

KNL WINTER 2023 | LOVE, DEATH, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

It was a Saturday in early March. The NCAA basketball tournament, my favorite sports event, was getting underway that afternoon. The weather was beautiful, and I was off for the weekend after a grueling week at work. All was well with the world.

I was about to head out for the hardware store to buy some things for my house, which my wife and I were renovating, when the phone rang. It was Paul, my sponsor of six years. He often called to see how things were going or which meeting I was going to or to ask if I'd like to go to an eating meeting or a church picnic. This was not the average phone call, however. His words were "I've got a little bad news."

Alcoholics Anonymous in the Louisville, Kentucky area had taken some big hits recently with the death of some solid members with quality sobriety. My own father had died eleven months earlier, one week after celebrating thirty-four years of continuous sobriety. I anxiously waited to find out who had died now. The news was even worse than I had imagined. Paul had just gotten home from the hospital, where he had been taken by ambulance a few hours earlier. He had cancer.

What followed for Paul was an incredible battery of tests. We'd take a trip to the doctor one day and visit the hospital for more tests the next. They seemed endless. The lives of his large family -four daughters, three sons-in-law, six grandchildren, and three sisters -were affected. His many sponsees and even more numerous friends also took the news hard. Nevertheless, for the most part, we all tried to keep it business as usual.

Then, as the months rolled by and the cancer progressed, certain elements of his personality, which made him who he was, began to be affected. He maintained his quick wit and warm smile, but it took a little longer for him to produce them. Next, he reached the point where he was going to need some help. He was already living with two good friends, also members of AA, who had insisted he come to live with them when he first announced he had cancer, but alone they could no longer give Paul the help he needed all day every day. They had to sleep and go to work. They needed help, and lots of it. They knew where to go.

Phone calls were made to me and a few others, asking if we could spend the night at their house a few nights a week. Our friend frequently got up in the middle of the night to eat, to watch television, or just to be up, and he needed help getting from one room to the next safely. The response was unbelievable. The word spread quickly through our local AA meetings, and we got more help than we asked for.

Seven of us each picked a night and stayed there, awake and alert, in case Paul wanted to make a move. When that, too, became difficult because of our work, more phone calls were made, and we quickly got seven more people and split each night into two shifts. When people had to leave for a week or two for long planned vacations, substitutes were waiting eagerly in the wings to lend a hand.

In total, over thirty members of Alcoholics Anonymous came and went during the wee hours of the night to help this man who had helped them so many times. It was awe-inspiring. And when neighbors asked what kind of organization cares so much that they would do all this for someone, Paul simply said, "That's the program of Alcoholics Anonymous at work." (Members of Al-Anon, a program my sponsor loved with all his heart, were there in force as well.) As the days and weeks passed, people just kept coming. Those who couldn't stay came to visit and brought breakfast, lunch, or dinner. There was never a shortage of food, fellowship, laughter, or peace. Our friend was able to take part in all of it.

My sponsor took his last breath on October 20, 2000. When he died he was far richer than he had ever dreamed of being. During the last eight months, he had been able to see what he meant to us and to tell us what we meant to him. He had brought his family and friends together, and he died happy, satisfied, and in the middle of the most amazing show of love anyone around here has ever seen.

Tom F.



KNL WINTER 2023 | SECOND FIRST MEETING

In July 2007 I attended my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I had no family or friends in a recovery program. The only person I knew in AA was an ex-girlfriend of mine that introduced me to the love of my life, Captain Morgan Spiced Rum and Coke. I went into that meeting as John, the supporter and left as “John, the supporter” with a 24 hour token AND a Big Book. This was my introduction to AA. I stayed sober for about 30 days on my own. I did not do any work but this planted the AA seed.



I really started to take hold of how this program only worked one day at a time and for that I am truly grateful.

A few years later, September 2009, I picked up the phone and called that only person I knew in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, the ex-girlfriend. Fortunately for me she was still sober! This time I went to my second first meeting, a Sunday night speaker meeting called Group 19. I remember being able to relate to the speaker and after the meeting I met a couple men for coffee.

“What do you get out of AA that you don’t get out of anything else?” I asked the men sitting across from me.

One responded, “I get a little serenity and a little piece of mind. I get to wake up the next day and remember what happened the night before.”

Being a 28 year old and not having much direction in my life, at this point all I really wanted was to wake up and remember what happened the night before. I can remember going to sleep and deleting text messages, and things I sent the night before. I didn’t want to have to wake up and feel the guilt, shame and remorse of my actions. My new friends told me on Mondays we go to this meeting, on Tuesdays we go to that meeting, on Wednesdays I don’t usually go to a meeting but I can get you in touch with someone who does. They told me the meetings they went to all week long. I tried to make as many as I could. I just didn’t want to drink. The book talks about, not being able to live with alcohol and not being able to live without alcohol. That’s where I was when I stopped drinking. I didn’t know what to do. After stringing some days together, I can remember waking up thinking, wow I can remember what happened the night before. What a blessing!

One thing I really had to focus on was that this is a one day at a time program. As excited as I was to get a 30 day chip, 60 day chip, and a 90 day chip, I really started to take hold of how this program only worked one day at a time and for that I am truly grateful.

John B

Sobriety Date

September 17, 2009

KNL WINTER 2023 | SEEDS



Every Seed Can Grow

“There’s nothing you can do. He has to hit his (or her) bottom, first.”

How many times have we spoken those words to frightened, helpless friends and families of “hopeless, hapless” alcoholics?

But here’s the thing: While our need to hit bottom is a proven reality for our recovery in AA, the long journey from chronic alcoholism to our admission of powerlessness is littered with warning signals along the way.

I’m not talking about the common signals we know all too well— DUIs, wrecks, divorce, poor health, job loss, homelessness, etc.

Rather, I’m speaking of other, less obvious signals, little seeds of truth that come to us in the form of words from others or as insights gleaned from small experiences. These can be quietly powerful—if we pay attention. But as good, hearty drinkers, we seldom do. We thoroughly ignore them—until they resurface, often much later, at the most opportune times!

For example, in my own case of 40 years of alcoholic drinking, I was never arrested, never hurt anyone (physically), never lost a job or missed a meal. So, Why the heck would I stop drinking? Heck yeah!

But , as I finally approached the end of my drinking career, little snippets of “alcoholic memory” began popping into my consciousness. Little, unrelated “seeds”

that I had previously ignored were now stoking my fears that I might be in trouble with alcohol; that my charmed life of never-having-had consequences might be coming to a bitter end. Later, I realized that these “little seeds, were breaking through the toxic soil of denial, dishonesty and rationalization. They were cracking the surface of my lifelong alcoholic shield. Long forgotten—until now.

For example, I recalled a time long ago, when I was a soldier stationed in Germany, sitting on a barstool with my girlfriend who had come to see me. I remarked that whenever I drank, my face felt “fat”. She told me that was a sign of alcoholism. Of course, I laughed it off. I was only 22 year’s old for Pete’s sake. But my subconscious thought “hmm”.

I had totally forgotten that moment, but it was one of my first emerging memories as I began to fear my compulsion for drink, many years later.

Another time, well before I considered stopping drinking, my mother read an article that alcoholism was thought to have a hereditary component. A fair measure of alcoholism appeared in our family tree and she called me to share her concern. Again: “Naw mom!! I’m fine. And again, “hmm.”

And that was one more little long forgotten seed that re-appeared to nurture my fear about drinking many years later.

Every girlfriend throughout my youth and early adulthood, eventually told me that I drank too much. “Naw! I’m fine! I just love to drink! No DUIs. I go to work every day, etc.”

That was the beginning of the end for all of those relationships.

Years later, it was the beginning of the end of my drinking.

Looking back, I can now easily imagine those people in my life as angels, heaven-sent, planting seeds of caution in my psyche. There were enough of those seeds for an ample garden yet they lay dormant until exposed to the first rays of the Sunlight of the Spirit, after years of incubation.

On page 12 of the Big Book, in Bill’s story, he recounts his moments in early recovery. He tells of recalling his long forgotten experience at Winchester Cathedral back when he was stationed in England during WW1. During his very early recovery, he suddenly recalled his moment at the cathedral, and the spiritual message that he totally dismissed as he looked for his next drink. That was a big seed.

When I read that passage recently, it reminded me of my most poignant seed. It was the image of an older, alcoholic neighbor when I was in college, living in a third floor apartment. I used to laugh at his “Walter Mitty-ish” misadventures in the backyard while watching from my window. He would dress up in various costumes and parade around the yard, pretending to be a sailor, or pirate, or pioneer. Very entertaining.

One day, I saw him standing in front of an artist’s easel wearing a smock and a French beret, with a paint brush and pallet, having assumed the mantle of a great painter. It was comical but suddenly sad. I remember having a brief shudder of fear that a man could turn-out like that. How could that happen? I felt fear, not humor and I didn’t know why. Nor did I reflect on it very long. Time for a beer!

30 years later, in June, 2004 as I entered spaghetti junction on my way to work, in Indiana I experienced the moment of clarity described in our book. It was as if the clouds parted and suddenly I couldn’t imagine life without alcohol and I couldn’t imagine life with it. It was a moment of sheer terror; and at that moment, the image of that man with the paintbrush appeared before me and I knew instantly the reason I had been fearful on that day so long ago. I was now becoming him.

The seeds that had been planted in my mind along my journey, coalesced to give me that moment of clarity. I called AA and went to my first meeting shortly thereafter. That was June 7th and I haven’t had a drink since.

The point, for me, is this—I can never underestimate my ability to make a difference. Our counsel and admonitions to someone who isn’t yet ready, can show up much later as a seed for the garden of recovery. It can be one of many little reasons a person finally puts a plug in the jug and enters a new way of living. Never give up.

Kenes B.