

Mr. Fix-It

A drunk finds a spiritual toolkit

My first drink was at the age of two. I was found in a stumbling state at one of my parents' parties from sipping all the drinks. That started my many years of "becoming a man" with the comment, "What a man he'll be! He's already started to learn how to drink." Well, I didn't sit down to write about my drunkalog, so let's just say that I was a very slow learner and did not find out the real truth until the age of forty-six. That's when I would like to start my story, when my new life began.

It was just before Mother's Day weekend in 1999, and I was still on the mend from my last severe car accident in November 1998. I was "controlling" my drinking by hiding it from even my closest drinking buddies. After all, since they didn't understand or have any problems, they might think I was insane to be drinking and driving — again. Well, it was Tuesday and I came home in my normal state of mellowness after drinking since 4:30 A.M. Everything would have been fine, except that I needed just one more touch of vodka and didn't expect my wife to come into the garage so quickly. Yes, the garage — where else do you keep your vodka but under your workbench? In my haste to hide the bottle, it started leaking all over the workbench. When my wife asked what all the water was, I told her it was a leaky pipe. That might have worked if there were any water pipes around. Life, as I knew it, ended that moment.

I took it like the man I was, and spent that night and all of the Wednesday "fixing" the problem by myself. Just as I always had done with the aid of my once-best-friend — alcohol. I could not expect my wife to stay, since I had broken yet another promise never to drink again. She had been there when I came to after my last accident, stayed by me through all my surgeries, continued to work with me so I could regain the use of my right hand, and had signed me up for counseling for my "depression." I could go on for a while, but I think that, like Dr. Bob and Bill W., we alcoholics really seem to be blessed with wonderful wives. Anyway, my fix for my drinking was to get a job in Japan without my family coming along. I could "control" my drinking there because I didn't like hot sake (it made sense to me at the time).

On Thursday morning, I got up for work at my normal time, 4 A.M., got ready for my commute to work, and was about to leave the room, but something stopped me. I went to my wife's side of the bed to say good-bye. She reminded me to come home early from work because "we" had some appointments. Since I was in a blackout the previous night, my alcoholic instincts instantly reacted by pretending to know what she was talking about. I asked her if she really intended to give me another chance, and she said, "Yes." She thought, after all these years, that there was something inside me that was worth saving. Bingo, my life returned to me. I went downstairs and poured myself an orange juice with my usual half pint of vodka and went off to work. I was saved again, but in case these "appointments" might be with somebody that could not be fooled, or could actually

smell vodka, I did not drink my usual lunch.

The first appointment was with a counselor who asked me when I had my last drink. I don't know why, but I told the truth about my breakfast. She asked me why I took that drink. I didn't know why. After a while, when she asked again, I finally said, "I guess I'm an alcoholic." Well, she continued to talk to me about the disease of alcoholism, which I was sure she might know about, but I knew she didn't understand that I could handle my drinking. I finally had to admit that I hadn't taken that breakfast drink, that drink had taken me. I was not the one that was in control that morning, my vodka was. Okay, I needed help; I was an alcoholic, no guessing about it. I signed up for treatment, but then she dropped another bomb. She asked how often I drank, and I admitted that I drank every day. She "recommended" that I do something every day to treat my disease. Since her program would only cover four days per week, she asked if I would attend AA meetings on the other days. Immediately, I explained that AA was not for me. For instance, they all smoked too much and I was different from them. I really didn't know a thing about it, except that they went to meetings and carried cards in their wallets (I guess that's like the one I now carry with our Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Preamble). But there was no arguing with her, so I agreed to go to one AA meeting and prove to her that AA was not for me. Of course, I didn't know where any meetings were and I had to go to work; the following day was Friday, so it would be a while; and all the other excuses. But that lady bet me that there was a meeting at noon, within distance of my office near Capitol Hill, and that I could find it if I tried. Well, I agreed to try. My second appointment that day was to go and admit to my "depression" counselor that my real problem was alcohol, and to apologize for lying to her.

On Friday, May 7, 1999, I woke up and didn't drink any alcohol. I went to work and admitted to a close friend (the nurse at the office who ran the blood drive for my last series of operations) that I had been drunk when I had my last accident and that I needed to find an AA meeting. Within an hour, she found me information about a meeting. There was a noon meeting and I could walk to it at lunch. I lost the bet with the counselor. That started my new life. I found a bunch of crazy people with a lot of problems, but they were not drinking. I needed to figure that out.

My family kept close watch on me Saturday — I was "white-knuckle sober." The next day was Mother's Day and all my kids came for dinner with me and my wife. They left in time for me to go to another AA meeting that night, and I bought my first copy of the Big Book there. I was only three days sober, but AAs told me it would get better, one day at a time, if I just kept coming back.

My outpatient rehab started on Monday. I learned more about alcoholism and saw a film, but the Big Book explained much more about my problems. How did they know all about me when they wrote that book?

As God had planned, my brother's beagle had pups that week and one had been promised to me. I agreed to meet him halfway between my house and his, on the weekend after Mother's Day. I shared that in my group and that counselor asked me where the halfway point might be. I said, "Somewhere in Ohio." It turned out to be right near Akron, Ohio. My wife agreed to leave early with me on Saturday

so I could stop in Akron. We got to Dr. Bob's house at noon. I walked up those twelve steps and was greeted by the hand of AA and a warm "Welcome home!" I can't explain the emotion that flowed through me, but finally I felt that I was really home. I had found the way out and I made a decision to really work the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as our Big Book and "Twelve and Twelve" explain them.

One day at a time, I have continued to work the program. I don't drink, I maintain a conscious contact with the God of my understanding, I go to meetings, and I share my experience, strength, and hope with other alcoholics and the families of alcoholics, because it does affect families. As I have worked the Steps and looked back over my life, I can see that God planned everything. I don't have any burning bushes to report, but spiritual happenings in my life are numerous.

Yesterday was my 1,000th sober day and I happened to attend my 1,003rd AA meeting. You might have heard that ninety-and-ninety stuff but I'm a slow learner. I hope to continue learning, or at least to always remain teachable. There are many miracles I've seen and experienced since coming to AA — I hope you are another. I thank God for the miracle of AA, and for this real alcoholic's miracle of another sober day.

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International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous

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