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AA IN PERU

MY name is Enrique. I am a Peruvian citizen and I have already been sober for ten years, the AA way, twenty-four hours a day. Practicing this wonderful program for ten years has made my life a useful and productive one, for my family and for society. My story is like that of many AAs, a story filled with sadness and with the desire of finding the miraculous solution which would stop my drinking. The search for this solution, the AA solution, took place in my life eleven years ago, in Lima, Peru, and the story is the following:

One day, eleven years ago, I was

passing by a bookstore when suddenly a booklet caught my eye; this title was: *How to Live Without Alcohol*, by Dr. Habas. I bought it immediately with great expectations and read it. I noticed that at the end of the booklet the author suggested the program of Alcoholics Anonymous for alcoholics who desired to stop drinking. AA's address in the United States was also listed.

I wrote immediately requesting information, and I received a letter and a package of literature in English. At that time I did not know any English and, since these pam-

phlets were for alcoholics, I was ashamed to ask my friends to translate them for me. Consequently, I could not read the literature. I thought maybe there was, in Lima, somebody who would be a member of this organization, and I decided to start looking for AA.

At that time, the text of the Questions and Answers was published in one of Lima's newspapers, and so my next step was to ask this newspaper how they had found this article and who had supplied it. They informed me that an American lady residing in Lima had given them this article and, as they had considered it of public interest, they had decided to publish it. The only information they were able to give me about the American lady was that she lived in San Isidro, in Lima, and that her name was Jean B. From then on, I went to San Isidro every day during my free moments. My only hope and solution were to go from one door to the next asking if this was Mrs. Jean B.'s house. As I was unsuccessful, I went to the post office and I asked one of the employees I knew if they had by any chance seen an American lady picking up letters from the United States with the address of Alcoholics Anonymous. They told me that there was an American lady who had a P.O. Box and who received correspondence from AA, but that this P.O. Box had been closed.

I continued looking for Jean

among the American societies of Lima. Finally, after several investigations, I found a parish mainly for Americans—it was the Maryknoll Parish. I could fortunately speak to the director, Father Lowell, who told me about the AA group Jean had been able to form. This group used to meet there on Tuesdays and had about ten members. It was the first AA group in Peru, and its name was *Los Incas*. Father Lowell told me that Jean had already gone back to the United States and that the other members did not meet any more. The parish of Maryknoll also had a school and Father Lowell was kind enough to give me one of the classrooms for my meetings with the members of the group, if I could find them.

From that date, I used to go there every Tuesday hoping to see one of the remaining members of the group *Los Incas*. When I had lost all hope of finding these ten members and of thus having the opportunity of attending the meetings of a group, I decided that the only solution I had left was to learn English to be able to read the AA literature I had received from the General Service Office of AA in the United States. I still did not know anything about the AA program. I only knew it was an organization which had been able to help some alcoholics who honestly wanted to stop drinking, and this was enough incentive for me because AA offered me the only hope to which I was clinging.

When my knowledge of the English language was good enough to be able to have a rough idea of what AA was through the literature, I went to see a doctor friend and I asked him where I could find another alcoholic whom I could try to help. He gave me the name of a hospital in which I could find an alcoholic who was hospitalized there and who was a difficult and acute case of alcoholism. His name was Humberto. I went to see him right away and he received me coldly. But I told him about my year of sobriety, of what the AA program was, that in this same room where he, Humberto, was lying, I had been in similar circumstances.

This was how, when Humberto left the hospital, the *Los Incas* group was reborn, with only Humberto and myself as members. This happened in 1954, and our meeting

place was the same, in the parish of Maryknoll. We struggled to carry the message to the alcoholics who still suffered and in less than a year our group was able to have twenty-eight members. I started an AA campaign, and published announcements for alcoholics in the newspapers, which most of the time were answered by relatives of alcoholics. As a result, I sometimes had to answer forty letters a day, because I was taking care of all this correspondence and its expenses.

For two years ours was the only group that functioned in Lima. Then a friend formed another group — the *Lima One*. From then on, the AA program started spreading and gaining strength every day and many other alcoholics in Peru have been able to have the AA program within their reach, to recover from alcoholism.

Enrique T., Barranco, Peru