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A NEW LEAF

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The Alcohol Thing

by Rachel K.

I have decided to write in to tell about my experiences with "the alcohol thing" in hopes of helping others. I know I'm not unique, and if I've done this, someone else has too. My guess is it probably happens more than I can imagine. To understand my story, I live in Southern California, and the meetings I go to state: "We give chips at this time for abstinence from marijuana, alcohol, and all other mind altering chemicals." This is where my problem began.

I stopped smoking pot on January 15, 2002. I never really made a decision to stop drinking. I'm not an alcoholic. I've always been able to drink one margarita, one daiquiri, one beer, and not want a second one. I started taking chips and it felt really good. When I had about 75 days from pot, I had my first drink. I was out with friends celebrating an accomplishment in college. I had one drink and that was it. I knew that I shouldn't take my next chip, but then I thought about the struggle that not smoking pot had been for me. I deserved recognition and celebration. I took my 90-day chip. A few months later I was at a restaurant with my parents and ordered a margarita. I drank it, and a few months later collected a 6-month chip.

There were several more instances like this over the next two and a half years. I would be out with my family for dinner or on vacation and have a drink. I wasn't drinking to get drunk and I wasn't drinking to stuff my feelings. I was drinking because I didn't have a problem and I could take it or leave it. I never needed a drink, but occasionally I wanted one. I knew my relationship with pot wasn't normal, but I wanted to feel normal in other realms of my life. After I took my 18-month chip, I began feeling guilty about what I was doing. I knew it was lying. I knew it wasn't right. I wasn't being rigorously honest. But damn it, I earned that time from marijuana with blood, sweat, and tears. I had a sponsor and I had been working the steps. I was honest about everything else in my step work except the drinking. My sponsor considered herself an alcoholic and I never felt comfortable divulging my secret to her. I figured she wouldn't want to work with me anymore, and then where would I be? I knew she wouldn't understand. I decided to confide in a close friend in this program about what I had been doing. He told me that I should come clean, and that eventually my secret would "take me out." I kept my secret though. I wasn't willing to give up my time for something like this. If I were ever going to turn in my time, it would only be if I got stoned. In my own head, I was very adamant about that.

I completed working the steps for the first time in January 2004, when I had two years free of marijuana. From that time on, I didn't have any type of regular contact with my sponsor. So much time would elapse between phone calls that it felt incredibly uncomfortable to call her. Even before that I had only called her if the sh*t had hit the fan and I had no other options. My friends and my boyfriend became my sponsors. I went to them for all my problems and asked for their advice. It wasn't a good recipe for success.

Besides the one person in the program I had told, I kept the secret from everyone in fear of judgment and having to start my time over. It was about pride and ego. I thought that as long as I was the only one who knew, I would be forced to police myself. I couldn't let it get out of control. I could only have one and only every few months. I knew I had to be mindful of what I was doing. I surely didn't want to start abusing alcohol the same way I had abused pot. I was acutely aware of cross-addiction in other areas of my life (food, shopping, work) and didn't want to add another to the list. So far I had been successful. When I had 2 1/2 years from pot, I began feeling funky. I kept going to meetings. I was being of service at meeting and district level. I tried to use the spiritual tools the best I knew how but had forgotten some of them. My sponsor would call me and I wouldn't return her call for a week. She was always willing to help me. It wasn't about her; it was about me not wanting to face myself.

I kept watching as people took chips and cakes, and thought about what a fraud I was. These people were doing the real deal. I still wasn't willing to tell anyone what was going on. I started thinking about getting high more and more often. I just wanted to stop feeling uncomfortable.

When I had two years and 9 months from pot, the house of cards came falling down on me. I went to an MA event on Halloween night. It was a particularly rough night for me. My roommate (who is also in recovery) was gone for the weekend. I knew damn well I couldn't smoke pot, but I wanted to stop feeling. I left the party craving a drink. I called someone in program. He talked me past every convenience store on the way home. I told myself, "Not today, maybe tomorrow" and went to bed. That tool had worked so many times with pot.

The next morning I woke up with an incredible and overpowering urge to drink. I did not want to feel my pain anymore. I went to the store and got some alcohol. I knew exactly what I was doing. It was different and scary. I drank that day and the pain subsided for a while. All day I contemplated telling my roommate what I had done, and what part of it he should know. Should it be just today or the whole ugly truth? He came home and I confessed everything. He was stunned.

After that day everything changed in my life. I was still in so much pain. I wanted to drink again. I just wanted to be anywhere but here. I had suicidal thoughts. I started thinking about pot more and more. My options became clear. I could get high and come back, I could get high and never come back, or I could not get high, get honest, and start over. I didn't want my old way of life back, but I wasn't sure I was sold on recovery either. It can be painful. I started going to meetings every day, but was haunted by the obsession to use. I also wanted to drink. It was a new twist. I decided to take a newcomer chip at my home meeting on Wednesday. It wasn't a decision I arrived at easily. I was still self-righteous

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A NEW LEAF

The purpose of *A New Leaf* is to carry the message of recovery from marijuana addiction. It is through the written experiences of recovering addicts and their stories that we may find experience, strength and hope.

Articles submitted should reflect recovery, unity, and service.

The articles contained in *A New Leaf* are the sole opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Marijuana Anonymous as a whole.

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We send approximately 681 copies of *A New Leaf* each month to subscribers in 31 states



The Roving Reporter

The question for this month was "WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT AN MA CONVENTION?" Here is what a few had to say.

Jason L.: The loving and fun atmosphere. It's like getting baptized with healthy, caring energy. I come off the weekend high, naturally.

Colette R., Texas: Where else can you find 250+ ex-potheads in one place who are willing to talk about it?! Laugh about it?! Cry about it?!

Kevin E.: The people.

Jennifer L., Philadelphia: The feeling that I get when I see that all of these people are a lot like me! It's an indescribable feeling of warmth, validation, compassion and hope.

Anonymous: It reminds me of all the other MA members that are living pot free. The power of the numbers. I've never attended a meeting with 100+. The unauthorized hotel room after parties and remembering it the next day. Seeing old friends and meeting new ones.

Danny G., District 7: Meeting all the new people and sharing our deepest, darkest secrets with each other, and laughing about them.

Patricia, District 7: Seeing all the people around the country that I don't see very often.

Dave K., District 6: The culmination of marijuana addicts from all over coming together. The positive energy that is created when a larger group gets together that cannot be duplicated at a regular meeting.

Mariska, Medford, OR: Fellowship – I love the dance – catching up with people year after year – the fact that it's growing and we have new members every time I come – checking out the different cities.

Sheila B., Philadelphia: The love that is spread and shown all day and all weekend.

Matt H., Humboldt County: meeting the friends I haven't met yet and seeing the ones I've met before.



DISTRICT NEWS



Here are some upcoming campouts from various district to plan for. If you have an event in your district and would like it in the New Leaf, please contact us.

DISTRICT 5: Annual Idyllwild Campout--at Black Mountain Campground, Idyllwild, CA
June 10th-12th (FRI-SUN) www.madistrict5.org

DISTRICT 6: Annual Leo Carrillo Campout--at Leo Carrillo State Beach, Malibu, CA
August 5th-7th (FRI-SUN) www.madistrict6.org

DISTRICT 11: Cape Lookout State Park Campout near Tillamook, Oregon
August 19th-21st (FRI-SUN) Call Paul G. for info at (971) 544-0397
www.madistrict11.org

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and fighting it every step of the way. After all, I still had almost three years of abstinence from pot, my love and master. I felt like if I was going to be a newcomer, I should earn it. I told people that I was going to get high and come back in a few weeks. I don't know if I was trying to convince them or myself. I wanted to get loaded more than just about anything else. I came out at every meeting I went to. I was in so much fear of the judgment. I worried that people would think they could never, ever trust me again. I packed my fear up and took it with me. I came out at another meeting I attend regularly. I was met with love, compassion, and understanding from almost everyone. I was judged by a few. It caught me off guard. I had to face that as a consequence of my action. On Saturday I went to a morning meeting where there are a lot of old-timers in MA. I took a newcomer chip and told them I needed a new sponsor. I needed someone to save me from myself. A wonderfully wise woman who I already knew came up to me and said I could call her. I did, and she became my sponsor that day. I have called her almost every day since. I went to tons of meetings. I started going to therapy. I was still in a horrible state of limbo where I didn't want to be in program but I didn't want to smoke either. I kept talking to my sponsor about wanting to get high, and she told me to "Shit or get off the pot." I had to make a decision. The contemplation was killing me.

I eventually decided not to get high. I realized that no matter what I told anyone else about my day count, if I chose to get stoned I would always have to live with that fact. I decided to stay sober for myself. After all, I'm the only one who has to live with me for the rest of my life. I got busy on my step work and kept my service commitments to MA. I've had numerous people tell me how "courageous" I have been, but I still have trouble accepting that. I am still feeling a lot of guilt and shame over what I have done. My sponsor tells me she's proud of me all the time. I hope it will sink in. Until I divulged my secret, I was never truly free. Now I have the opportunity to start fresh with a new sponsor and a new program. I don't know what else will be revealed. That's my Higher Power's business. For now I'm trying to stay sober from everything one day at a time. I hope sharing this part of my story makes someone see they aren't alone. If I can help another addict, my struggle hasn't been in vain.

The Kitty Story

I have always struggled with the concept of powerlessness in recovery in my relationship to GOD and to life. First off I am not a cat person and now in the last three weeks we have two. I want to share the story of the kitten we got today as an example. We left church and my wife and I heard a kitten screaming. We saw some teenage boys torturing the three-week old kitten. My wife confronted the gang and it could have gotten ugly but she grabbed the kitten. I said we couldn't have any more animals; we have like 40 now. Well the kitten was starving and it held on to me all the way home. It was truly powerless. It couldn't save itself from the gang and it had no say in where we took it. Also in her powerlessness, she needed someone else to step into help. That's the definition of "powerless". If she could have saved herself, she would have. So God taught me two lessons today, maybe more. 1) If I am powerless, I need help. 2) I have to trust the helper (god) or another addict to help me and not make it worse. Powerlessness and helplessness, sometimes the same thing, and we need to turn to others if they offer to help. Now I have watched my wife feed this kitten with an eyedropper all day. She will continue all night on and off and she is sleeping in my lap, trusting me to provide warmth and shelter for her and to have her best interest at heart, so even I can learn, and sometimes, from the weirdest places.

By Dave K (DrummerDude)

Living in Peace by Anonymous

I used to smoke pot every day.

I'm not sure I was aware I wanted to live inside a feeling. Getting high was fun, it felt good, was something to do, and even helped me somehow. I was more relaxed and confident. I had feelings of inspiration and vision that seemed unique and special to me. I felt being high was an elevated state in which to live in order to cultivate these dreams. I told myself I was better than a lot of other people. I had all these rationalizations for how my choices were superior to others'. The company I kept was based on their drug of choice. My sense of self-worth and attractiveness was wrapped tightly into my small version of reality.

At the same time, I felt I couldn't laugh as much, enjoy as well or share as deeply without being high. Deep down inside I was not fun. I was morose, uninteresting, ugly and wrong. I believed being able to share lots of good pot was what helped me get over this and what distinguished me from others. I know I'm an addict and I will be one for the rest of my life, and perhaps I always was. I'm learning, over time, I lived unaware of the fact I lived my life in reaction to being hurt. Even the fun and joy in my life was anodized by fear of a feeling- the avoidance of or reaction to pain. All feelings, good and bad, would eventually overwhelm me.

Coming to grips with the fact feelings are finite has been one of the greatest challenges and blessings of my life, along with my sobriety. I could tell you all about who I think I am, the good and the bad, meaningful and mundane... but all I am is just a person.

I still feel I want to live inside some safe space where I'm perpetually happy and enlightened, loved unconditionally, entertained; a place where I'm thought to be special; where I contribute and effect great change for the better; where I am better. So I chase it as if it could be caught.

Sometimes that feeling is lent to me via my relationships with others or how I think I'm perceived. Sometimes I trick myself into a feeling and end up wallowing in self-loathing. Sometimes volunteerism and self-improvement, hard work and sincere practice let me feel I've earned the right to feel good about myself and to be glad to be alive.

And then, sometimes, I'm quiet and still, and a sense of wonder, awe and inexplicable gratitude is granted to me like some strange and wonderful gift. I do not wonder whether or not I deserve it because I have done good works or thought good thoughts or loved and been loved by someone today... It isn't a sensation I can keep, reproduce, or even understand or explain. When I experience something meaningful to me, in that moment, I know that nothing can take it from me or make it for me, this feeling of peace.

I do live in it. It lives in me.

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BIRTHDAYS

Are you celebrating a birthday in the next few months? Or have you celebrated one in the last 30 days and not seen it in A New Leaf? If you live in a District area of MA, let your Bureau Chief know about it. If not, tell us! For contact information, see the box on page 2.

District 5

Mike C.	3/25/93	12 years
Ernest F.	3/09/95	10 years
Diana	3/09/95	10 years
Robert M.(S.D.)	3/18/00	5 years
Russ T.	3/15/04	1 year!

District 2

Dave S.	2/01/00	5 years
Charles	2/09/96	9 years
Don	3/01/97	8 years
Tim	3/01/94	11 years
Dave W.	3/08/03	2 years
Ethan A.	3/28/01	4 years

District 11

Walt G.	2/13/01	4 years
Maria S.	3/15/97	8 years

District 3

Shawn O.	3/10/04	1 year!
Heather C.	3/23/03	2 years
Margee W.	3/07/03	2 years
John F.	3/12/00	5 years
Ken G.	3/18/96	9 years
Peter M.	3/24/92	13 years
Roger W.	3/09/92	13 years

District 7

Demetrius	2/01/03	2 years
Craig	2/08/91	14 years
Dan	1/01/91	14 years
Robert S.	1/20/04	1 year!
Debra Mauser	1/03/95	10 years
Mike LB	1/40/87	18 years

Davis, CA

Liam K.	3/07/03	2 years
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District 4

Rosie S.	2/08/02	3 years
Kurt B.	2/15/97	8 years
Erik J.	2/21/97	8 years
Dave L.	2/27/99	5 years
John S.	3/12/99	5 years
Thaddeus	3/14/04	1 year!
Krista D.	3/17/04	1 year!

District 6

Bernie D.	3/20/99	6 years
Chris E.	3/28/93	12 years
Dean H.	3/19/95	10 years
Keith G.	3/27/95	10 years

Austin, TX

Howard H.	3/18/04	1 year!
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St. Louis, MO

Dave S.	3/05/04	1 year!
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Celebrating 266 Years of Sobriety in This Issue!