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# Fred's story

My name is Fred—I'm an alcoholic.

I joined the Army in 1965, enrolling in my home city of Liverpool. I wanted to serve in the same corps as my elder brother so joined the Royal Corps of Transport. After my recruitment and trade training as a driver, I joined my first unit in northern Germany. After being welcomed by all the 'old sweats' of my squadron, we repaired to the NAAFI beer bar and partied. This was my introduction to heavy drinking. We seemed to work very hard and drink very hard. This was to lead to a lot of time in our unit guardroom cells for things like being drunk and disorderly, being drunk and fighting, etc. I was to end up with a bad-conduct sheet as long as your arm, but because I was a hard worker I seemed to lead a charmed life. There was always one more chance. I was to discover drink driving—not something I am proud of, and not something that was ever found out. There were many, many escapades, a lot of them stupid. Heavy drinking continued in every unit I served with. I know today in hindsight that it did hold back my career; at my six-year service point, other soldiers that I had been in training with were senior NCOs. I was to marry, and for a short time I became a little more responsible, but after a short time my drinking resumed. We had two children, and the same happened—a little more responsible for a while, and then back to heavy drinking. We always scraped by financially, and my drinking started to happen in bouts; each time it happened, I took one drink at the start of the bout, and then could not stop. Unhappy soldiers who read this will understand! I shirked my family duty, but was as good a father as I could be (in sobriety my son says I did alright). I drank all over the world; at one time I served with combined operations on board HMS Intrepid; we were only allowed two cans of beer each night, if not on duty, but I always found more. I broke the Navy's rules and served 28 days of detention in their detention centre in Portsmouth. This was all to do with drink. I finished my service in the rank of sergeant major, and in hindsight as an alcoholic. My family never knew who I was going to be when I arrived home after a drinking session—mad, sad, or glad. I could not control my temper at times, and they lived in fear. After my Army service of twenty-three years, I hated being a civilian and joined the Ministry of Defence guard service. Shortly after this my wife kicked me out of our failed marriage, and we divorced (with extreme acrimony on my side). I found myself in a one-bedroom flat and tried to drink myself to death. Still in uniform, well turned out, upright, shiny shoes, etc.—so how could I have a drink problem? After two more years of this, and two attempts at suicide, in the middle of a drink and very, very drunk I rang AA. The rest is history. The first part of this story only scratches the surface of my drinking life—yet my sobriety has been much more noteworthy.

The last twenty-two years of my life have been different—sometimes hard—but I have always remained sober. Now my chaotic service drinking is my greatest asset in my work in AA as an armed service liaison officer, initially at local, and then at regional level. In this role I have the opportunity to carry the message of AA to service personnel and veterans. When I finally started to take note of our 'twelve-step programme' and the bridge to normal living it provides, my life took on a new meaning. I have learned how to be a proper father, a proper husband, how to take responsibility, and how to come up to the mark every morning. I have matured, and I finally know what I am on this planet for; I know who and what I am, and more importantly who you are. AA gave me the tools to make amends to those I had hurt. It gave me back the love of my children. I was able to make amends to my ex-wife before she died of cancer. All the promises contained in our basic text, Alcoholics Anonymous, have come true for me. I have great times sober, e.g. being invited to share the lives of my two grandsons, being asked to give my elder stepdaughter away at her wedding, going on holiday with my second wife (whom I met at my first AA meeting), being back in touch with my family—the list is endless. This all started when, at the start of my recovery, an 'an old timer', now nearly fifty years sober, said to me 'son, there are two things to remember: yes, there is a God, and no, you're not it!'[[1]](#endnote-1) I get so much out of the 'college of knowledge' of AA, and because I am still willing to learn and still willing to take action, the story goes on and on.

1. Editor: AA does not require any religious or spiritual belief. The suggested (but not mandatory) twelve-step programme includes reference to a higher power, as we understand that higher power. To some, that is God; to others, that is the AA group. This matter is left to the individual to resolve—or leave unresolved. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)