



## MY MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

The first thought that entered my alcohol-sodden mind that morning was, “Oh my God, I did it again.” Once again, I had chosen to drink myself into a stupor rather than deal with my life situation. My “excuse” this time was that the previous afternoon I had received notice that I was being laid off. Although I had known for quite some time that our small law firm was in big financial trouble, the blow (mostly to my ego) was still severe. I remember thinking while I drove home that evening that I would not allow myself to drink. But within an hour of receiving the news, I found myself at the liquor store. So, on that Saturday morning I found myself lying in bed feeling as if I were going to die. Unfortunately, this was not a new scenario for me. I had started my battle for lasting sobriety many years before.

Like all my friends, I had started my drinking career in high school. However, my drinking habits were different from my friends. They drank some, started to feel good, and either stopped or slowed down. From the time I took my first drink, alcohol made me feel the way I wanted to feel all of the time. When I drank, I was more comfortable – no longer shy or insecure. So each time I started to drink, I drank until I either got sick or passed out. This pattern continued into my early thirties.

During my twenties, in spite of my drinking, I managed to have a successful career, as well as get married and build a nice home. Things started to change for me around the time I turned thirty. I could no longer control any aspect of my drinking, and it began to affect every part of my life. At its worst, my daily drinking controlled my every move. I would get up in the morning feeling awful, struggle through the day at work, hit the liquor store on the way home, and drink myself into oblivion once more. It finally got to the point where I started to drink in the morning so I could focus enough to perform my job. Of course, that didn’t work, and there came a time when I had to admit I had

a big problem and needed some help.

Asking for help did not come easy for me, but I made a few half-hearted attempts to get sober, even going to an in-patient detox and an outpatient treatment program. I also went to some Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. But I always started to drink again. It was during this time that my daily drinking changed to secret binge drinking. I never drank publicly again. After all, I had professed to my family and friends that I was going to stop, and there was no way that my ego would allow them to see my failure. Over the next several years, I did many things during my months of sobriety that I was really proud of. I had my son, built a new career, and made a huge cross-country move with my family. However, these years were always marked by relapses in my sobriety. Sometimes I would go for months without drinking, sometimes only weeks, but inevitably I always drank for one reason or another – or for no reason at all. Sometimes I drank because that was the most natural thing for me to do. I seemed to be in a constant battle with alcohol, and there came a time when I just couldn’t fight any more.

My detoxes were becoming excruciating. For two days or more, my heart rate would elevate to dangerous levels and I would feel that I was “coming out of my skin.” And when I made the choice to drink again, I truly thought I was going to die.

Then came the decision to do whatever I had to do to **stay** sober. I made the call to the hospital at midnight. I had been drinking from early morning until noon, but by midnight I was in full detox and so uncomfortable that I knew I needed help. My husband was so angry with me he refused to take me to the hospital. Instead, my dad drove me to the hospital. I will never forget the sorrow in his eyes. Through all my years of failure, my parents had stood by me, even though as “normies” they just didn’t understand. However, their love for me was unconditional, and they always came through with

compassion. I arrived at the Providence Cedar Hills facility at 5:00 a.m., just as the sun was beginning to come up. I remember thinking that there were people going to work and school, starting their days as usual, and here I was as miserable as I had ever been.

At the hospital I absolutely threw myself into the prescribed activities. I knew that if I was going to have any chance at lasting sobriety I had to make the best of the time I spent there. So I listened during classes, got really honest with my counselors, and did a lot of praying. Because of my past experience with treatment and AA, I knew that sobriety was mine for the taking, but I had to want it with all my heart and soul. I had to commit to doing everything that was suggested to me by people who knew what they were talking about from experience. When I left the hospital after a four-day stay, I called a good friend of mine in AA. She told me that she would sponsor me if I would be willing to do “ninety in ninety,” recovery shorthand for ninety AA meetings in ninety days.

Because I was already feeling better, I really protested. I was way too busy! I had to go to outpatient treatment four nights a week, and there was no way I could fit in an AA meeting every day. Her answer: if I really wanted to stay sober, I would have to put as much effort into it as I had put into my drinking. She was right, and I finally conceded to start my journey.

In the weeks that followed, I went to many different meetings. I listened to people who, like me, were newly sober and to people who had been sober for years. I did my outpatient treatment and learned not only about the mental effects of alcoholism, but the physical effects as well. My treatment group was difficult at best, being comprised mostly of people who were forced to attend. However, I knew that I had to go and that I belonged there. I knew it could save my life if I was willing and if I would listen. I read my books, started working on AA’s “12 steps,” and followed suggestions made to me.

Now I do these things because I want to, and I know they are my “medicine” – the things that keep me well. I know that there is nothing in this world worth taking a drink over. If I ever feel that I need to drink, I can call on any one of my wonderful friends

in AA for help in getting over the hump. I also speak at a treatment center once a month, because I never want to forget where I have been.

My life today is better than I ever thought it could be. I have many material things and a wonderful family. But the most precious gift I have is my sobriety. Without that, I have nothing.

#### Priority on Sobriety