

Going Insane

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This fun-loving newcomer thought AA meant the good times were over. Boy, did she get a big surprise I have been nicknamed “trouble” since I was 8 years old, but I never understood why. What looked like trouble to outsiders was simply my absolute insistence on having a good time. I just wanted to play, go on adventures and connect with others.

Fitting in was a top priority in my adolescence, and drinking became a part of that. Unfortunately, as my social lubricant began taking over my every thought and desire, it became a wedge in my relationships with others, my sense of self, and let’s be honest, any trace of rational thinking.

I once harbored resentment toward a friend for severing our friendship for no apparent reason, until a year later I learned that I had screamed obscenities at them during a blackout. Another time a potential friend approached me during the first week of college, curious about smoking pot. I responded with, “It’s great. You should try it sometime,” and then I proceeded to smoke my joint alone. I wasn’t about to share!

My obsession with alcohol stunted the growth of any potential social skills, taking me to the edge of isolation, leaving me feeling alone and misunderstood.

At a mere 20 years old I found myself in AA. Entering felt like walking through the Milky Way, seeing glistening eyes and wide smiles at every glance. This biker chick chairperson opened the meeting, stating that we should silence any cell phones and beepers, adding, “And if you still have a beeper in 2010, please see me after the meeting.”

Later that week at another AA meeting, an older man with long, silver hair tied with a pink scrunchie remembered my name. When the people there told their stories, cussed and talked about God, I knew that this cigarette smoke-clouded room full of misfits like me was home. I know some believe that profanity is not a sign of spiritual growth, but to me it was part of my identification and relation process. I wanted what these people had—a spiritual awakening as the result of working the Twelve Steps, listed on the smoke-stained, yellowed poster on the wall. (Legend had it the poster had once been white many years ago.)

So I kept coming back. I got a sponsor and met weekly to work the Steps. I started integrating with the old timers, picking their brains, asking about the God of their understanding and about prayer. They tolerated my youthful playfulness before and after the meeting and taught me to settle down, pay attention, stay seated and turn my phone off during the meeting.

I had my first spiritual experience at 10 months sober when I thought I was going clinically insane. I called up a hospital asking for a brain scan. All this chaos in me and still I didn’t want to drink. I guess, as it turns out, I was just going sane. The AAs laughed with me when I told them what I had done.

One meeting at a time, multiple times a day, I became an active member of the Fellowship. They never kicked me out, even when I brought the stray dog I had found into the meetings with me or when I made up fake service positions to post on the chalkboard, like “the debating society” and “untrusted servants.”

I learned that I could be a kind, helpful person and still find opportunities to have fun and make a little trouble. The members of that group carried me through times of sorrow and times of celebration until we all knew I was ready to spread my wings and set out to accomplish other dreams. As I’ve grown up in AA, I’ve learned that the more I align myself with my Higher Power and my truest self and the more I focus on being helpful to others, the more I’m free to enjoy this life.

At age 33, and with 13 sober years, I try to remain a beginner in AA (why would I want to be near the end?). I’m active in my current home group, I sponsor others and I’m active in service inside and outside of AA. I have a host of friends, including that biker chick woman who chaired my first meeting. Today I find my Higher Power’s love in connection with others.

The God of my understanding has opened my world so much. I’m writing this story from a hammock in a small town in Nicaragua where I can see the *rea*/Milky Way! I trust that if I continue to allow God to discipline me, and the more I rely on the spirit of the universe, the more independent I actually become—to run, play, and live by one rule only, No. 62—don’t take myself too damn seriously.