

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

Indigenous People in A.A.



ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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A Path to Indigenous Sobriety

Millions of Indigenous¹ people live in the United States and Canada today. Although many of us reside on one of the hundreds of recognized reservations or in an Indigenous community, most do not. Regardless, it is safe to say that there are as many different experiences of being Indigenous as there are Indigenous people.

It is a fact that Indigenous peoples have had their lives, families, and cultures disrupted by colonization, racism, oppression, generational trauma, and displacement. Many of us have turned to alcohol as a way of avoiding the painful feelings brought on by these cultural challenges while others drank simply because we enjoyed the effect produced by alcohol. Those of us who are alcoholic found that we eventually lost control of our drinking and, in addition to causing harm to ourselves and others, we ended up feeling hopeless and alone.

Regardless of why or how we drank, thousands of Indigenous people have been able to achieve sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. In doing so, we have found that our recoveries depended upon our willingness to look for what we share in common with other alcoholics. Regardless of their culture, millions have been able to stay sober in this program, one day at a time.

We have found that alcoholics can come from different cultures and have vastly different life experiences. However, we share a common problem with alcoholism, and a common solution in the recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today, Alcoholics Anonymous exists in more than 180 countries, and has more than two million mem-

bers. It is abundantly clear that alcoholism has no preference for characteristics like culture, race, gender, income level, or sexual orientation.

A spirit of community exists at the heart of Alcoholics Anonymous. We acknowledge that our sense of Indigenous community may have been damaged by the traumas that we have faced as individuals and in our culture. However, many Indigenous people have regained a sense of community in Alcoholics Anonymous and found a “road of happy destiny,” that has led us back to full and rewarding lives.

A.A. is not a religion and has no creed or dogma that one must follow. It is, instead, a spiritual program that encourages each member to develop a uniquely personal relationship with a power greater than themselves to help them achieve recovery. Whether we walk on a traditional path or not, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are suggested as a program that can aid and enhance our recovery process.

This introduction and the nine new stories that follow (along with six from the previous pamphlet — “A.A. for the Native North American”) are written by Indigenous people, each from a different tribal nation or community, who have been able to stop drinking in A.A. We now enjoy sober lives and can face challenges that once used to overwhelm us. There are thousands more like us who have come here feeling hopeless and alone, but who now live as productive members of their communities and who contribute to the lives and welfare of others. We have been where you are. You can be one of us.

¹The use of the term Indigenous in this pamphlet is intended to be inclusive of those cultures living on the land prior to colonization.

Tana, San Felipe Pueblo

“I walk as myself.”

I was born in San Francisco, California, in 1967 to my loving parents. My dad is a tribal member of San Felipe Pueblo in New Mexico, and my mother is a member of the Washoe tribe in Nevada/California. My life was filled with family, joy and love. My dad and brother were fishing on the piers, and we attended pow wows in the parks. One of my earliest memories was Dad holding my body as he jumped into the boat for us to attend the occupation at Alcatraz, where we supported our Indigenous relatives. Growing up, I did not have an understanding that I was a Native American Indian and that I had a strong cultural background and many powerful ancestors walking beside me. Growing up, all I knew was love and family. I think I may have come to the realization at the age of 7 when my dad moved the family back to Katishtya, also called San Felipe Pueblo, New Mexico.

My father moved the family — my mom, older brother and me — to New Mexico when the company he worked for filed bankruptcy. He had a house built for us on the rez. I was 7 when that traumatic experience took place, going from the big city to a small dusty village where I felt like an outsider. I was teased and bullied in school. Not only did I not speak the Keres language, I was also a “tomboy.” I knew I was different; I just didn’t have words for it at the time. I was a lonely and lost individual.

As time went on, my parents would drink al-

cohol on the weekends and would sometimes go overboard, getting loud, drinking, and driving to go for more alcohol when it ran out. I thought this was normal behavior and everyone's family did this. I had my first wine cooler at the age of 16 years old and did not know what that would lead to.

I survived middle school and high school, graduated in 1985, and began my working career. And it was there at my first job that I met others like me (gay). At the age of 19 years, I had my first kiss and first heartbreak. I met the one who took all the pain away and helped me get through the heartbreak.... that was *alcohol*.

I received the first of many DUIs at the age of 23. It was during my first jail stay, the first time I realized that maybe, just maybe, I had a problem with alcohol. I had my first experience in the program of A.A. in 1992, although I only attended to get a paper signed, regain my driving privileges, and show the courts that I was in compliance with the judge's order. "I am a grateful recovering alcoholic." I never understood what that meant when I heard others making that statement when I first walked into the rooms of A.A. Alcohol, it helped me get through so much, or should I say it helped me ignore problems I did not want to face and numb feelings I did not want to feel. I did not know that there would be a price to pay, and Alcohol would want its due.

I was trying to come to terms with my sexuality while hearing all the negative remarks from people around me about gay people and how they were gross and sick people. How could I be myself? How do I let my family or friends know who I really am? I ran from all of this and did not want to face the fact that I was gay. But guess who accepted me for who I really was? Alcohol.

I began going out to the gay clubs two or three times a week, going overboard because I didn't want to lose that superpower alcohol gave me, the ability to be comfortable in my own skin. I hung out with people who didn't care about me, because I didn't care about me. I couldn't come to terms with my sexuality; I hated myself and others that were like me. I had internalized homophobia. I

disrespected and talked down and bad about the LGBTQ community. Although I was partying with these people and I was one of these people, I continued to talk in a negative way, pretending I was not one of them. As time progressed, I was not able to “control” my drinking consumption once I started. I would cross the invisible line and become a blackout drunk. In 1994 I received another DUI and another in 1996. Heavy fines, impounded vehicles, jail time, drunk driving school did not seem to hinder my bad behavior. Along with blacking out and getting stuck in ditches because I was so drunk I couldn’t climb out, I was also selfish and unkind, a tornado in my family’s life. I had the “ISM, I Self Me.” I was so ungrateful and sneaky, taking advantage of the people who loved me. I attempted a geographical change and stayed sober for a while, but wherever I went, there I was, angry, irritable, and discontent. I cried out to God so many times with those foxhole prayers when I would find myself in a sticky situation, then go right back to the drinking, taking those answered prayers for granted. Until I was labeled a felon. That’s when I realized I was truly an alcoholic with an allergy to alcohol, and once it got into my system it was over (Jekyll/Hyde).

Little did I know I would get to know my Higher Power and develop a strong relationship with it, seeking guidance and giving gratitude every chance I got.

Along with the alcohol addiction, I was struggling with some mental health issues, two attempts with suicide and threatening to cut my wrists. I scared my family, and they encouraged me to enter a treatment facility. In 2006 came my first attempt in a 30-day rehab. I stayed sober for a while, feeling great and rejuvenated, on my pink cloud. Straying away from all the suggestions I was given, like, go to A.A. meetings, get a sponsor, work the Steps, pick up the phone and call someone, I was right back where I had left off — blackout drunk.

My family was tired and finished with me, I was told that I was not to come around until I got myself together. I tried many times to get myself

together — jail, rehab, nothing seemed to help.

One time when I was telephoning my family to let them know where I was (in jail), my mom suggested I may need a longer treatment program. I met with some women who came in to visit the jail; they were from a women's transitional housing program. I filled out an application and when I was released from jail, I was told I was accepted into their program. I had to make a choice between staying in a dysfunctional relationship, or entering a program for six months and working on myself, or continuing on the path of being a miserable drunk.

I began to meet with a psychiatrist every Tuesday, and during this time, I began to learn about myself and my addiction. With the help of a doctor and a stern probation officer, I was encouraged to accept my potential and intelligence. As I was healing, the cloud began to lift. I enrolled in community college because I wanted to learn about addiction and why "I" did the things I did. I made a commitment to myself that by the time I turned 50 years old, I would follow through and finish what I started, because as an alcoholic and in my addiction, I would start something and never see it through to the end. Two years later I was on the dean's list, a member of two honor societies, receiving one degree in social work and another in psychology.

I began to attend A.A. meetings. This time around I did what people in the rooms suggested: I got a sponsor, worked the Steps, and hung out after meetings to meet others and get out of my comfort zone. Doing all this took work and practice; it was something I did not know how to do. Soon I had a support network, individuals that I could rely on when things got tough.

Life was looking brighter and being sober felt great. Life still threw me curveballs. I still had some bumps along the way, but being sober and alcohol-free made it easier to face and deal with those things. I was able to be a part of my community. I volunteered, and I tutored other classmates who did not grasp the curriculum. It was no longer just about I, Self, Me.

I did choose to stay single, focusing on getting my life together. A.A. gave me a design for living. At three years sober and working a program, I met a wonderful woman who was also a Friend of Bill. She has played a huge part in my journey and encouraged me to follow my heart to work with my community and assist in the healing.

Part of my felony charge had me sentenced to a lifetime interlock installed in my car. I accepted this as what I had deserved. In my recovery I stood humbled in front of the judge and asked for release. As a part of my felony, I had lost my right to vote; I now have that restored. I have written a book.

Today I work in behavioral health for Katishtya, San Felipe Pueblo. I share my experience, strength and hope daily. I am available for ceremonies with my family. I participate daily in my own recovery and follow through with service commitments. Today I am truly a part of something, and I walk as myself, accepting myself. Today I know I have a strong cultural background and many powerful ancestors walking beside me. I have choices, and I choose to be happy, joyous, and free in my sobriety.

John, Lakota Sioux

“Finally convinced”

My name is John, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is April 26, 2005. I am Oglala, Lakota Sioux and was born in Los Angeles, California. My mom’s family participated in a federal relocation program in the fifties and sixties that placed Native American families in urban areas.

I grew up with lots of cousins, aunts, and uncles. My parents separated when I was young, and I never got to know my biological father. My family got us kids into competitive swimming early on, and we spent many a summer day at a swim meet or local swimming pool. On weekends there would be picnics or pow wows organized by our Native community.

When I was in second grade we moved to San Diego. My mom started dating a Native guy and we eventually moved in with him. Growing up, my household was intense! My mom was physically abusive toward my brother and me. I learned to read her mood in an instant to figure out if it was safe to be around her.

Our school district had a program called Title IV Indian Education. Native families would meet at a school cafeteria once or twice a week in the evening and learn Native arts and crafts, like beading and leatherwork. We learned how to make our own Native dance regalia and started to participate in pow wows in the San Diego and Los Angeles area.

The older kids in our neighborhood introduced us to smoking weed and partying. By eighth grade, my grades had dropped off a cliff and so had my self-esteem. I went to school only to see my friends and play lacrosse.

I barely graduated high school, and my parents convinced me to join the military. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training and got stationed at Fort Drum, New York. I wasn't sure what to expect when I got to Fort Drum, but when I saw my platoon buddies drinking beer, I knew I was going to fit right in. We would go out in the field and play war for a week or two, then come back to the barracks and party on the weekends.

Somehow, I made it through my military tour with an honorable discharge. My Mom had broken up with my stepdad and moved back to her reservation in South Dakota. I tried living with her briefly but decided to move back to San Diego. I met a Native Alaskan girl and moved in with her and her family. I was drinking excessively, and she eventually kicked me out. An aunt I was close to suggested I go to a Native rehab center in San Francisco.

In rehab, we had A.A. meetings every day. After 30 days we were allowed to attend outside meetings. I made some good Native friends, and we would attend meetings and socialize together. After rehab I moved into a Salvation Army hotel in

the Tenderloin District and found a job at a local hotel and as a night auditor.

I asked a long-haired hippie to be my sponsor, and we completed my first Fourth Step inventory. After a year of sobriety, I started dating a woman in my home group. She decided to move to Seattle, and I followed. We got married and lived there for a couple of years. She got pregnant with our first child, and we decided to move to her hometown of Bozeman, Montana.

After my second daughter was born, I relapsed. I had a subconscious thought that after 10 or 20 years, I could drink like a normal person. In Chapter 3 of our Basic Text, it says “The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker.” It also says, “This idea has to be smashed.” I wasn’t sure if I was a real alcoholic, but a divorce, bankruptcy, DUI, and panic attack finally convinced me.

After being “out” for a couple of years I was able to crawl back into the rooms of A.A. I knew the program worked, and I was finally willing to go to any length to re-create my life. I found a sponsor, a home group, and a service commitment. I worked the Steps to the best of my ability and slowly my life got better. The only thing I heard at my first A.A. meeting years back in San Francisco was, “Keep Coming Back — It Gets Better.”

The guys at my home group said they had lives that were second to none, and if I did what they did, I would get what they got. I wasn’t sure if they were telling me the truth, but I had nothing to lose. I’ve been able to stay sober for 19 years so far and raise two beautiful daughters. I remarried and we were able to buy a home with a VA loan. I stay consistent in my meeting attendance and working with new guys whenever I’m asked. I love how my experience can help others avoid misery and death from this disease.

Lestina, Nebraska

Life is a pow wow. Make a Grand Entry.

My story is no different than many Native Americans across Turtle Island. I grew up in a large family, raised by a single mother who had her own battles with alcoholism. As a result, I was first exposed to A.A. at the age of five when I waited with the rest of my family for our mother, who was attending a meeting. Little did I know at the time how my own journey with alcohol would lead me to these rooms decades later. I never would have chosen to be an alcoholic if I could have helped it. I used to watch alcoholics and tell myself that I'd never touch the stuff. Yet at the ripe age of 11, I found myself wanting to taste beer, to taste the escape from poverty, abandonment issues from my father, and the growing pains that life was dealing to me.

Alcohol didn't stick the first time but rather progressed into alcohol poisoning, DUIs, public intoxication, jail stays, and blackouts. It turned out to be the cunning, baffling, and powerful spirit that the Big Book talks about. Everything was fun in the beginning. Alcohol filled me with a new zest for socializing and gave me the liquid courage that I thought I needed to have fun. Alcohol took me away from pow wow dancing and into drunk dancing or wherever I could fit in. People seemed to like me better drunk. In our Native American concept of the Red Road or sobriety, there is a concept that says that this black road is right beside it. That's exactly how my alcoholism went, all or nothing. Ultimately, my relationship with alcohol led me to experiment with harder substances, which ultimately led me to a federal prison stay. I picked up a lot of traumas along the way, ranging from self-harm while under the influence to domestic violence relationships. I didn't know my worth, so I settled for anything I could find along the way. Being arrested was the best thing that happened to me, even though I may have felt different at the time. Under the conditions of being incarcerated, I started entertaining the thought of making a lifestyle change, anything to remain free.

The most painful part was abandoning my two children and being powerless over their pain and their anger directed toward me. I didn't make the best choices and didn't know how to be a mom back then. It was during this federal indictment where I met my future sponsor, whom I've had for 15 years now. She has loved me when I couldn't love myself, believed in me when I couldn't, and accepted me back after a relapse. In A.A., I found the true freedom that I craved. I learned that I can handle life without needing to numb myself. It was the beginning of a great healing. I worked the Steps, attended therapy, went to treatment, sponsored women, and regained my culture again by re-entering the pow wow arena. I don't always work a perfect program, but through the fellowship of A.A., I have plenty of supporters to call and tools to utilize. One of my biggest tools has been gratitude. It used to feel awkward to make gratitude lists, and I had to learn how to spell "grateful." Early on, in my selfish mind, I thought I was "greatful" or full of greatness. A.A. has taught me the meaning of humility and proved to be a firm foundation to rebuilding my life free from substances. Today I am a sober grandma and mother, which is the greatest blessing to give my three kids and two grandsons. If all goes well, I will have 10 years of sobriety. Life is good today, and every day I do my best to make a grand entry into my recovery. By the grace of Wakan Tanka, Tunkasida aka God, I will take another 24.

Patricia, New Mexico

***"I am not alone.
I am being taken care of."***

As I look out the window, I see white clouds amongst the blue sky, and the wind blowing, and the trees and bushes are moving and dancing in the wind. Never did I care about Mother Nature during my alcoholism. Alcohol took me to places I never intended to be. My grandparents were so accepting of their eleven grandchildren after their daughter, my mom, passed away in 1972. My grandparents believed and respected their

way of traditional belief and culture. They both woke every morning ready to greet the sun with prayers and accepted the gifts brought for a day.

My parents met elders of the Mormon church who shared their religion. At the time, an Indian Placement Program was in place where Native American children at the age of 8 were baptized into the Mormon church and placed in foster families in the state of Utah. I remember having my metal suitcase packed to get on the Trailways bus. On the bus, I was looking out the window in such fear, wondering where I was going and who I was going to live with. Nine months of school and then I spent summer break at home with real family.

Living a new lifestyle, speaking a new language, and having to believe in a new religion filled my heart and mind with new beliefs and new ideas. I learned manners, worked hard on the farms with two of my six foster families. I believe today my excellent work ethic was learned when I completed my chores on the farm, which I loved more than cooking and cleaning in the house. Not so fun.

After leaving the Indian Placement Program, at the age of 16, I gave birth to my son. My drinking and partying began in high school. I went to work after graduating from high school to support my son; I was employed by the United States Forest Service. After a hard day's work, all the guys wanted to pitch in money to stop at the bar. I depended on these guy co-workers for a ride to and from work. I couldn't ask them to take me home first before the first drink of alcohol. Everything after that was a blur. My alcoholism progressed not knowing the mental obsession of the first drink and the physical craving after.

I enjoyed my job as a firefighter, and I was a hard worker. The job paid good. On April 1, I was expecting a large sum of money from a fire in California. My plan was to have a good drinking party at our home. Cashed my check, hitchhiked down south with my cousin to the bar. We made our run, our driver had other plans for us. We chose his plan to drive around and drink and get drunk. Forgot about the friends waiting for us at my house for the booze.

The party happened but not as planned. We got so loaded that when leaving the Pueblo south of my homeland in the intersection, we collided with an 18-wheeler. How I survived only Creator knows. I woke up under bright lights in the hospital. Scared I was going to die, emotions of self-pity and fear brought on the tears of knowing my drinking had brought me to this place. Honest thinking helped me admit what I had done, and it took a small window of faith in this power greater than me to ask for help. I said a prayer, "Help me stop drinking." I left the hospital, and I was so scared. How was I not going to drink?

Come to find out my two brothers older than me were not drinking. They were attending A.A. in our community. I had no idea about A.A., but my two brothers and another alcoholic, Sam E, took me to my first A.A. meeting in my community. They knew what to do with this alcoholic. There were no women in my first home group. Sitting and listening to these men share their experience of happiness and strength for disappointments gave me hope that I did not have to drink alcohol ever again. My brothers were anchors for my sobriety, and they taught me how to be of service to Alcoholics Anonymous. One member in my home group was a spiritual leader in my community, and he was sober. I struggled with my belief in HP. He gave me five minutes of his time after a meeting, and he taught me how to pray in my language and how to ask every morning and throughout the day for strength and guidance. The freedom in my understanding of my Higher Power is powerful. I ask every day in the morning and throughout the day what Creator's will is for me. Moments of a coyote crossing my path, seeing a hawk fly over me, are messages of spirits who have passed on letting me know I am not alone. I am being taken care of.

The spiritual tools of my home group, working the Twelve Steps with my sponsors, and carrying the message to the next sufferer has allowed me to live the twelve promises of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today I am not outside the circle looking in. I participate in my community and have found peace knowing my tradition and cul-

ture and language are who I am today. Alcoholics Anonymous has given me a new way to live. My experience, strength, and hope without a drink of alcohol is amazing.

Francis, North Dakota

A.A. loved this rezzer.

Growing up on my reservation, it was not apparent to me in my upbringing that abnormal drinking was a problem or that it was not normal. As a matter of fact, it was only normal life, it seemed. I was well adapted to being alone in my house for days at a time. I learned to cook and dress myself as well; I would get up in the morning and go to school, self-reliance would fix it! I was well adapted to school, and I performed good in my studies. I could control the situation just as long as nobody noticed, and no one really asked questions about the whereabouts of my parents. I enjoyed school for the sole purpose of the school lunch! Being alone at home and hungry was not an enjoyable experience, so I would go to school to interact with my peers and get away from the chaos which was my home life.

My life continued with relatively no drama. To all onlookers it seemed like I was a well-adjusted kid. That was far from the truth; I was silently suffering from an underlying fear... to prove I was good enough and to show the world I was not afraid. Quite the paradox, this drive had manifested itself through sports and girls and street fights, as well as good grades. I was a polite kid to the proper authorities. I was an adaptable sneaky kid. I lived two lives, one at school where I would be kind and polite and follow the rules. The other with my family was filled with crime and fights and rebellion. I was, in a word, *Rez-fabulous*. At the height of my school career, I was dating the girl of my dreams and played every sport — which is not too hard considering the fact that there were 800 people in my town. My brother (first cousin) had a paper route, and he got his first check, and the three of us planned to drink that day. We got a

buyer and sat in a ditch just outside of town. Two things happened to me. I commenced to drink the beer like it was water. I got so intoxicated that I could not crawl out of the ditch. My two brothers did not have this reaction to alcohol, as far as I can remember. They took me to their house. Second, I became violently ill and began to be sick. I can recall that I never had a euphoric feeling of release, or a feeling of having “arrived.” To me, my experience was awful. But nevertheless, I drank the following week.

When I look back, I can say that alcohol had the subtle effect of making me fearless. I know this because of the explosion of violence in the following years. There was no situation where drinking was involved where I was shy or quiet. I was that guy. My social standing with family and friends, as well as my community, became strained, to say the least (even on the rez). I was always an abnormal drinker; there was no honeymoon period for me. I had the first symptom of alcoholism from the beginning. I did not know that.

I landed in A.A. at the age of 18, with a pregnant girlfriend and in college. I jumped into A.A. and went to meetings every day, twice a day, maybe three (I neglected my college studies). I worked on the Steps (only doing the easy parts of the Steps, no amends). Started working with others (not making my appointments with said guys). A.A. and myself became my Higher Power (no Step Eleven to speak of); I was only able to sustain this way of life for three years. I consequently left my pregnant girlfriend, dropped out of college, and lost my job. I had taken only the parts of the program I wanted to do and left the rest. I had missed the valuable lesson of letting go. I was full of A.A. activity, but I was being powered by myself. I failed to grow in the spiritual way of life described in the Big Book. Then began my going in and out of A.A. as well as my attempt to live life by managing well and looking good. My pattern of life, which was to torture me for 20 years: I was to find a girl, get her pregnant, start a family, destroy it with my drinking, walk away and repeat. I had been in and out of A.A., and at the age of 44, I had run out of options.

Divorced three times, I was over \$120,000 in child support debt; I had eight children who I hadn't seen in years. I owed everyone I knew three dollars, or so it seemed. I would walk this lonely road for eight years, I would become the town drunk, walking around my reservation with no shirt and no shoes on, singing Indian everywhere I went. I was kicked out of every establishment in my town except one bar and the post office. My children would run home when they would see me walking towards them. I was a mean, toothless man. I would wake in the morning and ask God why he hadn't taken me yet.

I received a call one day out of the blue. It was my cousin who, in my estimation, was the worst drinker I knew. I thought that if I ever got that bad, I would sober up. He was sober! I could hear it in his voice. He gave me hope! He told me he was in Arizona and to come down. He planted the seed.

This was the beginning of my journey into sobriety. I would, in a couple of weeks, have what I would call my turning point. This was that moment of clarity or, as I like to think about it, was a miracle just for me. I was leaving my third wife, walking down the highway, half a state away hitchhiking from Montana to North Dakota, and was beginning to do what I always do, while walking I began planning my next move. Who was I going to snag? Where would we live if I wanted to be a stepdad to her kids? All these thoughts were flooding my mind. Suddenly my mind moved forward in time, to the moment where I always ended up in every relationship I had been in, walking out on this new woman and her family. In the exact position I was in at the moment! I could see the truth of my life.

This vision hit me hard! I saw this with the help of something outside myself. The pattern of my life. I stopped in my tracks, and I found myself at an impasse. I didn't want to walk forward, and I didn't want to go back to where I just came from. I did something I hadn't done in a while. I raised my hand in the air and asked the sky or whoever would hear me, and I said a prayer, "I will do what you ask of me. I just don't want to go back to this

life!” No sooner did the words come out of my mouth, a truck pulled up beside me and gave me a ride. I cried tears of joy, because in that instant I was filled with spirit. It was powerful and yet, it did not last... Unfortunately, I didn’t stay sober for another month. What happened after that month, I will forever be grateful.

I did make it to Arizona for treatment. I had to get away from the rez. There I was reintroduced to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was only practicing Fellowship all those years of in and out. I did not know that by working the program of Alcoholics Anonymous I would be released from the worst aspect of my drinking... being sober. I found that a relationship with a God of my own understanding is the most wonderful thing in my life today. When asked to read or write something, I did the best I could. I met my sponsor, who showed me patience, love, and tolerance. He would also nudge me in the right direction when I was off the beam. Being Native, I was very unapproachable, and rough around the edges. But Alcoholics Anonymous kept shaking my hand, and with the help of my sponsor, I began to start to get out of myself. My Creator began to show up in my life. I was responding to life with a different attitude, and I was shocked at my responses to these situations. I know now it was because of the actions I was taking.

Trust God, Clean House, and Help Others are the Steps in their simplest form, and that is what has saved me, keeping this thing simple. Today because of the amends process, I have relationships with all but one of my daughters, but even that one is beginning to spark. I have a relationship with my sons today too. I have returned to my community with new luster, and my spirit has been reborn with a new purpose. I am so indebted to the people of A.A. They carried a message to a wild Indian!! I would be selfish if I didn’t do the same. Thank you, Creator, for getting me to A.A., and thank you, A.A., for getting me closer to my Creator!

Troy, New Brunswick, Canada

Two spirited and sober

My life began in a small reservation in New Brunswick, Canada. I always knew from a young age that I was different. In the late 1970s the effects of colonization and loss of culture faded indigenous traditions and ceremonies, but values still remained. I saw and experienced much abuse. My father beat my mother so bad; many times she ended up in the hospital. It only happened when my father was drunk. He also was a well-known drug dealer.

Weekends consisted of people, parties, alcohol and drugs, and we always saw many fights due to drinking. At 7 I started getting sexually abused by an older sibling. Years later, I found out he had too been abused. When my parents would party, my older brother and his friends would ask me to steal liquor from them and I did. Soon, I wanted to be part of the group. This is where my drinking and criminal behaviour began. By the age of 11, I was dual-addicted to both alcohol and drugs. I became promiscuous and was taken advantage of by older men. To me, this seemed normal. I don't think my parents ever realized the extent of my damaged youth or addiction.

I realized, at 13, that I was two-spirited. I battled with these thoughts and even attempted suicide. I was crying out for help. My life was totally out of control. I stole a lot and I started lying to anyone who tried to see beyond my hurt. I struggled in school because I was lost. My only escape was addiction.

My father passed away just after I turned 18. This put my family in deep mourning, which fueled my mother's drinking and mine too. Soon after, I found my first love, left home, and started hairstyling school. I tried to have a normal life. My partner and I partied a lot, and I joined the LGBTQ community and started performing in drag. Of course, the drinking continued. Being a drag queen was a big deal to me. But over the next three years, I ruined my career, and made a mess

of my relationship. My soon-to-be ex and I moved in with my mother on the reservation.

These were the years of my decline. I only had a small job that didn't pay much, but my partner had a great-paying job. So as my drinking increased, so did my dishonesty. I started using his credit card and lying about it. When he was sleeping, I would take money from his account and go find the nearest bar. Finally, everything blew up. He started cheating on me, and I wound up with an assault charge and 90 days in jail. After I got out, I moved to the city. I was sure that things were going to change. A new gay nightclub opened, and I decided to give my drag another whirl. I even stayed sober for a time. Even though I was at the top of my game in the drag world and sober, I wasn't happy and started drinking. I ended up in bad trouble. I stole a few thousand dollars and got two years house arrest. I tried changing my ways but got into more trouble stealing from the church. I got eleven months in the county jail.

I threw myself back into drag, and I became a hit in my town. I felt like a star. I started college and studied interior design and decorating, which I completed with honors but I never used my degree. I just kept doing drag. Traveling around Canada performing became my escape, but deep inside, my trauma still lingered. I drank in secret. I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous. I joined a great group and did quite well. I got an apartment, a job, and I was sober. Then it happened again. I gave up and started drinking again. I was introduced to escorting and thought — why not? Fellow A.A. members checked up on me but I refused to face my issues. I turned them away.

Soon, I had a warrant out for my arrest for stealing cheques. To make matters worse, they were from someone in A.A. I got nine months in jail for that.

When I got out, I returned to A.A. and again was welcomed with open arms, even by those I had hurt. I left A.A. again in 2016 and became homeless. I was part of an armed robbery and got five-and-a-half years in prison for that offense. I joined A.A. in prison and became an active member doing

service work. I started to find some peace. I got paroled and returned to prison a few more times. I am now serving a sentence of two years and five months. One thing I have learned through my trials is that the hand of A.A. is always there, and it never closed the door on me. This is my family. This is where I find hope and serenity.

Pamela, Tlingit

***“No matter what,
don’t stop going to meetings.”***

My name is Pamela. My traditional name is Ka-jastee, and I am a tribal citizen of the Tlingit tribe from Juneau, Alaska — Southeast Alaska. My people are known as the “People of the Tide.” I belong to the Eagle Moiety of the Wooshkeetaan (Shark) Clan. Although I grew up in Juneau, Alaska, my ancestral lands are Glacier Bay and Dundas Bay, Alaska. Many summers of my childhood were spent in Hoonah, Alaska, where I have fond memories of my grandmother singing to me in our language. I remember picking berries and playing under the fishing docks, eagerly awaiting my uncle’s purse seine (fishing net) after a long season of fishing. Unfortunately, alcoholism runs deep in my community. Both of my parents were plagued with alcoholism. However, I am proud to say that they both, like me, achieved sobriety in their later years.

I was 13 years old when I had my first drink. I remember that day vividly. The room spun around me, and I reveled in the euphoria it brought. While staying the night at my cousin’s house, we raided my uncle’s liquor cabinet, mixing hard liquor with orange juice. The next day I awakened feeling violently ill. And I couldn’t wait to do it again. Initially, I limited my drinking to weekends, but soon I found myself drawn into a destructive lifestyle. I joined a female gang called the Black Velvets, and I spiraled into criminal activities, leading to brushes with the law and a sense of rebellion. It seemed that every time I drank, I broke out in

handcuffs! However, behind the facade of bravado, I struggled with self-hatred, exacerbated by many racist incidents. One day while eating dinner, my family and I were alarmed by the sounds of crashing eggs being thrown at our windows. When we peered through the window, we saw the neighborhood white kids running away. We went outside to see the damage and saw the ugly word of “M U K” (“dirty Indian”) spray-painted across the garage door. I was enraged by what had happened, and it fueled my self-hatred and perpetuated a cycle of abuse. I didn’t know it back then, but I used the abuse and racism as an excuse to protect my alcoholism. The truth was that I drank because I’m alcoholic.

My upbringing was marred by various forms of abuse, mental, physical, emotional and sexual, ultimately pushing me into a tumultuous marriage at just 14. Despite becoming a mother, I blamed myself for the abuse and suffered deeply. After enduring a terrifying incident with a loaded rifle to my head, I found the courage to leave. I took my 6-month-old son and sought refuge in a women’s shelter. Leaving behind the racism and trauma of my past, my son, and my heritage, in Alaska, I made Seattle, Washington, my home.

However, my struggles continued, leading to a pattern of abusive relationships and substance abuse. Alcohol became my crutch, shielding me from the pain and regret of my past. Despite numerous periods of sobriety which included five-and-a-half years of recovery, I was in and out of A.A. for many years. I experienced many self-induced hardships, jails, prison. My addiction progressed, eventually leading me to other drugs.

One fateful night, consumed by self-loathing, I indulged in too much of another substance. In the darkness of that moment, the drug took hold; I felt my heart and breath slowly slipping away. It was then, in the depths of despair, I knew I was going to die, that I found the courage to call out to God for help. Checking into an intensive outpatient treatment program on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation marked a pivotal moment in my journey. This time, I stood ready to face my inner de-

mons head-on and embrace the path to sobriety. Immersing myself in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I found solace and support in my newfound A.A. family. This time making sobriety my top priority, I embarked on a journey of self-acceptance, self-forgiveness and self-love. Through hard work and the guidance of Higher Power and my ancestors, I learned to embrace my heritage once again. Finding strength in my Native spirituality and service, I participate in the sweat lodge; I pray, meditate and listen to the voice of my ancestors. I know they are watching over me, and I find safety and security knowing that my Higher Power speaks to me through them.

Today, I reside in Auburn, Washington — a place where I am surrounded by the unwavering support of my husband, my A.A. family, a multitude of friends, and guidance from Higher Power. I get to experience the joy of helping others and rebuilding my family relationships. I remain steadfast in my commitment to recovery, embracing honesty, open-mindedness and willingness as my guiding principles. My journey to recovery has so many miracles! Too many to list. However, one that I hold close to my heart is “no matter what, don’t stop going to meetings.”

Sharon, Ojibwe

Yellow bird

I’m an Ojibwe woman, born in Atikokan and raised in an all-white family. Two parents, six siblings — our parents ran a tight, strict ship. I was always observing my surroundings and always uncertain of who, what, why, how come? I hated being Native. Different, scared, alone, shy, the unknown, the awkwardness. Especially, it was like my second skin I lived in. And I was teased a lot as a kid.

The neighborhood kids would cackle always: “The only reason you’re there is to be their built-in babysitter.” I got resentful cause I always had two or three younger siblings with me when I want-

ed some free time to myself to play. I went to a Catholic school and church.

All my report cards said, “Sharon’s daydreaming often.” My first drink, drunk blackout was at the age of 14. Alcohol vanished my fears, emptiness, my existence. Never realizing my dignity was so, and still is, obsolete, I was still wondering where was my place, or what was next. Pregnant at 17, married, and second son born when I was 22. Never drank while pregnant.

I was a kid having a kid, and I always had it on my mind that I was missing out. My drinking had once again fearlessly picked up like there would be no tomorrow. Divorced, more alone, forgot all my responsibilities. The drink had taken over everything and more. My angel, as I like to call him, CIA’s (Children’s Aid Society) worker said, “I think you have a drinking problem. You’d better do something about it.” It was like a switch went off. It seemed that within the next few days, I was in treatment. The first time I took an honest look at what I was doing in my life.

Then there was another guardian angel put in my path, a stubborn, stern, alcohol counselor who I appreciated. He saved me from more battles. Five weeks at the clinic and 18 months at a halfway house. Introduced to the workforce, hired, and now working and staying sober. Working hard maintaining my sobriety and a new living structure. My roommate knew of a man who had a similar background to mine, introduced us — turned out he was my biological brother. It’s like they’ve been telling me: Work your Steps, work your program. With all the good coming my way, I changed my perspective on believing in a creator, which I call God.

I moved into my own apartment, first time ever living on my own + sober + staying that way and doing okay. Though I wondered why the good was happening; I still questioned it at times. I know today if I turn it over to God and work my program, it all seems to turn out fine. Never thought I’d be freed of alcohol and regain my priorities. With meeting my brother, I regained oh, so much more. A privilege to have status plus five more biological siblings to find out my being and my roots.

It was like another miracle came around. My culture drum dance, sacred items, I became proud like a new person had been found.

Everything, as promised, came to be true and everlasting. I could be totally grateful to have discovered my drinking problem, a solution to be happy. I can actually comprehend most of the four *Ws* — who, what, where, why. My once-juvenile body can actually catch up with the growth I gained in A.A., to be someone. I've found the gifts of people who were there for me!

In return I need to help my sponsees and others, to be a good example in this new walk of life. I still desire to go to three or four meetings a week. As one member said, we're all teachable, as long as I stay positive, ask for help and guidance from my God, and say thank you. I could never repay A.A. for that which was so freely given to me. Though I maintain daily and work towards as my H.P. wants me to live.

Nainoa, Kanaka Maoli

“Try it like this.”

Being a Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) comes with a great deal of pride and responsibility. As men, we are taught to be confident and courageous. Asking for help is a sign of weakness, yet we are asked to willingly give ourselves in the “Spirit of Aloha” to those in need.

From a young age, the ideals of perfectionism ruled my attitudes. Life was an all-or-nothing proposition. Win or lose, there was no in-between. In later years, this thinking would lead to a prolonged journey of finding true joy, as well as a slow progression of complete submission of my will to God. In early sobriety, I found myself bouncing in and out of the rooms of A.A. I would sporadically go to meetings. I had no home group. I had a sponsor whom I rarely called, half-heartedly worked the Steps, and balked at service. It's no wonder it was difficult to submit.

In 2017, I came across a Keiki o Ka 'Aina

Hawaiian culture class titled “Board and Stone strengthens families and perpetuates Hawaiian traditions.” Participation included a three-month family commitment to attend all planned activities, such as learning the ancient techniques of carving a curved wooded board (papa ku’i ‘ai), using a handmade adz (ko’i), and carving a river rock into the shape of a Hawaiian poi pounder (Pohaku ku’I ai) using only a small tapping hammer. At first thought, this seemed like a wonderful opportunity to show my family my exemplary leadership skills, which I knew I possessed. I imagined our ‘ohana (family) experiences to be full of smiles, laughs, and wonderful opportunities to help us grow together.

Our ‘ohana committed. Indeed, we did grow, but with many frustrated efforts! On the third class, the urgency of working together to carve our papa ku’i ‘ai while having a deadline became a daunting reality. As if being poked in the eye with a dull stick, I would have done anything to make the pain stop. The kids were running amok. Our mothers were chasing the restless children. Fathers were intensely trying to show the kids how to “do it right.” Everything felt unmanageable!

While in class, our Kumu (teacher) smiled patiently, and while observing, taught us Hawaiian principles and family values. On this one day, he stopped the entire class, gathered us all in, and instructed the fathers directly in front of our families. He went on to explain that he noticed our frustration, the use of intense emotions, harsh words, body language, and intimidation to lead our families. He said, “Instead of getting angry, and impatient, I would like you to repeat this phrase in an extremely slow and calm tone.” He smiled, lifted his hands, and said, “Son...try it like this.” We all laughed, and thought he was joking. He then gave the entire class of fathers the opportunity to practice out loud at least 10 more times. He wasn’t satisfied. He looked at me directly and told me to go to the front of the class. He pulled me up to my feet, had me raise my hands, then up on my tip-toes, asking me to gently say the words in front of everyone five more times, “Son ... try it like this.”

At first, I was embarrassed, yet looking out to see my 'ohana smiling, encouraging me, allowed me to be present and say the words with sincerity. "Son, ... try it like this."

Weeks passed. I found myself, the last person in my family, trying to chisel my pohaku ku'i'ai. I kept cracking each new pohaku, due to haste and frustration. Each time my pohaku broke, the arduous process restarted with a new one. My son noticed my unfortunate circumstances. His was the best pohaku of all. He walked over to me, gently put his hand on my shoulder, and said "Dad... try it like this." Tears filled my eyes as my impatience dissipated and was replaced with humility. I felt God speaking through my son to touch my heart in a way I'd never experienced. I knew "my way" was not "God's way." Working together strengthened our 'ohana.

Years later, I was in a similar circumstance of demoralization. My father tragically had passed away. I had yet another relapse. A friend from A.A. reached out and called to say he'd be right over to visit. I was beet red on my couch, sweating in my underwear, and experiencing brutal withdrawals. He came to my door, looked me in the eyes, gave me a hug, and said "Nainoa, you know why you keep relapsing?" "No," I replied. He said, "You keep doing it your way. You've got to do things the A.A. way." Immediately, that familiar feeling returned to my heart from the Board and Stone class. I could hear and feel my God speaking through my friend saying, "Son... try it like this." Tears filled my eyes like before. I nodded my head in humility and whispered, "I submit."

God wanted me to lose myself, my will, to discover my true self and be in alignment with His will. My submission was the only decision that was mine, and mine alone to offer to God. Only He could do for me what I could not do for myself. It was the only conscious decision I made for my sobriety. I knew I couldn't "decide" to stop drinking, as was based on previous failed attempts. This time, I surrendered.

Progression towards submission equally brings progression towards increased joy, until pure joy

is finally found in the complete surrendering of one's will. I began a new journey the A.A. way. I sit down, shut up, and listen, because I know, my "thinking" is what got me here. I consciously decide daily to sacrifice my will to God to do with me as He will. I choose to stay because of the joy that fills my life and to perpetuate this joy in my family, as I continually remember to submit and "Try it like this."

Jacquie, Nisga'a

"Never in my life did anyone tell me to keep coming back."

I live in the village of New Aiyansh, in northern British Columbia, a community in the traditional territories of the Nisga'a Nation. There were no active A.A. meetings in the village when my lifestyle forced me to get sober. I started drinking when I was 14 years old. At first it was only on weekends. I had to lie to my parents as to where I was going or what I was doing, which became a pattern of deceitfulness that I perfected with time. I was a blackout drunk from the get-go; I came to puking from the whiskey that I had been sharing with a circle of friends who had no idea I was only 14. Drinking was like a rite of passage; after that first drunk, I was accepted by other teens who seemed cool and had an attitude I only dreamed of having. Without alcohol, I was painfully shy, a shrinking violet.

I was a functional drunk and I managed to graduate from high school and achieved college certificates, which made it possible for me to stay employed over most of my drinking career. When it looked like I was going to lose a job because of my drinking, I'd move on to another job. A time came when I didn't want to live anymore and couldn't see how life could get any better. I had gone through a lot of failed relationships and blamed my misery on people, places and things. I tried suicide, wrote suicide notes and found I couldn't even do that right. I'd be so angry when I

came to in hospitals after having had my stomach pumped of whatever I had taken to get me out of my miserable life. I did several geographic cures: my last was from Prince Rupert to New Aiyansh. If I could just get away from all those people who drank and all those bars, maybe my life would get better. I tried drinking beer or wine coolers instead of whiskey or vodka in an attempt to control my blackouts, but when I moved “home” I found my drinking got worse. I was now buying out the bootleggers. I was back to drinking hard stuff and getting painfully sick. The job I got in the village was at a health center where they had a visiting psychologist who sent me to an alcohol and drug abuse counselor who would get me to a treatment center.

I didn’t know what the treatment center was for; I didn’t think I had a drinking problem. All I knew was I needed a break from life. So off I went to a treatment center for, in my mind, a much-needed vacation and to learn how to sober “him” up — (my higher power, who drove a red truck).

I was reintroduced to A.A. and listened closely for ways to help my current partner, all the time thinking “I’m not that bad....” I still had a job, still paid bills and still had food in the cupboards. I found out in Step Four that juggling bills and having a case of whiskey on my grocery list meant my life was “unmanageable.” To me that was normal behavior. Ten years prior to going to the treatment center, I did attend one A.A. meeting, with a past live-in boyfriend who was non-Native, and my conclusion was A.A. was for “white people”; everyone was all dressed up and they all knew each other. I felt left out and different, so I didn’t go there again. It was suggested when I got out of treatment that I attend A.A. meetings. I didn’t own a car, so I’d hitchhike to the nearest meeting, which was one and a half hours away on unpaved highway. Because I didn’t feel I had anything to offer anyone, I’d attend beginners meetings. I was amazed at how I was welcomed into any meeting I got to, and they kept telling me to keep coming back. *Never* in my life did anyone tell me to keep coming back.

As I began to accept that I could be an alcoholic, I wanted to know how to start an A.A. group. I was invited to a district meeting. I felt so honored that I would be invited to something so exceptional, to be rubbing elbows with “professional” A.A.s who had permanent smiles and glowing faces. I was given everything I needed to start a group, with lots of suggestions and phone numbers if I needed any help or had any questions. They also included Grapevine magazines and speaker tapes, which helped to get me through the night. Wow, I was in the big league now. I became GSR when I didn’t know what a GSR was, which eventually led to service work as secretary, treasurer, alternate DCM and DCM for my district. While serving at the district level, I missed only 20 minutes of one district meeting — to meet my very young grandson at the airport. I broke a glass ceiling: I was the first First Nation person/woman to serve as DCM in our district. I thought our membership must be crazy to vote me in, a drunken Indian woman from the hinterlands who came through the doors feeling I was a waste of skin and going nowhere fast.

I learned to express my opinion at area assemblies. With the Twelve Steps I found a design for living. My family could count on me to be there in times of crises. I became a good daughter, a good sister, a good mother, a good grandmother and a respectable human being. Prior to A.A., I had lost three brothers and a sister-in-law in a single car crash; I lost my faith in God. With a restored faith in my Higher Power and sobriety I have survived a lot of family deaths without picking up a drink. A.A. reacted with understanding and concern. When my father passed, A.A. was there to hold me and comfort me. A.A. kept me going, reminding me that I may not need general service to ensure my own recovery but that *“We do need it to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism.”*

I have several family members who found sobriety after I joined A.A. Today, I want to give back

what was freely given to me. Staying sober opens up the way to life and happiness. I owe my wonder-filled life to Alcoholics Anonymous, and I am truly grateful.

My name is Jacquie and I am an alcoholic, and proud to be a Nisga'a woman.

Dwayne, Micmac

“People showed me kindness and I learned to trust the white man.”

I am a Micmac from Red Bank First Nation in New Brunswick, Canada, and I am an alcoholic. I saw at an early age the destruction that alcohol could cause. I saw battered wives, social workers taking my friends away, violent fights, people going without, and police officers arresting people on my reserve. I told myself I would never turn out like that. I turned out like that and worse.

I came from a big family — six girls and four boys. My parents were strict, but looking back I realize they were trying to shield us from everything going on in the reserve. My dad was an alcoholic, so alcohol affected me before I took a drink.

As a child I grew up with a lot of insecurities. I had low self-esteem and was bullied a lot. I was a teacher's pet and very smart. Maybe that's why I got picked on so much. I was isolated from my friends because my dad was so strict. We were always working in the yard while the other kids played hide-and-go-seek. I felt like the square peg in the round hole.

I had my first drunk at around 15 years old. I just remember it was harsh going down, but the feeling that came afterward — I fell in love with that feeling! My shyness, low self-esteem, and insecurities disappeared. I started getting in trouble with the law and getting arrested for underage drinking. I went right into a criminal lifestyle with break-ins and fighting. I was trying to gain the reputation as a tough guy because I was bullied when I was young. All my rage from my childhood came out when I drank. For the first time I felt like

I belonged in the partying lifestyle.

I graduated high school and took a university course. Partying had such a hold on me then that I didn't apply myself — nothing mattered except my partying. I decided I was going to travel and see the different reserves around me. I did lots of things I wasn't proud of in those reserves — like fighting, insulting, stealing, and disrespecting people. For somebody with such low self-esteem, I seemed to be filled with ego and pride. The morals and standards I was raised with went right out the window when I drank. I treated my alcoholic thug friends better than I treated my own family.

I was arrested by the police and have been in front of a judge a few times. I even went to jail, but not for long. I hit my rock bottom many times and chose to ignore the road signs the Creator gave me.

My sober date is July 11, 1999, and that date keeps me sober today. That is the day my life became so unmanageable that I did not feel like living any more. I was 25 years old and had had 10 years of hard partying; I couldn't handle it any more. I cried in front of the mirror that morning, looking at what I had become. I was ashamed, lonely, scared, and drained. I looked myself in the eye and, with tears rolling down my cheeks, I said, "You gotta change, you can't keep doing this to yourself." That's when I let the Creator into my life. I surrendered and knew I was beaten. He kept me alive through all the violent confrontations and accidents. I asked for help and my dad, sober for 11 years then, directed me to a detox. I went to a treatment center and found out that I was an alcoholic. It wasn't that I was a bad person, I was a sick person.

We attended A.A. meetings in the center and when I got out I started going to meetings everywhere. I used to hike to the meetings in the rain, snow, hot and cold weather. I didn't have a car, wife, kids, or a house. I didn't even have a license. People showed me kindness and I learned to trust the white man. I hung out with members who had good sobriety and worked their program. We went to roundups, on Twelfth Step calls, and to anniver-

saries. I went through breakups, deaths, and financial troubles without having to pick up a drink or a drug. That's because of the A.A. program. If I were to count the blessings I received, I'd be here until tomorrow. I still go to three to five meetings a week.

I got married this year to a beautiful, inside and out, Micmac woman. I am a stepfather to her son and take that as an honor. Family is important to me. I love my family today and don't turn my back on them anymore. This is all because of A.A. in my life. All the oil fields in Texas can't buy sobriety: it has to be earned through hard work. I will never be able to repay A.A. for everything it has given me. I hope I don't ever forget where I came from and where I got the help.

Wellalin ("thank you" in Micmac).

Angela, California

"My first drunk was much like my last drunk, full of pitiful, incomprehensible demoralization."

I am an alcoholic, I am a woman, and I am Native American. That is the order given to me by my sponsor. When I got sober 19 years ago I wanted to be an Indian woman who was a sober alcoholic. My sponsor, who was given the gift of sobriety in 1955, taught me that I was to place my alcoholism first, the fact I was female second and then maybe I could identify myself as Native American last. Thank God she taught me to put my priorities in order. Because of her love and knowledge about the A.A. program of recovery, I have been able to stay in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous when I knew I was different from all the rest of A.A.s.

I was raised on an Indian reservation and I rarely, if ever, saw anyone who was not Indian. My childhood held wonder and sunshine and lots of family. My first drink was heavenly. I felt happy, warm, invincible. I laughed. That was in the morning. As the day progressed, the feelings left and I became less drunk, and I needed to find those

feelings again — and so I did. I went into several bars and got kicked out, too young to be served alcohol. But in the last bar there were several men who welcomed me and bought me beer — I was 12 years old. Several hours, or days, later I woke up, hung over and sick, many miles from where I started. I had lost time, my shoes and my soul. My first drunk was much like my last drunk, full of pitiful, incomprehensible demoralization. That first bender was the peak of my drinking career — the downward slide lasted 26 years and it never got any better. I never could recapture that feeling of happy, warm invincibility again.

Several times during those 26 years, professional people — judges, lawyers, probation officers, drug and alcohol counselors — begged, pleaded, threatened me. They would tell me I had a terrible problem with alcohol but I couldn't and wouldn't see it. I thought they should mind their own business and leave me alone. My family was heartbroken. They did not understand why I could not hold down a job, raise a family, pay my bills, obtain a driver's license, stay off the streets or out of jail.

After all, I was reasonably smart, rather pretty and didn't really drink every day. So much for self-delusion. By the time I wanted to sober up, most of my options for a happy life had passed me by, or so I thought. I had bounced along a bottom for so many years the idea that my life could change if I surrendered to a simple program that promised me a relationship with a Higher Power seemed weak and pathetic.

I met my sponsor after I had been sober for one year. She never mentioned the fact I was Indian, didn't even care if I was a homeless, jobless, hopeless drunk. She had me read and write and pray. She made me sponsor other women; she made me talk about myself, the good and the bad. She wanted me to go to as many meetings as I could, sharing as honestly as I could what a miracle had occurred in my life due to Alcoholics Anonymous. She taught me to be grateful by showing other women what the Steps could do in their lives — make them better mothers, wives

and daughters. She taught me to dress up in my best clothes and put a smile on my face so that I could give hope to other women who needed cheering up. She told me I could be sad or mad or in the dumps, as long as I knew there was a God to heal and help me.

She loved me into a life beyond my wildest dreams. I have learned how to live through the heartbreak of my brother's alcoholic death and the passing of my mother and father. I have had the glorious task of raising six foster boys in my home. I have gone to college and earned degrees that have enabled me to return to my reservation and become an asset rather than a liability.

My sponsor passed away a few years ago with 46 years of sobriety, but her legacy to me and the countless other men and women she sponsored lives on. I am so thankful for her kindness and patience. Eventually she acknowledged I was Native American, but in a very off hand way. By that time it didn't matter to her or to me; what mattered was that I was just another fellow alcoholic who would go to any lengths to stay sober. The beauty of Alcoholics Anonymous is that it works for everybody, no matter what your race, your sexual orientation, the size of your pocketbook, whether you've been in jail or live in a mansion. God's grace is available to all of us.

Douglas, California

***"I am living one day at a time
and I keep coming back."***

My life began on the Round Valley rez, where my father helped deliver me. At the age of 7, I was introduced to alcohol by my dad and his friends. They liked to give my brothers and me beer to watch us stagger around. My mother and I and my eight brothers and sisters would sit outside the drinking place on Friday nights waiting for my dad to come out, but mostly he would sneak out the back and we wouldn't see him until Sunday night, when his paycheck was gone.

I attended the Sherman Indian School in Riverside until the government brought Native Americans from Arizona and New Mexico, then I had to go back home to finish my high school education. At this time I was drinking only on weekends. We had to have white people (“runners”) buy our booze because at that time Indians were not allowed to buy liquor.

I got a football scholarship and attended a local college until I got 86’d out of town twice for being drunk on the Indian rez. I joined the U.S. Marine Corps and my drinking escalated. Now I was able to buy booze every day since I was a serviceman. The MPs would pick me up in town drunk and take me back to the base so I could stand my post. I was sent to Korea and watched my whole platoon die. I turned away from my God and continued drinking as much as I could find. I had given up on life and wanted to die. My drinking career lasted 44 years.

The strong hand of the law forced me into A.A. I had a choice — go to prison for five years or take a five-year probation and find a program to help me. I hated being without my freedom. The police could check on me anytime they felt like it, even to smell my breath. If there was a hint of booze — then off to prison for years. I could not be in the company of drinking people and my drivers license was suspended. So, being hemmed in like that, what could I do?

I came to A.A. with more reservations in my head than most Indians visit in a lifetime. I heard from white people that I wasn’t different. That we were all the same. That really got my attention. Of course I was different. White people could buy booze and I was not allowed in bars. On my reservation the only Indians who worked did so for white people. White people were better off financially and in control. How my thinking changed was a big part of my probation.

When a white guy came up to me and said, “You need a sponsor, my Indian friend, and I am it,” I said OK. He took me to a meeting three times a day for a year and taught me all about the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. We spent many hours in his living room going over the first 164 pages

of the Big Book. The first thing I had to do was surrender. The courts had helped with that. The sharing I heard at meetings and reading the Big Book showed me I wasn't different. I was sick, and the reality was I got a chance to hear this because I surrendered and came to and my Higher Power worked through the 252 meetings I attended in my first 90 days.

Finally, I realized I didn't just want to go to meetings to get my court card signed: I wanted what they had. They were called winners. These A.A.s were actually happy without drinking. I used to be happy only when I was drinking and carrying on. What I learned is that drinking is only a symptom of my disease. The Steps are what saved me from myself. The rooms triggered the insight into myself.

A.A. has shown me a new life. I celebrated 33 years of continuous sobriety this year. I carry the message to our Indian people on their reservations, sponsor people and have spent many years in general service. I enjoy going to meetings even more today, but I must say if it was not for my Higher Power, which I turned my will and my life over to, I would not have the life of gratitude that I have today. I am living one day at a time and I keep coming back.

Caron, Comanche

***“I consider myself truly blessed...
to bring the message of recovery to many
Native Americans.”***

I'm an “Army brat” and the youngest of eight children, born in Arizona but raised in Oklahoma. My father was a full-blooded Comanche and my mother was Otoe and French. They met at Haskell Institute in Kansas, where they married and had us “Haskell rascals.” They were both full-blown alcoholics when I was born.

I started sipping my father's beer, liquor and wine when I was 4 years old. Liquor was always available in the house. I lived in a violent, hostile,

alcoholic environment, which became normal to my siblings and me. We were traumatized at an early age from parents who were traumatized themselves. My father suffered from PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] from the war and my mother suffered historical trauma from growing up in boarding schools since first grade. I was full of emotional pain.

I started drinking liquor when I was 6 years old. I couldn't read, write or spell, so I don't know what kind of alcohol I was drinking. I filled the bottles back up with water so nobody suspected anything. I was a full-blown alcoholic at the age of 12. I didn't have much of a childhood. I was too embarrassed to bring anyone home. After we moved back to the States, I started dancing in regalia, trying to find my "Indian identity." I was drinking daily. I had no clue who I was, where I was heading or what I was doing. School came easy for me as I made good grades and passed my classes. I discovered "snagging at 49s" when I started going to pow wows. I was going to "over 21" bars when I was 16. My drinking progressed at an alarming rate!

I got my first DUI when I was 18. I married at 21 to escape the hell at home. My husband was an emcee at pow wows and I got sick of dances. I met my second husband in the Crazy Horse Bar. My second marriage was exactly like my parents' marriage: drunk and toxic. My second DUI occurred when I was 29. My third DUI happened when I was 34, when my mother died. She held my family together, so naturally the family split up after her death. My dad died 10 months later. I became a binge drinker and "beer wolf." I developed a pattern of noncommitted relationships. I had my first real date at 36. We became drinking buddies and I became both my mother and father at the same time. I was hurting so bad that I hurt everyone around me. He finally dumped me for "my drinking."

When I was 38, I hit my emotional bottom. I woke up at the county hospital with a blood alcohol level of 0.38! My first spiritual experience was my last foxhole prayer. I was praying on my knees on the jail cot. I said, "Oh God, please get me out of jail. I promise to go to treatment, A.A. and coun-

seling.” My attorney appeared and said he would bond me out of jail if I would submit to treatment, A.A. and counseling.

I attended my first A.A. meeting three days after I got out of jail. I realized when I was introducing myself that I was an alcoholic. Right then I felt a magnetic-type charge going through my body. When they asked me to share, I started crying. I was ashamed. At treatment, I started handling the core of my emotions that led me to fight with boyfriends and husbands. My childhood was so horrific that I blocked everything out and chose not to handle it. I was emotionally paralyzed with visible scars of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. I have relived my parents’ lives through my failed marriages and relationships.

I learned in treatment that I would either drink until I died, drink until I became insane, or drink until I recovered. I know now that the pain will go away when I deal with it. At first, I could not relate to Alcoholics Anonymous because I never saw any Indians at any meetings. I used to see one every now and then. Now when I go to A.A. the room is filled with at least five to ten Indians. I am the director of the only Native American Halfway House in Oklahoma.

I was a trusted servant for six years at my first home group. I have started my two-year GSR commitment for district work and am district chair for Grapevine. Working the Twelve Steps keeps me sober. I consider myself truly blessed to have been the vessel to bring the message of recovery to many Native Americans. I hope you enjoy the Indigenous Journey as I have.

Esther, Athabaskan

Friends everywhere

I was born in a small village in the Ungalik region of Alaska, about 450 miles northwest of Anchorage. I am an Athabaskan woman who is a successful executive today. But a few years ago, I was unable to cope with everyday living.

In my early years I was raised by my grandmother, who instilled in me a lot of the Athabaskan tradition. I knew that I was different. When I was growing up and going to school in Anchorage, I was hit with racial remarks from other kids. There were not many Alaska Native activities, so I had to survive in the best way I knew how. I decided that the easiest way would be to identify myself with white society. This was foolish because I have brown skin, black hair and features that are not Caucasian. I was only fooling myself. Deep down inside I knew this, but I went for the image.

In my teens, I found out that alcohol made me feel better about myself. It made me more confident and better able to communicate with others.

I worked in Anchorage with social and educational programs for Alaskans and American Natives. I felt “at home” among the mostly Native staff. I took a great deal of pride in helping other Native people obtain food, shelter and jobs. Seeing others worse off than myself took the focus off my drinking, which was getting worse. When my alcoholism was becoming more public I feared that it would threaten my job. So fear was important in my ending up on A.A.’s doorstep.

One day, I sat in my living room knowing that I couldn’t live with alcohol or without it. I had been arrested for driving while intoxicated but I honestly believed that I needed to give up driving rather than drinking. My caring, patient husband finally said, “Go to A.A. or get out.”

After praying to a God that I thought long ago gave up on me, I was given the courage to pick up the phone. I called Alcoholics Anonymous and was introduced to a white woman who had about two years’ sobriety. This lady looked great. I could hardly believe she ever had a drinking problem. Her story was a lot like mine — she was always in trouble at home, at work or with the law.

My first A.A. meeting seemed so strange. People were so happy and looked so well, which was totally opposite of where I was. It helped to be told that I was loved, to keep coming back, and to get telephone numbers.

In my first year I got a sponsor and began work-

ing the Twelve Steps. After two years of sobriety, I visited my mother, who lives in a northwest coastal state. I realized the terror I must have caused in her life. I always telephoned her from Alaska when I was drunk, in the wee hours of the morning. Of course, I couldn't remember what I said, but I knew it was usually a crying jag. One morning at breakfast I told my mother I was in A.A. Since she is a Native woman who stayed close to her cultural ways, I wasn't sure of her reaction. Amazingly, she was glad. She knew about A.A. because her best friends were in the program and had told her about it. She said now she didn't have to worry about me when I traveled because I would have friends wherever I went.

I have seen many Alaska Natives come into Alcoholics Anonymous either through treatment centers or on their own. Alaska Natives are taking more leadership roles in the A.A. program, and are staying sober using A.A. principles.

I don't hear the statement "I can't stay sober in A.A. because it's a white man's program" so often anymore because A.A. works for any color, nationality, or gender.

I try to talk to Native newcomers and introduce them to others. I am called on from time to time to contact a Native needing help. I also sponsor Native women because cultural issues come up that can better be understood by talking with another sober Native.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

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

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Where to find A.A.

There are A.A. groups in large cities, rural areas and villages throughout the world. These resources can help direct you to a meeting in your community:

- Many A.A. intergroup or central offices have websites where information about local A.A. meetings can be found, and almost anywhere in the United States or Canada you can use the “A.A. Near You” section on the A.A. website: www.aa.org.
- You can also find a meeting by downloading the Meeting Guide app at no cost on your smartphone.
- Additionally, information about local meetings can often be obtained from healthcare workers, faith leaders, media outlets, hospitals and alcoholism facilities that are familiar with our program.



Each A.A. group endeavors to provide a safe meeting place for all attendees and to encourage a secure and nurturing environment. In A.A., the shared experience, strength and hope of sober alcoholics is the lifeline to sobriety; our common suffering and our common solution transcend most difficulties, helping us to create the conditions in which to carry A.A.’s message of hope and recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.

Many Indigenous alcoholics feel quite comfortable in any A.A. group. Yet, some A.A. groups can have more of an Indigenous orientation which allows attendees to more easily identify as an alcoholic and be open about certain personal issues.

If you cannot locate a group in your area, please contact the A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, (212) 870-3400, www.aa.org. They will put you in touch with the group nearest you.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: www.aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
AS BILL SEES IT
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
BLACK IN A.A.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN A.A.
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —
AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER — MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US:
AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION — HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

VIDEOS (available on www.aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, www.aagrapevine.org)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, www.aalavina.org)
ABOUT A.A. (digital-only, www.aa.org/about-aa)

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: **I am responsible.**



Scan the QR code to learn more
about this pamphlet at
www.aa.org/indigenous-people-aa.

This is A.A. General Service
Conference-approved literature.

