

No Longer Seeking Oblivion



By Ronald W.

I started drinking at age 15 in high school, and I always drank to get drunk. And I did that for 37 years. That was my deal with life – as long as I could drink when I wanted to or needed to, I could deal with life and get by. At first I was seeking nirvana, and then gradually seeking comfortable numbness, and then finally oblivion.

My parents were not drunks. They barely drank at all. They were very strict, very religious people, and they raised their family of 6 children that way, with a lot of corporal punishment and harsh discipline when we were young. But I did have a stable environment, and enough food, clothing, and shelter, along with a decent education, and I am grateful for that.

By the time I was a teen I was overflowing with guilt, shame, fear, feelings of inferiority, and suppressed anger. I found some others who became my friends and we started drinking together on weekend nights. And then I got involved with other mind-altering substances as well, and other friends. And I had become an agnostic as well.

I was a nerd in high school, and very socially awkward, and that did not improve much in college. I was thirsty for learning, however, and I earned two bachelor's degrees over the course of 10 years. I was able to keep my partying to mostly just weekend blowouts for about 12 years, until a breakup with a girlfriend, and I drank more often after that. Still I got a good job, which involved a lot of travel, and which allowed me to drink a lot during the week after work. I knew I needed money to drink, and I needed to drink so I needed to work. That cycle worked for many years, more or less.

However, after another couple of breakups with more girlfriends, I started going downhill and struggled to keep my drinking in check. During this time I earned my Master's degree and several more certificates and certifications for my career. But after about 1 ½ years of voluntary sobriety, I finally went over the edge again on my last three year run. I was still very much a closet drinker, but most of my friends were gone. I never had a family of my own as alcohol was always my mistress and first choice. And my drinking was starting to affect my work. During that final phase, I started to drink to blackout and passing out and waking up in my own vomit, which I had mostly been able to avoid in previous years. I was desperately seeking oblivion.

Then came the moment of clarity, when the fog cleared a bit after 32 years of drinking. The sign was flashing "Point of No Return", and I was descending into a very ugly oblivion. I knew I had a decision to make. That I could continue on with my downward spiral and probably not escape, or something had to change. I could not live without alcohol, but I realized I could not live with alcohol anymore.

My employment had an Employee Assistance Program, and I called them Monday morning after my latest drunken spree. They set me up with a therapist after telling them I was depressed and seeking help (I did not tell them I was considering suicide). The therapist I went to the next day turned out to be a very beneficial beginning on the road I was embarking on. I was honest enough that my therapist recommended I go to AA. And the very next day, Wednesday, I attended my first meeting.

Just talking to my therapist once a week, or reading a self-help book was not going to cut it, I knew that from the get go. I needed a more active solution, a tool kit for life, but mostly I needed to get out of myself and my own head, and around others who had a similar problem but who had found a solution.

And so every night after work on my drive home, I was able to find a meeting, and then on the weekends I would go to a morning meeting and an evening meeting, so I did more than 90 meetings in 90 days. But I desperately needed those meetings, and the hope and encouragement I felt and heard in these rooms. I needed to see that there were other people who had problems with life and with alcohol and with their own self, like I did. And that they had found a way to help them not drink, and to help them live life on life's terms.

One day at a time really hit me right where I needed it. I could not see swearing off alcohol forever when I had no idea if I could go for a week without drinking. That would be meaningless. But I could maybe go for a day, and just do today, one day at a time, each day. And that is what I have done ever since. I have never taken an oath to not drink and I never will. I will always only do one day at a time.

I did not identify with any of the god talk in AA and I mostly ignored it. I then came to realize I was actually more of an atheist than an agnostic. But what did I believe? I believe in myself, and in others, and in the fellowship, as well as things like truth, justice, liberty, equality, fairness, nature, science, and the wonder of living.

I was psychologically weak when I first came in to get sober, and I needed emotional support, friendship, and connection with others who had done this thing. I found an agnostic sponsor and worked a secular version of the 12 steps. It kept my mind off drinking.

As a human, I do need relationships with other people, and even though I am still very much a loner, I have found some of what I need in AA. I also found that by helping others as others helped me, I feel better about myself, and find a place for myself among others in different ways.

I know I never want to go back to those final desolate days of desperation and hopelessness, and staying in a fellowship of others like myself is the best way for me to do that. I will soon be celebrating my 18th year of sobriety, and have been retired for three years now after my 35 year engineering career. Still having fun and looking forward to more one day at a times. I take care of myself and my relationships, help others, sleep well, eat healthy, stay active, and keep involved. I will continue dancing one day at a time until I dance no more!

Ron W had his last drink on September 30, 2006. He came to AA on the recommendation of his therapist. Ron has used many different ideas as his higher power, as he was agnostic when he joined AA and soon realized he was actually mostly atheist. Many meetings in southern California are more tolerant of different versions of one's higher power, even though they use the Big Book and Twelve Steps, and he is grateful for that. During the Covid lockdown, he found many available secular meetings and fellowships and that was a breath of fresh air. Today he is retired, travelling, and is content with life.
