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The Independent Blonde

This is the sixth in an intermittent series of personal stories which first appeared at the back of the first and second editions of the Big Book, **Alcoholics Anonymous**, but were later dropped from the third edition.

By presenting these stories, the Grapevine hopes to continue offering newcomers a chance to meet — in print — some of the Fellowship's early members.



I have to tell you a little of the way I lived before I got into AA so you can see why I made the choice that I did. I started drinking at the age of seventeen, but I was in trouble with myself long before that. I never got along at home, and at the age of thirteen I stepped off and decided I'd go out for myself. I decided that no one loved me and I didn't love them, and I was going off and make myself independent.

My father brought us up to give no quarter and seek no quarter, and that was just the way I lived. I gave nothing,

and I took nothing. I suppose I lived mostly for pleasure, or what I knew for pleasure, which to me was just going out at night. I worked all day, and went out and stayed out at night. That was about as much as I knew about life. I rebelled against everything I'd ever heard as a child, and I lived to suit myself.

I never thought much about settling down. I thought anyone who got under the dominance of another human being was pretty foolish, but when I was twenty-nine I did get married. I was never trained to live with anyone else, and I took on a pretty big job I wasn't capable of handling.

After I was married I was in much more trouble with myself and I drank a great deal more, but now I had someone to blame it on. All my life I had blamed everything that ever happened to me on someone else, and I usually could find someone. Now I had a husband. If I was drinking worse now, it must be his fault.

One night I was out drinking by myself, which I didn't do as a rule. I sat in a bar drinking martinis for a long time, and somewhere on the way home I fell down in the street, and a cop came along and picked me up and took me to St. Vincent's Hospital. They pronounced me drunk and disorderly and took me over to Bellevue.

When I came to the next morning, I was in the psychopathic ward. The doctor who tested me and asked me a few personal questions was a psychiatrist. I asked him to call where I worked and tell them I wouldn't be in. I thought they'd just give me my clothes and let me leave quietly. They told me that I was not able to go out on the street alone, that I was not a responsible citizen. They said someone would have to call for me. To someone as arrogant as I was, who had taken care of herself, that was kind of rough.

I thought I would never get in such a situation again, and I thought the way to get over it would be not to drink. I was so naive that I thought that would be possible—just by wishing not to drink! I didn't take a drink for three months, but on New Year's Eve everybody was drinking, and

about two-thirty in the morning I started. In about one hour I was drunker than anyone there. I kicked someone in the shins and slammed the door on his fingers. I knew I shouldn't be drinking, and I was scared to death. I was in real trouble. I didn't know why I was drinking, and I didn't know why my behavior had changed so. I thought if I left my husband things would be different. I thought I would be different if I could live by myself again. Which I did — and proceeded to drink worse than ever before.

Then I decided that I was in trouble because I was living in New York and everyone knew me, and I used to drink too much with people, and maybe I didn't know the *right* people. So I moved away. I never thought about changing myself, I always thought about changing people, or changing places.

I went down to Virginia, of all places, to stop drinking. I was down there one month when I bumped into a fellow I knew from Greenwich Village who was on the same army post. We were glad to see each other, and he invited me out, and I said, "Oh, I can't go out. I don't drink any more." I really thought if you didn't drink, you couldn't go out! And he said, "Oh, that's all right. Come on over to the club and have a few beers." And I said, "Well, that I can do." About midnight that night, when they wanted to close up the club, they announced that if anybody was missing his companion, she was in the ladies'

room, passed out. That was me, in my brand new environment, with the right people!

So I left there and went to another army post, where some Red Cross workers took me out on a date with some British officers. I got drunk with the British officers, and I don't need to tell you what I told the British officers, I being Irish. I left the next day, telling my boss that I needed a

1945. I had lost all of that kind of independence. I had been drunk for nine days, sick and alone and desperate. They didn't have to tell me that alcoholism was a sickness. When you take a bottle and lock that door and go in by yourself, that is death.

This day I decided to give up. I don't know why you give up one day and not another — I have never been



very serious operation, and he agreed with me. I never had the courage to wait to be fired. I left every place I'd ever been. I ran away from life. I never knew myself until I got into AA.

I had heard about AA about a year before I came in, but I thought it was some organization that helped you out financially, and I was always too independent for that. But on June 1,

able to understand that. I had suffered on drunks before, but as they explained it to me in AA, that particular day I hit bottom. I decided to call up AA, but I didn't know that the clubhouse didn't open until noon. So I kept drinking and calling up, and drinking and calling up. Finally, I got someone on the telephone, and I told her I was in trouble and asked what I should do. The girl asked me if I

could walk. And I said to myself, "My God, how understanding! Somebody who knows that you couldn't walk and why you couldn't walk!" I said to her, "I don't know, I haven't tried." She said, "Well, the only reason I ask is, if you can't we'll come over to you." And I reared up in all my arrogance and I said, "You'll never come to me, but I'll go to you!" It took me until four o'clock that day to get there.

I shall never forget how comforted I felt that there was a building, there was a place, there were people who were interested in what was wrong with me. I walked in that door and the girl asked me my name, and I said, "I'd rather not give you my name." She said, "We don't care if you haven't got a name, just so you have an alcoholic problem!" Well, I was put to shame, and I told her my name. She assigned me to another girl who took me upstairs. I looked into this girl's eyes, and I thought, "If only my eyes would ever be that clear again, then I'd be grateful for that alone." Little did I ever think that many more things would happen to me than clear eyes.

The first thing I learned that day was that if I never took another drink I would never have another problem with alcohol. That went over in my mind like a Victrola record. I had never thought about that first drink. I had schemed and stolen drinks, but it was never the first one. And here I had a very simple problem — one drink, and that's all I was able to

understand.

About seven o'clock someone came over to this girl and asked her to speak at a meeting in Brooklyn. I was scared this girl would leave me. It was the first time in my life I ever had *needed* someone, and I knew it. I looked at her to see what she would say. She looked at me and said, "Would you like to go to Brooklyn?" I don't like to go to Brooklyn when I'm cold sober! But I wanted to stay sober, and I went to Brooklyn. I don't know who spoke first, last, or what, but someone got up and said he had been in Bellevue thirty-five times. I thought, "Oh, my God! I'll look like St. Cecilia here!" I was so glad to be able to tell this dark secret that I had had for eight years that I nudged a man alongside of me and said, "Mister, do you know I was in Bellevue once?" He said, "Okay, girly, you'll get the program." I guess he figured I was just another psycho!

The next day I started back for the clubhouse. On my way over, that thick head of mine started saying to me, "I don't know that you're such a drunk. I think you're far too dramatic about this whole thing. Why do you have to go over there with that bunch of people?" I was walking along a Bowery sort of street, with music playing and those awful neon lights all around, and suddenly a little man started to follow me. Not the kind of man that follows nice girls. And suddenly I said to myself, "Listen, Toots, there's something the matter with you when a guy like that

follows you, and you better get over to the clubhouse and find out what it is!" I always like to say that on my second day I was "wolfed" into AA.

I had heard that I had to make amends, and do something good for someone — that I was too self-centered. I thought of a girl friend who had a brand new baby, and she liked to get drunk on Saturday night. And I thought, "That'll be it. That'll be good." I called her up and told her I'd mind the baby while she went out and got drunk. That's how much I knew about doing good! The next day I called my boss and told what happened to me and asked if she would take me back to work. It was the first time in my life that I ever showed any sort of humility, that I ever asked anybody for anything. And I went back there to work. I learned that going back and facing something unpleasant, regardless of how tough it is at the time, is a lot easier than running away.

I went to meetings every night in the week, because I'm that kind of person. I either do a thing or I don't do it. I didn't have to give up very much, because my life before AA was very empty, very lonely, and very superficial. Then I was always afraid of being a sucker, for some unknown reason — I always thought people were taking advantage of me.

One day a call came in to the clubhouse for someone to go out and do a Twelfth Step job. And they looked at me and said, "How long are you in?" and I said, "A week or so." And they



said, "Oh, you can't go. You have to be sober three months." And then I realized that here I had spent all my life afraid that people were trying to get something out of me, and I had nothing to give! Now I was in an

organization where they needed someone that had something I didn't have; someone who was sober three months, who had some sort of stability; someone that had kindness in their hearts for other human beings,

and compassion for their suffering. I had to wait until these people gave it to me so that I could go out and give it away.

Then I began to have trouble with myself, and I went to see Dr. Silkworth and he explained to me what honesty was. I always thought honesty had something to do with telling other people the truth. He explained that it had to do first with telling *myself* the truth. I spent most of my life worrying about myself, thinking that I was unwanted, that I was unloved. I've learned since being in AA that the more I worry about me loving you, and the less I worry about you loving me, the happier I'll be.

I discovered a fellowship of human beings that I'd never seen before. I learned how to have self-respect through work that AA gave me to do. I learned how to be a friend. I learned how to go out and help other people — there was nowhere else I could have done that. I have learned that the more I give, the more I will have; the more I learn to give, the more I learn to live.