

Becoming Connected

BY ANONYMOUS

We are flying high today, out of Providence, R.I., back toward Austin. The flight attendant offers me a cocktail, and when I refuse, my traveling companions give me quizzical stares. Simply and unapologetically, I explain, “I’m allergic.” Nobody asks a follow-up question, and if they did, I’m not sure they’d understand the answer: *“Once I start, I can’t stop. It’s an allergy in my body that I can’t control.”*

We go back to our conversation and my companions drink their white wine and beer. Anonymous in the clouds, I say the serenity prayer and let my thoughts drift to the other alcoholics in my life. There are those who still struggle with this disease and those who have, like me, recovered from a hopeless state of mind and body.

Today, my life has a purpose and is filled with a sense of freedom I have never known before. Staying sober, performing service work, and helping others who continue to struggle enables me to neither regret my past nor wish to shut the door on it. Ease and comfort are my constant companions. I enjoy what some of my closest friends describe as “serenity.”

It hasn’t always been this way.

On our layover in Chicago, I hurry to my next gate and take out my laptop. I am a young attorney, newly licensed, and I have work to do. I’m one man in a mid-size firm, working on contract. I’m on a mission: Plugged in and set up, fully connected to the Internet and my cell phone, I lay my work out and start calculating landowner royalties and mineral interests. When I encounter difficulties, I call my boss. He and I talk through whatever issues I’ve come across. The only mistake I can make is not to reach out. Help is always a phone call away.

I didn’t always know that help was available. At the end of my third year of law school, while all of my friends signed up for their bar review courses, got married, and found apartments in new cities, I was passed out on the floor of my friend’s apartment in a town in Texas.

Intellectually, I knew I was an alcoholic. My drinking became worse each year of law school. My 2L year motto was *“Wednesday is the new Thursday.”* By 3L year, Monday was the new Friday and I spent every day, all day, in a drunken stupor. My habit was to “come to” around 6 a.m., drink again until I passed out, then come to again at lunch time and repeat the process over again, throughout the entire day. Anyone can imagine how this grated on my psyche and on my soul. I rarely ventured out in that last year of law school. On those occasions when I did, I never enjoyed myself. The only thing more unbearable than the incomprehensible demoralization of not

being able to stop was the reality of continually surviving such compulsive self-destruction.

Emotionally, I knew I was an alcoholic. I went home for Easter in 2006 and completely broke down. The life I’d been living was about to kill me and I knew this because suicide was now *the* option, not just an option. There I was, a grown man, crying in my father’s arms. It was then that I took the first step of the Alcoholics Anonymous program: I *conceded*

to my innermost self that I was an alcoholic by giving up the idea that I could drink like a normal person. No longer just an intellectual understanding, my emotional understanding gave me the desire to become sober.

I checked into a treatment center and I did what they told me to do. Afterward, recognizing that 63 days was insufficient to change a 12-year habit, I moved to Florida. I joined an AA group and got a sponsor who suggested I complete all 12 steps of the AA program. He also suggested I get phone numbers from other men in that group and call them. Not tomorrow or next week, he suggested, but right now, *tonight*.

It was extremely hard to make that first call. Alcoholism is a disease of isolation. I had felt “less than” and “apart from” other people my whole life. My use of alcohol had always helped me in social situations throughout my early career. The first time I drank, I felt more connected to God, the universe, and every-



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thing else than I'd ever felt my whole life. I chased that feeling right up to my sobriety date of May 28, 2006. So there I was, in a new city, newly sober and scared. In a desperate attempt to keep from drinking, I finally reached out to another alcoholic. I made the call that my sponsor had suggested. For the 10 minutes we talked on the phone, we connected. For a moment, all the jitters, the self-doubt, and the fear vanished: For that night, I was able to stay sober.

It was the start of becoming connected and moving into recovery. Treatment helped but recovery required action. The 12 steps of AA have enabled me to connect with a higher power, which has enabled me to live a sober, healthy life. I sincerely believe I have had a spiritual experience as a result of completing all 12 steps of the AA program. This phenomenon occurred when I shared my story with another alcoholic who was fresh from detox. We worked together, and I was able to use my experiences to reach him and connect with him in a manner that is unique to alcoholics. This is my life's work and something I will continue to do for as long as I am able.

Through AA and the fellowship that surrounds the program, I have moved into recovery. I am able to reconnect to humanity and regain friendships. I am now always connected to my higher power and to humanity in general. This connection enables me to live a very full and productive life. Recently, I have been very blessed to be involved with the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) and Texas Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (TLCL).

As a TLAP volunteer, I've participated in educational activities and started a weekly AA meeting at my law school. Both projects are ways for me to give back to the legal community and carry the message of recovery. But, between you and me, I am most satisfied by attending “my” little meeting every Thursday evening. If I can reach just one law student who is struggling with this disease, I feel my life will have served its purpose.

The TLCL Convention, held in Austin this past June, was such a wonderful surprise. Being newly licensed, I did not expect such a large crowd of attorneys to attend the gathering. Our late-night meeting on Saturday was one of the most powerful experiences I've had as a sober person. It felt wonder-

ful to see people from all over the state sharing openly and honestly about their life experiences. Better yet, I got to be a part of it all!

If you are feeling isolated and alone, please don't despair. Help is only a phone call away. The only mistake you can make is not to reach out and let someone know you need help. There are lots of organizations, places, and people who care. One resource that specializes in helping lawyers, judges, and law students is the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program. It's confidential and free. They can connect you with resources and peer assistance in your community. Call TLAP at (800)343-8527 and talk to someone who can help. ☺

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