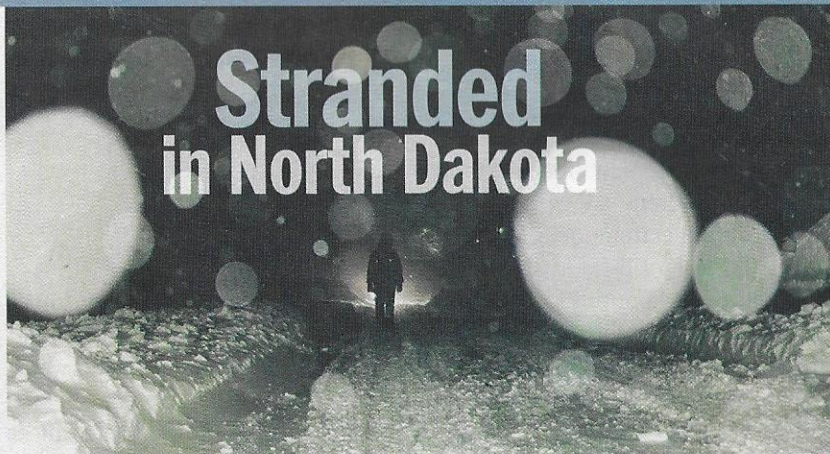


course, I had to celebrate. I invited several friends to join me for dinner at my favorite watering hole in L.A. After a delicious meal, we'd clink our champagne glasses and then I'd head home so I could be asleep under my blankets early.

As it happened the champagne was preceded by several bottles of wine and was followed by several snorts of "chemical booze." When the

time arrived to stick to my schedule and head home, a familiar voice popped up in my head. It said, "To hell with that. You're having a good time!" And just like that, once again I was off and running.

Much later that night, long after Michael the bartender had yelled, "Last call!" and long after the busboys had stacked chairs on the tables, I found myself weaving home,



Stranded in North Dakota

FOUR months into sobriety, I left my hometown for Chicago. I'd had a run-in with the law, sober, and preferred to face new horizons in AA rather than face the judge.

My destination was my brother's home. He had placed two conditions on my stay: First, I wouldn't stay longer than two weeks. Sec-

ond, I had to stay sober.

The bus route took me through North Dakota in January and, unsurprisingly, the bus was held up by a massive blizzard that closed the Interstate. The bus company secured accommodations for the passengers at a run-down motel in Dickenson, North Dakota. We were bunked together

six to a room. And wouldn't you know it, my roommates immediately broke out the beer and weed.

Right away, I was feeling pretty jumpy. Outside the motel room window, I could see the lights of a truck stop fading in and out through the blowing snow. Excusing myself, I set out across the abandoned Interstate

thinking, Damn, you did it again. It was 3:00 A.M. and I had to be at the studio at 10:00 A.M. I set the alarm to wake me up at the very last possible moment. After tossing and turning for an hour or so, I drank another half bottle of wine to knock myself out. Maybe I wasn't actually drunk when I woke up, but there sure must have been a lot of residual alcohol in my bloodstream. With no time to

shower or even make coffee, I raced to the studio about as stressed out as a human being could possibly be.

I don't remember much about that meeting, but I do remember how I felt. Paralyzed with fear and with a mouth that felt full of cotton, I could barely speak. I remember thinking I was making a fool of myself and, so as not to leave any doubt about that, I mumbled an excuse,

through the howling wind and mounting snow toward the lights of the truck stop. While I struggled along, I wondered whether the storm would suddenly worsen, dooming me to wander about until they found my remains in the spring. Fortunately, I made it.

I had intended to merely sit at the counter or in a booth and wait things out. Maybe in the morning the weather would clear and I could board the bus and be on my way. But I noticed a group of people that didn't look like they belonged together seated at several tables pulled together near the back of the diner. They were all laughing and a little loud, but some power helped me overcome my apprehensions and I walked

I was feeling pretty jumpy. Excusing myself, I set out across the abandoned Interstate through the howling wind and snow toward the lights of the truck stop.

toward them. A fellow noticed my approach and said, "You looking for the meeting?" I knew it! Something told me they were AA. "Yes," I replied. "You are AA, right?" Sure enough. I learned later that the school where those folks regularly met had been closed by the storm and an extemporaneous group conscience landed them at

the local "after-the-meeting spot." They had left behind a few members in the school parking lot to direct stragglers to the truck stop for fellowship.

I don't recall much else from that night 40 years ago, but I do know that when I returned across the Interstate to that motel room all those men were sleeping and I stayed sober, continuing on to Chicago the next morning.

Whether you are four months or 40 years along on your journey of sobriety, travel can mean unforeseen circumstances. It has been my experience that AA can be found if I look for it, most anywhere. Even if—like me—you don't expect to find it.

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