

Annie the Cop Fighter

This is the second in an intermittent series of personal stories which first appeared at the back of the first and second editions of the Big Book, **Alcoholics Anonymous**, but were later dropped from the third edition.

By presenting a representative sampling of these stories in the months to come, the Grapevine hopes to offer newcomers a chance to meet — in print — some of the Fellowship's early members.



I started to drink in 1913, when the women sat in the back rooms. We had a good time in those back rooms. I had two little boys at the time, but my family didn't worry me, because one drunk always led to another. So my husband left me and took the two boys; one was six and one was nine. They were going off to school in those days, and it didn't worry me a bit. I loved the liquor and I loved the crowd that I hung out with. As far as my family was concerned, I lost everything of love and respect and everything else.

Believe me, this is no made up

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story. When my husband left me, I had to be on my own. I never worked before, but I had to get out and get a job if I wanted to drink. So I got a pretty tough job. I wasn't any chicken. I was a woman of thirty-one when I had my first drink. I got a job as cleaner after mechanics in buildings. I would have done anything to get the money for drink. Any place I threw my hat was home-sweet-home to me. It could be a basement or a cellar or a back yard. I fell plenty low, but if I tell it maybe it will help some gal or some guy so they don't have to get down that low.

Finally one day, as usual, drunk, I was standing on a corner waiting for a streetcar, and a guy comes over to me and he says, "Lady, you're on the

wrong side." And I says, "Mind your own business!" And as I looked up, it was a feller in uniform! So we had a few words, and he pushed me, and I wasn't going to let anybody get the best of me, and I shoved him back, and we had a little tussle there, and finally I had two buttons off his overcoat, and he says, "I'm takin' you in!" And I says, "Do as you damn please!" I was a tough piece of furniture in those days; if the Almighty God had come down I'd have done the same thing to him. So I landed in the 67th Street station house on the east side, and I stayed there all night long. The next day I had to appear, and I was finger printed for molesting a policeman's uniform. So I got five days in the House of Detention. It didn't bother me whatsoever. The only thing I was worrying about was how was the gang making out without me. I thought I was missed all over. But they made out all right.

So I got out, and then I had to grab myself another job again, so what did I get into but hotel work! That was during the Prohibition days, and the bottles were flying all over the place. When I went to work on the floor, my first idea was to look in the guests' closets where the bottles were. I was all right going in, but I was cockeyed drunk coming out. And I'd have the help drunk with me. One time I got so drunk I blacked out and fell asleep in the guest's bed. I had the nerve to go back on the job the next morning — I didn't know what happened the day before — and the housekeeper was

right there with her little note and my check. "Your service no longer required." And I had the nerve to ask, "Why?" I was told, all right. Well, in those days you could get jobs any time. It wasn't like today. If they had ever looked for references from me I think I'd never have got a job, because I never stayed in one.

I never hit hospitals, and I don't know why because I was fit for hospitals many a time. All the time I saw queer things crawling up the wall in my bedroom. In 1918, I got pinched again for the same thing. I turned out to be a cop fighter; I thought I could beat the whole force. I landed in the same court, had the same judge, and he asked me was I ever arrested before. I says, "No, your Honor!" Just as brazen as can be. And all he done was give me that sneering look, and he says, "For lying in court," he says, "you're not getting away with five days this trip!" I had gone under an assumed name, and I had forgot that I was finger printed, and I thought, being away for two years, he wouldn't know who I was! Playing so innocent! But I got thirty days then, five days off for good behavior, over on the Island.

Another time I was in court on the same old charge of drunk and disorderly. "Thirty days," says the judge. And I was that mad and disgusting that I reared right up and spit clean in the judge's eye. It was a distance of at least five feet, too! You should have seen him leap. "Another thirty days," he says, "for spittin' in the eye of the

court." "Nuts to you," says I, but I had to serve the whole sixty days just the same.

I was worrying about my liquor and I was worrying about the crowd I hung out with. As far as my family was concerned, they never entered my mind. So I did my twenty-five days on the Island, and all I could do was look through the bars across the East River and see First Avenue and the joints I hung out in.

When I got out of the workhouse that time I got a domestic job, and it was right up my alley because I got paid every day, and paid by the hour. In my day the women only got twenty-five cents an hour, but the liquor was cheap, and that would be all there was to it — maybe. I had blackouts, and many a night I don't know how I ever got home. I always did say, well, thank God I'm in one piece. But where I had been I would never know.

I had been away from home for fifteen years, and one day I was walking up First Avenue and I met my beloved husband. He called to me and he said, "Where are you going?" I was running like blue blazes to a speakeasy to get a drink, and I didn't know what to say, so I said, "I'm goin' up to the Five and Ten to get hairnets." I wanted to beat it, but he says, "Wait a minute." So I did, and we had a few words, and he looked me over, and he says, "You smoke, too, don't you?" He didn't know what all I was into; he should have known the rest! I said, "Listen here, you! This is my body and soul, and I can do as I

please about it! I have been on my own for all these years, and I can still do as I please!" He didn't get angry over it, and then finally he popped the question to me: "Would you like a drink?" Whooh! There's what I was running for! And I says, "Sure I would." So we went into a speakeasy up along the line and we had quite a few drinks, and we talked things over and I went back home with him.

But believe me, when I went back home it was too much of a decent life for me to lead. I didn't want that decent, clean life. I wanted to be what I was, a drunk. So I spent more time over on First Avenue than I did at home. Of course when I went back home, my two boys were raised, which I will give my husband credit for. He raised them as gentlemen. The oldest boy was married, and the youngest boy was going to Delehanty's — to become a policeman! Brother! Well, it was all right. I had to take it and accept it. But every time I thought of that uniform, it killed me! After he had been in the force one year he got married. I was invited to that wedding with his father. But I invited myself to the old gin mill over on First Avenue again, and celebrated his wedding with my crowd that I hung out with. That's the kind of mother I was.

I went back home again anyway. I was always forgiven, somehow or other. But I wasn't back home very long before it was the same old roundabout — back again to the friends and the blazes with the family. When the doors opened up for the women



to sit at the bars, I thought that was the terriblest thing — for a woman to sit at the bar! Well, it didn't take me a long while until I got myself initiated to the bar. I was thrown off those stools so often that, believe me, it wasn't funny.

I had everybody's answers. I butted in to everybody's conversation. If a guy would fall asleep and leave his change on the bar, I was handy to help myself. He couldn't sleep and spend his money, so what was I waiting for? And I'd hang around like an old jackass until I got loaded. Brother, was I black and blue! I'm surprised today that I'm not lame or something like that, the way I was knocked and kicked.

Then I got so low that I hung out

with the guys and gals that were on the Bowery. I was loused up too. My whole clothes on my body were full of lice. How low can a woman get!

I got in tow with a gal named Irene, and we used to drink. When we had good money, we'd drink the best, but when we had only a little bit, beer was good enough. So one day in 1946, I happened to go into our hangout again as usual, and I asked Irene what she was drinking. She says, "Anna, to tell you the truth, I can't take the first drink. I'm havin' cola." (She nearly knocked me dead!) I says, "Saints above! What happened to you?" She says, "I can't take the first drink." "Well," I says, "nuts to you. I'm havin' mine!" "But," she says, "I'm gonna get you yet!" I says,

"Over my dead body!"

She got me into AA in March of 1946, and in May of that year, Mother's Day was on the 12th. The day before that I was having a good time in a gin mill again, and I don't know whatever come over me, but I asked some of the younger folks that could dial the phone to call Irene. I don't remember doing it. This was all told to me after. The next day was Mother's Day, and like everyone else I wanted to be such a wonderful mother that I had to buy a gardenia for my coat. I went up to this same gin mill to celebrate Mother's Day, I sat on the stool drinking, and pretty soon in comes my friend.

"Oh!" I says, "Hello, Irene!" She says, "Hello my eye! You got me lookin' all over the town for you! You made a date with me yesterday!" I says, "I?" She says, "Not you, but the crowd in here had the ears rung off me with the telephone. They said you wanted to meet me tonight and you wanted me to take you where I go on Sunday nights." "Hmm," I says, "That's news to me. Have a drink?" "No," she says, "I can't take that first drink. There's a cab there waitin' for me to take you down to AA."

So down to the old 41st Street Clubhouse I landed. In those days they used to have three meetings a week — Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. So I went down to that AA meeting that night. They took me to the beginners' meeting. I don't know what was said, but I do remember that when the meeting was over, when

the door of the 41st Street Clubhouse opened, I sobered up that very night after thirty-two years of knocking liquor around. I drank cola there that night, and I went back and forth to the meetings for eight months.

I was sober for eight months, physically, but not mentally. I never mingled with a soul in the meetings. I never shook hands or said hello to my neighbor sitting alongside of me. I never stopped for coffee. I just ran in and ran out. In the meanwhile I got married the second time. I picked a swell partner, another drunk like myself. I would come home from the meetings and tell him all about these stories, about these women hitting the jails so often and all the hospitals so often, and he says, "You old so-and-so, you should've been there yourself!" That's what I got for an answer. But it didn't bother me.

Then one night a little argument started. I think I was waiting to start something. It was a foolish thing, over pig's knuckles, believe it or not. I was waiting for that pig's knuckles argument. He told me he was gonna have the gang over to eat up my sauerkraut and pig's knuckles for Saturday night, and I said, "You will in a pig's eye!" And I went out and got a fine load on. I only drank for two days, but I carried enough for a year in those two days.

I got off that two-day drunk through the AAs. The nosey AAs caught up with me somehow or other. They went to the place where I worked. The woman there was very interested

in alcoholics. She said to me, "You're drinking." I says, "How do you know?" She said, "Come on in — sit down awhile and rest yourself." She says, "Charlie called up." I says, "That son-of-a-gun! He's got me so advertised that this damn organization knows my whole business! Nobody stepped over my territory before in my life! Now I gotta get into a thing like this and they know it all!" "Don't get excited," she says. "They're comin' up to see you tonight." I nearly dropped dead.

They came up all right. And I humbled myself. I felt so guilty. I don't know what AA does to you, but you can never drink the same again. So they suggested to me to go up to a farm in Connecticut, nothing but wide open spaces in the Berkshire Hills. It was a beautiful place. I stayed up there two days, and I came back a new woman.

Today I have a lot to be thankful for. Alcoholics Anonymous has

taught me the way of life. It has given me back my respect. It has given me back the love of everybody I know. It has taught me to be humble when I have to be humble.

I am what you call a lucky woman. I live alone now. I have a television set which my boys have treated me to, and now I have a telephone too! I do love to go to AA meetings, and I meet with everybody, the old and the new. I'm a twenty-four hour person. I live on that twenty-four hour plan. I am five years and seven months without a drink, but I could go out tonight, but for the grace of God, and get drunk. There's another thing I must remember, that once an alcoholic always an alcoholic. I don't mind the name of alcoholic, because I was called a son-of-a-this and a son-of-a-that, and alcoholic is a good enough name for me. So I'm very, very happy. To newcomers I say, go to meetings, and God take care of each and every one of you!