

One Member's Story

I had no memory of how I ended up all bloodied, scared and sore in a police cell; only a faint recollection of being trundled in the back of a van. Many hours later, when I was deemed sober enough to interview, I was shown a photograph of a facial wound which I had inflicted in a bar with a wine glass; I was shocked and horrified that I had hurt someone. I was charged with Section 18, wounding with intent before I was allowed to go home. How had this happened? I was a 40 year old mother who had no previous conviction, who had never been in trouble with the police and who was working and studying during her final year of a degree. I rarely went out apart from to restaurants or to the cinema with my daughter; I preferred to stay at home in the evening with a bottle of wine or two (or three?). Like everyone else I knew, I needed a bit of help to wind down in the evening, to take the 'edge' off.

After this weekend my 'edge' suddenly took on a new dimension; I knew that something was seriously wrong and I was worried. The alcohol liaison officer at the station had questioned me about my drinking and advised me to see my GP. It was clear that there was a cause and effect link between my drinking and what had happened; I suddenly became more fearful of drinking than not drinking. I was a nervous wreck and I couldn't stop shaking; two days later I went for an assessment at a private psychiatric hospital where thankfully I was able to join a residential four week addiction programme. I went to my first AA meeting on a minibus during the first week; I managed to sit through the first half with my head numbed full of medication, my eyes smarting and my heart ready to burst. During the coffee break I couldn't go back; did these people not understand that I couldn't cope with listening to their emotional shares. To be honest I felt that if I looked at myself as clear as these people seemed to do, I would surely break in pieces.

I was soon able to admit with the help of AA and the hospital that my life had become unmanageable because of my drinking and that I was an alcoholic. It became clear that other behaviour habits such as not opening my mail, not answering the phone and general paranoia about others could be caused by my drinking. I found a sponsor, attended AA and worked hard for my sobriety until I was sentenced eight months later for the reduced offence of wounding without intent. My probation officer wrote a letter of support to the judge in my case and I was given 12 months in custody. Before prison I had got up to Step 4 and my higher power was in the form of AA friends and my sponsor. When this higher power was removed from me in prison, I found it difficult to cope with being separated from my daughter and the environment. One night in desperation I begged God to show himself to me as a higher power; I said the serenity prayer over and over again until I eventually fell asleep. The next morning I woke up with a calmness and acceptance of my situation and from then on, I started to use aspects of the programme on a day to day basis. I tried to help others, used prayer and meditation, kept things simple and attended the once a week prison AA meeting.

After 3 months, under the recommendation of my probation officer and prison probation staff, I was released on tag. I believe that probation, and the governor who supported my early release, understood that I had done everything I could to make an indirect amend to the victim of my crime by dealing with my drinking problem. As part of my release condition, it was agreed that I could have my tag curfew time extended so that I could attend my AA home group. I celebrated my release with family, shower gel and a chicken roast dinner – and an AA meeting! On home detention, during my weekly visits to probation, I shared my continuing step work with my officer, who became familiar herself with the programme. Two years on, I continue to work the programme daily, some days better than others; I am grateful for the gift of humility which the AA programme gave me.