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# Brian's story

My name is Brian—I'm an alcoholic.

In 1967, at the age of 17, I joined the Army. As both my parents were dead, the Army became my 'surrogate family'. After basic training I was sent abroad to Germany. It was there that I came to realise that drinking in the Army was a way of life. You are fed, clothed, and given accommodation and money to spend, and most of my money was spent on drink. I was drinking almost every night, but weekends were the real drinking times. Being drunk for much of the time was 'just a laugh' (or so I thought). At this time I was starting to get into trouble through drink. I would end up in the middle of a field, or would occasionally be locked up for the night in the guardhouse for some drunken escapade. As time passed, my drinking started to even out, and I managed for the most part to stay out of trouble, but only for a while.

I was eventually promoted and given stripes, although never a week went by when I was not drunk. As my alcoholism progressed I started to get into more serious trouble. I was arrested by the German police for drunk-driving, and this culminated in my admission to a detox unit. After treatment, I went through a dry period, and the Army shipped me back to England for two years. During this time, I decided to start a fitness regime and somehow managed some 'controlled drinking'.

I arrived back in Germany, and for a few years I continued to manage this 'controlled drinking'. I saved up all my 'sweeties' for the weekend. I was then promoted and given a normal posting back to England. At this time, the progression of my alcoholism was affecting me more and more. After a drunken argument I clocked an officer and was in trouble again. It was 1986, I knew I had a serious drink problem, and it was then that I first made contact with Alcoholics Anonymous.

I went to a few AA meetings and managed to stay dry for six weeks. Fear was what stopped me from drinking. I was still blaming people, places, and things, however—and inevitably lifted the first drink. Providence again seemed to be on my side, and I was given a posting back home to Scotland before retiring from the Army. I finished my last three years without any more serious trouble.

When I left the Army, it was with a great sense of relief. It was 1991, and my alcoholism began to accelerate. For the next three years I went through a cycle of binge drinking, emerging from each bout demoralised and full of fear. During this time I tried to get back to AA and managed some dry periods, but all I was doing was 'getting fit to drink again'. On 11 November 1994, I asked for help, and finally took the first step—admitting I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable.

I knew I had to build up a mental defence against the first drink by using the twelve-step recovery programme. Being atheist at this time, the mention of God always put me off. The third step in particular seemed to be a major hurdle. It was explained to me, however, that I was only being asked to 'make a decision' to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him[[1]](#endnote-1). The actual turning over would take place as I worked the following eight steps.

I began to understand that the alcohol was merely a symptom of deeper emotional problems. I then sat down and took a moral inventory of myself, writing down all my fears and resentments. After some serious thinking, I took my inventory to a priest in the fellowship and unloaded all the emotional garbage I had been carrying around all my adult life. I told him things I thought I would take to my grave. What I had done was build myself a 'platform' which would then allow me to move onto a new and sober life.

I continued on the recovery programme and made a list of all the people I had harmed. I made amends as best I could. By this time I was starting to become 'God-conscious', and I was also reading a lot of AA books. It was after I read Chapter 16 of one such book, *Pass It On*,that I was guided to a church in Glasgow, where I went through a 'Spiritual Experience'. After that night the whole twelve-step recovery programme fell into place.

At the beginning, when I was an atheist, I was told that if I thoroughly applied myself to the twelve steps as they are laid down in our literature, it would be impossible not to come to believe in a God of my own understanding. Today the first nine steps have been put into the dustbin of the past (I would have to go back to them only if I got drunk), and I use the last three steps as my 'daily maintenance steps'.

I met my wife, Mary, in AA, and we have both settled down to a happy and sober life—all thanks to AA and the grace of God as I understand Him.

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)