

December 1977

*A father discovers
the Big Book was right*

The Answers Will Come

THE MEETING had been over for two hours, but the warmth of it lingered. It was midnight on a Friday, and I lounged in bed feeling good about my sobriety, the lead of that evening, the words of advice from my sponsor, the horselaughs of an old-timer being kidded about his multicolored sport jacket.

The ring of the phone cut into my thoughts. It was a police detective. "We've picked up your son Christopher. He was caught smoking marijuana and drinking beer in the park. We'd like you to come get him."

This was the third time Chris had been nailed for the same offense, beer and grass. The other two times, the sheriff had brought him home. After several weeks of being confined to the house, no privileges but plenty of boredom, the incidents were forgotten. Now, the scab was being picked again. I saw myself in Chris. Was he headed toward the insane way of life that delivered me so much grief? What could I do to help him?

Because of that night's meeting and all the meetings before, I had

no desire to take a drink. I prayed as I drove to the jailhouse. I thought of the promise the Big Book makes on page 84: "We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us."

The three teenage boys were seated around a conference-room table. Their backs were to me when I came into the room. They didn't see me enter. Several other parents were silently standing about. The arresting officer was seated across from the boys. At the end of the table was a plainclothes detective with a gun tucked in his belt, reading the riot act to the glazed-out kids.

One of the boys was crying. He couldn't remember his phone number or his mother's name. Obviously, it was his first clash with the law.

The other boy was red-faced and sullen. His mother threatened to "box his ears" when he got home. She'd need a ladder to reach them. The kid was over six feet tall.

Chris sat there like he was in geography class. Relaxed. No problem. Soon, it'd be all over and forgotten.

Exactly the way it was with me.

Somebody was always lining my bottom with soft goose feathers. I was always forgiven for my drunks. Punishment was threatened, rarely delivered. Regardless of what I did or who I hurt, I would invariably hear: "You're not an alcoholic." Or "One more time and you'd better have your resume' written. Now get back to your office." Or "Do it again and I'll go home to Mother. What do you want for supper?" I was always let off the hook as gently as possible.

The detective continued to chew on the kids. One of the fathers leaned against the wall. He was half in the bag. Fumes of bourbon began to drift over to me.

If that had been me during my drinking days, I wouldn't have been at home when the phone rang. Not on a Friday night. And if bad luck had put me near the phone, I'd have been more than slumping on the wall. I'd probably have been shouting advice to my son from the drunk tank.

Suddenly, I felt tremendously virtuous. For the first time in my life, I was looking at angry cops who weren't directing their wrath at me. I saw myself standing there like a statue, an angel with folded hands, eyes piously closed, dressed in a long white gown with sandals, with a halo shedding rays of goodwill upon everyone in the room.

I snapped back to reality when the detective looked up at the parents and asked if there were any

questions. Silence. He dismissed the boys and told us to take them home. That's when I screwed up the courage to speak. Courage is the right word. When I see men wearing guns, I tend to clam up.

Chris, the two police officers, and I sat alone at the table. I mentioned that this wasn't Christopher's first offense. Then, words came to me that seemed to get through to my son.

"I can't change you, Chris. I can't make you stop drinking and smoking grass. There is no punishment I can offer that will keep you out of trouble. These officers can't change you, either. In spite of all the threats they made tonight, you'll be back here again and again until you change your attitude. You're the only one who can change you. Nobody else can do it. I learned that the hard way, and I hope you don't have to travel that path.

"So I'm asking the arresting officer to do you a big favor. I want him to write a note on your file that the next time you get in trouble, you'll be put behind bars. When they call me at home, I don't want to be told to come and get you. The only way you'll learn is by hitting your bottom as hard and as painfully as possible. Wake up in the drunk tank in the midst of vomit and urine. Face the judge with sweat rolling off your skin, with your head pounding and your body stinking and your soul filled with terror and remorse."

I can hear his grandmother say-

ing, "How can you love your son and treat him that way?"

My answer is "Because I love him."

Chris values my sobriety. I believe he isn't copying my actions of the past. If he is, that's something else I can't change. Yet I'm convinced that if I got drunk, his heart would be broken. It may be he has the same disease I have. If so, thank God I have the tools to help him, the identical tools he may eventually be using. They are available because I'm available.

One of the beautiful things about AA is the sharing of problems and insights. A member of the Fellowship told me of his son, who has a drug and booze problem, had a car

accident last week, and was just released from the hospital with more than a hundred stitches in his body. Another dear friend told me of his son, who isn't walking around today. This young man received a stiff jail sentence for sticking up a filling station while under the two influences.

I grieve for them as I do for my son. But I can't change them. Only myself. My problems haven't gone away just because I'm sober. The truth is, they've increased. But it's a joy to fearlessly face the problems with serene confidence that the answers will intuitively come. Page 84 of the Big Book says so. It's the God's truth.

L.C., Fort Wayne, Ind.