

Alice G.
St. Augustine
DOS March 7, 1957

Alice G. is one of our AA Pioneers. She is 91 years young and just celebrated 57 years of sobriety. She has been a vital force in the AA fellowship in St. Augustine. Alice taped her story for the intergroup archives in 2014 and the following has been excerpted from that tape with her permission. (Interviewed by Kevin G., transcribed by Rhonda B. and edited by Charlie M.)

Kevin: I'm with Alice G. and we are going to listen to Alice tell her story of her history with AA. When you were born, where you were born and what was your early childhood like?

Alice: I was born in Fernandina Beach in 1924. I was brought up in Callahan, US 1 South where all the Yankees came down. My father had a garage and a filling station in Callahan, that's why we ended up there. Callahan was a nice little quiet town of about 500 people. Everyone knew each other, you didn't lock your doors and you shared whatever you had, everyone was poor. In 1939, we moved to Starke, Florida. I didn't like it but I lived there and that's where I had my first drink. I was probably around 14 and it was moonshine. I didn't like it but I chased it with a Marlboro and oh when it went down, I'll tell you I had the courage of a lion. After that I drank every chance I could get. I used to have a drink before I went to church to sing in the choir.

I went to Connecticut to high school for two years. I stayed with my sister and we had cocktails every night and I was allowed to have two, but I could not smoke cigarettes in their house. It wasn't long before I was having whiskey delivered to me at night while I babysat their two children. I always had a bottle in my closet. I graduated from high school in 1942 and came back to Starke to work for my father in his auto supply store. He would fix bicycles and cars. I put in batteries, gas pumps and fuel pumps in the cars.

K.: You were a mechanic back then?

A.: Well, everybody was Rosie the Riveter during World War II. We did everything. We women did as good a job as you could do. I tried to enlist in the military but they wouldn't let me. I weighed only 89 pounds and the Army didn't think they needed that kind of weight.

K.: So you were 14 when you started drinking gin and then 17 when you started selling bootlegging. Where did you get your liquor?

A.: At first I would get my liquor when my Dad and I went to Jacksonville. Later on we had to either go to Melrose or to Lake Butler.

K.: You drove there and picked it up and brought it back?

A.: I didn't know how to drive and Daddy wouldn't let Eleanor drive. I forget how we got a ride over there but we got a ride somehow. You know how alcoholics are. We would buy a case every month.

I sold liquor out of the back of my apartment. Dad had a storage shed for parts and bicycles and all that stuff and he had an apartment on top of it. I took it to live in so I didn't have to walk out to the house which was 3 miles from Starke. I was very lucky I didn't go to prison. Raiford was only seven miles away.

K.: You drank at home?

A.: Yep.

K.: You didn't go out to bars or things?

A.: I never went in a bar. A lady did not go in a bar by herself. I did go to bars when I lived in St. Augustine.

K.: How did you get to St. Augustine?

A.: I'd always lived with my sister or family but when I was about 31 or 32 I decided to move to St. Augustine and got an apartment for \$30 dollars a month. It was 1955. At first I worked as a waitress but got fired from that job and then got a job at a dry cleaning establishment.

K.: Were you drinking all the time or were you just a weekend drinker.

A.: No, I drank all of the time. I always had a bottle in my house. I also used to drink at the Tradewinds. Now we Southern women have very strict rules. We didn't go out dressed in sloppy slacks or anything. We went out dressed and I do it to this day. Anyway, this Tradewinds Bar had a pianist in there, Amy, and I wanted to go in but I couldn't go in by myself and then I thought, "Well, yes I can, I can go in and sit next to Amy and nobody will approach me for a date or to do anything.

K.: So, you knew what you were doing?

A.: Oh yes, I knew what I was doing

I met a gentleman there one night, his name was Joe, and he had been in AA before but he was out drinking. I said I would like to go to a meeting and sure enough,

the next week he was there and we went to the Wednesday night meeting in the Florida Power and Light building on Cordova Street.

K.: He took you?

A.: Yes, and I couldn't tell you whether he stayed or not. He took me and there were 2 ladies there. A beautiful gray haired woman just the epitome of what I thought I wanted to be if I lived to be that old and Rose the prostitute and I didn't want any of that. Rose didn't make it and Margaret used to travel with her husband all the time and I didn't see her again.

That night I found out what was the matter with Alice. You didn't call me a drunk; you said I was an alcoholic, a high class word that I could accept because I was a snob if there ever was one. I made up my mind that night that I wanted this program. That was March 7, 1957.

There were 2 men in the group that became my sponsors and they used to come by and pick me up all the time. There were maybe 10 men in the group.

K.: This man from the bar took you to your first meeting?

A.: Yes and I never saw him again.

K.: How did they run their meeting?

A.: They didn't do the steps at all. Back then it was all speaker meetings. That's what I needed because the first night I was there I knew I was where I should be and I wanted what they had and I wouldn't talk and tell them about my drinking days cause I thought they would throw me out and you know but they gave me the coffee job to do which I did.

K.: They gave you service work right away?

A.: Yea, I needed that and they didn't want to make coffee anyway. Men back in those days didn't do anything in the kitchen.

K.: They were smoking more?

A.: Oh yes, everybody smoked. We didn't have nonsmoking meetings for many, many years.

A.: After I got sober, I met a man that worked at Fairchild and we got married at my mother's home in Stark in 1957. He was not a drinker. We were married ten years when he passed away. We had two children even though three doctors told me I could

never have any children. I call them my miracle children. I have two grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

K.: Back to the men who took you to meetings. They just picked you up at your home?

A.: Oh yes. They didn't ask you if you wanted to go, they told you what you were going to do. You know I just loved it. We would go up to Jacksonville to Bay Street, we would go to Gainesville and Melbourne and every Friday we'd go to Flagler Beach.

K.: What did your husband say?

A.: He had no problems with that at all. He trusted these fellows and he knew we were going to these meetings here in town and in different towns. We had only one meeting a week in St. Augustine and didn't get another meeting there for about seven years. The Oldest City Group met at the Flagler Hospital. I took on the duty of being the person who welcomed you at the door and I made the coffee. We moved several times and finally found a home at 144 King Street. We were there for quite a while.

K.: What about ladies?

A.: It was 5-7 years before we had a lady come in AA and stay. It was all men. On my first anniversary, one of the members bought me a Universal Coffee Pot. He didn't ask the Group if he could. He just said, "it's for Alice". That coffee pot is sort of famous; it's made a lot of coffee over the years.

K.: Did they have chips or tokens or anything?

A.: No, they didn't have those at least until I was in the program seven or ten years and somebody in Jacksonville or somewhere in Starke started giving out the chips and then that's when we did it and we only had the white chip. Then they added a blue and we didn't add anything in between them; just those two. One year and one to start which I think is better than what they have now but who am I to say.

K.: How did they dress?

A.: The men from the first meeting I went to were dressed with jackets and ties and everything. This impressed me. For years they dressed that way.

I didn't have many women friends. At about ten years this lady came in. and she was from Georgia and I had this thing that anyone from Georgia wasn't worth a dime. I greeted her fine but I wasn't sure I liked her. My husband had passed away so I had to learn to drive and I had a fear of driving. One night after a meeting at Flagler I complained that I wished I could get downtown to shop but didn't drive. Well she said, "I

go down every Thursday would you like to go with me?" That's how she became one of my dearest friends and she was one of the best AA person with newcomers. She and I went on many a 12 step call together.

K.: Can you tell me about 12-stepping because they don't do very much of that now.

A.: No, they don't. We never went without a bottle of whiskey with some whiskey in it.

K.: You never went alone did you?

A.: No never go alone. We used to take a little bit of whiskey and orange juice because sometimes they were in a real mess. The house would be in a mess. The babies would need a bath and you know we sort of cleaned them up a little and so forth and so on and we would go back during the week to see how they were doing.

K.: Mostly men, there were no ladies?

A.: We called on a couple of ladies but they didn't stay. Most everyone that came in were men.

K.: So what did you do then when you 12-stepped someone and tried to help them get sober. You just gave some liquor to calm them down and then how?

A.: If they had DT's, we would in orange juice.

K.: And then you just took them to meetings?

A.: Yes.

K.: So they detoxed in AA?

A.: Yes, sometimes they had a place in Jacksonville if we could drive them but mostly they just detoxed the hard way.

K.: You were the only lady for seven years and you sponsored each other. What did you do? When did you work the steps?

A.: I didn't do the steps until very late in my program. They didn't do the steps back then and I didn't do them. My current home group is a 12-step group and they help me a lot.

A.: My sponsor today is another Florida Cracker. She was born over around Tampa and she lives in Gainesville and she comes over quite often and spends some time. We call one another back and forth.

I don't sponsor anyone anymore but I do speak because I still need to tell my story. I still go to three meetings a week. AA has been good to me. I'm reminded of this lady from New York who gave a talk at the Presbyterian Church. She was about 4'10" and they needed two coke cases for her to stand on. She closed her talk with, "Oh Lord, I ain't what I want to be. Oh Lord, I ain't what I ought to be. And, Oh Lord, I ain't what I'm gonna be, but thank you Lord, I ain't what I used to be." That's me exactly.

K.: Thank you Alice.

