

Reflections of An Alcoholic, Part 2

2007 (Journal and program notes during 28-day residential treatment program that husband started)

Second day of treatment – “Simple solutions to recovery”

- Anger “comes with the territory”
- The disease is untreatable until we accept that we have the disease
- I like being able to change how I feel with the first drink, then alcohol completely takes control. This is the compulsion after the first drink. “Craving beyond mental control” is compulsion. It is not a matter of self-discipline. It is a disease of the brain.
- I cannot ever drink – ever
- Why? I’m different from non-alcoholics:
 - o My brain chemistry is different,
 - o the livers of alcoholics metabolize alcohol differently, fooling the brain.Alcoholics have two enzymes that non-alcoholics don’t have.
- I want to become addicted to feeling good: no hangovers, sore throat, high blood pressure, or shame.
- I don’t want to miss any more of my life.

Third day of treatment

- In order to stop drinking, I must stop – not slow down and then stop. Simple. During previous attempts I made the decision, but took no actions except to go to AA meetings and counseling.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

Step One – My First Step

Twice before, I have first-stepped. The first first-step was with a sponsor with whom I later developed a personality conflict. The second first-step was on my own, absent a sponsor. These experiences were not without value. The next time I will exercise more care in asking a sponsor to help me. I plan to get to know (and vice-versa) a potential sponsor outside the rooms of AA before we make a sponsorship commitment. And, more importantly, I can’t work the steps alone. I must have help.

I Admit I Am Powerless over Alcohol

First, I admit that I am an alcoholic. When drinking alcohol, I know that I am different from my wife, my Mom and Dad, and ninety-some percent of the general population in that I cannot drink without serious and progressively worsening consequences. The only thing in this world that I cannot do is drink alcohol--that is, if I am to live and my marriage survive another month, another year.

Alcohol has taken over my life, my brain. Alcohol, my unique body chemistry and my family genetics have molded me into the deadly world of alcoholism. I'm rapidly losing the struggle swimming upstream in a torrent of vodka, or whatever form of $C_6H_{12}O_3$ appeals to my daily compulsion.

My Life Has Become Unmanageable

A year ago, my life was mostly manageable. Six months ago, barely manageable. One month ago, not manageable. I could no longer practice my profession responsibly. I neglected my appearance. I usually skipped breakfast and lunch and ate less than a child's portion for dinner, getting most of my "nutrition" from booze. Food can get in front of a good buzz. For the first time as an adult I would skip my morning coffee and go straight to vodka and orange juice. The rest of the day would be shot even though I planned every day to the contrary. Drinking and driving does not demonstrate good management practice, either. Fortunately, there were no incidents. I was lucky. I could not manage my side of our marriage or household responsibilities except for contributing my share of money. I contributed more than my fair share to compensate for being slack in other quarters of my married life. My wife was not impressed. She saw through that gesture. I let my car get very dirty and low on oil—unthinkable in earlier years. Also, during the later months of unmanageability, it was fortunate that I had no pets or plants at home to care for. They would not have fared well.

As an alcoholic I am powerless over alcohol consumption. I must never drink again. Once I start, I cannot stop until I'm drunk, passed out, or out of supply.

Good-bye my turncoat friend. We can no longer walk down life's way together. We are at a fork in the road. We must now permanently part. I must learn to control my alcoholism. I want a life and my wife back. Good-bye alcohol/ C_6 .

Additional Step One notes

1. Admit complete defeat.

2. Every natural instinct cops out against the idea of personal powerlessness.
3. We have warped our minds into an obsession for destructive drinking that only an act of God can remove.
4. Alcohol bleeds us of all self-sufficiency and all will to resist its demands.
5. Once this fact is accepted, our bankruptcy is complete.
6. Absolute humiliation.
7. Only through complete defeat are we able to take the first steps toward liberation and strength.
8. Only my admission of personal powerlessness turns out to be firm bedrock upon which a happy and purposeful live may be built.
9. Little good can come to me unless I have first accepted my debilitating weakness and all its consequences.
10. Until I humble myself, sobriety will be precarious, without real happiness.
11. Admission of complete defeat is one of the facts of AA Life. No enduring strength can come without admitting complete defeat.
12. I must admit complete defeat.
13. Entering program, self-confidence is a total liability.
14. I am a victim of a mental obsession so subtly powerful, that no amount of willpower can break it.
15. I cannot do it alone.
16. Years ago, I realized alcohol was out of control, no mere habit, the beginning of a fatal progression.
17. Controlled drinking did not work for me; I soon returned to excess.
18. I hit the bottom before I started with AA.
19. The remaining steps 2-12 mean the adoption of attributes and actions that no one drinking could dream of doing.
20. I must be rigorously honest and tolerant.
21. I must confess faults to another and make restitution for harm done.
22. Meditation and prayer are required.
23. Help others who are suffering.
24. I cannot be self-centered.
25. I have discovered that fatal nature of my situation.
26. I must be open-minded and willing to listen.
27. I will do anything to lift the merciless obsession from me.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

Alcohol's Negative Effects on Me

This assigned task would be much easier if I were asked to list those parts of my life not affected by alcohol. A blank paper may be stark but not very informative. I've attempted to organize my thoughts into some loose categories. Here goes.

Physical

- Raises blood pressure and triglycerides
- Irritates throat and esophagus
- Acid reflux
- Poor sleep
- Night sweats
- Imagined voices and noises at night
- Hand tremors
- Hangovers
- Decreased appetite
- Booze takes the place of real food
- Weight loss
- Blood became anemic
- Stopped taking recommended supplements
- Blood-shot eyes
- Leg cramps
- Black-outs
- Weird dreams
- Hiccups

Spiritual

- Loss of spiritual experience
- Loss of religion (church)
- Careless about humanity – local and world

Personal

- Lower self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Professional competence and responsibility declines
- Procrastination increases

- More unorganized
- Poor financial decisions
- Fantasies, day and night
- Day lacks organization
- Loss of interest in hobbies, shop, photography, art
- Decreased interest in personal appearance – shaving, clean hair, clean clothes
- Neglect automobile – not clean and maintained
- Loss of interest in home remodeling, yard, garden
- Increase in Internet surfing
- Outside sexual interests
- Increase in drinking and driving
- Money spent on alcohol
- Become irritable at people, traffic getting between me and drink

Family

- Loss in caring for wife's interests and my dad's – he needs me
- Loss in true affection to wife
- Loss in caring for my children and other relatives
- I lose things – eyeglasses, car, etc.

Big stuff

- Alcohol became the center of my life; all decisions and my schedule took alcohol into consideration first. What does alcoholic need/want?
- It prevented me from planning events in evenings when I knew that I should not drive/go.

2007 (worksheet during 28-day treatment program)

Question: What is perception? Describe the relationship between perception and your behavior. Explain how alcohol changes your perception.

- Answer: Alcohol provides the only Technicolor in my life – otherwise life is black and white.

Three traits in an unhealthy character are:

- dishonesty;
- the belief that a person must be loved by everyone to do well;

- the belief that one is controlled by the past.

Three unhealthy beliefs are:

- One's life is forever controlled by things which happened to us in the past;
- the belief that one is not "enough," that I am inadequate or not able to do something;
- it is very difficult to find solutions to problems.

How did alcohol become your chief value?

- I perceived that alcohol had become my best friend – always there when I needed it, with a predictable warm glow. It would smooth over rough times, and sometimes make them go away. I seldom remember the negative aspects.

2007 (assignment during 28-day treatment program)

My Gratitude List AA program

- This place of recovery
- My good health
- My faith
- My growing spirituality, beyond my church
- My daily increasing knowledge about the disease
- My wife and her love for me
- My dad
- My children and other relatives
- My two friends in recovery who are ministers
- Our natural environment
- My friends in AA
- My insights into recovery and revelations about myself that are coming to me almost daily.

2007 (during 28-day treatment program)

"How I Can Respond to Anxiety" worksheet

Triggering event: my son, living in another city, is arrested and charged with 26 counts of breaking and entering.

Thoughts/ feelings: I'm very hurt. I'm embarrassed because he is the grandson of the most respected man in the community, my own father.

Connected memory or event: raising a very disturbed person, doing all I can to help him, and failing.

Connected thoughts and feelings: my old friends, neighbors, and relatives will think that I shirked my responsibility to him, that his behavior is a result of bad parenting from me, so it is my fault.

Recovery-based answer: I no longer have any control over this person. The state prison system has him under control.

Right now, I can: accept the reality of his condition. I can correspond with, visit, send books, and pray for him.

In the future, I will: do the things I've stated above.

2007 Step Two (*during 28-day residential treatment program*)

"I came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity"

Why I need God in My Life

Some Thoughts on My Second Step

Selfishness

Up until this point in my alcoholic career, I unknowingly played God. I say unknowing because I would never consciously assume that role. The 12-step program that I'm studying here shows me clearly that I had gradually, over the past 35 or so years, become selfish, self-centered, with many variances on those two traits. Prior to coming here, I had heard the word "selfish" in AA meetings. I assumed a narrow definition of that word, and applied it only to money or material goods, things I've always shared with others, usually, my family. I looked up "selfish" in Webster's. Not one mention of money. Rather the middle definition reads "seeking or concentrating on one's own pleasure, or well-being..." Ouch, that's me.

Alcohol, My Co-God

I am keenly aware of the other God-replacement sitting in the driver's seat. I silently witnessed alcohol substitute itself for God and virtually destroy every value, person, plan, or goal in my

universe. Alcoholism highjacked my brain and became my ersatz God of predictable pleasure and pain.

My Need (as in “Why I need God)

I need my real God, my church-God, close at hand to help me through the white-knuckle cravings or other situations that lie ahead.

I have a higher power. That power is my church-God. I’ve had a church-God since I was an infant, baptized in the church my family attended. I have continued to attend services as an adult.

I must have a higher power to give me faith. Faith in my heart, mind, spirit and gut so that I can move on about the mechanics of re-structuring myself, re-learning to trust and lean on my higher power, my church God. I’ll move out of the center of my universe, fire my disease and let God replace me (my ego) and my disease.

Words into Action and Change

The marks on these papers are just words. I must now learn both here, and 16 days hence in my local AA group, a new way of living.

Advice from an Expert

I am fortunate to have a recovering priest as a friend and spiritual advisor. I asked her how to pray for help in recovery. She said, just ask for what you need, be quiet and open, then when you receive it, remember to say “thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Some Other Thoughts that I Embrace

1. The AA program offers a spiritual solution to a non-spiritual problem.
2. Alcoholics Anonymous has Christian roots. I have Christian roots. I have heard the following many times in church: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). I now so pray, now with new eyes.
3. “Trust” – another key recovery word I’ve learned here, is an experience that I will apply to my higher power, faith, and to my own recovery work.
4. Spirituality. This paper is mostly about my concept of God, my church-God as my higher power in recovery work. I have a spiritual dimension. It is much larger than my religion. My church-God is at the center of my spiritual concepts. This is a late life phase for me. It will expand as I work along the path of Recovery.

Step Two Additional Notes

- Much of the words of Step 2 has to do with the non-believer. I skip this, since I do believe in God/ a Higher Power.
- Even for believers, maybe from childhood faith – gave us certain values – some thought honesty, being tolerant and just, ambition, hard work, fair play would be enough.
- Some think that the intellect alone could displace the God of our fathers.
- Defiance is the outstanding characteristic of many alcoholics.
- Belief means reliance, not defiance.
- The answer has to do with the quality of faith rather than its quantity.
- Must be serious, not superficial, asking something for nothing.
- Must clean house so that the grace of God can enter us and expel the obsession.
- We must understand the love of God and Man. No alcoholic can claim soundness of mind, therefore not sane
- True humility and an open mind can lead us to faith. God will restore us to sanity if we rightly relate ourselves to Him.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

Step Three

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

Key Words

Step

Will

Care

- a. I have made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. I have no other choice, save for death. For me this is the only path left. I have tried self-will, moderation, O'Doul's step-down, beverage change, self-sponsoring, psychotherapy, my priest, medications, going to several AA meetings a week and white-knuckling. None worked.

A month ago, everything was going down rapidly because my drinking pattern was no longer straight-line linear; it became asymptomatic. This was the end that I had often wondered about. Mine was the poster image of a child with an unmanageable life.

I saw clearly what I needed to do – seriously begin working the steps in a rehabilitation facility. Therefore, here I am, writing about my third step.

I have a determination that I'm trying to rev up to a passion to turn over this helpless mess – alcoholism – to my higher power, my church-God. I pray that it will happen.

b. How do I feel about my decision?

I'm feeling a sense of relief. Pieces of the recovery puzzle are now falling into place. I've been struggling with drink and disease for years—at least 30. I'm losing ground and I'm tired. I want help. I need help. I look to God's coming grace like I look at a beautiful sunrise.

c. What action will I take?

Pray. Go to a meeting every day. Engage a sponsor. Work the steps. Be of service to others. Continue to look inward for things that need to be fixed. Talk to the old-timers. Sit on the front row, both literally and figuratively. Try to never take my sobriety for granted. These sober days here are precious jewels. It feels so good once again to sleep well, awake without a hangover, with a healthy body and clear head that knows what needs to be done. And, pray.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

I'm learning things that were unknown to me, that can work against sobriety. Ego inflation displaces spirituality. Good nutrition is crucial. I have a need for joy.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

Notes from Step 4 worksheet

Chemical dependence “grinds us up” and causes a conflict between our values and our behavior. Contrary to what we may know and feel is right, the use of chemicals has led to feelings of shame, humiliation, worthlessness, and a loss of dignity. In order to cope with this inner conflict, the chemically dependent person must resort to deceit, lying, and dishonesty. The Fourth Step will enable you to deal with this built-up inner conflict by recognizing the person that you have become.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

Notes from a worksheet on Steps 6 and 7

God, please take away my use of manipulation. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by being less than honest with others. Also, God please fill me with a principle of complete honesty so that I may be free from deception and not drink over it.

God, please take away my self-pity. I am completely willing to surrender my tendency to feel sorry for myself. It has hurt my life by making me sad. Please fill me with self-confidence so that I may move on with recovery.

Please take away my rejection of others. I surrender my selfishness, because it has hurt my life by not accepting other's behaviors. Please fill me with acceptance so that I may be more open and move on in recovery.

Please take away my victim problem. I surrender my feeling of being the victim. It has hurt my life by shifting blame to other people and situations. Please fill me with humility, honesty, and maturity so that I may see people and situations in their true light and not feel victimized and drink.

Please take away my dependence problem, which has hurt my life by preventing me from taking responsibility. Please fill me with responsibility so that I may be truly interdependent with others, and not be dependent on alcohol for joy.

Please take away my dishonesty and my control through dishonesty. It has hurt my life by causing me guilt, and loss of credibility. Please fill me with honesty so that I may live true to myself and others.

Please take away my impulsiveness and my habit of acting before thinking. It has hurt my life because I do or say things without thinking, like drinking. Please fill me with mature thinking so that I may control my thoughts, think them through, and not drink impulsively.

Please take away my jealousy and my fears. They have hurt my life by allowing stinking thinking space in my head. Please fill me with trust so that I may live and let live.

God, please take away my rejection of myself. I am completely willing to surrender my destructive thoughts. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by giving me a reason to drink. God, please fill me with acceptance so that I may like myself and not drink over this feeling.

Please take away my worries. I am completely willing to surrender my unnecessary concerns. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by worrying of things unnecessarily. Please fill me with faith, trust, and action so that I may not fill my mind with unnecessary thoughts and drink over them.

Please take away my desire to isolate myself. I am completely willing to surrender my need to be alone. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by allowing me to drink. Also, please fill me with a thirst for participation so that I may get out of my cave and not drink.

Please take away my feelings of inadequacy. I am completely willing to surrender my belittling thoughts. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by thinking I'm inferior because I drink – therefore I drink. Also, please fill me with wholeness so that I may feel like a whole human being.

God, please take away my practice of denial. I am completely willing to surrender my putting away reality. I don't want it anymore because it has hurt my life by causing me to not face reality, then drink more. Also, God please fill me with honesty so that I may do what needs to be done for myself.

2007 (during 28-day residential treatment program)

What Brought Me Here?

I had to work hard at becoming an alcoholic, and it was not easy, even though I inherited the tendency towards depression from both sides of my family. I was in my mid-thirties before I crossed the line of light social drinking into the dark side of excessive drinking.

For the past five or so years I've known and admitted that I was an alcoholic. I started going to AA meetings irregularly, in fits and starts, seeing a very good addiction counselor, went to an intensive out-patient (IOP) series, and read a whole lot of literature, both lay and scientific. At one time, early on, I had a sponsor, and after six months or so I ended the relationship at Step Four.

I truly thought that casual attendance at AA meetings, seeing a very good \$90/hour counselor every week and reading a lot about the disease and recovery would surely be enough to keep me sober. Unfortunately, there is no easy, softer way out – these half-measures did not work.

Regarding scattered attendance at AA meetings, I'm reminded of an old AA story. The Chicken and the Pig went to breakfast – the Chicken was associated with breakfast, and the Pig was committed.

My drinking was somewhat under control while I worked, because I never drank at work. Then I retired about two years ago and found I had 10 hours a day "free time" at which I could do anything. Well, Mr. Alcohol already had dibs on that time, and two months ago I found

myself drinking in the morning, not for that delicious early buzz or the good taste of the expensive stuff, but so that I would not feel so rotten and could somewhat function for that day.

One of my addiction counselors recommended (at least three times) that I come to this 28-day program. Two months ago, I knew that my way wasn't working and I needed full-time help. So now here I am.

I've abandoned my old way. So Monday I'm taking this eight-step program back home with me. My steps are:

1. Don't drink. Very basic and very important. I can't get sober if I'm still drinking. I'm the poster child for sincere and innovative chemistry experiments.
2. Structure in my every-day life. Every day is not a clean slate. I will already have an agenda for the day when I go to bed the night before.
3. Go to meetings, virtually every day, particularly for the next three months.
4. Get a sponsor, soon – don't procrastinate.
5. Work the steps with a sponsor.
6. Pray. Cherish and nurture and use my spirituality.
7. Be of service, both inside AA and out.
8. Last, enjoy a new way of living, where alcohol is not the center of anything in my life.

I had to learn a lesson the hard way – I cannot think or pray my way out of this mess. Neither could the people in my home group, including a physician, a priest, and a NASA rocket scientist.

To close – be the pig, not the chicken

2007 (After 28-day treatment program has ended, when relapse had already occurred. Among husband's papers after his death, wife found a grocery list of things to get after leaving treatment program – first on the list is alcohol.)

I do my best creative thinking when I'm drinking alcohol.

I must re-structure/re-engineer myself. For the past 43 years, my life has been defined by, and to a large extent, shaped by work. My initial plan for retirement included quite a lot of consulting work to earn money, and bring back some of the structure that work gives.

Things that I do well:

- Make things with my hands: work on our home, drawings, photos, food
- Earn money (but not save any)
- Drink alcohol

Hit Bottom

At meetings, I've heard the term "hit bottom" and people have said you have to hit bottom before you can start back up into recovery. Stories include jail, wrecks, inpatient treatment, detox. Some people say they're "high bottom." I think I have a high bottom.

The old me has to die before I can begin, again.

During my childhood, something inside me died and left a huge hole.

Inventory of myself. I have not taken care of myself, physically and the things around me.

I want to fix: myself, and my relationship with my wife; our house; and give of myself.

August, 2007 *(Notes written after leaving 28-day residential program, never shared with wife.)*

How do I feel about our separation?

1. Sadness. This continues our being apart. I miss you. I want to continue with our dreams and day-to-day stuff.
2. Sadness. This reflects my failure, my detachment from the reality of my disease. This separation is a constant reminder of my failure to act more positively, to stop my disease.
3. Sadness. Where I'm living now is a lonely place – very beautiful, but I'm in isolation. But, maybe, this is another dark night of my soul, when my sadness and loneliness may cut deeper.
4. Joy. I no longer have to live out of my car or a motel room.

2007 (after 28-day treatment has ended)

I drank beer for four evenings. I went to 5 AA meetings.

Last Monday gave me some insights

- Maybe I'm not depressed, just sad
- I felt a natural high on Tuesday
- Sadness is a comfortable feeling. Then I started feeling sad and depressed Wednesday through Sunday

I'm starting to use time with my wife as a buffer against drinking.

I think I'm sad because I'm giving up something – alcohol – that was always there for me, during upbeat and downbeat times.

I'm treading water, not making much progress and not regressing. Each week I am seeing elements of my past and present that relate to drinking and not drinking.

I'm taking medication for moderate depression.

Why do I drink for all these years? To feel better – alcohol is a mood elevator for me. By and large it worked, up to a point, then it caused depression, occasionally to the point of crying.

This past week, I spent three days out of town visiting my dad. I went to AA meetings 6 out of 7 days, and a healing service at church. I drank beer on three nights. I bought a six-pack and drank three of them at home, then the next morning, with remorse, I poured it out. I did the same thing two more evenings.

Summer 2008 *(The following was an assignment for an intensive 12-week out-patient program.)*

How have I survived and progressed this week?

- Not one day at a time, not one hour at a time; it's been one minute at a time.

Supply Side

If I don't have it, I won't drink it.

At the 28-day rehab last year, I did not have an obsession/compulsion to drink, because I knew that it was not available. I had a longing on two Friday/late-afternoons from years of many

Friday afternoons of socializing with friends, work's done, time to cook food, drink beers, and be with friends on the gazebo by the lake.

Now, the only thing left of that joy is alcohol – no friends, save for my wife, no gazebo by the lake, no plans for fishing or cleaning the lakeshore as a help to the community the next morning.

I've let alcohol substitute for all the previous joy in my life.

Smells are strong remembrances in my life – lavender, woods, foods, the Post Office...mail has a smell. Remembrances of joyful experiences that alcohol has displaced. I'm pushing back the false alcohol lies that have displaced my real, legitimate pleasures.

Prayer. Real prayer on my knees, not lying in bed, sitting on my commode, but in a special place – out in the open having a 360-degree vision at night or late evening at my temporary home beside of the horse pasture at the jumping gate. It works for me. The first time I did this I felt a huge burden lifted from my shoulders. Now, it's up to me to do my part in this recovery journey.

Why have I failed in the past?

- I didn't pray sincerely and HARD.
- I didn't do my part; I relied on AA meetings, sponsor contact, and counseling, to do the recovery job for me.

That was not enough. The missing part was my total commitment and resolve to recover. And prayer – I had not really prayed, and more importantly, listened.

The first obstacle was honesty. Not with others, not cash register honesty, but honesty with MYSELF. I was lying to myself, aka denial. I started being honest with myself and my condition and my responsibilities to others. It's not just about me. It's about my marriage to my wife – she has suffered years over my problem. It's about my responsibility to my father, and my children. My son is in prison with no other person on the outside who would care for him the same way I am able to, because I know him the best.

I thought that if I went to meetings, talked to my sponsor, and met with my counselor, that all would be well. Not so – it was a lack of personal commitment to recovery.

- 1) I did not know how to pray, and I did not know how to listen to the message. I now do – I have felt answers to prayers.
- 2) I was not diligent enough, powerful, forceful enough in my own resolve to quit and recover.

I remember asking a retired minister in the early days after being confronted with my wife about my alcoholism, about what I should do to deal with my addiction. He answered, “Buck up boy and do what needs to be done. Help your neighbors; serve others.” I laughed it off for years looking for more concrete advice. Now, I know what he meant – I must give personal resolve, work, and effort to recovery. Buck up. Not rely just on the AA program, sponsor, counseling, unless I buck up and do what needs to be done. DON'T BUY ALCOHOL.

I must stop lying to myself about my condition.

- Plan my days as my counselor suggested. Include people – AA folks and non-AA.
- Don't buy it.
- Be patient with others.
- Take better care of myself physically.
- Slowly return to pleasurable things – now it's reading the newspaper, observing wildlife, listening to the radio, helping a neighbor, cooking for my family, doing things with my dad, going to church, and serving my community.

In the past 10 days I've faced the three big holes in my recovery – my commitment; true prayers; and the joyous things in my previous life that have been displaced by alcohol.

Alcohol is a short-cut to joy. So why bother to gear up to go camping? Why bother to chop up wood?

January, 2009 (*Husband entered treatment facility for three months in January, 2009; he completed this assessment shortly after starting the program. He and his wife were separated at the time. They promised each other they would write every day. She was allowed to come visit on Sunday for three hours.*)

I have been consuming 1.5 liters of alcohol a day. My lifetime use of alcohol is for 50 years. I have been drinking alcohol to intoxication for 20 years. I drink every day to the point of intoxication. My longest period of abstinence is 28 days, during my residential treatment program in 2007; I immediately relapsed after leaving the facility. I have been spending approximately \$300/month on alcohol. I have experienced problems related to alcohol for 30 of the past 30 days.

My wife promises me that she will write every day. She asked me to write her every day. I can see her for a couple of hours a week on Sunday.

January, 2009 *(the first week after entering treatment)*

I took the "Screening for Alcohol or Drug Addiction" test. There are 12 statements for the "early-stage addiction" section (I checked 9), 11 in the "middle-stage," (I checked 7) and 14 (I checked 9) in the "late-stage" section. Some of the boxes I checked are: I use stronger alcohol at first to get a good start; I have regular blackouts; I make promises to do better but I don't; I give up other things; I neglect food; I can't make decisions; it takes more to get high; I drink all the time; nothing else matters than getting high; I feel lost and alone; I feel totally defeated. When asked to complete the sentence, "If I don't stop drinking, I will probably..." I wrote "die."

January, 2009 *(in treatment)*

Notes on worksheet entitled, "Spirituality Retreat Reflection"

How has your disease of chemical dependency affected your life?

- I have been less of a husband, less of a son, and less of a father than I have wanted to be.

How has it affected the lives of your loved ones?

- It's been horrific for them.

How has my drug of addiction hurt the people close to me?

- My wife is afraid of the condition that I'll be in when she comes home.

(This is the second part of the video on YouTube, "Reflections of an alcoholic 5 weeks before death," which was an assignment when he was in treatment. His wife didn't find this until after he had died. Sobriety lasted for approximately twenty months, and then he relapsed.)

January 25, 2009. The magic fairy visits my bedroom.

It was a cold winter's night. Sometime during my dark sleep, I imagined a light, sensual brush across my forehead. Thinking nothing about it, I flipped to my other side and resumed slumber. Upon the beginning of my usual, very groggy escape from sleep, *aka* hangover, I knew something had happened the previous night.

I was not sick. I was not nauseated, congested. My head was not full of mucous. My head did not hurt. I was hungry. I did not have a raging thirst. My hand was not reaching for a bottle of cheap port, nor trying to remember if there was any left from the previous evening's black/pass-out. My hands were not shaking.

My mind instantly remembered my obligations for the day. It was only 6:30 am; time to make the 7:30 early birds' AA meeting, nine minutes away. Hanging on the coat-rack by the front door were my three best black and white cameras, with leather bags filled with film, filters and tripods. My late father's antique fly rod was there, along with canvas bags and vests of lures. My canoe had been washed and lashed to the roof of my car. The car's gas tank had been filled. Ham biscuits had been made, and coffee was ready to brew.

The sun was beginning to rise. Reservations for dinner and theatre with my wife had been made. I will be the driver.

The magic fairy had come sometime last night, and plucked, with her magic wand, the cancer of my uncontrollable alcohol addiction from my soul. I was ready for the day, for joy.

Magic fairies **do** exist. They must be guided by hard, spiritual work and prayers.

January 2009 (*in treatment*)

The assignment was to imagine a letter to Mr. Rogers from the six-year-old self, named "Timmy."

Mr. Rogers, What is God?

Timmy, that's a very good question. First of all, God is not this old, mean-looking man with a beard and long, gray hair, wearing a flowing robe, and sitting on a pink cloud way up in the sky, judging everyone and everything. Let me tell you who I think God is.

Almost everyone on this earth has a god or believes in a god. Each person's god is different in some way. For me, a simple way of understanding different people's gods is to imagine that every person on this earth has a God Basket. Inside his or her God Basket are carried our best stuff – not stuff like toys or candy, but stuff like kindness, love for our families,

friends, neighborhoods, tribes. And our dreams for peace, one another, good health and food for everyone – usually things we can't see.

And, at the right time, when we need to, or should, we can reach into our God Basket and bring out the right thing. Think of God as this kind-of imaginary basket for carrying around the best stuff from our minds, dreams, hearts, and souls.

From, Mr. Rogers

January 2009 (*in treatment*)

Responses to NA Step One questions

I am obsessed with drinking alcohol and am absolutely unable to control my compulsion to drink. During the past two years or so, I started drinking in the morning and continued until I blacked/passed out. My disease has affected me physically, causing anemia, gastric reflux, liver problems, and acute gastritis. I have ignored the signs that something may be seriously wrong with my health. Mentally, I have slowed cognition, and forget names. I forget what I said yesterday. My spiritual development has slowed. I am very sad. My drinking has caused marital problems.

I am in denial. I tell myself that I will drink to cure a hangover. I am plagued by the idea that I should know better.

I first recognized my addiction was a problem when I was in my early 40s, when I limited my consumption for a time.

I am powerless over drinking alcohol, and drink a lot of it, once I start. I drink and drive. I buy things I do not need. I injure myself. I lose my temper.

I have tried to quit but it was too painful. I was filled with anxiety when I wasn't drinking.

I have had two accidents in my front yard while drinking. I have had two legal separations from my wife and we lived apart another time before those; we are separated as I write this. I am not able to carry out my daily responsibilities and it has made me miserable. I maintain a crisis mentality, responding to every situation with panic, which has created chaos in my life. I over-react to my feelings in ways that lower my self-respect. My drinking has seriously affected my own life and those of my family.

I started out on my addiction to make myself happy.

Unmanageability to me means that the alcoholic brain takes over.

Do I act on compulsive thoughts immediately? Some, like drinking, cause me to act immediately. I also buy an article of clothing or book that is on sale and I have no need for it.

I think first, and sometimes only, of myself, rather than the implications to others.

January, 2009 (*in treatment*)

Step Three, re-write

Beseeched my God to care for me, removing my bondage to alcohol, now the very core of my existence, with the spirit of love and light. I have further beseeched my God to return to me the joy of life that once bathed me, the joy that I feared was forever lost. Oh God, I was once abandoned to poison, take my will and me to a better place. Care for me.

January, 2009 (*in treatment*)

It is important to understand the dynamic of the “co-dependent” (the non-drinking spouse, significant other, family members, or other important people in addict’s life) with the “counter-dependent” or addict. The character traits which lead to becoming “co-” or “counter-” dependent start in childhood, and are based on family of origin dynamics. There are crucial things to understand in this relationship dynamic. Ideally, each person in the relationship will work towards being “independent.”

January, 2009 (*writing assignment in treatment*)

Describe painful events from my past.

1. Here it is, almost 3 o’clock on Sunday afternoon. I’m 14 years old. Mom is very angry. I don’t know why. She’s been in a rage all day. Only Dad and me at church this morning. Embarrassed. Don’t know what to say when people ask if Mom is OK.

I’m dreading the inevitable phone call from Mrs. Smith, the preacher’s wife, who will call to see if I need a ride to church for the young adult meeting this afternoon at 4. Mom has already told me that I can’t go to church. Why? I don’t know. I haven’t done anything bad. And I thought going to church was a good thing.

The phone on the hall wall rings and Dad answers it. He says it's Mrs. Smith. He doesn't intervene. He hands the receiver to me. I talk to her and tell her I'm sorry, I can't go. She wants to know if something is wrong, if I don't feel well. I just say I'm sorry, I can't go. She asks if there's anything I need or anything she can do. I say no. I feel terrible. I hate lying to her. Why can't I go to church and see my friends? Mom stays mad at me. My Dad doesn't say or do anything. I feel ashamed and guilty, as if I've done something wrong. It's horrible.

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2. I'm 15 years old. Dad and I are coming back from a fishing trip, just the two of us. It's been a great trip. I can't wait to tell mom about it. When we left, she was feeling good – maybe too good – sent us off with a kiss on my cheek. That hardly ever happens.

We are driving in the driveway towards the back of the house. It's nighttime. The headlights of Dad's car are shining into the back yard that slopes away from the house. My bedroom has a window that opens to the back yard. And on the grass are all of my things – model airplanes; my "museum" of arrowheads, rocks, bird nests; some of my clothes.

It looks like there has been an explosion in my room, or maybe somebody broke into the house and vandalized things. What has happened???

I'm going into the house and realize that Mom is no longer happy – she's furious with me and Dad for going away and having a good time without her. And I'm bad because I've cluttered up my bedroom with my stuff.

It wasn't clutter – I dusted my museum shelves and had labels taped in front of each thing.

I find a box and put the things into it that I can find. I hide the box in the garage.

I feel very sad and lonely. I know that my museum on the book cases that Dad made for me for my room was not a bad thing.

Why is Mom so mad?

Mom told us she doesn't want us to be in the house tonight, that we've treated her horribly and we don't deserve to be inside. I'm kneeling by the little pine tree by the white picket fence in the dark. I'm crying. I'm praying to God to make my Mom better. Dad sleeps under the little pine tree and I'm trying to sleep in the car.

**

3. I'm 16 or 17 years old. I'm driving in our driveway after a movie date. I took Laura to the late show and a milkshake afterwards.

Strange, there's no porch light left on for me. The house is totally dark. The door is locked. That's strange. Mom and Dad usually leave the porch light on and the door unlocked. I have a key but the storm door is locked, so I can't use my key. I'll knock. No response. Are they home? Yes – their car is here. I knock louder. Nothing. I ring the doorbell – nothing happens.

I must have messed up again. But HOW? I've been out this later before. They like Laura – she's from a nice family – that's what's important to Mom.

I'm trying to sleep in my car. It's hard to sleep in a car and dread the next day and face a Mad woman.

In writing this I kept coming up with more details than I thought I could remember. My feelings and more stories that I could tell. I realized later in life that my mother suffered from bi-polar disorder. But there were no treatments for her.

The feeling of sadness this week – comforting, but like a computer laboring under spyware.

February, 2009 (*in treatment*)

I have learned that I need to think of “drinking” as the tip of the iceberg. It's what lies underneath that drives my drinking. Here are some conditions that would give rise to the first drink:

- Feeling sad, or being in a stressful situation
- Finding a supply of alcohol, traveling alone, being alone so I can “get away with it”
- Physical problems
- Hunger
- Not doing something – “Idle Hands” etc.

How does what lies underneath affect my life in other ways?

- Sadness, mild depression
- Lack of self-esteem
- It causes me to be a loner
- It causes procrastination
- It causes selfishness

- It causes guilt

My favorite “defects” from the list:

- Selfishness
- Procrastination
- Guilt

My favorite “fears” from the list:

- Being irresponsible or inadequate
- Physical and mental discomfort, so I need alcohol to cope

Things I can do to avoid drinking: use AA meetings, have a solid relationship with a sponsor, avoid situations in which I used to drink.

March, 2009 (*in treatment*)

My wife is still writing to me every day. In today’s mail, she mentioned something she heard on the radio related to spirituality and depression. She said she learned two things that impressed her. A person with depression asked a counselor “Why must I suffer with depression? Why is God doing this to me?” And the answer was, “Think of this not as punishment, but instead as God pressing down on you to give you a safe place to stand.”

The other image she heard was, think of depression as if you were clay, and the potter – God – as working you, pounding you, stretching you, so you can be made more malleable.

Spring 2009 (*in treatment*)

There’s a Turkey on My Pink Cloud and it Ain’t Me

(A Lesson on Spiritual Cohabitation)

Prologue

I love my new Pink Cloud. The cloud floated in about one week prior to me departing my initial residential program. I well remember the day. I was having lunch outside with some comrades in recovery. Perfect ambiance – bright sun, gentle warm breeze, spring buds and birds, honking geese forming “focus flocks” seeking ways to be better geese and finding greener mud.

Blending that primal warmth with an excellent lunch and four oatmeal cookies led me to yell silently, “Man it don’t get no better than this.” My brain’s joy juices were at flood level. I had arrived, finally, on the much-discussed Pink Cloud, and it was my very own.

This is too good to be true, I thought. Basic instinct told me there must be something to worry about. So I ran a quick audit of my innards to see if there might be something I was missing (read, drink over):

- Spousal relationship – good as it can be, given the fact that my wife is married to a chronic drunk.
- Family situations are stabilized.
- Finances – up to snuff.
- Spiritual – warm and fuzzy.
- My lawn at home needs mowing, but my unemployed, alcoholic next-door neighbor will happily mow yard in exchange for a 12 pack of Old Milwaukee like last year, and this time two won’t be missing because I drank them.
- National and world situation – can’t do anything about them.

Done with audit.

Analysis

I wanted to savor this feeling, this PAWS (*post-acute withdrawal symptom*) moment, early recovery trophy cloud, an AA icon, a benchmark and milestone. And it’s all mine, mine, mine. It’s all about mine. Wow. I looked down far above earth and reality. Save for a few pink doves around the perimeter, there was no guard rail. I could barely see reality, let alone large brown vultures circling.

A week later, still on my cloud, I graduated from primary care rehab, Magna Cum Sober, and moved up the hill to the grad school of Advanced Recovery Studies (*several additional weeks in treatment with more privileges, in a home on the campus*). I decided to run another reality check on this cloud. I babbled about this euphoria to my recovery cohorts, seeking their feedback. I could hear their eyes roll and I could read their lips, saying, “So?”

Then I embarked on extensive research on pink clouds. The Google summary says, enjoy while it lasts, for it will go away. Be grateful. But this is a temporary artificial euphoria brought about by detox, quantities of good food, insight, and at least nine hours of uninterrupted sleep every night. Symptoms of addiction are gone:

- Hangovers are only a memory
- Shameful secrets are out and dealt with

- Marriage is healed
- Crying stops

Further research reveals a darker side of the pink cloud. The Pink Cloud feeling is a reprieve from the struggles associated with early recovery. Alcoholics begin to believe more in themselves than in the process they have been following. Without the pain as a daily reminder, they tend to forget about what it took for them to embrace recovery. Denial rears its ugly head and they minimize how devastating their alcoholism really was and that they have a disease of alcoholism that requires attention on a daily basis. Relapse prevention becomes an afterthought as the person becomes defiant and rebellious. Relapse is a process, not an event.

The Pink Cloud can be a harbinger of relapse. In *Staying Sober: A Guide for Relapse Prevention* by Terence T. Gorski, he writes of the eleven phases and 49 warning signs of relapse. Steps two and three of the 49 warning signs state:

I-2 Change in thinking: "Sometimes things are going so well that I don't believe I need to put a lot of effort into my program."

I-3 Change in feeling: "Sometimes I feel euphoric, like everything is going my way."

WOAH! Not so fast there, lost child.

However, I decided to go with my first Google hit – be grateful and make the most of it. I dismissed Gorski and all his warnings as meaningless trivia. In the ensuing weeks I mellowed a bit and reflected on the health of my pink cloud. Its gloss was beginning to wear a bit. Is this a temporary, artificial euphoria? I wondered, am I resting on my laurels? Is this an error in perception, concept, or belief?

Chapter Two

It was late afternoon on a Monday in April. I had a craving for Pepsi and burning desire for anti-fungal cream. My on-board monitoring circuits were flashing "low-level, go and buy." My new roommate had recently arrived from six weeks in primary care, and I was sure he would love to go somewhere, if only to the grocery store. He beat me to my car. Visions of printed material and his own bucket of yogurt danced in his head.

After buying stuff we were puttering home along a straight stretch of country road. Then I saw it, strutting magnificently and proudly across 20 feet of pavement, not 50 yards ahead. It slowed and went a few feet into a dirt driveway. It stopped turned its head slowly toward me across his shoulder, his eyes locked squarely into mine. There it was, on a dirt

driveway, a 30-pound magnificent specimen of the Eastern Wild Turkey, and an alpha male at that.

The sight of the turkey was not that unusual, but what followed in the next one-seventh of a second was nothing less than a divine revelation. In the ensuing micro-seconds, my brain launched a missile with a relapse warhead. The image of that turkey was an exact replica of the beautifully painted picture on bottles of Wild Turkey – a delicious, top-shelf bourbon that I could only afford once in a great while. In those microseconds I actually smelled it and tasted it, even though it has been years since I've drunk it.

In the next fraction of a second, an image of the local ABC store flashed across my screen. The next fraction of a second took me back at least 60 years to the smoky interior of my granddad's Esso service station where Pop nailed his Wild Turkey wall calendar with that very same image, where he sat in his favorite cane-bottom chair under that calendar, sipping whiskey all afternoon, smelling of ripe apples. He was the best granddad on earth – kind, caring, ruddy, and smelling of ripe apples. He was also an alcoholic.

It happened, a trigger missile completely out of the blue. How many other warheads are out there, in bunkers, just waiting for me to see them, smell them, taste them, hear them, sense them, or feel them and send me into that relapse cascade to pure hell. A pink cloud has no grounding, no copper wire and bronze rod extending deep inside the womb of Mother Earth. Grounding is vital to recovery. Thus, the cloud is not a safe place to be. My triggers are so real and well-entrenched that they are like perfect electrical circuits. When I finished writing this assignment by myself, something still nagged at me. Is there more to the turkey story than an image and smell of whiskey? Was the turkey a symbol of something more?

I found lots of references to the turkey in Native American spirituality, some of which relate to recovery. Among Native North Americans, the turkey has a long history of spirituality and the honoring of mother earth. To me, I found a relationship to my recovery. The shamans would turn themselves into turkeys and prowl among other villages. The turkey sighting was a direct communication from my God, my higher power. It was an epiphany, a burning bush brought to me by animal spirituality – the bird was the perfect message at the perfect time.

On animal totems, the turkey is called the "ground eagle" or the "life giver." Thus, it is associated with shared blessings, harvests, fertility, grounding and self-sacrifice. In Hopi creation myths, a male turkey was the first to raise the sun in the sky, hence his burnt head. When you walk with turkey energy, you walk with an open and giving heart to help others just for the sake of helping; those with such energy understand that in sacrifice there are rewards untold. A gift from the turkey may be a glorious sunrise that gives one a whole new perspective, or something so major it changes one's entire life.

Epilogue

My cloud precipitated a big spiritual moment that I will remember forever. On this past Sunday, my wife and I attended the most beautiful and meaningful service at our church with glorious music from many instruments. The service ended with a long triumphal organ anthem. I could not contain my new-found joy brought about by this powerful service. After the closing I held my wife and cried into her hair. Finally, I was totally there, with her in the moment, without that alcoholic barrier that I had placed between us. I felt so good that it hurt. I let the hurt, the pain, cut more deeply so that I would always remember the exaltation of life, finally free of addiction. Thank you, ground eagle. Your friend in recovery.

Spring 2009 (in treatment)

Lecture notes:

- A relapse prevention plan is necessary when a person is feeling elated, depressed, or anything in between. Relapse prevention recognizes one's triggers, unhealthy thought patterns and behaviors – plan as to how to best address them.
- Alcoholics are not used to feeling good about themselves. When a person in recovery starts feeling good about themselves, they need to work harder and practice what has been working for them – this is an opportunity to break old patterns of self-sabotage and develop a new pattern of developing self-worth.
- “Sobriety high.” Recovery brings with it a brain depleted of dopamine. The first months of recovery are filled with highs and lows. The roller coaster may last 6 to 24 months.
- The sleep body is attempting to re-establish a balance between being asleep and awake.
- Early recovery is thrilling, and it can bring feelings of euphoria. The pink cloud can disintegrate rapidly and disillusion and disappointment start.
- I resent going to meetings – they remind me of what I am, an alcoholic. I must exercise discipline in every action.

Relapse exercise. Justification for relapse – describe gut-level despair. Remember the worst times of drinking; describe your feelings.

Relapse process:

- There is a change inside us, and we start to notice that something is wrong.
- Next comes denial, when we stop expressing honestly how we feel.
- Then we avoid feedback and become defensive.

- We go from crisis to crisis.
- Next, we become immobilized, and nothing seems to work.
- We become confused.
- We become depressed.
- We lose control and hide our problems
- We think about relapse – killing the pain becomes the most important thing. Relapse starts to look like a rational alternative – or we could go insane or commit suicide.
- We start the relapse and try to control it. Relapse did not solve our problems – it added to them.

Relapse exercise – “relapse inventory”

- What were your triggers?
 - o Stress, being alone and angry
- What were you thinking and feeling right before you decided to relapse?
 - o A calm, warm feeling of relief
- What did you want the relapse to do for you that you could not do for yourself in recovery?
 - o Give me ease and joy. I wanted to feel good.
- What happened to you after you relapsed?
 - o I drank until I blacked/passed out.
- Why did you quite using?
 - o To save my life and marriage. I’ve discovered that I can’t have “just one drink” because I can’t stop. There are no games to “trick” myself to moderation.

My big trigger – free-floating, non-specific anxiety, particularly when I’m alone. Old living habits, that used to accompany drinking – procrastination; compulsion to be alone.

Immediate high-risk situations that I may be involved in within the next several weeks that could cause me to feel like starting addictive use:

1. Being alone and feeling sorry for myself; not finding joy.
2. Finding out about a serious physical condition.
3. Alone in a car away from home.

Immediate high-risk situations that would trigger or “justify” relapse, and possible challenges to this justification

1. Separation or divorce from my wife
2. My father's house (*not being lived in now*) is burglarized
3. I have a serious medical problem
4. My dog is lost

Reasons to justify relapse (A), and how to challenge this justification (B)

- 1A. What's the use in sobriety? My wife is gone
 - 1B. I still have myself, and I'm still responsible for my children.
- 2A. I need to dull the pain and anger
 - 2B. It's only stuff that I didn't have room for anyway.
- 3A. Why not drink? Alcohol probably caused this condition
 - 3B. Alcohol will only make this situation worse.
- 4A. My dog was my best friend. I hurt down to my soul.
 - 4B. If I stay sober, maybe I can find him.

Immediate Relapse Prevention Plan

- Divorce
 - o Irrational thoughts: my whole life was encompassed in my marriage, and now I'm free to do as I wish
 - o Unmanageable feelings, and emotional pain
 - o Self-defeating action urges – start drinking and dull the pain
 - o More effective ways of thinking – remember the basics: AA meetings, talk with members, and seek counseling
 - o Manage feelings – stop, slow down, and remember my responsibilities
 - o More effective ways of action – increase the number of AA meetings I go to; talk more; go to church, and pray

Recovery Planning.

Personal Goals. I need to change these three personal characteristics if I'm going to avoid relapse:

- Selfishness
- Tendency to be alone
- Procrastination

Occupational Goals. I need to resolve my procrastination if I am to avoid relapse.

Family Goals. I need to resolve these major family issues if I'm going to avoid relapse.

- I must stay sober
- I must handle my finances better
- I must be a better support of my older son

Social Goals. I must change these social situations if I am to avoid relapse

- Stop being a loner
- Create social events with friends and family
- Engage in more social events with my wife

Recovery Goals. I need to resolve these major problems in working my recovery program

- Too many missed AA meetings
- Not using my sponsor
- Avoid being a loner

ABC-D Chain Theory

"A" Antecedent, or what led to the thought. From the thought comes feelings, then urges, which lead to...

"B" Behavior, which leads to...

"C" Consequence;

Or you could interrupt the cycle and go to...

"D" Dispute, talking back to the thought.

For example,

Antecedent – you walk past a bar;

- thought – drinking would feel so good;
- feeling – you get excited and maybe afraid;
- urge – to drink;

Behavior – you go to the liquor store, go home, and start drinking

Consequences – you make a list or think of positive short-term and long-term consequences, then do the same for negative short- and long-term consequences

Dispute – you talk back to the thoughts

Spring 2009 (in treatment)

Excerpts from “Key Concepts” handout: believe it and you’ll see it; recognize abundance; look for possibilities; unleash your energy to fix what’s wrong; be your best for the world.

Self-centered fear is the center of addiction.

We talked about daily mindfulness, that it’s helpful to notice the tendency to want to change our experience. This is the root of addiction – the desire to feel differently. We can notice the craving and then don’t react to it – this will strengthen our sobriety, and will begin to wear down our habit of escaping. When we’re not escaping, we are in the here and now, with mindfulness for what is happening in our lives.

(Journal notes in treatment, 2009, shared with wife)

Monday, March 23

My wife asked that I write something each day that is meaningful to my recovery that I will share with her later. I’m seeing so very clearly now the importance of understanding the family of origin imprint. It has revealed my early coping skills.

Tuesday, March 24

A huge part of my 28 days of joy here has been the anticipating joy that we will have in our future – I’m packing for the ultimate vacation. And there are so, so many things that I want to do for myself. Nothing will get in the way of this.

Wednesday, March 25

I see now so much more clearly the importance of aftercare. The eight additional weeks in supplemental care are essential. Care of myself after supplemental care is extremely important. I am making a post-supplemental care plan that I will follow – everything else is secondary. This step is so important. I will not fail this time.

Thursday, March 26

In learning labs, I hear and see others struggling with ongoing relationships that make their recovery much more difficult. The younger clients have problems with parents. Those with spouses are getting e-mails that they want a divorce. There are many tears, and hours on the phone and computer. I'm so thankful to you, my wife, for your support. I know you're here for me. This allows me to focus solely on my recovery.

Friday, March 27

This morning found me a bit unsettled, out of my center. So, at 9:00 a.m. meditation, I prayed for knowledge. I felt better afterwards. Heard sad tales in lab:

- One person is having cravings in rehab
- Another has a lot of material possessions but still feels empty inside
- Another is always told what to do by parents and husband

After lunch, I felt so much better about myself. The dog here sensed this and ran slightly ahead, happily barking at me, wanting me to run with her.

Saturday, March 28

No classes – a day for homework and reflection. I feel that I'm coming together and building confidence in myself. I can see myself reflected in the eyes of others. I'm feeling stronger and more determined to succeed.

It rained hard most of today – I liked it – our soil needs it, like I need recovery.

Nice, low key evening – one of the staff made chili and cornbread.

Sunday, March 29

We went to church this morning. Beautiful anthem. I'm again feeling spirituality and love for our church very deeply. Went to 8:00 p.m. roundtable meeting.

Monday, March 30

There was a talk by one of the staff. Key terms: "Tyranny of the familiar." The familiar is the most comfortable route; frequently the familiar is not the best for recovery. Be ready to risk the unfamiliar and uncomfortable.

Tuesday, March 31

Morning talk by staff: Make a gratitude list at night. My core issues will be with me the rest of my life. Core issues are false impressions about ourselves, brought from childhood. Anger is a cover-up for fear.

Evening talk by staff: Develop courage to go with and past obstacles. Fear is a corroding thread throughout life. It permeates our lives. A problem shared is halved, and joy is doubled.

Envision the worst-case scenario – expect the worst so that the result will not hurt.

(picture of metronome – center line is “courage” – goes between “sad” and “glad”)

Using = to control range of emotion

Objective is to experience a full range of emotion

(another picture of a metronome – off to the left is “great pain” and “relapse” while way off to the right is “great joy.”)

- We create our own reality
- Lean into fear
- Most fears are paper tigers. If we don’t take responsibility, we develop fear.
 - o See what one’s role is in any situation – some things we cannot control.

Wednesday, April 1

- Dial down core issues during PAWS (*post-acute withdrawal symptom*) as maintenance rather than spur of the moment
- When intrusive thoughts occur, say I’ll deal with it for 10 minutes and then move on.

We are not responsible for the first thought – but we are responsible for the next thoughts.

Watch for intrusive thoughts. “Catch Yourself.” Stop.

Thursday, April 2

We will have our core issues forever. I am counter-dependent. I have a strong fear of abandonment. I am insecure. I am a turtle.

I am feasting in recovery at the Banquet Table of Life.

- You need to bring everything into recovery. That means the whole person. You are looking for a “comfortable” sobriety.

- Relationships are the greatest catalyst for growth. It's easy to be spiritual on a mountaintop, but not easy in reality.
- Recovery is an "inside job."
- If I want something, give it. "If I am not for me, then who will be?"
- To find joy, we must go after it.
- Alcohol is not the problem; it becomes is the "solution" to the problem.
- Spirituality is a verb.
- Love is a verb.
- Plan my weekends.
- Practice being assertive – not aggressive, not passive.
- Procrastination is part of the disease.
- Show up and be present in the moment.
- Identify with what is happening.
- Got to go-go-go- and do-do-do. Don't give in to my previous habit of retreat.
- We're the hand puppets of our core.

Friday, April 3

I started too late to make my usual meeting. I was ill with myself – I truly had a compulsion to go to a meeting. Then I remembered another meeting off-site and went there. It was a spiritual experience. I picked up a green chip (90 days).

(Undated notes in journal)

I now have a compulsion to go to meetings – they are daily reminders of where I've been as a lesson for not going there again.

My core and my genetics caused my alcoholism.

I want to go to places that are unknown to me.

Sitting with a friend in treatment outside on the terrace on his last night here, having a deep and light conversation while playing with the dogs, was a spiritual experience.

Watch out for free-floating, non-specific anxiety. It can cascade into a trigger – relapse.

I'm the Lost Child.

Tough dream last night about your attempts to help me recover.

Wisdom I have heard: Stay focused, stay balanced, practice humility.

I will move from the knowing (about recovery) to doing.

I developed protective behaviors in childhood. I still have these – isolation, fear, counter-dependent. That meshed with my alcoholic dreams. I used self-medication to modulate my moods. I am “naturally” mildly depressed. Thus, I am here.

Absolute dedication to recovery is an absolute must.

Joy, great joy and good health await me. A joy that comes from knowing and doing and experiencing spirituality in all manifestations available for me.

I can stand it no more. My head is exploding with _____ (*husband drew the line and left it blank*). I'm encircled by precious jewels, my favorite candy, Life. Faces of children and old people, flowers and squirrels. Everywhere I look I find joy, color, sunshine, even on a cloudy day. I think this is why I nap so much. I must find respite from my life's new-found engine of _____ (*husband drew the line and left it blank*).

Knowing vs. Doing: Now I know how a non-alcoholic feels – when I have a bottle of addictive pills and it doesn't mean anything. (*Last entry made in journal to share with wife.*)

(Husband left supplemental care program and resumed his life in the spring of 2009. His wife moved back into the house several months later. He relapsed sometime in mid-2010, but was able to hide it from his wife until early 2012.)

2010

Giving up tobacco was a slam/dunk – I just threw all the pipes, tools, the pouch, and great tobacco blends – I just gave it up cold turkey.

Why can't I do the same with alcohol? Tobacco use was long-standing, for decades. WHY?

I would highly desire to round up all, and any substances containing alcohol and go to the nearest dumpster and slam it shut, dust my hands, walk away, and never look back. With pipe tobacco, when I pass a pipe smoker, I get a brief longing for my pipes.

I bake stuff – cookies, bread, biscuits, roast beef and vegetables so as to lend an aroma to my house, my home.

I was not prepared – I drank, and goofed off when I should have prepared for my dad's swift decline towards death.

I've recently had two dreams about drinking. First dream: there was a man at my father's gas station, which was closed because it was Sunday. The man was staggering around with a bottle of my wine. I refused to open up the garage and sell him gas. Second dream: I am struggling with a brown grocery bag full of empty wine bottles and smashed beer cans.

2012

Discussion notes to review with counselor

When I entered into supplemental care in 2009 during treatment, for the first time in my life I was no longer an "only child" because I gained brothers and sisters. It was a great experience.

WHY? Why do I drink?

- Alcohol likes me, seduces me like a lover who entices me and massages me.
- Vicky Vodka is My Girl. She is sweet and warm, knows how to wrap her warm hands around my back and neck. She breathes into my ears and neck. She is erotic and sensual. She touches all my important parts. She guides my addiction, and whispers love stories into my ear. "It will be OK this time" she says. She is so lovely, and makes me feel good all over. She is my best friend and my crutch. She is always there, here, for me because I always plan for her presence. I buy alcohol ahead, and always keep a stock on hand. I know, though, that many times her presence is at excess. I can't function, drive safely, or talk coherently. I have let myself go. I don't shave or change clothes. I wear the same clothes all week. I can't look at myself in my mirror.
- Alcohol can:
 - o Calm any anguish, and help me cope with stress
 - o Make me feel good, and eliminate boredom
 - o Ease any problems; it is my coping mechanism.
 - o Make me feel warm and cozy
- Alcohol can help me cope with the problems caused by drinking
- My grandfather drank, as did my uncles, and alcohol caused their early deaths. My mother and her sisters struggled with mental illness and there were no treatments available to them. I was the one who suffered from my mother's unprovoked rages. It left terrible scars, and drinking was a way to escape.

Spring 2012 (During five-day detox program)

Worksheet

I am most content when: I'm sober, doing things I enjoy, designing things, spiritually aligned, cooking for others, spending time with my wife and our dog.

My hopes and dreams for the future: to be continuously sober, take trips with my wife, spend time fishing.

I like myself most when I'm sober, I finish home projects, and am content.

I like myself least when I'm angry and resentful.

My greatest fear is relapse, and having health problems from drinking.

I feel disappointed when I fail in my goals.

People think I am lonely, quiet, old, and intelligent.

I value most my wife's love, and my compassion for people and animals.

One negative trait about myself is being a recluse and being depressed.

One positive trait about myself is compassion.

I'm going to share these thoughts and feelings with my wife and my counselor (*never shared with wife*).

(Relapse took place a few weeks after detox.)

(These are the words in the first part of the video on YouTube, "Reflections of an alcoholic 5 weeks before death," taken from a small notebook his wife found among her husband's papers after he died. She was not aware that he wrote this until then.)

June 25 2012. I am now in a place, a position where I can redesign, reorient, restructure, reconfigure, define my life. At the moment I am free of alcohol.

For years, my life has been defined by alcohol, 24 hours a day, struggling to awaken. Assessing the carnage of the past day and night, assessing the physical hangover, planning the first drink of the day, not **if**, but what, when, where, and how much.

What can I expect to accomplish this day? At best, 40 percent of what I plan to do. Alcohol defines what I plan to do, can do, and cannot do; where I can go, can't go; people I can meet, can't meet. Do I nap, or in other words, pass out?

The medication I am taking now, to help me stop drinking, is giving me a break in my downward spiral. There is significantly lessened compulsion and craving, but the notions to consume alcohol are still there. Will I cook dinner? Usually. Will I eat dinner? Not usually. When will I go to bed, or really, pass out? What will I dream about? The fear of not having a supply, hiding it, trying to drink it, and then disposing of the empties? Which I seldom do.

Alcohol has defined my life. It prevented me from doing the stuff that I have dreamed of, particularly post-retirement.

Today, I find myself in a unique place. I *have* choices. This place is very precarious. I could easily fall off. It's like balancing myself on a point. I must *hold on* to this precious point, and plan, and *work* my plan.

Some thoughts about depression: the medication I am taking to help me stop drinking worsens depression. It's a joy-killer, from alcohol and from libido. It's also a joy-killer from *good* sources, that are harder to identify and quantify. Like maybe from playing with my dog or going fishing. This medication has other side effects: stomachache, headache, sleep disturbance, vivid, dour dreams and increased appetite, so I must eat every two hours. It does increase depression. It really messes up sleep. But I will tolerate these side effects, if only for a while, to remain dry.

July 5, 2012

My counselor asked me to write a program "for the rest of my life." I choose three sub-chapters, or phases. In all three phases, get out of my box of thinking.

1. Now to when I reach physical limitations. This time includes camping, fishing, travel, hiking across England 110 miles, and the noble stuff – charity, volunteer adventures, marine biology.
2. Respect physical limitations. During this time, I am more passive. I will read more and do more volunteer work.
3. I will be able to do fewer physical activities in my later years, like my elderly father-in-law is now.

July 12, 2012

(Notes from a 10th Step worksheet from his counselor. The anger is leaping off the page.)

“A” (antecedents, what led to the thought, feeling and behavior) I had a meeting with a medical doctor whom the counselor recommended. I was expecting some degree of psychoanalysis, but it did not happen. He is a “pill pusher.” All he did was write prescriptions. I am furious!

“B” (behavior) I drank vodka. This meeting with the “doctor” caused me to relapse.

“C” (consequence) **RELAPSE**, shame, anger, anger at “doctors” who profess to help.

“D” (dispute, talk back to your thought) I am still angry and pissed-off. I spent \$240 on this appointment for prescriptions that I already had in my medicine cabinet from my family doctor. DAMN!!!

(on form – “is there anything you need to do now? What amends need to be made?) NO!!!

(Husband died suddenly some time later.)