



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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TALES FROM THE OTHER BAR

Last May, the OAAP celebrated its annual Attorneys in Recovery dinner with a theme of *Sharing the Legacy*. Several speakers shared their recovery experiences, including working the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous and taking advantage of the help and support offered by the OAAP. One speaker shared his experiences with staying sober through very difficult times. His story is inspiring for people in and out of recovery and shows that the basic principles of the twelve steps still apply even after more than thirty years of sobriety. Here, in his own words, is a portion of his story that he shared at the 2003 recovery dinner:

*I'm an alcoholic. My name is ***. It's important for me to tell you what I am before I tell you who I am because if I ever forget for one second what I am – an alcoholic – who I am doesn't really matter.*

In recovery, you may have all heard the expressions – “Don't drink, no matter what,” “This, too, shall pass,” “Nothing is made better by a drink,” or “Reality is reality.” It's one thing to hear a slogan and another to have to put those words into practice. So I want to tell you about some of the challenges I have experienced in sobriety.

On August 1, 1991, I was talking to a client who had lost his daughter in an automobile accident when the phone rang and my secretary told me it was an emergency. Picking up the phone, I learned that my daughter had been killed in a car wreck. At the time, she was just twenty-three and a practicing

nurse. When I heard the news, the spiritual light in my soul went out. The idea of trusting God was pretty meaningless to me.

*Still, I did what I had learned early in sobriety from the people in AA. I did not drink. I went to meetings. I read *The Big Book of AA**. I meditated, and just kept taking one step at a time. Then, on April 19, 1992, my daughter H*****, whom I had the privilege of raising in sobriety, was also killed in a car accident.*

*This time, my soul became a deep freeze. I had no feelings. I didn't care. I was consumed with anger. During the saying of the rosary for my daughter, a friend attempted to comfort me, saying, “***, remember nothing happens by mistake.” It was hard for me to really hear my friend that day – I was completely full of despair and anger. I nearly lost all of my spiritual beliefs. I wanted to drink, and I thought, “If a drink would bring my daughter back to life, I'd drink.” But I knew that a drink wouldn't bring her back to life and I had best not take a drink because I also knew it would ruin everything else. I knew that was the truth. So I didn't take that first drink.*

As a result, by going to meetings and working with other alcoholics – especially lawyers – my healing process continued. I feel you're never really the same person as you were before the loss, but in time grief passes and you can get a grip on life again. It's not easy, but occasionally you find something to laugh about again.

After my drinking brought my first marriage to an end, my son and one of my daughters remained in contact with me, but my other daughter would have noth-

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ing to do with me. My daughter was very angry about how I behaved during my years of drinking. Her anger was justified. I tried to reach out to her by sending her birthday cards and Christmas greetings, but she never acknowledged them. I even made an amends on tape. I was anxious about it, but I sent it to her anyway. She wouldn't even listen to the tape. I found out that when she received the tape, she took scissors and cut it.

My daughter who wouldn't communicate with me graduated from chiropractic school and set up an office near Tacoma, Washington. A chiropractor, older than me, befriended her and became her mentor. He took my place in her life. She really loved this old dude and I was really resentful. I so wanted that caring relationship back and it wouldn't return and I couldn't force it. I was angry – so angry that I wanted to meet that chiropractor some night in a dark alley and make **him** need an adjustment.

One night, the phone rang and an unfamiliar voice said, "My name is Carl A. and I'm an alcoholic with forty years of sobriety. There is going to be a big AA meeting in Tacoma on Father's Day night. Would you be kind enough to come to speak at that meeting?" I told him I would be happy to be a speaker. When I asked how he knew me, he told me that he was a chiropractor and my daughter's friend. He also told me that he intended to bring her to the meeting.

My daughter came to the meeting with Carl, and he told me later that he had to call in every favor she owed him to get her there. She opened her heart, heard my story, and thankfully we now have a fantastic relationship. She gave me the greatest gift anybody can ever get in life – a beautiful grandson named Sam. Sam and I are the best of buds. When he has problems with his homework, he calls me and the person who answers the phone is sober. If it weren't for this program, I probably wouldn't even bother to answer the phone.

I'm so thankful for all of the strength and help I received during those difficult family times and also when I had my stroke in 1993. I was paralyzed on the left side and confined to a wheelchair. I didn't know if I was going to walk again. The doctors thought I would be depressed – I had experienced the loss of

two kids and now wasn't able to walk. They wanted to know what kind of "happy pill" I wanted when I was in physical rehab. I said, "How about a quiet corner, twenty minutes a day with a couple of my favorite books, preferably a time early in the morning." They gave that to me and I didn't have to take the "happy pills," thanks to AA's 11th step – meditation, which I think is one of the pillar steps.

While I was in the hospital a lot of the lawyers I had helped, some from as far as Eugene, visited me and brought AA meetings to me. They felt that a meeting was an important ingredient in my recovery. It was, but the significant thing is that those turkeys kept picking the topic of "acceptance" as a theme of every meeting. I don't know what they were trying to tell me! Well, I guess I really did . . . and thankfully, I listened and with their help, and the help of God, I began to walk. Now, I'm standing here tonight at the OAAP recovery dinner in a room full of my kind of people who understand what it takes to be here. So remember: Shoot for the moon, because if you miss, you're going to end up in the stars.

Shared with Love and Gratitude

Near the conclusion of ***'s speech at the OAAP recovery dinner, *** asked the group to look to the back of the room where his daughter was standing. She came forward and hugged him – a visual testimony to their refound relationship and to the power of recovery.

* "The Big Book" refers to the text *Alcoholics Anonymous*, now in its 4th Edition, available from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., NYC.