



EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

LGBTQ Alcoholics in **A.A.**

This is A.A. General Service
Conference-approved literature.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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Original title:

A.A. for the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic

Revised 2018.

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LGBTQ Alcoholics in A.A.

Do you have a drinking problem?

It can be difficult for many of us to admit and to accept that we have a problem with alcohol. Sometimes alcohol seems like the solution to our problems, the only thing making life bearable. But if, when we look honestly at our lives, we see that problems seem to occur when we drink — problems at home or on the job, problems with our health, with our emotional stability or with our social lives — it is more than likely that we have a drinking problem.

If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, we in Alcoholics Anonymous invite you to join us. In A.A. you will find a community of kindred folks from every walk of life and “of every stripe.” For those of us who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ), A.A. extends a helping hand, an open heart, and a life-saving and life-affirming program of recovery. From the time A.A. was founded, with one alcoholic helping another in Akron, Ohio, on June 10, 1935, the hope of the Fellowship has always been to reach every alcoholic who needs and wants help.

As A.A. co-founder Bill W. noted in 1940, “All people having an alcoholic problem who wish to get rid of it and so make a happy adjustment with the circumstances of their lives, become A.A. members by simply associating with us. Nothing but sincerity is needed. But we do not demand even this.”

Together, we share an overarching and deeply felt kinship, as we’ve learned that anyone can suffer from the disease of alcoholism. We have also learned that anyone who wants to stop drinking can find help and recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.

The stories that follow share the experience, strength and hope of a wide variety of LGBTQ members of A.A. We hope you will discover, as these individuals did, that you are welcome in Alcoholics Anonymous, and that you, too, can find a new freedom and a new happiness in this spiritual way of life.

Katie

“I always knew I had a deep and unhealthy connection to booze.”

My name is Katie and I'm a real alcoholic. Identifying as such is something I don't take for granted and am grateful for each day. I spent the better part of 15 years taking shots of whatever I could get my hands on and pretending to be the girl I thought others wanted me to be: happy, confident and full of life. I worked hard concealing the fact that I was none of those things and spent most of my days hopeless, scared and ashamed.

I had the “ism” of alcoholism from an early age, always feeling a little “off” and unsure of myself. After growing up in a big Irish family, I associated drinking with laughter, storytelling and camaraderie. From the time I took my first drink in the eighth grade to my last drunk many years later, my obsession for feeling “part of” was apparent, and I grew accustomed to the ease and comfort that alcohol offered me. I never drank “normally” like my friends and quickly identified partying hard as a gift. I was the party girl, the one down for anything, a ride-or-die companion in the wildest of situations.

Just like being Irish, drinking became an important part of my identity and who I thought I was. It also made it easy for me to hide parts of myself I wasn't as fond of. In college I drank between classes and was always busy planning my next party, secretly worried that news of my emerging sexuality would somehow make its way home to my family. Evading responsibilities and acquiring a reputation called for heavy drinking, and I spent more time sleeping off hangovers than making something of myself.

After coming out to my parents at age 25, I figured the worst was behind me. I had even begun to believe that my heavy drinking could easily

have been attributed to my gnawing anxieties and fear of coming clean about who I was. After all, my self-imposed identity crisis was a great excuse for misbehaving. However, it was only a few years later that I found myself drinking a bottle a day and still unable to manage my life. My relationships were often troublesome and abusive, fueled by insecurities and alcohol, and my character defects made daily living a struggle at work and at home.

Dating trans and gender-nonconforming partners brought about more challenges, and I felt as though my newly formed identity as a femme lesbian was threatened. Defending my sexuality and my relationships to friends and family was uncomfortable and left me feeling angry and resentful. I had convinced myself that drinking made it easier to deal with my emotions and forget about my fears, when in reality it just made things worse.

Unlike many who are caught in denial, I always knew I had a deep and unhealthy connection to booze, but it wasn't until my partner packed her bags for the third and final time, threatening to disappear for good, that I felt an urgent sense of desperation. They say it takes what it takes to get here, and on that chilly day in February, the end of my weathered rope had finally appeared.

Thank God for Alcoholics Anonymous and this insanely practical (yet totally magical) program of recovery. Since the moment I made the decision to attend my first meeting, my life has changed for the better. I jumped in with both feet and followed a 90-meetings-in-90-days regimen, which was suggested to me by a fellow member. It wasn't easy, but I had the willingness to see what was on the other side of this elusive "sobriety" everyone talked about.

I wanted what they had and soon began taking commitments and immersing myself in my home group, building a foundation that continues to serve me today. For someone with a deeply rooted need to fit in, it was a huge relief to find LGBTQ meetings online and in the directory. Additionally, though, I realized that my new identity as an alcoholic connected me to men and women in every meeting and I felt welcomed among my fellows — straight, gay and everything in between. Through strong sponsorship, working the Twelve Steps and following the Traditions, I have slowly begun to accept who I am, flaws

and all, and emerge as a present and purpose-driven woman.

I often hear people share in meetings that they got their lives back. Thanks to a God of my own understanding, a sponsor who keeps me on my toes, and an all-inclusive fellowship, I have come to know a brand new life. My primary purpose today is remembering that I am one among many, to be of service, and to live as authentically as I can — happy, joyous and free, one day at a time.

Daniel

“My alcoholism developed a life of its own, and I could not stop the progression.”

I became aware of my sexuality around the same age I started drinking. I was not a closeted drinker, but I hid being gay from most people. I hung out in gay clubs — in another city, on weekends. I did not feel any sense of shame, guilt or remorse about being gay, then or since. But I had been beaten up several times over it as a teenager, so I went to great lengths to keep that side of my life private as I got older.

At 25 I met a man with whom I fell deeply in love. And that’s when I finally came out to everyone in my life. My parents had no idea until I told them. The important thing was that for the first time I became really honest with others. I no longer cared what anyone might think about me. And that was a great time in my life, due to those feelings of freedom and happiness. The relationship didn’t last long, though, but even that didn’t dampen my spirits.

So why did my drinking suddenly increase at the same time? Most normal people slow down their drinking as they get older and put their lives in order. But apparently I’m just not one of those typical drinkers! The phenomenon of craving just took over completely. And when it did, it no longer mattered what was happening in my life. My alcoholism developed a life of its own, and I could not stop the progression.

One day in 1994 I just fell apart on my job. I had some kind of mental breakdown. A co-worker found me, calmed me down, then took me to my first A.A. meeting that weekend. I had no idea she was in A.A. One thing I do remember about that

meeting was seeing the Twelve Steps on the wall. I noticed that the first two words in Step One are, "We admitted." And I understood exactly what that meant. I had gone through the coming out process, which was really just copping to who I was. And once I began reading through the Big Book, I had little trouble copping to my alcoholism, too. So I did a sort of coming out with my alcoholism, very early on. I admitted it to everyone in my life. And it must have worked, because I took my last drink that same week!

An old acquaintance I hadn't seen in years was at that meeting, and she became my temporary sponsor. Gloria took me to a few gay meetings, gave me a copy of the Big Book, and introduced me to her friends in the Fellowship. So I'm one of the lucky ones who had someone in their pocket from day one. My hope is that all newcomers could receive the kind of welcome that I received from her group. Most importantly, she helped me make contact with the God of my understanding, very early on. We both noticed the irony of her being at my first meeting, one that someone else took me to. Given that there are over 300 weekly meetings in my area, that was quite a "coincidence."

I must stress how powerful it was for me to see gay alcoholics whose lives did not revolve around the bar scene, who had good relationships and friendships, and who were just having lots of fun in their lives. For this reason, gay meetings were very important to me as a newcomer. But I was also welcomed and respected at all the other meetings I attended. A.A. is one place I've never had to deal with anyone's homophobia. They just accept me as I am. And I'm so grateful for that.

I soon found a sponsor who was an older, straight male, and he walked me through the Steps. I have also sponsored straight men over the years. I've found that when the sponsor and newcomer have totally different lifestyles, it forces the two to focus on what they have in common as alcoholics. And for me this only strengthens the bond. Because I'm very open about my life, my fears and my struggles, my sponsees have told me they felt comfortable sharing their Fifth Steps with me. They believed that I would not be judgmental or disapproving of anything they might share with me. It's such a gift to know that I can help in this way, given that there was a long time I wouldn't tell anyone who I really was.

“I take every opportunity to share my story and to be of service and have never felt judged.”

I have been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous for about three years now although I suffered in my alcoholism for about 15 years before coming to A.A. I was introduced to the program in prison. I had grown up in a very religious family, and because I am gay, I never felt as though I fit in. During several stints in treatment, jail and prison, I was often told that A.A. was what I needed. But after a quick review of the Steps, the word *God* always caught my attention and I did not believe that I could be accepted in the program or by God. So, until about three years ago, I never even tried.

Some years ago, while in prison, a counselor again recommended I try A.A. Immediately the wall went up, but at this point I was willing to try anything to get out of prison. She introduced me to a potential sponsor and after meeting with him for the first time, I became willing to continue. This sponsor was also gay and had been in the program for over 20 years. He was just like me, and from listening to his story, I was given hope. I saw that not only had he been accepted in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, but he had also been accepted by God. He had overcome the tragedies and misery of his past and was now there to share his story of strength, hope and experience with me.

I continued to work with my sponsor and I began to work the Steps. My life began to change drastically, even from behind bars. I began to chair a meeting in the prison, and no matter how different we all were, we were the same inside those rooms.

I have now been out of prison about eight months. I am still very active in the program. I live in a pretty small and very religious community in Idaho. Although there are not many other gay/lesbian people in the program here, I have been very accepted. I take every opportunity to share my story and to be of service and have never felt judged. In January of next year, I will be the newly elected secretary of my home group here in Idaho Falls. I am so excited to be able to be of service in this way.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, I have learned through experience that it truly doesn't matter who we are, where we come from, or how we live our personal lives. All that matters is that we share the desire to stop drinking. As members and as recovering alcoholics, we all have this in common.

I look forward to my future in Alcoholics Anonymous and to my continued service. Without this program, I would still be suffering and just another gay alcoholic. With the program, I am respected, valued and recovering.

Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous!

Bootsie

*“Lonely and isolated,
I fell in love with alcohol at age 14.”*

I am a bisexual alcoholic. Before I arrived at Alcoholics Anonymous, I thought those were two of the worst things that a human being could be. I harbored guilt, shame and remorse about who I was and the things I did. Today, as a result of working the Twelve Steps and receiving acceptance from loving sponsors, I accept myself and am no longer burdened by shame.

I grew up in the 1970s in an upper-middle-class home with an emotionally absent stepfather and an abusive mother whose greatest concern was what other people would think. She was adamant that I never talk about what happened at home.

I was terrified every day of my life. I was abused at home and bullied at school. I had no skills to defend myself. I believed I must be an awful person. Why else would everyone be so mean to me?

By the age of 10, I knew that I liked both boys and girls. When I let a female teacher know that I had a crush on her, my mother was notified. I was made to feel ashamed and warned never to discuss these feelings with anyone.

Lonely and isolated, I fell in love with alcohol at age 14. It made me attractive and popular and able to flirt. I experienced blackouts immediately. I dreaded the day after a party, when my friends would tell me what I had done. My behavior generally involved taking my clothes off in front of

people, leaving with someone else's date, and having sex with pretty much anyone.

I attended a gay and lesbian youth group, but I still felt different. Bisexuality is sometimes viewed as “confusion” or an inability to make up one's mind. Often, to both gay and straight people, bisexuals are really gay, but in denial. For many bisexuals, identifying as either gay/lesbian or straight is the path of least resistance. I did not feel accepted either in the gay community or among heterosexuals.

I knew something was terribly wrong with me and I thought it must be my sexuality. It never occurred to me it was my drinking. Psychotherapy failed to fix me (I wasn't honest about my drinking). Ashamed about my sexuality, I hit upon a grand solution: I would get married! I picked the most macho man I could find — a Green Beret — and I suffered for seven years in a physically abusive marriage. But I still wasn't “cured” of either my bisexuality or my alcoholism.

My drinking worsened. I was a periodic drunk, my binges punctuated by dry periods. Because I didn't drink in the morning or every day, and because I still — barely — had a job, an apartment and a car, my denial flourished. But the periods between drunks became shorter and shorter, and I was well on my way to becoming a daily drinker when I found Alcoholics Anonymous.

I identified right away, but it took three more years of misery before I surrendered. I worked the first three Steps, but got stuck at Step Four — the Step focused on taking inventory and getting honest. I just knew that at my core I would find a roiling, stinking mess.

My first sponsor — a gay man — gave me the most incredible gift: he listened to me for a whole afternoon as I went through page after page of my inventory. Every once in a while he would interject some encouragement, but mostly he listened. After years of silence, my most horrible secrets were received with acceptance and love. And instead of the stinking mess I expected to find at my core, I discovered that I was a hurting member of the human race who had done some awful things. I was accountable for those actions, but by working the Steps, I would not have to repeat the behaviors.

I moved shortly after that, and I found a straight woman with a couple of decades of sobriety to be my sponsor. I was terrified she would

reject me if I revealed I was bisexual. I told her that I had something to say but that I was afraid of her reaction. She said, "I am here. Tell me what you need to say so you won't drink over it." I told her and she said, "I am still here. What else do you have to say?"

Through the acceptance and love of these sponsors, I have been able to accept and love myself. At seven years sober, I met a bisexual man and we married. We were both able to be open and honest about ourselves. Together we chaired the "Bisexuals and All Others Welcome" A.A. group. The relationship lasted for 10 years before we amicably divorced.

I no longer feel that I am a terrible person because I am alcoholic and bisexual. I am a flawed human being, as we all are. I accept that Higher Power made me exactly as I am supposed to be. By sharing my story of recovery and life on life's terms, I hope that I may be useful to another alcoholic who is wrestling with the same feelings.

Chris

"Not embracing my true inner self can create a fear that might make me thirsty, and for me, to drink is to go on to the bitter end alone."

My name is Chris and I am most certainly an alcoholic. I'm 24 years old and sober for two years. Recovery has been a process that was confusing and painful in the beginning but has given way to joy and serenity.

My first drink was at 11 years old. Family thought it was okay to give a child a shot of brandy during the winter and a glass of wine every so often at dinner. As my teenage years went on, I found myself guzzling vodka with friends and partying through the night. I had always known that I was in the wrong body, and alcohol helped push that thought to the recesses of my mind. It was hard living a lie and pushing the masculinity bar further and further to fit in with what society told me I had to be. But like I said, alcohol helped me live a lie.

Toward the end of my drinking, I was blacking out and on my way to state prison for not completing a treatment program. I had been to the

rooms and saw happy, successful, sober alcoholics but honestly thought I could never find what they had. I was in prison serving two years when I finally decided to write a friend back home in the program and ask him to be my sponsor. I had my last drink of jailhouse wine shortly after and came to recognize the allergy to alcohol described in the “Doctor’s Opinion” section of *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

I’ll never forget the pain of that last drink. Upon writing that friend, I began to work the Steps with him through the postal service. When I got to the Fourth Step I wrote about the resentment I had against myself for the lack of self-acceptance toward my gender identity.

That was a major turning point in my sobriety. I got honest with myself, my Higher Power and my sponsor, and a door to freedom opened up. I have no delusion that having a sex change will cure my alcoholism; however, I strongly sense that not embracing my true inner self can create a fear that might make me thirsty, and for me, to drink is to go on to the bitter end alone.

I came home from prison with a year of sobriety and made my first meetings. I continue practicing the Twelve Steps and am grateful. I found a therapist who has been helping me with my transition and have met many trans persons in the rooms of A.A. I intend to start taking female hormones soon. With the help of a Higher Power that has taught me to be of service, I also intend to stay sober through life’s ups and downs, as well as my transition, no matter if it gets uncomfortable or not.

Patrick

“The anticipated horror of a dismal sober life has instead blossomed...”

When the court-appointed alcohol counselor told me I was “sentenced” to attend three A.A. meetings a week for two years, I was horrified. It felt like my life, as I knew it, was over. However, I was also told the alternative was to spend that time in jail, so I reluctantly acquiesced to this dismal turn of events. The counselor also said, “I think I might know of a meeting that would be just right for you.” I still laugh to myself as I wonder, “How

did he know to send me to a ‘gay-friendly’ A.A. meeting!?” The next evening I took my court slip and headed off to find this meeting. To my horror I discovered it, in a back room of a rundown shopping mall where I normally would not be seen. I did not go in that night.

The next evening found me facing that door again, ready to walk away, when a gentleman walked up and said, “New here? C’mon, I’ll show you around.” He became my first sponsor and took me through the first three Steps before he moved to Phoenix. Group members invited me to go out after the meetings to eat with them. I turned them down several times, as I did not know how to be around people when both they and I were sober! But they did not give up. They kept inviting me, and when I finally accepted, those “after-the-meeting meetings” turned out to be some of my favorite times in early sobriety.

Before he moved to New York, my next sponsor took me through a remarkable experience with Steps Four and Five using the setup outlined in the Big Book. This was when I felt that I had really joined A.A. instead of simply coming to meetings. And he taught me a major A.A. lesson as I reached six months sober: “You’re in luck!” he said. “There is a steering committee meeting tonight and there are open positions that you are going to stand for until you get one!” (By the way, I got the first one I stood for, intergroup rep.)

Following what I had assumed were going to be “easy” Steps — Steps Six and Seven, as discussed in the “Twelve and Twelve” — was yet another lesson, a life-changing exposure to the power of the Steps in action: I learned that I was an alcoholic who was also gay, instead of a gay man who happened to be alcoholic. This opened up a whole new world of possibilities for sponsors, which I was soon to need, as this sponsor moved to Canada.

Instead of looking for a gay sober alcoholic for a sponsor who would understand me because I, too, was gay, I started looking over the whole spectrum of A.A.s for someone who had some solid sober time and worked a good program (the recovery side of the triangle), who demonstrated the Traditions in all of their affairs (the unity side), and who gave freely of themselves (the service side).

I found such a person and this new sponsor

helped me finish my first trip through the Twelve Steps. It turned out he was not really strong on the service side, so I also got a service sponsor, and that has added an extra dimension to my sobriety.

Since that evening when I became intergroup rep at six months sober, I have continuously had a service position, with the exception of a nine-month period when I was moving to a new location.

Because of the support I received from A.A.s in the group during my early days, the guidance of the series of sponsors I've had, and the power of the program, the anticipated horror of a dismal sober life has instead blossomed into a life filled with friends and opportunities to explore aspects of life that I never would have imagined before. I've had the opportunity to speak in front of large groups and wasn't (totally) terrified! I've had art-work in juried shows and even won some awards. These are things I would never have had the opportunity to experience had the judge not "sentenced" me to A.A. and made sure that my life, as I knew it, was over!

Carol

"I was able to identify that I, too, was alcoholic."

During the late 1970s, gay bar culture offered many lesbians a refuge from the relentless imperative to feel, act, look, think and be heterosexual, which was dominant in American culture at that time. In the bars, many gay women first found real friendship and love, and could drop the disguise required simply to get through the day without some sort of harm. But for me, the bars turned from a refuge into an alcoholic trap.

By the early 1980s, I had just quit my first real job obtained after squeaking through college. Too hungover to report on time several days a week, unable to think clearly on the job, and ashamed to face my co-workers after behaving badly from too much wine at the office Christmas party, I resigned rather than be fired. They tried to help — they sent a sympathetic human resources professional to my home who asked gently if I had a problem with alcohol. Ashamed and feeling

trapped, I lied and showed her the door as quickly as I could.

Unemployed, alone in a strange town, and unable to stop drinking despite all my promises to myself, I made a decision to turn my life over to alcohol. Seeing no way out, I told myself that since it was hopeless, I might as well accept that I was a drunk and learn to drink quietly, learn to manage it all better. Despite trying every trick, I failed again and again and usually ended up on the bathroom floor, alternating vomiting with prayers to God to save me from this misery.

Without my understanding, that force I know today to be the Higher Power sent the answer to my prayers. It came in the form of a blind date with a lesbian already in the program. During our date, I ordered a drink, as people do. Somehow, she knew that I was an alcoholic and, very naturally, began sharing bits and pieces about her own drinking and how she had gotten over it. It sounded so much like my own problem I was able to identify that I, too, was alcoholic, and admit that it had overwhelmed every defense I tried against it.

I was soon sitting in a gay A.A. meeting surrounded by men and women whose sharing I understood because their experience was so like my own it spoke to my heart. Because of their sharing, I was able to gain new strength and hope. Working with a gay man as my first sponsor, because that makes sense for us, I learned to work the Steps and began a recovery from active alcoholism that has lasted 27 years.

Because A.A. members then and now honor the tradition of anonymity and focus solely on the primary purpose of sobriety, A.A. offered a refuge of safety from the ravages of my alcoholism. My identity as anything other than a drunk desiring recovery was never an issue.

Society has shifted a bit in its attitudes, and so have I. Today, I continue to learn and grow among my fellow A.A.s of every type and kind, one day at a time. But, the language of the heart is still spoken at gay meetings, and anyone with a desire to stop drinking is always welcome.

Look for us in your local "Where & When" (what many A.A.s call their meeting schedule). The gay meetings are listed as such. We will save you a seat.

“I had never gotten truly honest with myself and with other people.”

I have always struggled to connect with people, to feel like I belong in the world. At six years sober I can see that Alcoholics Anonymous has changed that for me.

At 15 years old, my father kicked me out after reading my diary and finding out that I was queer. By that time, I had only gotten drunk maybe a handful of times, but life as a homeless youth opened that up for me. I no longer had the responsibilities of school; I didn't have to hide who I was; and everyone around me drank. A lot.

I had always been a loner growing up, the kid that everyone picked on. I was constantly riddled with paralyzing anxiety. But not anymore. For the first time in my life, I found a group of people that I could relate to, that accepted me, and if they didn't I was too drunk to care. Drinking was the cement that bound me to other people. It erased any fear, anxiety or social hang-ups I had. I could flirt my way into any heart, and talk my way out of any bad situation. Or so I thought.

Eventually my drinking took on a new level and I found myself mixing it with harder illicit drugs. This combination soon landed me on the rocks. I found myself in jail more and more frequently. At 18 I had earned my first prison sentence. My life was falling apart. When I was released, I made a firm resolution to stop using any hard drugs, thinking I didn't have a problem with alcohol. This thinking quickly landed me in treatment.

When I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous I knew I was transgender, but it wasn't something at the forefront of my mind. I was 20 years old, just trying to learn how to live life and stay out of jail. Besides, I felt so alone: I didn't want to add another thing that would set me apart from other people.

But after almost two years of sobriety I drank again. I could name a list of things I could have done differently, but I think for me it all came down to one thing: honesty. During this time in A.A. I had never gotten truly honest with myself and with other people. I was too afraid to trust the people around me. After a short stint “out

there,” I found myself back in A.A. This time the pain outweighed my fear.

I stopped holding onto all those secrets I thought made me unlovable, unwanted. I got real honest with my sponsor in my Step work. I started seeing a therapist and talking about my gender identity. At one year sober, I started my medical transition. Transitioning in A.A. has been one of the hardest things I have ever done. It was public and people noticed, and sometimes the fear around rejection overwhelmed me. People said things to me — usually in support, but sometimes people said horrible things out of ignorance and intolerance. In the end, what I really found was a community of people that supported me no matter what, and I learned how to tell the difference between the people who loved me and were willing to help me stay sober and those who wanted to exclude me or bring me down.

Ultimately, service work is what really saved my life. I have always struggled to feel like I belonged in life. I never felt like I belonged in the LGBTQ community, and for the longest time I wasn't sure I belonged in A.A. However, service work in A.A. has become the cement that continues to bind me to people and to this program. A little while after I started transitioning, my friend and service sponsor got me a speaking gig on a LGBTQ panel at a local A.A. event in a neighboring area. I talked about my struggles in A.A. and the struggles of other trans people facing stares and whispers and sometimes outright exclusion.

After the panel, this big ol' cowboy came up to me. Expecting the worst, I could feel myself fill with fear. But he just thanked me for sharing about issues he had never even thought about. Who knew that the thing that sometimes separated me from other people could become one of my greatest assets? Through service work I have found a new purpose in life and have made a host of friends from all over the country.

Today I have an opportunity to create the fellowship that I crave. More and more transgender alcoholics are coming into the rooms and I am glad that I am sober today to welcome them. In my little town, there are now a handful of us walking this path of recovery with each other. I no longer have to feel alone.

“I realized being gay was not my problem. Alcohol was.”

I managed to drink my way through four years of being in the military, during the “Don’t ask, don’t tell period,” without too many consequences. It was a time when many of my peers were outing themselves just to be discharged from the military. Not me — I didn’t want any part of a dishonorable discharge.

Nevertheless, when my time in the service ended — with an honorable discharge, I might add — I made a poor decision based on self-will and headed back to my hometown. My drinking took off and within a few years I was looking to move as an attempt to control my drinking. I was trying to live my life as an openly gay man, but the geographic cure failed. My new life was filled with blackouts, DWIs, and wrecking cars that weren’t mine. I eventually got sick and tired of being sick and tired of the way my life was going.

I will never forget the day I decided to do something about my drinking. I was standing outside the doors of a detox facility. As scared as I was, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to know I was gay. Yet, as I was shoveled off to a nurse for evaluation, I said with grave concern in my voice, “I’m a gay, black man living in northeast Washington.” She looked at me with very caring eyes and said, “Dear, none of that is a requirement to be here.” Relieved, I spent the next 21 days crying, not drinking, eating three meals a day, and getting long-overdue rest and sleep.

With each day spent in detox, I became more comfortable in my new, sober skin. I was drawn to one counselor who simply kept repeating that I was going to be okay. I believed him. I believed a lot of things I heard, not only from that counselor (a gay man in recovery), but also in the A.A. meetings we went to each day. It was obvious to me what my problem was the first time I saw the Twelve Steps hanging on the wall. I had entered that detox wanting to do something about my drinking but not knowing what could be done, and then I saw it so clearly on the wall. That information wasn’t so tough to digest, but what I heard at my next A.A. meeting changed everything for me. For the first time since going to meetings,

I heard the Third Tradition: “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.” I was no longer fearful that my sexual orientation would be an issue that I had to keep some big, dark secret. I had a true desire to stop drinking. That was all that mattered.

One of the first A.A. phrases that stuck with me was, “Learn to listen and listen to learn.” I listened closely every day while in detox. It was suggested that I continue going to meetings once I was released from the detox facility. I hung out with two people from the detox facility, and we went to meetings together at A.A. clubhouses. I carried with me that one tool that was keeping me sober: the Third Tradition. People in the meetings didn’t care that I was gay. We had the same purpose — to stay sober. I was always greeted warmly and told every time to “keep coming back.” One day a friend suggested I try a gay A.A. meeting.

I found the Triangle Club, a gay A.A. clubhouse in the heart of the D.C. gay community. I was nervous about attending my first gay A.A. meeting. As I ascended the stairs, at the top I was greeted by this tall, black man named Kent. He said to me with a huge smile, “Who are you, my little pretty?” That was my first encounter and not my last with Kent, a longstanding sober member of the recovering gay community. Kent took me under his wing and made me feel comfortable. I loved listening to him share about his two favorite men: Jack Daniels and his partner, Fred. It was through his example of not drinking one day at a time that I realized being gay was not my problem. Alcohol was.

Thankfully, I was able to recover with the help of a loving LGBTQ recovering community. My recovery took off with people who were just like me, not hiding their sexual orientation or drinking over it.

By attending A.A. meetings on a regular basis, meeting with my sponsor, working through the Steps, and hanging out with my litter mates, I have stayed sober. We are all alcoholics. If we work the Steps and practice the principles of A.A. in our lives, we will find peace through sobriety. That’s why I’m a grateful member of this Fellowship and I love being sober.

That nurse who greeted me at the detox facility turned out to be absolutely right — being a gay, black man is not a requirement for recovery — and I’m glad I listened to her.

“Accepting that I was powerless over alcohol was easy in light of my own drinking history, but I couldn’t understand unmanageability.”

At 13 years of age, I was aware of two strong, seemingly incompatible desires deep inside. I wanted to be a father and I wanted to be a woman. The first was very acceptable; the second seemed so unrealistic.

I grew up in an alcoholic home, and any personal awareness was snuffed out by the need to survive. I saw what alcohol did to my family, but at 14 I picked up my first drink and by 15 was already a blackout drinker. The First Step in the “Twelve and Twelve” talks about raising the bottom and saving many alcoholics from the last 15 years of drinking misery. I chuckle thinking about it because the last 15 years of drinking misery were my only drinking years. So many times I put myself in situations where I couldn’t drink, but inevitably circumstances would change and I’d start drinking myself senseless. This I did over and over again.

Sometime during my 26th year, I began noticing that I was becoming less tolerant of alcohol. Small quantities would put me into blackouts, and my always-severe hangovers became even worse. This went on for two more years while I realized that unless I quit drinking, I would never address any other problems I thought I might have.

After one more “dry-out,” I attended some A.A. meetings and read some A.A. literature, with special attention to “The Doctor’s Opinion” in the Big Book. Accepting that I was powerless over alcohol was easy in light of my own drinking history, but I couldn’t understand unmanageability. I paid scant attention to A.A. and went about my own business of facing life without alcohol. Over a period of months, I became more and more emotionally and mentally unstable, felt the loneliness that only an alcoholic would tolerate, and began rationalizing suicide.

Looking back, I believe there was a divine intervention that gave me the thought that maybe I might just be an alcoholic, that A.A. could do something about this madness that was myself without a drink. At this point I became active in

A.A. with a full understanding of the First Step. Even so, it was five years in sobriety before the phrase “grave mental and emotional disorders” in “How it Works” didn’t make me shudder. Then, after eight years, I saw my inability to form a true partnership with another human being. These milestones were so humanizing for me, and the person who had never had a sustained relationship with anyone became available. I met my wife-to-be at this time, and we passed two years together before we married.

During this time, we discussed our desire for a family, and I began exploring my deep-down, suppressed feelings of femininity. She was open-minded about this unconventionality of mine, and, little by little, we found ways of incorporating it into our relationship.

After two years of marriage, our first son was born and then two years later a second son came. Holding those boys in my arms 20 minutes after their birth, while the maternity nurse filled out their birth certificates and footprinted them, were my two greatest days in sobriety.

As these boys matured, the reality of fatherhood became paramount to me, and I never really felt deprived of my feminine side. The A.A. program had taught me to reduce my demands down to the level of requests.

Time seemed to pass by so quickly; my sons went off to college while memories of diaper changing were still so vivid in my mind. Although I missed them so much and still do, a new freedom presented itself. The A.A. program became even more important to me in an even deeper understanding of my inner world.

With the gradual change in my outward appearance, there was some cold reception among a few of my A.A. friends, but my home group was warmly supportive. The A.A. Fellowship is so large that I’ve come to find acceptance and a welcoming attitude in general toward my gender nonconformity.

When I remember the raging, self-hating alcoholic that came to A.A. so many years ago and compare that to who I am today, I’m deeply grateful.

The gift I have received from sobriety in A.A. is one I’ve only been recently conscious of. Today I am the kind-hearted person I always wanted to be.

“I thought I was different.”

I felt different for as long as I could remember. I grew up in a loving family in the Midwest. When I was very little, I remember telling my mother, “Momma, I think I was supposed to be born a girl.” “Oh, don’t be silly,” she said as she crouched down to my size, looking at me directly. “You were meant to be born a boy.” I could see the love in her eyes as she said these words. I wanted to believe this; I really did. I never mentioned it again.

Tucked in, I’d lay in my bed below the nearby window, and through it look up to see the stars in the night sky. I felt I was dropped off here by mistake. I just knew that I didn’t belong here on earth, and I’d pray, searching the sky, for an alien spaceship to come and pick me back up. Every night came the same desperate plea, and each morning I’d awake with my last memory of frustration and hopeless abandonment.

Grown up, I felt that inside I was a woman in a man’s body. My sexual interests were mixed between both women and men. In the ’70s I would go downtown to a club where there was a mix of people of all sexual interests — an LGBTQ nightclub. I felt like I wasn’t so different there until one night I was the victim of a horrific hate crime, targeted by three men as I left the club. Many hours of indescribable, excruciating pain had ensued when through a series of unusual events (which today I like to believe was my Higher Power), I was able to escape with my life.

Out of fear, I hid the “real me” from the outside world. I isolated and lacked trust in any man. I became socially segregated from most of society, and alcohol became my only friend. My life continued to deteriorate through decades of alcohol abuse, with a series of arrests and legal consequences. I fled the Midwest in a geographic change, yet the cure became the realization that everywhere I went, there I was.

Arrested again in a different state, I walked into A.A. defeated. Afraid, I kept my “secret” — which I believed would stay with me until my death.

The job I had landed eventually requested I transfer from the West to the East Coast. Petrified of this change, with little sobriety behind me, I shared about it at a meeting. A woman with 26

years sober then spoke up. Looking right at me with her smiling eyes, she said, “Always remember... The joy is in the journey.” Having heard this, two weeks later I ventured off across the country.

Once on the East Coast, I immediately found an A.A. meeting that became my new home group. I had trouble finding a sponsor and contacted the woman with the smiling eyes. For the first time, I got honest with another human being about who I was and what happened to me. I asked her if she could sponsor me until I found a sponsor on the East Coast. She agreed and asked me to pray for a sponsor and God would bring one to me.

One day a man came up to me after my home group meeting ended and said, “You look like you’re in need of a sponsor, and I’d like to be him.” I just wept; I couldn’t believe that my prayer was answered, that there really was a God. This man became the first man I ever told everything to. I even revealed my deepest secret: My mother, on her death bed, told me that I was born both male and female; I was surgically altered to be a boy. I cried when I got honest because I knew I was so different. This man suggested we look up my birth condition on the Internet, and that’s where we found that I am an “intersexual” individual — and they even have support groups!

I am so grateful for what this man did for me. My sponsor with the smiling eyes then said that God makes no mistakes, that I would help other alcoholics someday who are just like me, and she said she was sure there are many in A.A.

My thoughts of how different I was were not true. I am not unique, and thanks to A.A. and those who God put into my life, I have been set free! I have hope today and a sense of purpose. Today, I thank God for whom He made me to be; I do belong here on earth, as we walk together along this path of freedom.

Moriah

“Eventually, I started relying on alcohol even more for anything, everything and nothing.”

One of my earliest memories was not feeling right. I had a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear, and my mom used to call me a “worry wart” when I was only 4 years old. I remember observing my broth-

er growing up, and he seemed well put together. I felt like something was missing, and I realized right away what it was. I asked my mom when my “peter” was going to grow. My mom’s response was, “Never, because you’re a girl, and girls don’t have peters. God made you perfect just the way you are.”

I started to get really angry and had this angst inside of me, as though my fists were clenched all the time and my body was tight. When I was 10 years old, I asked if there was a surgery that would take off my chest because I had started to develop early. She told me, “No, honey, you’ll need those for your babies.” I started to hide even more, wearing huge clothes, and my anxiety and anger went up even more.

Fast-forwarding through a lot of life-changing experiences, when I was 15, I had my first experience with alcohol. I remember it touching my lips, and swallowing it. It was kind of gross, but I felt relaxed for the first time, comfortable in my skin, and not wanting to die. I just wanted more.

I started drinking pretty often, as much as I could get my hands on, but just to the point of where it didn’t matter anymore, and feeling comfortable again. That’s how it was for many years, and it worked — it helped.

When I was 20, I found out more of who I was being a transgender man. I transitioned from female to male when I was 22, and that truly saved my life. I was okay for a while, didn’t need to drink as much, and was comfortable being myself. Eventually, I started relying on alcohol even more for anything, everything and nothing.

I started to become very depressed again, and my anxiety level skyrocketed. I felt that constant tension, that closed-fist, body-tightening tension. The alcohol stopped working, so I would drink more to try to get comfortable again, but could never seem to get there no matter how much I drank. At that point, being 30 now, I felt alone, scared and depressed. I had hit an emotional bottom. I had burnt friendships and family relationships, and I didn’t really have any place to turn.

I knew I had a drinking problem but didn’t think I was an alcoholic. I was trying to think of where I could find people who felt like I did, regarding their relationship with alcohol, so I Googled “A.A.” and it got me to my local central office. A woman there helped me find the local

LGBTQ meetings, where I was welcomed. I went to my first meeting that night, and found myself surrounded by people who understood what I was going through. When I left that meeting, I couldn't wait to get to my next one. I instantly felt relief — of a healthy kind. I met new friends and started to surround myself with people I looked up to — how they were emotionally, their relationships with others. I wanted that, so I started to do what they did, started to follow their suggestions.

I quickly got into service, got a sponsor and started going through the Steps, which I have found to be a real solution to all the angst, frustration and anger that I felt in the past. By working the Twelve Steps, going to meetings, and being of service, I've never felt so free, calm and proud to be who I am, and I know that people can count on me to be present. For the first time, I truly started to love myself, which has, in turn, led me to truly love others.

Sharon

“I had been running my whole life — from my fears, my abusive childhood, alcohol and being a lesbian.”

I started self-medicating at an early age. I lied to myself, telling myself that I had no fears when, in reality, fear was eating me alive from the inside out. I became frozen and unable to learn or even function in a world that for me was hostile. I drank to escape the horrible thoughts I had whenever I was sober enough to become aware of my situation. Drinking released me from the suffocating fears, the feelings of inadequacy and the nagging voices in my head that told me I would never measure up. I knew I had a problem; what I didn't know was that it would take me almost four decades to learn the truth about myself and my newfound friend, alcohol.

Living in Alaska and trying all I knew to end my drinking, I realized also that I was gay. At this point, the world really began to spiral down. As the feelings of hopelessness and depression progressed, so did my drinking. Being rejected by society and my mother for being a lesbian — her telling me I was “evil” and basically going to hell — did not help. Having been brought up in a strict

religion, I even tried going on a religious mission in hopes that God would cure me from being an alcoholic and a lesbian. Needless to say, this plan did not work. Thoughts of suicide came more and more frequently. I felt as if things were never going to change. The hopelessness was compounded by the fact that the one thing that was bringing me relief was ultimately destroying me. I had come to that jumping-off place. I hated life and wished that I had never been born. Always that horrible feeling, “What’s the use? Nothing is worthwhile.”

I attempted Alcoholics Anonymous in 1976 and tried repeatedly through the years. A counselor kept encouraging me to continue trying. By now I was living in Utah — another great idea — only to discover that people drink in Utah, too! Finally, in 2006, I was blessed with the gift of desperation. I called the A.A. central office to find a gay meeting and there was one that night. I was too afraid to go alone, so I asked my neighbor to go with me. My fears were unfounded, though, as I found myself surrounded by people I could finally relate with. I no longer felt as if I was a total misfit because here was a room full of people who felt precisely as I did.

Not until I came into the rooms of A.A. did I realize that I had been running my whole life — from my fears, my abusive childhood, alcohol and being a lesbian. I had been trying to control something that was bigger than me. Today, I fit in my skin. I am at peace with who I am and the world around me. I am no longer at the mercy of a disease that tells me the only answer is to drink.

I have also learned that I belong in any A.A. meeting, not just gay or lesbian meetings. I have found that if willingness is the key to unlock the gates of hell, it is action that opens those doors so that I may walk freely among the living.

I now have a purpose in my life, not in great things accomplished, but in daily living. I want to keep the peace, serenity and tranquility I have found.

I have gained the love and understanding of a gracious God, who has lifted me from the alcoholic scrapheap to a position of trust, where I am able to reap the rich rewards that come from showing a little love for others and from serving them the best I can.

Life has become more than I ever thought possible, all because I am willing to believe that A.A. just might work for me, too. God willing, I will complete another 24 hours of sober living.

How it works

A.A. provides a proven pathway that can lead to recovery. By listening to the many members in A.A. share frankly and openly about their alcoholism, we come to recognize that we, too, are suffering from the same disease. Utilizing the Twelve Steps of A.A. and the A.A. principles we come to rely on, we discover new ways of living. If we are willing to be honest about our drinking and earnestly apply what we learn about ourselves in A.A., our chances at recovery are good.

Where to find A.A.

There are A.A. groups in large cities, rural areas and villages throughout the world. Many A.A. intergroup or central offices have websites where information about local A.A. meetings can be found, and almost anywhere in the United States or Canada you will find an A.A. telephone number. These resources can help direct you to a meeting in your community. Additionally, information about local meetings may often be obtained from doctors and nurses, from the clergy, media outlets, police officials, hospitals, community centers and alcoholism facilities that are familiar with our program.

Each A.A. group endeavors to provide a safe meeting place for all attendees and to encourage a secure and nurturing environment. In A.A., the shared experience, strength and hope of sober alcoholics is the lifeline to sobriety; our common suffering and our common solution transcend most difficulties, helping us to create the conditions in which to carry A.A.'s message of hope and recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.

Many LGBTQ alcoholics feel quite comfortable in any A.A. group. Yet, many A.A. communities also have special interest groups for LGBTQ individuals, where it may be easier to identify as an alcoholic or to be open about certain personal issues.

“After coming into A.A. and listening to people share their experience, strength and hope,” says one A.A. member, “those unnamed fears began to vanish. I realized that the A.A. people understood me — something I’d been looking for all my life. That terrible apartness from the human race and the loneliness began to disappear.”

If you cannot reach a group in your area, contact the A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, (212) 870-3400, www.aa.org. They will put you in touch with the group nearest you.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: www.aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
AS BILL SEES IT
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
BLACK IN A.A.
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —
AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US:
AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
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ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

VIDEOS (available on www.aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, www.aagrapevine.org)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, www.aalavina.org)
ABOUT A.A. (digital-only, www.aa.org/about-aa)

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I AM RESPONSIBLE...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that:

I am responsible.

ISBN 978-1-940889-72-6



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