

Hi, I am an alcoholic.

I've been a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous for a few years now.

I guess you might wonder what it really means to be an alcoholic?

Basically it means that I couldn't control how much I drank once I started drinking. Sometimes I would want to get really drunk and escape all my thoughts and worries but sometimes I wanted to only have a few drinks and be social and enjoy a good night out without going overboard. At these times, even though I started drinking with the idea that I would just have a few, once I started drinking I lost all control and found I could not stop – I always seemed to be wildly drunk – I mostly drank until I passed out – sometimes I blacked out; this is when the next day I could not remember what I got up to the night before. When I did remember, I would often cringe at the things I could recall.

When my life became out of control; I was having trouble in my relationships and I lost my job and felt really depressed, I could kind of see that drinking played a part in that and so I tried to cut down. I would get really irritable and I found that all I could think about was having a drink. I never really thought of all the problems drinking had caused me at these times, I only thought of the relief I could get in that next drink. The next thing I knew, my life was getting worse, I couldn't figure out what to do to make things right again and alcohol was a big part of it all.

I finally decided that I would have to stop drinking; I was going to quit for good and somehow get my life together. Despite making this decision, I found myself getting drunk again. This, I was to learn in AA, is a feature of alcoholism – I just could not stop and stay stopped no matter how much I wanted to – that might sound insane – and that's how I felt too!

What I heard in AA about being an alcoholic really helped me to understand why I couldn't control my drinking and why my life was so messed up. I learned that alcoholism is an illness and that all my wishing for things to be better than they were, and all my wanting to quit, and believing that I really needed to stop, was not going to help me stop. Worse still, was that all the information in the world about alcoholism was not going to keep me sober. I was told, and it is now my experience, that I could either continue to block out the problems in my life as best I can – with either alcohol or other drugs – or I could accept the help that is on offer in the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous - only then would I know real freedom. It was a huge step to take because it meant being open to new ideas and accepting that I didn't have the answers. I really had to listen to how other people were living sober and accept the help on offer.

Fortunately, the members in AA are always willing to help each other on their path to freedom from alcohol. Today, all these years later I don't think of taking a drink when life gets tough or when I'm in a social situation or any time at all. I keep going to meetings now to be there for the person nervously walking in the door for their first time and to share with them that there is hope if they too are willing to give this way of life an honest go. I also continue to attend meetings to keep my thinking in check and to join in fellowship with others who are living in sobriety.

Meetings are not all about our problems; they are about our common solution for living sober. AA members are a friendly bunch and most meetings contain a great deal of laughter – we don't get sober to be miserable; we absolutely insist on enjoying life and sharing that with others.