

I Am Different



By Keith C.

Hello, I'm Keith and I am an alcoholic and this is my story. Why start my story in such a strange way? Because as an alcoholic I have a disease of denial that tries to convince me I don't have it. I need to remind myself, not you, that I am and always will be an alcoholic.

The alcohol industry uses a variety of tactics to make alcohol seem fun, cool, and even necessary. Alcohol is everywhere. It's in our movies, our music, our TV shows, and most certainly our sporting events. Why I mention this is because as a kid I became very intrigued by this magical golden nectar. Of course they never mentioned the potential negative consequences. I don't ever remember reading a warning label informing me that I might become addicted and my life would be a complete fiasco for decades. Not that I would have heeded to that information anyhow, because I always thought I was special. I was different.

They say there is fine line between a problem drinking and full-on alcoholism, but for me there wasn't. I was never a normal drinker, nor even a problem drinker. I truly believe I was an alcoholic before I even had my first sip. So when I ponder the root cause of my addiction I believe it's because I do everything alcoholically, it's ingrained in me. I am a collect the whole set type of guy, one is never enough of anything I find appealing. A type of character defect or flaw if you will. My brain absolutely craves dopamine.

Few things are more American than drinking heavily. I found that to be true in my immediate family as my bloodlines are littered with alcoholism, but I also found that to be true in the neighborhood I grew up in and later in the United States Air Force and College. I just thought it was normal, because that was all I was ever exposed to. The whole drugs, rock 'n' roll, and hard drinking

lifestyle also had this certain allure to my friends and myself. We thought we were cool. Looking back, I have a few other adjectives in mind.

When I try to explain my drinking problem, it goes like this: the more I drank, the more I wanted to drink. Drinking increased my thirst. I wanted the second drink more than the first, and I wanted the fifth more than I'd wanted the fourth. My thirst always increased over the course of an evening. But it also increased, in a more subtle way, over the course of a month, a year, a decade, a quarter century.

My relationship with alcohol became more and more abusive and I didn't care because in my own odd way I was in love with a substance that was masked as a friend but at the same time destroying my life. I can now see how it had been poisoning not only my body but my mind and soul as well. I drank when I was happy; I drank when I was sad. I drank to celebrate and I drank to drown my sorrows. I drank when it was sunny. I drank when it rained. I just drank like a madman — because I was.

My whole world became a blur. At times it was almost as if I was running on auto pilot, occasionally trying to fool the people I came in contact with that I actually knew what planet I was trying to walk and pretend to function on. Yet, alcohol had masqueraded as the solution to the problems it actually created for me. It stunted and prohibited my growth in many other areas, especially emotional maturity and conflict resolution.

Booze was a thief of my time, memories, ambition and so much more. The more I drank, the more it stole. Relationships, jobs, cars, my summer camp, boats, even cats and a dog. But the greatest asset I had and nearly lost — was myself.

Drinking was my choice — addiction was not. Addiction had a hold on me. I was firmly in its grasp. The only way I was able to start my recovery journey was finally realizing it was a matter of life or death — and I had to make that choice. I was well aware that it was going to be a bit more complex than merely putting down the bottle, because I had already tried that before and it only works for so long. I needed a new strategy, and that had to start with willingness, an enthusiastic acceptance.

The Big Book describes the mental obsession as: "The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death." That was also my illusion and I certainly gave it a whirl. Not surprisingly, the experiments all failed miserably. The love affair was over. I finally admitted I was powerless over alcohol — that my life had become unmanageable.

I knew that AA worked, as I had seen many people succeed and thrive in the program. I just never fully committed to it in my previous attempts, because I was convinced I was special and that many of the suggestions in the Big Book simply didn't apply to me. This time around I was open minded. I was encouraged by another member of the fellowship to completely discard my illogical

and delusional thinking and stop picking the book apart looking for flaws and getting stuck on the God part of it. He assured me that contrary to popular belief in the rooms, it was quite possible to maintain sobriety without the help of God. He said he was living proof.

For me to be truly successful in breaking the chains of alcoholism, I needed to be honest with myself. There would be no white lights illuminating my path. Nor would I claim to believe in someone else's God, as that would mean I would be constitutionally incapable of being honest with myself.

You may be wondering how this happened? It was the fellowship, love, acceptance, encouragement and support that I found at Alcoholics Anonymous that changed my life for the better. The philosophy of the program is has points of pure genius. The storytelling aspect of the program is also very meaningful to me as I often hear my story spoken in the words of another or hear something that is thought provoking. It's a powerful reminder that I do not walk alone, especially in the Secular/Agnostic/Freethinker Groups.

Sobriety is not a journey to an exciting new destination, but a return to my natural state. This is the place always intended for me to be and I like to call this place home.

I feel more connected to myself, others and life. I am becoming a person that I look forward to greeting each day. It has been most marked, I suppose, by the regaining of a certain childlike sense of wonder at the world. The magic of me is back, because today I walk with a sense of purpose.

I'm under no illusions. I am still an alcoholic, and I will always have work to do on myself. But within the four walls of the AA meeting halls, I learned how to change what I could and accept what I could not. I'm still gaining wisdom to know the difference.

I didn't sign up to be an alcoholic, nor do I consider it among my greatest life accomplishments. However, it has given me a special gift, as I am able to lift others afflicted with the same deadly disease. That's what makes us all different. That's what makes us all special.

Keith C. had his last drink on August 22, 2020. He initially struggled in AA due to his agnosticism. Many members of the fellowship assured him that some magical white light moment would come his way. It never did. Today he has finally found his people via Zoom and is happy to report that he is in the process of helping create a much needed agnostic meeting in central New Hampshire. Keith operates an online shop called the Sobriety Club, specializing in unique, clever and special items to commemorate and provide inspiration for the recovery journey.
