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Hope Is Born for the Hopeless Behind Doors of State Hospital

From Forrest Hills, N. Y.

After having been a member of A.A. for six months and thinking I had been doing a "good job," I found myself in Creedmore State Hospital, as the result of about six weeks' intermittent drinking. I had once again taken the "first drink." To a person with no knowledge of hospitals or mental institutions, this is a rude awakening to say the least. To me, it was the end of my entire life, or so I thought. But A.A. had taken hold and it took just this experience to prove to me how it "works" inscrutably.

On the night before going to Creedmore, I stood at the window of my room in Bellevue Hospital, knowing the next day I was to enter this institution and feeling crushed to earth. The despair, torture, fear were indescribable. I looked out at the moon shining on the river and thought how good the world outside was; how desolate my future looked; confinement to what I did not know, or for how long. I was terrified.

In the past early days in A.A., I thought I had given my life and will to God, my Higher Power, but it suddenly came to me that I had done so with many reservations, even unconsciously. It was then I saw how it could never fail me. I must do this thing unreservedly. In this moment of retrospection, I made the complete renunciation of life and will, laying them before my God, asking only for physical strength to bear whatever the future held for me. Truly this was my

spiritual experience in that almost instantly, a wonderful feeling of serenity such as I had never know, pervaded my soul and a great strength of spirit upheld me, so that I was ready for the trial ahead. It is indeed a trial for an alcoholic" to be confined in a hospital with mental patients.

From that moment, it was evident that God did completely "take over" and from the beginning to the end of my stay at Creedmore, it was He who guided and strengthened me, smoothed the rough path one finds in such a place, shielded me and finally released me with peace and joy and love in my heart.

When I entered Creedmore, I was curious to know the kind of treatment provided for alcoholics. Being in good health, I soon found out as far as I was concerned, there was no medical treatment, but that there was in this institution and had been for the past five years, an A.A. group therapy conducted by a member of the Forrest Hills Group, a man who has been a patient at Creedmoor more than six years ago. Through these long years he has been going weekly to the hospital to conduct A.A. meetings for the benefit of alcoholics committed to this institution, arranging for their release, occupation and rehabilitation afterwards. All this he had been doing in an obscure manner.

It was the only bright spot for me in all of my 126 days stay at the hospital

and it gave me much to think of. The sacrifice and humility of this man stirred me as no speech from an A.A. platform ever had. I had absorbed the A.A. program in Creedmore as I had never before been able to. I learned A.A. I practiced A.A. I lived A.A. I was able to assist other alcoholics and in many cases, to assist mental patients who were there because of a drinking problem of loved ones in their homes.

In state institutions, various occupations are assigned patients as soon as they are prepared to work. I did stenographic and secretarial work in the office with the staff psychiatrists and while the approach to alcoholism on the part of the psychiatrist is far removed from the A.A. program, this A.A. group at Creedmore has been able for more than five years to successfully carry on in perfect harmony with the hospital staff.

Alcoholics arrive in Creedmore, broken in spirit; they are sent to A.A. meetings once a week and the majority leave Creedmoor with hope for the future for they have found A.A. They are able to rehabilitate themselves in society, find happiness for themselves and others and best of all, they do not return as a charge of the state.

The field is wide open in all state hospitals for A.A. work among alcoholics. It is a most natural thing in a mental hospital for alcoholics to find each other and to cling together. With the operation

of A.A. group therapy once a week, it becomes a daily therapy where alcoholics are in close contact. The older members assist new members and to both it is a source of great comfort. In Creedmore the alcoholics look forward to Thursday evening as a special occasion.

Since my release, I return weekly to "lend a hand" to this man in charge of the group at Creedmore and is the best medicine I can think of for an alcoholic. When I reflect upon all I secure in doing this, it is not surprising that the founder of this group has more than six years of sobriety behind him, that he enjoys a way of living rich in serenity, in peace, in joy and in love, - *M.M.*