

February 1992

Hindsight

This is the eighth 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 this story from the first edition, the Grapevine is happy to offer newcomers a chance to meet — in print — some of the Fellowship's early members.



Fired! Still, I got a new and better job. One which gave me more time to relax and where drinking was permitted during working hours. People were beginning to criticize my drinking habits and I scoffed at them. Hadn't I earned ten thousand dollars that year? And wasn't this the middle of the Depression? Who were they to say that I couldn't handle my liquor? A year of this and I was fired.

Other jobs followed with the same net result. After each experience of this kind I would sit down and figure out why it happened. I always found a good reason, and usually people accepted it and gave me another chance. For weeks, sometimes months, I wouldn't touch a drop and because I

could do this, I reasoned that there was a real excuse for that last bender, and since that excuse no longer existed I could start to drink moderately again.

I usually did — for a while. Then I would step up the consumption about one glass a day until I reached the stage where all of the unhappy experiences associated with drinking were brought back to my mind. Soon I was crying in my beer, full of self-pity, and off again to a flying start toward a floundering finish.

How many times this happened, I don't know. I don't even want to know. I do know that during this period I completely smashed nine new automobiles and was never scratched. Even this didn't convince me that there might be a God who was looking out for me in answer to the prayers

of others. I made many friends and abused them terribly. I didn't want to, but when it was a question of friendship or a drink, I usually took the drink.

In a final effort to escape, I went to New York thinking I could leave my reputation and troubles behind me. It didn't work. I was hired by eight large organizations and fired just as quickly when they checked my references. The world was against me. They wouldn't give me a chance. So I continued my drinking and took any mediocre job I could get.

Occasionally I dropped into a church half hoping that I might absorb something, anything, that might help a bit. On one of these visits I saw and met a girl who I felt could be the answer to all of my problems. I told her all about myself and how I felt sure that with her friendship and love everything could and would be different. Although born in New York she was "from Missouri." I would have to show her first. She had seen other girls try to reform men by marrying them and she knew it didn't work.

She suggested praying and having faith and a lot of things that seemed silly at the time, but I really got down to business and started doing some serious bargaining with God. I prayed and prayed. In all earnestness I said, "If you will get this girl for me then I'll stop drinking for you." And "If you will only get me my original job back, I'll drink moderately for you." I couldn't get that God didn't

work that way because I didn't get the girl or the job.

Six months later I was sitting in a small hotel on the west side of New York full of remorse and desperate because I didn't know what would happen next. A middle-aged man approached me and said in a very sincere voice, "Do you really want to stop drinking?" Immediately I answered "Yes," because I knew that was the correct answer. He wrote down a name and address and said, "When you are sure you do, go and see this man." He walked away.

I began to think, "Did I really want to quit? Why should I? If I couldn't have this girl and I couldn't ever have a good job again, why in the hell should I quit?" I tucked the address into my pocket along with a nickel for subway fare, just in case I ever decided to really quit. I started drinking again, but could get no happiness or release regardless of the number of drinks.

Occasionally I would check up to see if the address and the nickel were still safe, because I was being tormented with one thought this girl had given to me. "You must be decent for your own sake. And because you want to be decent, not because someone else wants you to be."

A week later I found myself in the presence of the man whose address was in my pocket. His story was incredible. I couldn't believe it, but he had the proof. I met men whose stories convinced me that in the ranks of men who had been heavy drinkers

I was an amateur and a sissy.

What I heard was hard to believe but I wanted to believe it. What's more I wanted to try it and see if it wouldn't work for me.

It worked, and is still working. For weeks I was bitter against society. Why didn't someone put me wise to this before? Why did I have to go on like that for years making my parents unhappy, abusing friends, and passing up opportunities? It wasn't fair that I should be the instrument to make people unhappy.

I believe that I was now given this experience so that I might understand and be of some use in helping others to find a solution to this and other problems.

When I decided to do something about my problem, I was reconciled to the fact that it might be necessary for me to wash dishes, scrub floors, or do some menial task for possibly many years in order to reestablish myself as a sober, sane, and reliable person. Although I still wanted and hoped for the better things in life, I was prepared to accept whatever was due me.

Once I became sincere, good things began to happen to me. My first experience in overcoming fear was three weeks later when I applied for a position with a national organization. After numerous questions I was finally asked why I left the company I had been with six years. I replied that I had been fired for being a drunk. The manager was so flabbergasted and so completely astounded by the truth that he refused to believe me. I re-

ferred him to my former employer but he refused to write him — but he did give me the job.

It has been three and a half years since I made that decision. Those years have been the happiest years of my life. The little girl, who was big enough to tell me the nasty truth when I needed it, is now my wife.

Eight months ago I went to another city to set up a new business. I had sufficient money to last me several months. What I wanted to accomplish could have been done under ordinary circumstances in about two weeks. The obstacles I have encountered and overcome are hard to enumerate. At least twenty times I have been sure that I would be doing business within the next twenty-four hours and at least twenty times something has happened which later made it seem that the business would never get started.

While I am writing this I happen to be at the low point of the twenty-first time. Money is exhausted. All recent developments have been unfavorable, everything seems on the surface to be wrong. Yet I am not discouraged. I am not blue. I feel no bitterness toward these people who have tried to obstruct the progress of the business, and somehow I feel because I have tried hard, played square, and met situations, that something good will come from this whole experience. It may not come the way I want it, but I sincerely believe that it will come in the way that is best.

Anonymous