



The Steps Require No Magic

By Bobbie K.

I joined AA the first time in 1991, at 13 years old. I was one of those whose very first time with alcohol and drugs resulted in expulsion from school. But it was the early 90s so everyone went to treatment back then. I hadn't really done enough research to determine if I was an alcoholic, but when they took us to an AA meeting, it felt right.

I remember everyone was smoking, and I was able to bum a cigarette. There was a copy of the 12 steps and 12 traditions hanging on the wall and I remember thinking, yeah, those make sense.

I was raised Roman Catholic and by 13, I knew being gay was going to be an issue so I knew I needed to find something else to help me navigate living at home until I could legally move out at 17. The 12 steps made sense and as I sat in one of my first meetings, someone told the type of story that when you laugh at it, people look at you as though you've done something wrong. But when I looked around, everyone else was laughing too. I found somewhere I fit in. When I was discharged home, I looked up AA in the phone book and found the Kingwood Group on Russell Palmer Drive.

Long story short, I fell in love with the program, with the steps, the literature, the people, the culture, and I stayed for 8 years. AA literally raised me. From 13-15 yrs old I was doing 12 step calls, speaker meetings, answering intergroup calls, attending Big Book and 12 & 12 studies, walking women through the steps, moving people from here and there as they climbed out of the bottle, any service work that anyone had for me to do, and drinking more coffee and smoking more cigarettes than seems humanly possible when I think back on it. Those men and women took care of me, and I needed that care. When I remember those times, over 30 years ago now, I tear up with gratitude.

I found Young People's AA when I was 15 and went to as many conferences all over the place as I could. Pulling all-nighters playing poker, sober dances, and attending conferences. They taught me how to live instead of just survive, how to get a job, and how to be a functioning member of society.

Back then, almost every meeting started with a moment of silence, maybe the serenity prayer (but not always) and reading the beginning of *How it Works*. The 7th tradition basket was passed in the beginning too. Business in the beginning of the meeting was maybe 5 minutes before the topic, readings, and sharing began. Back then, people talked as long as they needed to and if someone talked too long, people would go speak to them afterwards. I remember people railing about god, proclaimed agnostics, Wiccans who led meetings, and many folks who didn't believe in god, but did believe in the power of the group.

There was much talk in the rooms back then about spiritual experiences, but not in terms of what someone had to do or had to feel. There was a lady, Grandma Alice, who used to say, spirituality in AA is like the wet side of water, stick around long enough and you are bound to get wet. At the same time, I remember sitting with her in the club room with folks who were serious atheists and spirituality didn't mean magic, it meant working the steps and recovering from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

When I turned 21, I decided to leave AA and go do some research in the world "out there". No one gave me problems for leaving AA, and I wasn't treated differently. I was in for a rude awakening though. I remember the first time I asked some co-workers out to coffee and asked what big fears or character defects they were working on and they just stared at me. After about 8 months, there were some life events that sent me back to the rooms of AA, but this time I went to gay AA clubs and meetings only. This time I stayed for 6 years and wasn't as involved as I was previously. Quite frankly, I was sick of the "god stuff" and I was in good company being in rooms with so many other lesbians and gay men dying of AIDS. Those years in AA were very different, but I still had no issue with believing whatever I wanted to believe and I didn't have to hide it from others. At 28, I decided that it had been long enough since I had the really bad first time experience with alcohol and drugs and had learned enough in AA to drink responsibly. I said I would drink for 2 years to see and then stop so no real damage would be done.

Well, 7 years later, at 35, I crawled back to the rooms in unbelievably bad shape. I had done my "research", was on the literal brink of death, and my mind was trashed. But this time, I was thoroughly convinced to my innermost self that I was an alcoholic. This time the rooms seemed different. For one, knowing I was an alcoholic and being afraid I wouldn't be able to stop made everything I heard land differently. And meeting after meeting, I realized it was the tone of religiosity I heard, and more importantly, that I felt. The intro to meetings now seemed to take 15 to 20 mins, there were all these new rules, and so much more god! I never had any issue with others' conceptions of higher power, but I had quickly discovered some challenges feeling comfortable being real about my own conceptions. AA gave me the ability to modify what I believed over my life and the more I explored and experienced, the more private I became about what I believe spiritually since I started to see what a negative impact this could sometimes have on the recovery of others if they were questioning where they were in the process. I believe the focus should be on a desire to stop drinking rather than religious dogma.

I do not believe that a spiritual experience is magic. I believe we work the 12 steps, not one specific way, but in a way that makes sense to us at the time with another person, and as we walk through this process, it brings about a personality change sufficient enough to react to life differently consistently. I believe we get a daily reprieve based on the maintenance of our routine to bring about lower levels of selfishness. If I don't focus my energy on others, selfishness starts to grow again and I cannot think clearly and lose my ability to be honest. Once I lose this ability, I lose my defense against the first drink and can make a decision in delusion. And so the cycle begins again. But this is only my story, one story, among literally millions.

It's been 12 years this go around and I rarely go to meetings, maybe once every 3 to 6 months. I still have a sponsor, work the steps with others, and my life is based on 12 step principles. About a month ago I came across AA Agnostica and saw that there were secular meetings and I got excited that maybe I could add meetings back to the routine. With every article I read here, I see more of myself, of my experience in the last 12 years and I'm filled with hope that there may be space for me in the rooms of AA once again.

As Roger C would say, onward and upward!

Bobbie K. has been in the rooms since 1991 and had her last drink on July 7, 2012. She found AA for the first time at 13 because it was a requirement of the treatment center she was in. Even though she had yet to determine whether she was a real alcoholic, she stayed in the rooms for 8 years, left for a bit, and then came back to Lambda (gay) AA. After 6 years, she went to do some real research to find out if she was an alcoholic. Turns out, she was! This time around, she has noticed a marked change in the religious tone in meetings and is committed to preserving tradition 3, no matter what. She has been through the whole spectrum of transcendent belief and today her focus is on working the steps, no magic required. Today, Bobbie is a professor and a student, and supports people of all beliefs in the program, no dogma required!"
