

Howard B's Story

Howard B is a member of AA who has written his story as part of the St. Augustine AA Archives Committee effort to document members with long term sobriety. He sent his story to Heather W, and it was transcribed by Sally F.

My sobriety date is March 17, 1985. I had loving, religious parents but I became a drunk anyway. My first drink was when I was 16 years old. My friends and I went to a girly bar which was just across the state line from Hammond, Indiana where I was living. The beer was so expensive that we only had two. I didn't drink again until I was in college. Returning veterans also took me out a few times and I drank beer.

I began to drink moderately until I got married at the age of 21. My father-in-law, who died of alcoholism, encouraged me to drink with him. I drank sparingly until the age of 30 when I began drinking whiskey. By the time I had reached 48, I had wrecked my first marriage. By the time I had reached 54, I had wrecked my second marriage.

I became an outpatient at Twin Oaks which was a treatment center in St. Augustine. My counselor, Tom S, suggested I go to the Way Out Group in the fall of 1984.

I was so pleased that AA was spiritual in its orientation because it brought me back to God. I had my last beer with my sons on March 16, 1985. Thus, my sobriety date is March 17, 1985.

Fundamental to my recovery was my sponsor Bill Angalfy (Angy). He said he would never tell me what to do but would sometimes suggest and at other times, strongly suggest. He knew that I was a teacher and so he told me he had never seen anyone too dumb to get this program but he had some that were too smart to get it.

Angy and I and two other members of the Way Out Group went to Costa Rica where we went to AA meetings in San Juan. Jimmy Ellis and Whispering Bob Whipple were the other two. Bob had a laryngectomy – thus his nickname. Jimmy Ellis also used Angy as his sponsor. The three of us had many good times together. Jimmy passed away recently from Covid 19.

Another Way Out Group member was Dave the Indian. He is still alive and gave a Saturday Night Live talk about a year ago. He told us at one meeting that at his

first meeting at the Way Out Group, he sat by a waste basket and threw up in it. In spite of this, he was told to keep coming back. He said that was the first time anyone had asked him to come back. After he moved to Palatka, he would occasionally show up at the Way Out Group saying, "I've been sober a long time. I shouldn't feel like this".

Other Way Out Group members were Vince Minella who had a laryngectomy and prostate cancer. He said he asked God to remove his habit of running around with other women and to remove his profanity. He did. He gave him prostate cancer and throat cancer. "Be careful what you pray for". Dick the Pollack Bankowski was always glad to be here and glad to be sober. Bob Piver became a History teacher in central Florida. Frank S. is a professor and still around. I know nothing about Tennessee Bob.

One of the prime movers in establishing the Serenity Club was Mitch Lightsey. He was retired from the Dolphin Show at sea animal attraction on A1A, south of town. In 1984, the Club was relatively new and was still divided into rooms with 4' by 8' holes cut into the walls so that the discussions could be heard. One hot shot member couple broke the traditions and got their picture in the Jacksonville Sunday paper as Mr. and Mrs. AA.

I attended the King Street Club a few times when Perry and Alice were the prime movers. I saw Alice about a year ago or so at a meeting. She is about 95 or so.

In terms of service work, I have been the treasure for two home groups – one in St. Augustine and one in Palm Coast. I have also been the treasurer for the Intergroup in Palm Coast.

To the Newcomer: I would like to say what helped me the most at my beginning in AA

1. Meetings
2. Phone Therapy – calling AA members and asking “How are you?”.
3. The most important factor for me was working with Angy, my sponsor.

Angy paved the way for me to become a contributing member of AA by expanding the terms used, explaining the steps and calling me out when I was off tract by saying “Tact Howie, tact!”. His definition of tact was learning how to tell a person to go to hell in such a way that they would enjoy the trip.

Best wishes as you walk purposefully in your journey through the steps.

Howard Black of the Way Out Group.