

Gene E. A.A. # 28

"The Booze Fighter"

"Good evening friends, I'm Gene, I'm powerless over alcohol, an alcoholic. I'm very glad to be here and I appreciate your asking me to come down. I've been interested in quite a few of the attendees of this Group, and I used to see them over at the homes where they hold their meetings.

We old-timers have been here a while, but it's certainly wonderful to see the new people coming in and getting to understand what the program is; and working it. Recently at the Hawthorne Speakers Meeting, the leader called on those who had 30 days or less, to stand up. Twenty-seven arose, twenty-seven new people in AA for the first month.

That brought back memories of me, when I reached AA in July 4th weekend of 1939. I was the 28th AA member, according to Bill Wilson, in AA.

In the Big Book, it says the first "hundred" had recovered, but the book also told you later, that was erroneous. The reason they did that is, they were anticipating they would reach one hundred members . . . well, don't laugh, that stuff was written to sell, and Bill had no idea it would become what it did.

Bill and a fellow named Hank Parkhurst wrote it, it belonged to them, until we got the national Alcoholic Foundation; the Foundation demanded the book and Bill and Hank let them have it.

When I reached AA, there were only 3 people in New York including Bill Wilson, that had better than two years' sobriety. Bill had four, Parkhurst had three, and Fizzie Mayo had two. There were less than ten of us around New York. So our meetings for nearly a year, weren't meetings. It was just gatherings, we'd get together, Bill would lead, and we'd talk back and forth to Bill.

I'll tell you how they got away from the Oxford Group, if you don't mind. See, for the first four years, it was religion, strictly. These boys took me in, and they talked about (an occasion) when they had made a call on a certain fellow, and then one of them had to leave. The other one asked, "Would you pray for this Brother?", just like Methodists, Baptists, or anyone else steeped in religion (might say).

Well, it happened a few of them were attending the Oxford Group in New York, including Bill, because they weren't affiliated with a church. But some of the other boys were going to Protestant Churches, the Catholic Church, and others, two or three of them.

I went to the Oxford Group with those boys; wouldn't be over two or three of us at a time. The ladies, wives, would go in and sit down; out the men would come, smoke cigarettes, talk about baseball, everything. But they weren't stressing their experience of drinking.

They weren't getting religion there, it was spiritual. They were studying the Lord's Prayer, and "Sermon on the Mount" by Emmett Fox. We used "Sermon on the Mount" for a couple of years after we got our Big Book. That's where they got the idea for the formation of our Program.

And the reason they didn't bring Jesus Christ into the Program is, they wanted it to be spiritual. Practically all religions practice the principles that we are practicing in AA. But we don't say "Christ" in it. They wanted everyone who came in here, not be offended from a religious standpoint. Now if a person of the Jewish faith would come in, and hear Jesus Christ discussed, he wouldn't feel comfortable, don't you see? And they got that idea out of "Sermon on the Mount".

What I want to get back to now, is myself. I did not learn in AA, or since I got to AA, that I should give up the use of alcohol. I didn't learn it. It was my drinking record and experience in the using of alcohol.

I was ready to give up the use of it because I couldn't handle it, knew I couldn't, and I was missing the better things in life, when I was 22 years old. I'd already gone through that "Gene, you oughta quit, you're making a mess out of yourself, you can't handle it", from my brother or someone close to myself. And then they began to say, "Gene, you should quit, you're getting a reputation, getting an image here", I was a black sheep against the family, all that stuff. People wouldn't leave me alone.

Well, I began then to quit, because that woke me up. By George, I am missing some things. My friends and contemporaries, people I went through school with, was raised with, one of them introduced me to AA later. He and I were the drunks of the city. They'd be playing poker with the crowd, the next thing you know I'd hear they had another game, but they wouldn't invite me. That's all they would do. They drank, too, but chances are I was so drunk they couldn't have the game.

Then things like parties; I was being left out. I'm missing some of the better things. That hurts. I was getting the image that I'll never do well, a boy you can't depend on, and those things hurt me. I didn't feel I deserved that. But I did have sense enough to know that because of my drinking, I was missing things.

By the time I was 22, I wanted to quit drinking, not for that weekend, or that night, but forever. I'd had enough and saw that I was going to have to, to get along. I had no one to talk to, like you do. Now, people come to AA, we share our experiences.

Lots of time I'd contemplate asking the people I worked for, "Would you pay me on Monday, rather than on Saturday noon?" I didn't want to go through all that trouble. Then they'd say, "Well, why don't you just quit drinking? You don't need to wait 'till Monday."

Nobody understood us. So I tried. And then the old Volstead Act, many of the older people will remember, the Nation was going dry. I was 24 years of age and I was one of the happiest young men in America. A problem of mine was gonna be solved. After July the Fourth, there will be no booze.

I believed it; I drank right up to it. My friend bought booze, he got a supply for use after Prohibition. I didn't want any. I will never forget coming down the steps of the hotel there in Owensboro, Kentucky. My friend was in the lobby and said, "Gene, how 'bout one?" I said sure, I thought it was from his reserve liquor. Instead of that, he walked across the floor of the hotel, right into the bar, which was open as usual.

My heart sank, I'm not kidding you a bit. For the first time, I lost confidence in my Government.

And I knew that there was nothing in front of me now but to continue the drunken, hard life I was living. I had a lot of pride, unwarranted, but because of my conduct, the way I was acting, I didn't deserve it. So I had to drink on until I reached the age of 44, in 1939.

I used to quit drinking, I'd want to quit, this is the last time. A fellow would offer me a drink and I'd tell him, "No, I'm on the wagon." They would ask me, "How long have you been on the wagon?" My stock reply was, "If I can make this until day after tomorrow, it'll be three days."

I never once got by the next drink. And I've never in my life taken a drink of liquor I didn't want, drunk or sober. But I turned drinks down long before I ever heard of AA. I'd happen to run into a friend, "Gene, how 'bout one, I'll split it with you?" I hadn't had anything to drink, I'd say, "No, you take it." Why? Because there wasn't any liquor to back that up. That's why I believe we are born an alcoholic. I believe we are physically different from the others. Because of this physical allergy. I believe that, and that helps keep me sober.

The first memory I had of alcohol, I was too young to know what it was. I was about 7 or 8 years old, going to school in Shawnee, Oklahoma, grade school. It used to be the custom for parents to invite other children to come home with their children, to play after school. I was invited to go over with a little boy and his brother and sister. And of course mothers always had some food for the young ones. Well, I went in and I had something, I didn't know what it was, but brother, I liked it. Came out of a big fifth. But I was too young to know what it was. Now I had to be a con artist. I did every damn thing I could, hoping these kids would invite me to go back and play with them.

Then a little later, I was around 10 or 12 years old, a little friend of mine's family had a party the night before, had the old punch bowl of egg nog. Well, the family were all sleeping, we kids were up early, and we got in this punch bowl. Brother, that's the same stuff I had before. That kick and that glow, you know? Boy I liked it, and I remember how I used to, every New Years or any time of the year they were going to have that punch bowl, I'd highball it down there, hoping I might get in on that.

So, those things make me believe and know, and believe in myself, that you are born with it. I've known people that had hay fever from a certain pollen. The stuff would get into their bodies, they would breathe it in, might be pollen from a plant or a flower, and until they came in contact with it, they had no trouble. But once they do, their eyes begin watering, their faces swell. And they have no choice except to suffer until they find what the cause is, and then leave it alone. Well, that's physical.

I don't believe anyone becomes an alcoholic from the excessive use of alcohol. And I don't believe anyone becomes a diabetic from eating a hell of a lot of sugar and candy. You have to develop it, if you know what I mean. These are just my opinions.

My brother used to tell me, "Gene, why don't you determine your capacity, and just drink to it, and then leave it alone?" I said, "Nat, I always get drunk before I reach my capacity." And that's the truth.

I was nothing but walking misery during those years. I got to be unemployable. Then I reached AA through this friend of mine. We went through school together, we had known each other since we were nine years of age. Well now, anything was going on, Paul and I was usually the drunks, I thought I had missed Paul. I was in Hoboken, New Jersey and Paul was in New York, and we had been drinking together two or three years.

All of a sudden, I wondered what happened to him. I was dead drunk and I called him up. He talked, and next thing you know, his wife is on the phone, Gussie. And Gussie wanted to know where I was. I said, "I'm at the Plant in Hoboken." She asked if Paul could meet me and if I could come out and spend the weekend.

I said, "But Gussie, I'm drunk." She said, "That's all right." I never heard that before in my life, it was all right to be drunk. Usually when Paul was in the doghouse with her, from drinking, she was blaming me, "Paul, if you'd just stay away from that Edmiston boy, you'd be all right." And now she says it's all right for me to be drunk.

My sister used to blame my association with Paul for my downfall. I resented that because I felt I had sense enough to know what I wanted to do, not just to do something because of Paul. So I finally asked, "Gussie, are Paul's daughters at home?" Paul had two daughters in High School, they knew I was Paul's life-long friend, and I didn't want them to see me in the condition I was in. I preferred to be there when I was sober.

It wasn't too long after that I got a phone call at the plant where I was working. They were giving me enough to live on, they gave me a broom and cut me loose in the plant. I wasn't doing anything, just standing around. The fellow who hired me was another friend of mine. If he had gotten rid of me, I don't know what I would have done. I was unemployable, I had lost all, I couldn't stay sober.

When I was 44 years old and reached AA, I didn't have next week's room rent. That was about \$3.00 per week, this was in the '30's during the Depression. One day they called me to the phone, and there was Gussie. She and Paul invited me out for July the 4th weekend, 1939. I accepted, this must have been early in the week.

As soon as I put the phone down, I did as I'd usually do anytime I'd accepted something I knew I couldn't fulfill, I'd fight with myself. And I had a problem. I had to be sober this next weekend. I was to meet Paul in New York at the RKO Building, we were going out to the ball game.

So that Friday morning, I got up, I didn't drink anything, stayed there all day, didn't take a drink, walked the street, afraid I was going to lay awake all night. I had to have a drink to sleep on. Then a little bit after that, I was toying with the idea, but I had to stay off of it, keep sober tomorrow. Then I thought, uh-oh, the bars are going to close. So now I had two problems.

Boy that's fighting it; I wanted that drink, yet I wanted to be sober. Finally I gave in and went across the street to have a drink or two, to sleep on. That was around midnight, and the bars in Hoboken closed at two. By the time the bar closed, I was as usual helping the bartender put up the chairs, drunk as I'd ever been.

The next morning I wake up, my eyeballs on my cheeks, and I had this appointment to get over there by 10:30 or 11:00. On my mantelpiece were some cans of beer. I don't usually drink beer, but had some just in case I needed a night cap. There had been six or seven, but there weren't but two of them left. So of course I went, but I kept drinking. I had lived in New York, and in New York in those subways, you could quickly get off, get a drink, get back and catch the next train. By the time I arrived in New York I was quite loaded.

When I got there, there was my friend Paul; he had two guys with him. Seedy-looking, britches worn out and all, and they were talking, smiling, going to the ball game, yet I'm drunk. "...Easy does it, first things first", a lot of stuff they were saying. I wondered, "What the hell goes here?"

Anyway, I managed to get to the ball park and Paul finally said, "Gene, how about not drinking until we get home, and I'll go out and get a bottle?" I took him up on that. I didn't drink and after the game, we got on the Lackawanna train and off we set.

Well, Gussie met us at the end of the line. She drove us I don't know where, but I knew I was out in the country. I was talking to Paul a while and Gussie came in and she told me, "Gene, you know Paul hasn't had a drink in over a year?" I said, "Gussie, that's wonderful! And Gussie, I want you to know this; you need never fear when Paul is with me, I'll not encourage him to take a drink." And I meant that. I had no idea.

The next morning, Paul took me across the way to a little park and told me what had happened. He said he was meeting with some fellows over there, they were not drinking, and he had over a year.

I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" and he said he was afraid I'd misunderstand. He said, "you can go over there, maybe there's something for you, maybe not." But he also asked, "Do you want to quit drinking? . . . why do you want to quit drinking?"

When I told him I really wanted to, that I'd been wanting to for years, he said I might come over and we'll see how it worked, and if I wanted it I could come back. So I went over there and I met these fellows.

They didn't tell me a darn thing that I had to do. They told me what they had to do. They told me that they had to change their entire way of living. After explaining the disease; physical allergy coupled with the obsession of the mind. And then they told me they had to give up the

old ideas. And they told me how they were able to do it, explained the inventory to me. They told me what they were doing, they left me with a choice. Maybe if I do what they do, I could have what they have. No one told me a thing. And that's the way they left me.

The guy that most encouraged me to stop drinking, that I might be able to do it, this fellow didn't have a drink for a week. I came back, "Well how am I going to sleep?" He said, "I have been awake all night long, all week long. I haven't had a drink. You got to be willing to hurt, to get it. You danced, now you're paying the fiddler. One drink is not going to help you." I was afraid of the shakes, I said, "A drink is the only thing that will stop it.", and they said, "If you want what we have, you've got to be willing to hurt, and a drink is liable to reduce the desire."

So, thanks to them, they didn't tell me what I had to do. I stayed with them, kept calling them back, they simply shared their experience. They told me their situation and what they were doing, and I knew they were sober. I believed in them and they believed in me. I found understanding, something I never had before, because I understood them and I felt they understood me.

There's nobody I ever met, who comes here, sincerely means it, and wants it, and just did his part, who failed in AA. Keep an open mind, know yourself, and take that inventory. Eliminate your bad habits, defects of character. If you'll do that, you won't have to take another drink in all your life, and you are going to experience a life you never dreamed you could have enjoyed.

Thank you.

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