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In the End, It's Just One Drunk Talking to Another

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Exercise, acupuncture, self-help books, special diets, psychiatrists — nothing worked til he tried Alcoholics Anonymous

As Alcoholics Anonymous prepared to celebrate its 75th anniversary, the Los Angeles Times asked one of its members to write about the group and how he came to join. Following in the tradition of the organization, he is using his first name only.

My name is Chas. I'm an alcoholic.

I stumbled into my first A.A. meeting in fall 1997. I had been a hard drinker for 20 years and a serious drunk for the last 10. I had lost my job, was about to lose my family and was having serious health problems. My doctors said I had to stop drinking.

That was impossible. Life without alcohol was unimaginable. I had been an anxious, jumpy kid and a shy, morose teenager, and for decades I'd suffered from depression and panic attacks. Drinking wasn't a problem but a solution: Booze made me feel normal.

Over time, I required a lot of it — beer before breakfast, to steady my nerves, then one or two fifths of vodka through the day and deep into the night.

I now longer enjoyed it. I needed it. But I knew it was killing me. For years I had tried to stop drinking, or at least slow down. I tried exercise and acupuncture, self-help books and special diets. I was prescribed psycho-pharmaceuticals and spent hours with psychiatrists.

I tried everything but A.A., and I wasn't about to try that. My father had gotten sober with A.A.'s help. So had all

three of my younger brothers and my one living uncle. I was happy for them, but I knew it wouldn't work for me. I wasn't a joiner. I detested the idea of group therapy. I was allergic to organized religion and any concept of God. I thought A.A. was a sort of spiritual Ponzi scheme—half Scientology, half Tupperware party.

But alcohol brought me to my knees — nearly literally. By the time I turned 42, I was in constant pain and couldn't walk without a cane. The doctors said I needed two hip replacements, but they wouldn't operate unless I quit drinking for two months.

I hadn't gone that long without liquor since junior high school, and I'd proved I couldn't stay sober on my own. So I did the unthinkable: I called a friend who was sober and said, "I need to go to one of those meetings."

We went to a church in the Valley. I sat and listened for an hour. I heard nothing that moved me or gave me hope. The bumper sticker wisdom of the program was idiotic. The ardent cheerfulness of the group was repellent. The emphasis on God, or a Higher Power, was offensive. I hung my head and told my friend I was wasting his time. I wasn't going to read the book

"Alcoholics Anonymous," get a sponsor, work any steps or pray to a God I didn't believe in.

My friend said, "That's OK. Can you go home and try not to drink tonight?" I said I could try. "Can I take you to a meeting tomorrow?" I said he could. "That's all you have to do," he said. "Welcome to Alcoholics Anonymous."

Seventy-five years ago, two drunks — Bill, a failed New York stockbroker, and Bob, a disgraced Ohio proctologist — had a similar conversation. Bill had discovered that talking to other alcoholics about his alcohol problem diminished his need to drink. He helped Bob stop drinking, and together they began working with others. A few weeks later their first successful convert, a Kentucky man known as Bill D., took his last drink. Their friendship turned into the fellowship that turned into A.A., probably the most significant social movement of the 20th century.

I didn't take a drink that first night. My friend took me to a meeting the next day, and the next. Slowly, reluctantly, I admitted I was powerless over alcohol and that my life was unmanageable. I came to believe that some power greater than myself — the meetings, the

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program, God, whatever – might be able to help me with my problem, if I was willing. I became willing.

The doctors replaced my hips. My wife and children didn't leave. My health returned. I published my first book, then another. I got back on the tennis court, started motorcycling again and took up snowboarding. I got an A.A. sponsor and worked the 12 steps. I determined to live my life on a spiritual basis, made a written inventory of my errors and misdeeds, made restitution where possible, then tried to show other suffering alcoholics how they might recover too. In time I began to feel a sense of peace, ease and happiness that I had never known. I haven't had a drink in almost 13 years.

I don't know why that happened. Most alcoholics never make it to A.A., and many who make it don't stay sober. But I know how it happened. That's what I share with the newcomers I meet at the meetings I still attend: what I was like, what I did about it, and what I'm like now. That's what I hear from others too, men and women, gay and straight, older than I and younger, with more sober time and less, talking frankly about their struggles and their solutions. Some were gutter drunks who'd lost it all; others were Hollywood honchos who'd lost nothing except their souls. Almost all of them came through the door as I did, broken and brought to their knees. Almost all of those who stayed, and succeeded, surrendered to the program and worked the steps.

This Fourth of July weekend more than 40,000 of them, from 90 countries, will gather in San Antonio to celebrate their independence from alcohol and to mark A.A.' anniversary. They are part of a worldwide fellowship of, according to A.A.' figures, more than 2 million sober alcoholics – about 1.2 million in the U.S. – who meet regularly. (Los Angeles, its climate friendly to 12-step programs of all kinds, has more than 5,000 weekly A.A. meetings, attended by an estimated 100,000 alcoholics.) At the birthday celebration, members will talk about their drinking, and the miracle of their not drinking. In the end, that's their weapon against alcoholism, and the simple, elegant secret of A.A. that Bill and Bob discovered in 1935: One alcoholic talking to another can keep two drunks sober.

Via, The Hummer, Fall 2010

All I know about spirituality is: one drunk helping another drunk.

Peggy B., Palos Verde, CA

Via, The Messenger 2

Central Office Activities

	<u>FEBRUARY</u>	<u>Y.T.D.</u>
Visitors	85	179
Info. Calls	191	450
12 Step Calls	1	4
<u>Call Forwarding</u>		
Info. Calls	165	362
12 Step Calls	1	8
<u>TOTALS</u>		
Info. Calls	356	812
12 Step Calls	2	12

Directory Updates

HESPERIA

The Hesperia Umbrella Group (H.U.G.) has moved. The new address is:

16005 Main St.
Suite A

Parking is in the rear of the building behind the car dealership, off of Walnut St.

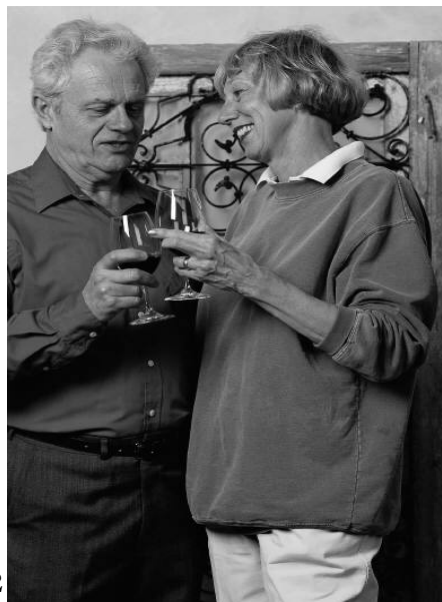
PLEASE PARK ONLY BEHIND THE CAR DEALERSHIP, BECAUSE YOU WILL BE TOWED!

Upcoming Events

March 23—25, 2012

Ride for Recovery – For information and flyers visit Central Office or www.victorvalleyaa.org

And Finally . . .



An old woman, sipping on a glass of wine while talking with her husband says, "I love you so much. I don't know how I could ever live without you."

Her husband asks, "Is that you or the wine talking?"

She replies, "It's me – talking to the wine."

Via, the Internet