

Self-Acceptance

Antonio: I didn't like me from the beginning. I was raised in Chicago in the projects, ghetto, it was a tough place, and I was drinking when I was 15 to 16. When I was young, drinking was the thing that everybody did.

My name is Antonio. Everybody calls me TJ. I served in the United States Army from 1974 to 1981. I was a Field Artillery Surveyor. I served in E7 slot. Being a soldier, that's really stressful. You have missions that you have to accomplish and one of the things that we did at the end of the day was drink, and then when we were out doing things, we would sneak and carry booze with us so that we'd have our little friend with us all the time.

I had no idea that I was an alcoholic. I didn't even know what alcoholic was. I drank a lot, as a matter of fact, people used to call me a good drinker, cause I could drink and drink and still do my job. And when I got out the service, life didn't connect for me, and everything I did afterwards I would drink. I couldn't keep a job, I couldn't pay bills, I couldn't pay rent. I was homeless most of the time, I was just sort of existing. After a few years, I started to get sick, found out I was a diabetic. I told myself that I didn't want to stop drinking, so why should I? I made excuses to drink.

One day, I called the police. I was hallucinating, I hadn't taken my diabetic medicine for a long time and I told them that people were coming after me, and the police showed up and one of the officers said, I'm gonna do you a favor, I'm gonna arrest you so you could feel safe in a cell. And he took me to jail, but they didn't want to keep me because I hadn't done anything wrong, so when I got out, they put me in a group and we started to talk about what I needed and they asked me if I would go back to AA.

When I went to AA this time, the fellowship started to help me. I was very angry, I fought everybody, I yelled at everybody, but I kept going to the meetings and eventually they started to help me in spite of myself. There was a garage that I moved into, but I couldn't pay the rent and so I just got up one day in the meeting and shared that they're gonna put me out. Guy came up to me and says, "What do you need?" I said, I need \$1600 to pay my rent. And he took me out to the car and wrote a check for \$1600, and I couldn't believe it. And I said, What do you want me to do? He said, "You'll pay somebody back one day. You'll do it to somebody else. Believe me." And then I start learning, I start connecting some of the things that happened to me and I finally became a person who could stand up and say "I'm an alcoholic." Yeah, and it wasn't such a bad thing.

As I went to the meetings, I started to realize that this was a disease that affected a lot of people, especially up at the meetings up at the VA, I could see me in them, and the more I looked at them, the more I wanted to be better so that I could help them. And I'm starting to like the reputation that I have among people. People call me and ask me for advice. I like where I'm heading because I feel purposeful.



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