



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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THE GIFT OF RECOVERY

As noted in our last issue of *In Sight*, last May the OAAP celebrated its annual Attorneys in Recovery dinner with a theme of “Sharing the Legacy.” The following article was adapted from one of the recovery stories shared on that evening:

*I am ***** and I am an alcoholic.*

I wasn't like some people who acknowledge that they need help and make a decision to go to Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn't know AA existed. I knew that I was in desperate straits. I knew that I was dying. But I had no idea that there was help for someone like me. I really thought I had no options. I had no hope.

Thankfully, there was the OAAP to throw a net over people like me who were killing themselves with alcohol. They brought me to treatment, to you, and to AA. And I came here tonight.

From the very beginning, I experienced something here that had never happened to me before. When another alcoholic talked to me about sobriety, about recovery, it changed something in my life. The terror reduced; the rage subsided. People talked to me and we understood each other. I found I needed that so badly that I couldn't stay away from meetings, even though, in my own wretched mind, I could barely keep the directions straight. (Maybe you'll recognize that confusion: Do I turn right after the store, or do I turn left?) But somehow I'd get to the next meeting – and to a lot of meetings – because, as our traditions tell us, a meeting of Alcoholics Anony-

mous is two alcoholics coming together for the purpose of sobriety.

Astonishingly, everyone let me stay in the meetings. They let me stay, when just previously I had been regularly tossed out of bars. A lot of people – many lawyers, a lot of them involved in the OAAP – took the time to keep me coming to meetings because of gratitude for their own recovery. I couldn't have stayed in recovery without them because I didn't know how. “Don't drink; Go to meetings,” were very complex instructions for me. “Stay in the chair; Don't hit people,” was what I was used to.

I was told that a fellow was willing to be my temporary sponsor but that I had to ask him. I didn't like the fellow, but I did what I was told and asked him to be my sponsor. The guy didn't like me, either, but he said he'd be my temporary sponsor. He died last July. He was my temporary sponsor for about 18 years.

Right from the start he made me do things. He made me take actions I didn't understand, but actions that somehow worked the magic of recovery. He made me clean ashtrays and set up chairs. I thought that was demeaning. After a while, I graduated to making coffee, which truly was a promotion. He made me stand out on the porch and greet people. I found that when people whose hands I had shaken sat in “my” chairs, drank “my” coffee, used “my” ashtrays, I could hear what they had to say. I had made an investment in them, and I could hear them. I truly believe that I can be here with you, that I can be in recovery, that I can be a citizen, that I can live according to principles, and that the promises in the 12 steps are coming true in my life. Those things will be true for me as long as I

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clean ashtrays, make coffee, set up chairs, and shake people's hands. I sponsor a lot of people. I do things.

A short time ago, someone said to me, "You must really love AA – you do so many things for the program." I thought, "That's probably true," until I reflected some more. Then I realized that I love AA because I do service work. There was a common saying in AA's predecessor, the Oxford Groups, that if you do this only for your own salvation, it will become burdensome to you, and you'll leave the program. For many years now, I have watched that happen. Those people say: "AA isn't everything." "I've got to find balance in my life." "I have other things to do." "I don't need AA right now, so I'm not going to meetings." A lot of those people drink, and a lot of those people die.

Recovery is a gift. The AA emblem depicts a triangle within a circle, with the triangle representing unity, recovery, and service, the three legacies of the program. We enjoy the gift of recovery while we stay in the circle, and this circle truly depends on the third leg of the triangle – service. I don't want to stop being grateful for the gift of recovery – and doing service work helps me remember to be grateful.

I was cranky driving here tonight. I felt put-upon. I thought, "Now I not only have to drive to Portland in traffic, but I have to drive all the way downtown and find the place where they're having the recovery dinner." And then it occurred to me, "That's a nice place. I was invited to speak at a nice place." What a difference from all those years ago when I had regularly been kicked out of places where you should burn your clothes afterward. I had forgotten to be grateful. For a short while, I'd forgotten about the third leg of the triangle – and how it can help me to show my gratitude.

Whenever I started to whine or complain, my sponsor used to ask me a simple question: "How are the girls?" He was referring to my two daughters. Because I'm sober today, I have them in my life. Their pictures are in my office. Every time I look up from my desk, I get a reminder to be grateful.

I can't take credit for this gift of recovery. I can only be grateful and share it with others. It's been so long since I've seen so many of you. I wish I

could see you more often. This is a much bigger group than we've had for a long time. I hope it continues to grow. We do help one another. Thank you.

Grateful to Share the Gift