

This is a story about life after prison and about living lawfully after running the course of illicit behavior and extreme drug usage, and a testament that change is possible, when based upon a firm foundation of willingness and honesty. If you can relate and perhaps are facing some serious shit, let me be the first to tell you, "It is still no excuse to continue an insane manner of living..."

When I first came to a CA meeting, I was an empty man. I had been released from a county prison by posting bail pending a resolution of a criminal matter. I was released in early January, 2001, and my "court date" for resolution was in mid-May, 2001. I had no permanent residence and was spending some time with one woman and some time with a second woman. My home had been destroyed by a hurricane in late 1998 and I had spent the past few years struggling against my own efforts to achieve some stability and permanence in my domestic life. I was not successful and spent these few years traveling from the Jersey shore to Philadelphia and from Philadelphia to Key West.

I was angry, frustrated, discontented and excessive in my ego-driven design for living. I never stopped to consider that my freedom was directly linked to my manner of living and the "cost of doing business" as I did was getting beyond my resources - quite a bit beyond these resources. When being in prison becomes its own relief, one must recognize how fucked up one's lifestyle may be!!!

When I attended my first CA meeting, I listened as some other people shared their stories of what their lives had been like, what happened and what they did today to remain drug-free and lawful in society. I made some notes while I was listening during that first meeting. I had been invited to attend a panel meeting at a local hospital and to meet some of the members of the CA PA-NJ-DE Area Fellowship. I accepted that invitation and attended that January 13th. Saturday night H & I Meeting in Roxborough, PA. I then attended the Sunday morning 10:00 a.m. meeting in the NE section of Philadelphia. The coffee sucked, frankly, and everyone was "coupled up" at that morning meeting. It was a "free flow" format and everyone in attendance had something to say about what was going on in their lives or what was coming up in the future. I didn't understand any of this jargon. "If this is a one day at a time program, why are you discussing an event in May?" I was told, "Just keep coming back." "Look at the similarities between all of us - do not focus on how we are different." "This is a 12 Step program for recovery - not 2 steps, not 13 - just 12 ego-crushing steps - do the step work or not, and die eating Twinkies after living a miserable, self-centered and isolated life."

WOW!!! No one ever said, "It's all right - everything's going to be OK." I was told that in spite of how fucked the world may seem, I'd be OK and I'd be all right. I was told that recovery is possible and that there is a solution to living a hopeless, desperate and isolated ego-driven life. I was told I could recover myself, and gain a peace of mind and discover a new happiness, that fear of people and of economic insecurity would leave me, that self-seeking would slip away, that I would intuitively know how to handle things that used to baffle me. AND, I could live a drug-free lawful life without suffering from an overwhelming obsession to get and stay high each and every day.

I was told to bathe regularly, stick around positive people and make a meeting. I try my best to maintain this simple posture after 6 years and 100 days drug-free and lawful so far. Sometimes, I am known to "parry" with the wordsmiths, jousting each against the other's insanities and vanities. I am not seeking sainthood. Not my "CA" subscription package.

Today, I am in service because I can afford the time and commitment and because I was taught that this is a "pay it forward" design for living. When someone took me out for a meal, I was told to take the next guy or gal out for a meal - to pay it forward.

I was told a sponsor is not a taxi driver, a banker, an employer, an investor or a material resource placed on a pedestal that defies human nature and is not infallible. I was told that there will come those moments when no human power could relieve me from that which is my malady. I was told that CA offers a spiritual program to help me gain some power, become less selfish and resentful, become better managed, less harmful to myself, to all of you and to society at large and that it did not matter what I believed - that this was a program of action and that it was not about waiting until I felt like doing something or for something outside of me to change. I was told that I had to change in order that the world around me changes. I HAD TO CHANGE!!!

How?

By following the actions outlined in the 12 Steps of recovery and precisely printed in the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous."

Others also suggested I ask someone to guide me with this course of action, and that we call these CA guides "sponsors" - men and women who have recovered from a hopeless and desperate drug-filled and selfish manner of being and who practice these principles in all their affairs.

"IN ALL THEIR AFFAIRS."

"What a challenge!!!" "I can't go through with it." Many of us balked, yet rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed this path.

That's what I know.

Jeff P., drug-free since 12/21/2000

(1,002 words)