

Son Of Tall Man

*An American Indian shares his strength, hope, and experience**

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I am proud to be the son of Tall Man, an American Indian, and a member of AA for many moons. We all one as Great Spirit walks through AA like sun walks through day. This first story I ever write. Sorry for the mistakes. Love has no words to spell or lines to start and stop. Our language has few words to say many things.

I was born a Maliseet Indian on a reservation in Canada, the oldest of thirteen children. Was alter boy at church reservation. Had first drink in young teens, but was scared of my father, so didn't drink much then. Now think I was an alcoholic from the first drink. Never forgot magic in firewater.

When I was twenty-one, my cousin comes home from the U.S. Army on leave, just before Pearl Harbor. I stay with him at my aunt's house in Maine. That night, we drink beer at taverns. He had a bottle of the hard stuff. He gave me many drinks from a bottle. The next thing I know, it was the day. The first time I have a blackout, but not last. My aunt had sharp words for me about drinking. I not listen to old women.

I hear about Pearl Harbor and join the Canadian Army, December 13, 1941. Could not run away from the problem. Soon found wet canteens serve drinks to Indians in uniform. Went overseas on beer. Soon change to the hard stuff. Then many blackouts for the next two years. God must watch over me. Got into no trouble. Came home just before D Day. Met father (Tall Man) at a fork in the road — one way to reservation, another way to the State of Maine. We went to a booze joint in Maine. Remember only the first two drinks. Then I black out and get home four days later. Now I slide down the mountain fast. Take many pledges but break them.

I get arrested on VE Day, again on VJ Day. Judge says I go to jail next time. So I change counties in Maine. When counties run out, I move to Connecticut. Climb on the water wagon for a few months. Build houses for some cops — ha-ha. Soon I drink beer. Then hard stuff. Then I find jails in Connecticut, too. Cops say for me to call them, they get me out. I think the sorry they tell me this. Next two years, I call them many times. Last time in jail, I have two black eyes. Cops now sick of me, so they buy me a one-way ticket to Canada. Pack my clothes and put me on the train.

My brother and I find work on the turnpike in Maine. I stay on the wagon for awhile, but miserable. Then drink again, but more miserable. I want to stop this bad life, but where to turn? The last time I drink, I go to the room. Think about kill me. Then went on the bridge to jump. By the grace of God I stop, think two things: This would kill good father and mother; then remember boys talk about Indian fellow who been sober three years. I hear about AA, but think it religion. I have a religion. But now I change if it brings good life.

I find an Indian fellow. We talk for a long time. Tell him I want to get away from bottle and misery. How he does it? He says he takes me to an AA meeting. I go with him to the first meeting, in a small town in Maine. My sponsor says men who talk speak the truth. Then I know we walk the same trail. This was July 15, 1954. Have not to take a drink since.

I hear men say, "One day not drink. Try no drinks for Lent or for life. Just one day." This sounds easy so will try. They say call friends before I buy a drink. Tank and meetings make me feel good. So I jump quickly from the First Step to Twelfth Step to help my brother, living with me. Two weeks later, he comes to an AA meeting. Came to believe. Have not to drink since. We are both happy. After six months, we move to Bridgeport Conn. Find the same AA, same Spirit. A year later, I go to Canada to carry a message to Tall Man, but he not listen to my son. He old, sick, wants to be alone with a bottle.

Miracles happen all-time in AA. Two years later, brother takes Tall Man to the first AA meeting, September 1957. Tall Man was blind, but soon he sees. He stays sober. Start a group on the reservation, and carry the message, help start other groups all over Maritimes and New England. He was old, but now he grows young with new life in AA and travels all time. When he speaks from heart, big men cry. Words of truth and love are strong medicine. Tall Man dies in September 1970, a sober, peaceful, happy man. Maine newsletter (Boomerang) says: "With tireless devotion and humility, this venerable Indian gentleman traveled thousands of miles humbly pleading for sobriety. He planted many seeds, and it will be many moons before another rises to walk in his shoes." Tall Man now sees the Great Spirit in Big Group in the sky. *

To find work, I have to travel much. At every place, I find the AA group first. I keep it simple, go to many meetings, carry messages to those who listen. To me, the program is spiritual. I feel the Great Spirit at all meetings and when talking to AA friends. I know peace. "How?" they ask me.

I say, "Just let it happen." This sober Indian says to the sick, red-eyed alcoholic who wants good medicine: "Put cook in the bottle. No drunk hopeless if he wants to follow a sober guide along the right trail. Go to AA meetings. Listen, not just hear the noise. Call friends in AA when bad thoughts come. Let the group spirit of love and understanding protect you. Take my hand. Walk with me up Twelve Steps of AA to peace."

To Indians, I say: "Don't be afraid to join AA. I once heard people say only Indians crazy when drunk. If so, AA full of Indians. Join the tribe!"

Maynard B, Fairfield, Conn.

* the story of Tall Man was told in the November 1962 Grapevine.

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