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There's No Running Away

What happened to the warm glow that started at my fingers and traveled at a breakneck speed to my toes, after that first long pull on a beer?

What happened to the euphoria that set off chain reactions in my brain, taking me out of myself to a place of tranquility?

My name is Lisa, and I'm an alcoholic and drug addict.

At the age of twenty, I began to notice that my drinking and drugging ceased to have the same effectiveness. My mind had no rational thinking, so I kept increasing my dosage until I was using twenty-four hours a day.

Through the haze of addiction, I did the geographical move knowing if I left I could control my drinking and my life would be wonderful.

I moved to the West coast, but quickly found that I still needed the drug and drink in my system, and I rapidly declined until I was admitted repeatedly into hospital. There was nowhere else to go. I had hit bottom and saw no way out.

I was suicidal and sick. I gave my business over to my partner. I was admitted to yet another hospital, this time on a psychiatric ward. Nobody came out of these places and I was a nobody.

I spent my first couple of nights in that institution wishing to die so I could leave all the pain, hurt and sickness.

I refused treatment and lay comatose on my bed, getting up long enough to have a cigarette in the only enclosed partition available. I heard the whispers. I knew they talked

about me. I didn't care. As I lay in bed one evening, a nurse visited me. She approached my bed as I lay staring at the ceiling and said only one sentence to me, "I will return in an hour at which point, I want you to tell me one thing that you have never told anyone before," and she walked out.

Why I thought about that question and the answer to it will never be known to me, but I did it and when she came back, I was ready with my answer—"I think I have a drinking problem."

All of a sudden there was a flurry of activity. They were breaking through my brick wall. One night I had visitors. They sat looking like two 'picture perfect' women, who probably worked in secretarial positions for professional people. They probably spent their evenings out with the girls laughing and enjoying life. As I stood on the threshold of that room looking out at them, I thought this was what I had always strived for—to look 'normal,' to talk and laugh freely. I wanted what they had.

They took me to my first AA meeting.

I saw even more women looking 'normal'-sitting around a table laughing and drinking coffee. The meeting began. Someone read the 'Twelve Steps' and 'How It Works.' They asked if there were any newcomers and I slowly raised my hand. Then they spoke. Every woman who spoke that night—spoke to me. They shared similar stories of alcoholism. They told me it was a disease, just like diabetes and there was a cure. If I was honest with myself and worked my program, I too, could have what they had. They told me for the first time in my life, I would not be alone. When they talked of God, my head snapped to attention. Childhood abuse had left the mere mention of God terrifying to me.

One woman, who would later become my friend and sponsor saw the change in me and spoke next.

"God is what you want it to be. See that doorknob over there? That was my God when I first started coming here and it hasn't changed since."

Everyone laughed and I got the point.

For the next six months that tiny church became my haven. I lived and drank in every word I could. I did thirty meetings in thirty days. I read the Big Book. I got a sponsor. I went to every meeting suggested and I reclaimed my business. I was high on life and I knew I'd never go back to the sickness—I had found freedom.

But after six months I became cocky. I began to think I knew all the answers. The weather was changing; it became a hassle traveling to meetings. My sponsor called and warned me that I had become too complacent, and missing meetings at this point was not healthy. I ignored her; I knew what I was doing. I was cured and eventually stopped going to my home group. I wasn't worried. I had the Big Book—though it was quickly collecting dust. I ignored the signs and started leaving my phone off the hook—too many people were calling and I was getting fed up with 'if you don't come to meetings you are setting yourself up for a relapse.'

My landlord gave me a bottle of wine for Christmas that year, and instead of refusing it, I kept it on a shelf in the kitchen where I could see it. I didn't think that I would drink it. My addicted mind persuaded me to keep it for friends that came to my home. What I didn't see was I had dropped all my friends and lived in isolation. Depression set in and on New Years Eve, full of self-pity, I rationalized one drink. I desperately needed to feel the warmth spread through my body, but I didn't feel anything.

Frantically, I took another drink. Still, nothing. I knew the warmth was there, I just had to drink until I found it. I drank the bottle, passed out and never found that warm happy feeling.

I was a mess and I didn't know how to live with my illness. I didn't think anyone could help me and again the feelings of suicide came back. It was another round of hospitals. This time though, my sponsor traveled to see me. She held me as I cried and told me I didn't belong there, I needed to go where I could get help for my addiction. I started to see a drug and alcohol counselor who arranged for a private women's treatment centre and I arrived within the year. I spent eight weeks there learning why I drank and how I had slipped. Most importantly, I learned that I could never drink again and that isolation bred relapse. I needed to work my program and dedicate my life to staying clean and sober.

That was seventeen years ago and now I'm only alone when I need to be, and I will never forget the signs of relapse.

I have come to realize that there is no 'normal', or 'picture perfect.'

There just is.

And by the grace of my God, let it always be so.

