

This member came into the program wondering could they really be honest, the answer was yes! Through being honest and working thorough program they came to experience the miracles of the program. Today life is so wonderful for them.

Page 58 of the Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* says, "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves."

I first heard this sentence over 20 years ago in another program. It struck terror in my heart. For most of the time since then I have been afraid I was one of "such unfortunates". Could I be honest? Could I give myself completely to this program? To this day I still fear being one of those people who can't.

I came to Debtors Anonymous in 2002. My partner and I had split up a year earlier. I had taken on \$10,000 of our credit card debt and had a school loan for \$23,000. In the year after the breakup I had racked up another \$11,000 in debt without her contribution to the mortgage and taxes. Two of my children still lived at home. My daughter was already paying rent and I couldn't downsize our living expenses any more than they were. I was desperate and tried taking a second job just to pay all the household expenses and the minimum amounts on all the debt. Things seemed to be going well and I got a real high when I deposited that second paycheck.

Then a notice in the mail informed me my ex-partner had declared bankruptcy. Since her name was on the title of the house we were financially intertwined. Everything she did impacted me and my family. I was lucky that a lawyer we had used when purchasing the house was available to guide me through the bankruptcy proceedings. He set up an agreement to buy her portion of the house, communicated with her lawyer and handled all the paperwork. His personal advice to me was to declare bankruptcy. The \$5,000 loan used to buy her out brought my debt to more than one and a half times

my annual income. He and all the financial sources I read stated that debt of even one time my annual income was insurmountable.

In looking back I see I was numb and unable to look at my behaviors and actions with honesty. But I did know one thing—if I declared bankruptcy, I would never be mentally free of the debt no matter what the court declared.

So I stopped using credit cards. Working the two jobs was helping me pay the minimums and even just paying that was bringing those minimums down monthly. I was so comforted knowing this that I could happily keep working seven days a week while cooking and cleaning house.

The trouble came slowly. I began crying easily and got angry at work. Every little thing was irritating. Then I hit the biggest depression of my life. Chronic low-level depression was normal, but this was enormous and brought me down. I could not work both jobs. Then I couldn't even work the one. Luckily my primary employer provided six weeks of 100 percent pay for short-term disability. But no one would take the insurance my company offered. I couldn't pay cash for treatment, either. My sheer stubbornness made me reject taking on more debt. My daily task was to contact doctor after doctor to find one that would take both me and my insurance. After calling every doctor in my county I began calling those in neighboring counties.

I was desperate and alone. But I had seen a little ad in a local weekly newspaper about D.A. I knew a Twelve-Step program was free and that I would be likely to find the best kind of people there. I went and sat in a tiny chair in a tiny room used as a nursery on Sundays. And, like so many of us, I sobbed through that whole meeting. I can't remember much more. I can't even remember the next meetings. I did know that in the darkness of my heart those meetings were the first pinprick of light. It was such a tiny thing that I would have missed it if I had not hit such a deep bottom.

My calls for treatment continued but that week I decided to start over by calling the first clinic I had called four weeks before. The woman who answered was horrified that I had been turned away. It had been a mistake. They should have made an appointment during the first call. My treatment

began immediately and I recovered quickly. However I did learn that I had a lifelong condition which would need continual treatment.

That was nine years ago. I honor that time in my life. We learn in the program that the times we thought were so unbearable frequently turn out to be the best thing that could happen. That month was one of those times. Though there are still many aspects of the program that are difficult for me to complete, I am here and recovering. Recently I was asked to speak and, in preparing, realized how far I have come and how central D.A. has been not only to my solvency but to my continued mental health.

Our town usually has only one local meeting. Others are several hours away. I attend that meeting religiously. Since it is a small meeting I am always able to do service. I do not incur more debt. In order to stay out of debt I continue working at the same job I have had for five years now. To leave I need a plan that includes enough income or savings to ensure continued solvency.

In other words, for the first time in my life I have had to be consistent. Each day of each week I know where I have to be. The people at work and in the group have been consistent as well. While that consistency may be boring to some it has lead me to a more honest view of myself. I am finally more aware of my true defects and strengths. I am finally able to continue work and group relationships when personalities clash. In order to discover and honor the principles we so highly value I have had to learn to cooperate and collaborate with group members. It is always hard but it is less difficult than it once was.

Because my personal D.A. recovery helped me to live consistently, my doctor and I began seeing patterns in the happy, irritable, angry, and depressed times. The diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder was finally confirmed and I began a new, more successful treatment plan.

Through this whole experience I have finally come to believe another sentence in that same paragraph of the Big Book. "There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do

recover if they have the capacity to be honest.” That sentence has given me hope and has opened me up to see my struggles in a completely new way. I have learned to be honest enough to know I belong in D.A. and always will. Life may never be easy but it will be easier if I stay. My reality still includes all the same people, situations, problems, and emotions. It is the change in my perceptions since joining D.A. that has changed my life. Of course you probably know my favorite promise. “Where once we felt despair, we will experience a newfound hope.” Yes, indeed!

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