work for this guy. But I didn't have any idea of what Alcoholics Anonymous was. So I summoned the courage, which took a lot for me, and I called that guy. I picked up that 500-pound phone and made that phone call. And I told him, I said, "You know, I think I have a problem."

He goes, "Well, I'm gonna stop you right there." He goes, "The first thing I'm gonna do is – I'm gonna tell you: I'm not gonna sponsor you." And it hurt my feelings, first of all. But he goes "What I am gonna do is – I'm gonna help you." and he goes "I'm gonna be at this meeting and this meeting and this meeting

and this meeting at these times I want you there.” and that's exactly what I did.

I just went in and sat in the meetings and it was a place I didn't want to be around people I didn't want to know. But the one thing I'd saw in these meetings were – is people were happy people were laughing and people were earnestly glad to see each other and welcoming. And I wasn't. I wasn't in a real happy place when I first came in. But I stayed and I did what that man told me and I went to as many meetings as I could.

All of a sudden something started to happen in those meetings is – I would hear a guy share a story from across the room. And he would be a story about how he drank. And I thought, “Man, I thought I was the only person in the world that that ever happened to.” Or somebody else would share something that – how they – how alcohol made him feel what it did for him.

And I would think to myself, “I thought I was the only person in the world that ever thought or felt that.” And then I started hearing what I call my story coming out of other people's mouths. And that's when I started to identify. And first of all – Just to say that I – Alcoholics Anonymous saved my life.

It's the most important thing that's ever happened to me, you know, with that I have every reverence. But I do want to say that I'm not a spokesperson for Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm just a person that is more of a testimonial how it worked in my life. I took some suggestions when I was in those meetings, I ended up getting a sponsor – a guy that was 30 years sober. I don't know why anybody would be 30 years sober and still go into meetings, but I found a guy that was 30 years sober and he started sponsoring me. And there's a lot of confusion about that word. “sponsorship,” but really all it is is somebody that has working knowledge of the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and has worked them before you.

And that's all I knew. And that man sat down with the literature of what we call The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and he walked me line through line. Step by step, you might say, and when I first came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I thought “There's no way I could ever get sober. There's no way I could ever have the peace and joy that these people have.”

You know, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in his story, he writes a little blurb: “No one can tell the loneliness and despair and the pit and self-pity that I found myself in. I've met my match. Alcohol became my master.”

And then at the end of that second paragraph it closes with, you know, "I have come to find a usefulness, a sense of ease, and ease and peace and a life that's incredibly more wonderful as time passes."

And I call those two paragraphs the book ends of what it was like for me. What it was like when I walked in the door of Alcoholics Anonymous to what it was like now as I'm looking at you today and I can say that I have that sense of ease, sense of comfort, sense of peace, and sense serenity.

And that's a free gift for me from God of my understanding – higher power if you want to put it, but the inverse part of that is that peace, sense of ease, and comfort and confidence that I got was all the things I drank for. And now I get it for free so I encourage you – if you're listening to this: find a room of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Do any web search of Alcoholics Anonymous. There's always a number in every area there's a helpline and go find a meeting and grab a cup of coffee. When I walked into that first meeting, I was frustrated, and pissed off, and angry and sad that I was losing my best friend, alcohol.

As I sit in there shaking and the terror was running through me a guy put his hand on my shoulder and looked at me and goes "I understand. I've been there." and It was that point in time that I knew where I needed to be. Thanks for asking me to do this.

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