



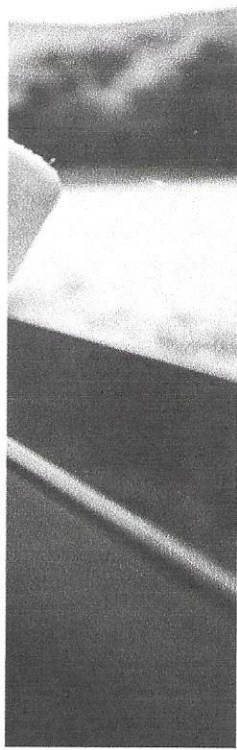
# GOOD THINGS TO COME

Getting sober young wasn't easy. But with a lot of help, he got in the car and hit the road for a long, wonderful life

**H**ER letter was annoying and intrusive. How dare she? I hadn't seen my older sister in, well, I didn't know how long it had been. Her letter stated that my drinking was out of control and I

needed to get help.

I was a solitary drinker. That is, until I would go into a blackout and leave my apartment to wander the streets of the dying, formerly industrial town where I lived. Occasionally, I would find mementos of my blackout travels—a snow shovel in the hallway, a book on my table—with no recollection of where they had come from. I learned later that what precipitated my sister's sharp missive were the phone calls I made to my parents during my blackouts.



Four months after my 22nd birthday, I made a half-hearted call for help. I had never heard of AA, but I found a number for an "Alcoholism Hotline" in the phonebook. It was a toll-free call, so I dialed the number at 7:45 in the morning. I assumed no one would answer at that hour and then I could be satisfied that I had tried to get help for my round-the-clock drinking. Instead, a woman named Rosemary answered. She asked me if I had a problem with drinking. I said I did. She said, "So did I. I'm an alcoholic."

My next thought was, Then what the hell am I talking to you for? But then something unexpected happened. A felt a surge of relief at Rosemary's words. The huge burden of shame I felt at being unable to control my drinking tumbled away.

Two days later, I got a phone call from a man named Mike. We arranged that he would pick me up for an AA meeting the next day. It was a Friday and 18 inches of snow had just fallen. Mike called me on Friday afternoon to confirm.

"There's still a meeting?" I asked, hoping for a reprieve. "There's a lot of snow out there and the roads don't look good."

"Did you have any trouble getting something to drink today?" Mike replied. The answer of course was no. When Mike came by to pick me up he had a slab of granite in the bed of his pickup truck to weigh it down in the snow. Off we went to the meeting. About 30 people were inside, including three speakers who had come all the way from another town. Though I did identify with a woman who told a story of trying with toothbrush and paste to scrub the alcohol smell out of her breath before work (something I had tried), I was not ready to jump into this AA thing with both feet.

My brilliant idea instead was to implement a marijuana-maintenance program. After all, my problem was with alcohol, not marijuana. I had a calendar with a box for each day. One slash meant I drank no alcohol

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that day. A second slash meant I used neither alcohol nor pot. There would be three days of one slash followed by three days with two. Marijuana always led me back to my drug of choice—liquor.

There's a saying in our program—bring the body and the mind will follow. Mike and his buddies loaded me in the back of their cars and took me to meetings despite my reservations. One day I even passed out in an AA meeting in a treatment

**Mike and his buddies loaded me in the back of their cars and took me to meetings. One day I even passed out in an AA meeting at which they were speaking.**

center at which they were speaking. When it was over, they just roused me and took me home.

Mike didn't give up on me though. I only did one right thing during those first months—I kept going to meetings. And I rarely spoke, which was a remarkable and uncharacteristic exhibition of good sense, as I had not much of value to share.

Then something happened. On May 4, 1978, my calendar had one

slash—no alcohol consumed that day. The next day was warm and sunny with the earthy scent of spring in the air. My drug dealer peddled up to me on his bike in front of my apartment and offered to share a joint with me—for free no less. I was standing there with my girlfriend. Something else, a Higher Power, was also present with the three of us. All of a sudden, the words, "No, thanks," tumbled out of my mouth. My girlfriend's jaw dropped. She was visibly shocked.

That turned out to be my first day of sobriety. Shortly thereafter, I threw the calendar away. Later I would come to understand that I had learned two things in those first three months of slipping and sliding. The first was that I had brought my body and my mind did follow. The second was that I can't think myself into right action, but I can act myself into right thinking. Going to meetings was the right action.

The best thing about finding AA when I did was that I could be sober not only for the good things to come in my 20s, but also especially for the sad things.

Less than three years after that spring day, my younger brother was diagnosed with cancer and I became his bone marrow donor. My sadness at his eventual death was tempered with gratitude. I was present for his death. I did what I needed to do and got to say goodbye to him before he

died because I was sober.

That first decade in AA I earned a college degree and married that remarkable young woman who had been standing next to me when I said, "No, thanks." I also witnessed the birth of our three daughters and fell into a great career.

It's been 42 years since that first wintry meeting with Mike and I'm still very much a meeting maker. As I've heard, "people who don't go to meetings don't find out what happens to people who don't go to meetings." I've learned that the only things you need to start a new meeting are a resentment and a coffee pot, and I've done that twice.

I frequently travel internationally for my job and I always center my trip around an AA meeting (or two,

if I can find them). In a four-week period earlier this year, I attended meetings on four continents. I've attended meetings in many languages, including Finnish, Hindi and Spanish, none of which I speak. I go because I just need to be with people who speak our language of the heart.

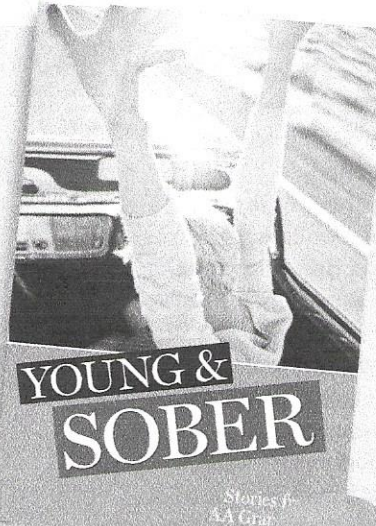
I've received many gifts in AA, including a connection with a Higher Power, reconciliation with my family and the creation of a new one. Perhaps the greatest gift I've received is a love affair with meetings and our stories—and those make everything else possible. I can also have a meeting with myself, even when two or more of us have not physically gathered. You're holding it in your hand.

BRIAN S.  
*Wyckoff, N.J.*

In this collection of Grapevine stories about the joys and challenges of getting sober at an early age, AA members share about recognizing their disease even though their drinking may have only lasted a few years. Written by members who got sober in their teens, 20s and 30s, the stories are about growing up young in AA, finding ways to connect when feeling different, getting involved in service and learning how to live a sober life joyously.

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