

## **Earth To Stand On**

### **A surfer cuts through an undertow of anger**

I am seventeen years old, and I recently graduated from a public high school, although I've also been to a military school, continuation schools, and group homes. I have two years of sobriety and I was able to stay sober in most of these places. So, whether it's military, private, public, or boarding school, it's possible to make it sober through school, one day at a time.

I drank through middle school, part of high school, and through a group home. I grew up in an abusive home — I think it tends to make a person different right from the start. In elementary school, I felt different from everyone, never a part of. I always wanted to be a part of the “cool crowd,” but I was never fully accepted. I was not interested in school, nor did I have many friends. I never saw any point in being there. Eventually, as a result of being teased and the issues at home, I became violent and started getting suspended from school.

I was in the sixth grade when I had my first drink. I was picked on and abused, and it fueled my anger and insecurities. At first, I started to huff correction fluid in class, knowing that it would make me feel “happy.” Soon, I found a crowd that I fit in perfectly with. Eventually, I was placed in after-school tutoring, and, since all of us good alcoholics are rebellious in one way or another, I decided to ditch school a lot.

One day, while ditching, I was introduced to pot. After that day, I knew I no longer needed to huff correction fluid. I ran with the same crew of kids until I got sober. We fought, drank, and smoked a lot. From sixth grade to my junior year, I got into at least one fight a year and I was suspended numerous times.

By the time I got into high school, I was running into nothing but walls. Within my first semester, I left my abusive home to live with a neglectful father. I was suspended for fighting and expelled for having a concealed weapon. I started to drink hard alcohol, alone. I started using harder drugs, and I became violent. I went to a continuation school, where I met some of my old crew and was immediately at home with the fights, drugs, and alcohol. Eventually, I was let back into my old school, only to be in two separate fights after two weeks of being back. With nowhere to turn, my father sent me to a slew of placements: Christian military school, two-week programs, and finally, long-term placements.

Eventually, I was kicked out of my father's house, so I went to live with my grandparents. Then, I was sent to a group home for a one-year stay during my sophomore year. While there, I was introduced to AA.

I continued to use in any way possible, however. Eventually, I was betrayed and beat up. Unwilling to continue with the way my life was going, I stayed sober for the remaining two months of my stay. With one month in an out-patient program and one meeting a week, I couldn't stay sober longer than ninety days.

Feeling that “incomprehensible demoralization,” and slipping once again, I stopped running with my own will. I decided to give AA one and only one chance. I got a sponsor. I was dry and still angry, but I managed to not let anyone know about my slip, so I was let out of my out-patient program at the end of my sophomore year. From there, I had the summer off. I had no summer school, no job, and no responsibilities.

Summer consisted of keeping myself busy. I stuck close to the Fellowship. I only worked the first three Steps my first year of sobriety, so therefore had to rely on fellowship and hobbies to keep me sober. The first thing I did was to get a summer job with another sober member of AA. I worked full-time and surfed my butt off. I kept up with at least three meetings a week and had a home group on Saturday night.

That summer, the main thing I did differently was to stop hanging out with all of my drinking buddies. If I hadn't done that, I'd have gotten drunk and wouldn't be writing this story.

The final semester of my junior year, I went to a regular public school.

Public school wasn't such a walk in the park, though. Since I had been involved in the Fellowship, I learned a lot about practicing AA's principles in my daily affairs. I had only just

learned how to be a good person, so I still got into a couple of confrontations, but no fights. If I had worked my Steps, perhaps I would have had a better understanding of myself and my actions. When I ran into people from my past, I explained that I was sober and living a different lifestyle, but I kept my anonymity. I talked to counselors when I needed to, and made sure I kept a close conscious contact with my Higher Power. You see, with me, it was not just one or two things that kept me sober, it was an accumulation of things that kept me going through my day-to-day business. Then I met *her*, and I went to my first high school function.

The high school function was the prom, and I had no clue about how many parties were going down that night. As I mentioned earlier, I was usually angry, so I was never much of a social drinker. I drank at home, alone. If I was with my friends, we weren't very social to begin with.

But, by the time of the prom, I had about ten months sober — I had not been around drugs or alcohol for a very long time. The prom wasn't a big test of my sobriety or anything; it was all the parties afterwards. See, I made the choice to go with a "normie," which isn't a bad thing, but it does mean that they usually drink. I had broken my anonymity to this girl a while ago, and I wasn't very uncomfortable, but I didn't think it was wise for an alcoholic like me to be around alcohol and people drinking. Knowing this, we left early, and as a result, somehow I lived one of the most memorable nights of my life sober. That summer, I stayed sober, celebrated my first year, and, although I didn't work full-time, I surfed and went to a lot of meetings.

Senior year was not much different from my previous semester as a junior. Things seemed to go a lot smoother as I worked the Steps. I had also committed to not getting into a fight during my last school year. This wasn't easy.

Eventually, I ran into one of those people who, I felt, are unavoidable in life. It was this kid on my surf team, talking trash about me because of an incident in the water when I accidentally ran him over with my surfboard. Every time I saw him, my mind and body screamed, "Put him in the hospital!" But my determination to stay sober kept me from hitting him.

The main thing that kept me in line was that first drink. If I were to hit this guy, I'd be falling into old habits and pushing myself into a pit of self-pity, pride, and ego, and I'd be making myself susceptible to that first drink. I talked to my sponsor, my therapist, and my grandparents, and I prayed my butt off.

Even in the midst of temptation, the principles we learn in AA can shine through and we can have a moment of clarity. "Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be." I try to remember that the amends I make are for me more than they are for the other person. I can make my amends and be an example of the freedom of living a sober life.

When we come to the edge of it all, we must believe in one of two things: We will be given earth to stand on, or we will be given wings.

*Greg T., Oceanside, California*

**Copyright © 1944–2008 AA Grapevine, Inc.**

*International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous*

*All rights reserved. Reprints by permission only.*

*For more information go to:*

<http://www.aagrapevine.org>