

stroke of luck was not luck at all, but due to prayers from our friends, including many AA members who we met visiting in Mexico and those in our town and others who kept me in the light.

I received a transplant that next morning and I went home six days later. Part of my post-transplant recovery required me to attend a clinic two times a week for several weeks, which meant I had to be downtown very early. I was in a wheelchair, and I needed help with everything. My wife was my rock, along with others, but she became really burned out after all this. We had no idea how I was going to get out of the house to the clinic. But an AA friend offered to take me there for as long as I needed to go. I was ornery, angry, self-absorbed and in a great deal of pain, but everyone just kept encouraging me to follow instructions and get well.

Friends brought AA meetings to our house. They fed me, visited with me and got me through the worst. A remarkable thing about my situation is that I never really believed I would die, but if I did die, I was glad that I got to experience a good deal of my adult life sober, clean and reasonably happy. As I saw it, the results of my treatment were up to God, not me.

Almost a year later, I went back to work with a new attitude of gratitude. We bought a place in Mexico just 100 steps from the beach and now we spend our winters there. I

felt like I had received a new lease on life, almost as dramatic as getting sober!

Today, I'm back to at least three AA meetings a week. I sponsor men and I'm in the same Step study group I helped start 28 years ago. I have maintained my business and I volunteer for the organization that's responsible for organ donation, procurement and distribution in my state.

Yes, I'm getting older. I have some aches and pains, but I thank God every day for having such great friends, a good work life and family. One thing I discovered during my illness was this ironic but poignant

**I thank God every day for having such great friends, a good work life and family. It took almost dying to understand, deep in my heart, how many people love me.**

thought: It took almost dying to understand, deep in my heart, how many people love me, how much God loves me and how AA and my recovery fellows brought me a life beyond my dreams.

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# The Hitchhiker

Thumbing her way across Ontario in a raging snowstorm, a newcomer gets the surprise of her life



**When I was 28 years old and just two months sober,**

my life bumped into Kenora, a town in northern Ontario. I was newly sober and just beginning to feel clarity of mind and a vibrancy come back that had been extinguished by years of the bottle.

[www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org)

Without much to do at the time, I decided to hitchhike up to Manitoba from Ottawa to see my university friend, Lynn. Hitchhiking wasn't new to me. Being young and without a car, I had hitchhiked around Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta hundreds of times.

I typically avoided serious trouble while thumbing it. I used my

experience, street smarts, privilege, luck and the “spidey sense” that women have about imminent danger to navigate this world. For the most part, hitchhiking had been a pleasurable and adventurous way to move through the world. Not true for everyone.

Leaving Ottawa, I made it as far as Thunder Bay the first day. Next morning, I continued on the Trans Canada determined to make the Manitoba border and my waiting friend by sundown. It was October. By late afternoon with fading daylight, Kenora came into view as an early season snowstorm rolled in. It was snowing heavily by the time my ride drove into Kenora and the roads had become a mess. Lynn had promised to meet me just over the border in Whiteshell, about 40 minutes away. Then we would drive to her home in Pinawa. How was I to hitchhike there in a raging snowstorm?

I Needed a snack, and with some time to figure out what to do, the driver dropped me off at a coffee shop in Kenora. I ordered a donut and coffee and employed one of my strategies for getting help. I shared my predicament with the counter person hoping to get local ideas. No bites.

Only two of the shop’s 20 tables were occupied. I sat down next to a table occupied by two men. They were middle-aged, wearing ball caps and chatting together. Total Kenorans. They turned to me almost im-

mediately. They’d seen my big backpack, heard bits of my story and they were curious. I launched into my tale of the past two days of hitchhiking and the seeming impossibility of getting to my destination in Whiteshell.

After we talked, they gave each other a look and one asked the other whether they should just drive me to Whiteshell themselves. Just like that, they agreed to help me. I wondered whether they might have been going that way to begin with, but they weren’t. They had no plans on leav-

**It was already pitch dark, with snow whipping sideways across the road, creating near-whiteout conditions. No one should have been out in that weather.**

ing Kenora that evening until they decided to help out. To me, this was the kind of situation—an apparently altruistic action taken by a pair of strangers—where I checked in with my spidey sense for other motives. I did that and I felt certain these men were trustworthy. And indeed, they were about to turn into my fairy godfathers.

We climbed up into their truck, three across the front seat. The truck

was a big, late-model pickup with lots of power and room to spare. Turned out it needed to be big to make it through that evening’s snow.

Our truck rumbled slowly onto the snowy highway at about 6:00 P.M. It was already pitch dark, with snow whipping sideways across the road, creating near-whiteout conditions. The highway was empty aside from emergency vehicles and cars in the ditch, an ominous sign. No one should have been out in that weather.

Despite this, the mood in the cab of that truck couldn’t have been more different than the weather outside. These men—I wish I could remember their names—were jovial and curious. They wanted to hear about my adventures, and they shared lighthearted stories of their own. It was as if we weren’t battling a raging storm. They were unmoved by the conditions outside. Maybe that’s a Kenoran thing.

During the cheerful conversation, they disclosed that they were both sober members of AA. Aha! I excitedly told them about my two months of sobriety and that I had been attending AA meetings. The three of us spent the rest of the treacherous trip in a bubble of levity, chatting about AA and sobriety.

We arrived at a truck-stop restaurant an hour and a half later, double the time it should have taken because of the storm.

My friend Lynn had just arrived,

excited but road-weary. Inside, I introduced Lynn to my new friends. As I was profusely thanking these men, they invited us to dinner in the restaurant, their treat. Without money and hungry for both food and kindness, we both said, “Yes.”

We had a great dinner and afterward, they shook our hands, wished us well and started off on the treacherous drive back to Kenora. Lynn and I drove off in the opposite direction to her family home in Pinawa, still surprised at the astonishing acts of generosity that had just been bestowed on us.

Almost 20 years later, I still ponder the kindness of those two strangers. They took a treacherous drive and bought me dinner because they saw my need. It cost them time, gas, money and effort. And they did it as though it were a normal everyday activity. Why? Maybe it’s a Kenoran thing.

Acts of selflessness and service are a primary feature of the AA program, so I wonder if this was their motivation, to be of service. That’s the AA way of doing things. Help out. Be generous. Show your best self. Do the next right thing. The spirit and hospitality of AA in Kenora was on display that snowy night. I want to thank those men for leaving an indelible mark on my heart and life.

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