

One Hispanic Woman's Journey in AA

Good morning sisters and brothers in AA I'm Virginia and I'm an alcoholic, one more grateful member of the AA Fellowship. My sobriety date is April 13, 1981. My home group is Grupo 12 of Pasco. We meet at 1416 W. Clark in Pasco and our meeting days are Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 7pm 8:30pm, and Sundays 10am to 11:30am.

I thank my higher power who for me is God because it is thanks to Him and this program, I am sober. Thank you for allowing me to share with you a little of my journey in AA. I came to the program at the age of 29 after destroying my first marriage. I started drinking at about 19 years old. I immediately loved the effect of alcohol; I never liked the taste but the effect yes. I was able to more easily talk, and thought I danced better. Everything was easier. Alcohol removed all my inhibitions. Initially I drank a little and in a short time I drank a lot, almost daily I suffered terribly from physical and moral hangovers. I was hospitalized and had many blackouts. In 10 years, I destroyed my husband's dreams, my dreams as well as my parent's dreams. They thought that now that their eldest daughter was married all would be well. They could not imagine the problems that were coming. My 2 children were little at the time and they did not have the opportunity to live their childhood. Instead of eating, playing and feeling secure with their mom, their lives consisted of being scared, not knowing what would happen next, making sure I did not get drunk, that I did not leave, that I did not fight with their father and many other things that they later told me. Some I remember, others I do not. My husband asked me many times to change, that if I did not, he was going to leave me. Eventually he did. When I was served the divorce papers, I could not believe it. I did not go to court because I thought the whole truth about me would come out there. The court gave him everything, the house, cars, our children, and I was going to have to pay child support. He returned our sons to me saying he could not care for them. He allowed us to live in the house, then he decided to rent it. I had to find a place to go and decided to move from Seattle back to Sunnyside where I am from, and where my parents lived and ask them if we could live with them. They accepted me with my children without scolding or conditions, as they had also told me many times to change. Living with their grandparents was the first time my children had security and stability in a long time. They did not have their father, their friends, nor their school. They suffered very much at first and eventually they adjusted to their new place.

I found a job and after a few months a couple came to work there, they were Dave and Sheila, they were in recovery, and they were members of AA. They began talking to me and I felt uncomfortable. He would ask me questions about my life and in one of those moments I began to cry. I felt bad, like a failure, but I would not share that with anyone. He asked me if at some time I had done something good for myself. That hurt worse. They knew more about my problem than I did. We talked a little more and then they asked me if I would like help, my heart softened, and I said yes. They set up 30 days of inpatient treatment for me. AA brought meetings to that center and those members gave me my first big book and 12 steps and 12 traditions book. When out of treatment Dave and Sheila would take me to English AA meetings, I was born in an English-speaking AA group. There were no Spanish speaking AA meetings in this area at the time. No one looked at my color or my race, just one alcoholic talking to another. I began to listen to their experiences; I remember Sheila telling me to listen and look for the similarities not the differences. Even though their sharing about their past lives seemed unbelievable to me because they looked fine. What was also true is that as I listened, I began to identify with them in their past. What I saw in them was love in their eyes, calm, peace and tranquility and I wanted what they had.

It seemed rare that those people took an interest in me, today I understand that all they wanted for me was my recovery. I remember on Sundays we would go to a breakfast meeting at the Tillicum restaurant, and they always told me to order what I wanted, and I never paid. After a time, I knew that someone paid for me. They were always thinking of my wellbeing. They did not want any obstacle or barriers to my recovery. Dave and Sheila were my sponsors and

walked me through the steps of this program for 5 years. For the first time I allowed myself to be guided. I began to have faith and hope that my life could change. At first it was not easy not to drink but I did it one day at a time. I changed old routines for new ones, going to AA meetings, new friends, no hangovers or remorse for inappropriate actions. I faced my reality, I am an alcoholic, Alcoholism is a disease and I have it. It is not a moral question It is a health problem not a shame problem. The AA program is a recovery program. I continued to stay sober and began to work the 12 steps of recovery that are a way of life for me, I am not perfect but a little better. AA has given me my life back. I have recovered my respect and the trust of others, my dignity, the confidence of my sons and I Took my role back as their mother. I remarried and together with the help of God we raised our sons. My husband died in 2003, it was very painful, but you helped me through the pain. I applied what I have learned here, and acceptance is the answer, I am grateful to My Higher Power for everything, and I continue ahead. My sons know I am in AA, they love it and are grateful to all of you. In my home group, we have had experiences of living What Bill W's writing "AA Communication can Cross all Barriers" says, but there is one that stands out. We welcomed and he became a member of our group an English-speaking man. He was with us for a year, then he moved out of state. The group gave him his AA literature in English, he shared his experience and read the 12 traditions in English and I interpreted into Spanish. As time went on, he even began to show up wearing tee shirts with a photo of Pancho Villa. He learned to say 'Felices 24 Horas' in Spanish as we do at the end of a meeting. When he left, we missed him.

Now there are many Hispanic AA groups, and my home group Grupo 12 is one of them. I love my home group and I love AA. I have had the opportunity to do the many service positions in my group and then in our District and now as DCM for District 24 (one of the 4 linguistic Districts in Area 92) I am grateful for the opportunity to give back a small amount of what I have received from AA. In AA I have learned from you that when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, be it meeting one to one, be it Group, District, Area, whatever type of meeting, "AA Communication can Cross all Barriers" and that in the end the only objective is to Pass on the Message of AA to the still suffering alcoholic and for this I Am Responsible.

Thank you very much for allowing me to share, Happy 24 hours.
Virginia Rickertsen