

DISTRICT 22, AREA 93  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

INTERVIEW  
WITH

BARBARA W  
&  
JANE P

JUNE 30, 2009

District 22, Area 93  
Interview  
Barbara W & Jane P  
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Jim: Hello, I am Jim L, and I am an alcoholic. The interview I am about to record is intended for internal use only by Alcoholics Anonymous and its members. As such I will be including last names and other identifiers. However, if any portion of this interview is used by the media—press, radio, films, television, internet—or in any public presentation, then our tradition of anonymity must be respected and identifiers, other than the first name and the initial of the last name must be omitted.

Today is June 30, 2009, and I'm sitting in the living room/dining room of Barbara W and Jane P. Also present is Paul L. We're going to learn something about Jane and Barbara. Why don't we start off with the youngest in sobriety—the youngest in sobriety, who is Barbara?

Could you tell us, Barbara, how you got into AA?

Barbara: All right. My name is Barbara W., and I am an alcoholic addict. When I reached my bottom, I nearly was dead physically from alcohol. And what I did was I went to a state convention of NOW, and I saw on the program they had a workshop on alcoholism. And I thought I could go there and learn how to drink. So, I signed up and I went to this meeting. It was a huge conference table and all these women sitting around it. And they started introducing themselves and every one of them at the table, except me, were managers of recovery programs all over the state, or directors, executive directors. Anyway, when it got to me, I was really embarrassed. I told them I had come there to learn how to control my drinking.

They didn't laugh or anything. I was accepted, and they let me stay for the meeting. I got a card from the woman who was director of the Alcoholism Center for Women in Los Angeles on Alvarado.

And it was primarily for lesbians, and that was where I got my start in Alcoholics Anonymous. I went to counseling and told her I wanted to learn how to control my drinking. So, she said, "Well, if you don't think you're an alcoholic, let's try it. See if you can control it for a week and come back and tell me what happened." And she said, "How much are you drinking now?" And I said, "I'm drinking about 3/4 of a liter of wine, and I go into a blackout usually." She said, "Well, just drink about a 1/2 a liter every night."

And so, I thought, well this is a sinch! Just drink a half-liter. And then she said, "And oh, by the way, you can't not drink. You have to drink every night."

And so, I thought, well I can do that. And so, I went home, and I did it! Successfully. For three days. And then something happened at work. You know how it is. All those people on the outside. And so, I went back, and I told her this elaborate story about what happened at work that made me drink, and she was very patient. She had a smile on her face, but she let me say it all. And then she said, "Well, what do you want to do?" And I

said, "I want to try it again", because I know at this point that thing hadn't happened, I could have stopped drinking. And so, we did that.

The next week I made it for...actually, I made it for 4 days, and then something happened at work again! So, I went back to her, and I said...she said, "Well, how did it this week?" I said, "I made it for 4 days." She said, "Well?" I said, "I guess I'm an alcoholic."

And I about chocked on the work "alcoholic". I did not want to be an alcoholic. I always envisioned an alcoholic as someone who was on Skid Row. I still had a job. I still had a few dollars in the bank, and I couldn't be an alcoholic, you know. But I accepted the fact that I must be because she said that if I couldn't control my drinking that was one of the signs of alcoholism.

So, I started going to meetings right away. She directed me to AA, and she directed me to the AT Center in LA, so I went to gay meetings. And I had homophobia at that time.

Jim: Explain what AT Center is.

Barbara: Oh, All Together\*, it's a gay and lesbian center, like the Alano Club for straight people. It was primarily gays. Everyone was welcome, but it was primarily for gay people. And since I had homophobia...it was upstairs in Hollywood, and I went halfway up the stairs my first meeting and I couldn't do it, and I went back down. I don't know what I expected up there. But I had never knowingly been in a room full of just gays.

So, I tried it again, because she thought I really should go deal with it and get used to being in a room full of all gay people. And so, I made it. Three times I went halfway up the stairs and went back down to the street. And finally, the fourth time I went up there, my heart was just racing, you know, but I got up there and sat down. And that was the beginning of my sobriety. I heard things I needed to hear. As I went back more and more to gay meetings, I got more and more comfortable with my alcoholism and well as with my homosexuality. I also went to straight meetings because she had me going to meetings every day. I was working fulltime so I went to two meetings on Saturday and two meetings on Sunday, and then every night I went to a meeting. And I worked. And that's all I did the first year of sobriety. I was just absolutely insane that first year. I thought it would have been better to be dead, you know, but I knew I was going to die if I kept drinking.

So, anyway, something kept me sober. And I was taking pills. I had been taking pills all day long---Valium---for the last 8 years, having blackouts every night. And so, I had to come off the Valium. That was in 1975. So, in those days, I was not directed to withdraw slowly, so I came off cold turkey. And I...

Jim: Whoa!

Barbara: And that was quite an experience. I felt like I was going to disassociate. And I had some real mental episodes that where I'd...it was just very dangerous to be in that

*\*Barbara was mistaken. The gay Alano Club was Alcoholics Together.*

state. But I survived it. Now, I managed to not go out of my body and got through it, but I was sick physically a lot that year.

I remember that all I could do really was to go to work and go to meetings, and that was it! I didn't want to go to parties or anything. I was forced to by some of the old-timers that wanted me to get out of myself and get to parties and start enjoying life, but it wasn't something I wanted to do. I went because they insisted. And today, I just can't even believe that I was ever like that. You know, I think back on it. I don't want to ever forget it. It was a living hell.

Once I got through that first year, I began to get over the fear, but at three years of sobriety, I had my first spiritual experience. I was driving down the Santa Monica Freeway, and all of a sudden, I thought, "Oh my God, I'm sober 3 months. I never could do that myself. There must be a God. It must be in AA." I get chocked up on this on.

Jane: You said 3 years first, instead of 3 months.

Barbara: 3 months, 3 months, yeah. Whew!

So anyway, at 3 months of sobriety, and the fear went away for 30 seconds, probably at the most, 30 seconds. With all this thought in my mind about a Higher Power, and that was when I first I realized there was a Higher Power for me. And then the fear came back. It didn't stay gone at all.

But later on in sobriety I realized that that was the moment I knew there was a God, but it wasn't the moment I started trusting. I didn't start trusting God for a long time. And today, I do, I really...you know, it's made such a difference in my life, because I don't have that kind of fear. I used to live in a state of terror from the age of 4 on, I was in a state of fear. I was fearful every day. I don't remember a day free of fear from the age of 4, until I'd been sober probably a couple of years before I really had a full day without fear. And today, I have...my program consisted of...do you want to hear, Jim, about the process that I use during the day?

Jim: Sure.

Barbara: OK, in early sobriety, I had a sponsor right away that had me doing the steps with her and had we got down on our knees and we said the 3<sup>rd</sup> Step prayer together. But she had me doing meditation and prayer early in the morning and journaling. And what I did, for myself, was to make a 10<sup>th</sup> Step early in the morning. It was best for me. It was too hard a night. My mind wasn't working that well. In the morning, I would write a letter to God. And that way I felt like well God knew everything anyway, so I might as well be really honest. And I learned how to talk to God and pray that way. Whew!

Jim: Take your time.

Barbara: I didn't expect to get so emotional, but sobriety is such a huge thing.

I pray every morning still for the strength and the power to stay sober today and not to use or abuse any pills. Over the length of my sobriety, since I got sober in '75, I'm 33 years sober now. I've had to use Vicodin periodically, and it terrified me. In the very beginning, I refused to do it, and I had some physical things the pain was just so excruciating that I think I prolonged the problem because I didn't take it. So, I learned how to do that in sobriety. I learned how to take medication for pain without abusing pills.

Jim: Could you explain how you do that?

Barbara: Yes, when I have, I have periodic flare-ups of a disease which causes severe pain. And so, I, what I do is I try to control it with Advil and Tylenol to the best of my ability, and then when it gets too excruciating, I start with a half a Vicodin, and I write it down on a piece of paper. I keep it on the sink. It's visible to my partner, who has 35 years of sobriety. And also, I tell another confidant that has over 30 years that I am starting to take Vicodin for my pain. So that both of them know it. And I have a relationship with my Higher Power today that has helped me. You know, I don't feel a high...when I have pain and I take it, I don't feel the high. And I was told that if I didn't have the pain and I took it, I'd have a high probably. So, I go on that premise, and I just take as much as I need to get through the night, just to stay comfortable enough that I can sleep. I haven't had to use any for months now. I think the last flare-up was in January through April and I think I took 3 maybe in beginning of the flare-up and I haven't had to have any since then. But I don't have the same fear. I've grown in the program about taking painkillers. I have a great respect for them, and I know how powerful they are, and what they did to me when I was not sober.

I always share in AA meetings that I'm an alcoholic addict because of that. I truly believe that it is such a big part of my story that it is not right to not say something about it.

Jim: That sort of fits in very well with something from my background. I was a radiation oncologist and as such I had a lot of patients who needed to take Vicodin or other heavy-duty pain relievers. And a lot of people are afraid, normal people are afraid to take the appropriate pain medication because they think they are going to become addicted. And one of the things that I told my patients was that if you're taking this pain medication for a physical reason, like pain, the chances of getting addicted are very slim. But if you're taking the pain medication for the high, the chances of you getting addicted are very high.

Barbara: Ah!

Jim: And you just gave the same advice in a mirror fashion in saying that you knew that you were addicted, but there was a reason for taking the pain medication—you had pain—and if you managed it well, you didn't get high.

Barbara: Right.

Jim: Let's go on to Jane. How did you get into the program?



Jane: My name is Jane P., and I've been sober for 35 years. However, my first run at this program was in 1971. My actual sobriety date is in '74.

A number of years ago when I was at about 25 years old, I had two friends down in L.A. that I saw quite a bit of, and one of them had been suggested strongly by her psychiatrist that she needed to go to A.A. And she agreed to do so, but she didn't want to go by herself. So, she had me go with her. And I would sit there in these Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and I would be very "isn't this wonderful what they've got for you alcoholics", never, ever dreaming that I had a problem myself. But through going to those meetings with her, I learned more about A.A. than I had really realized about it. And listening to those people talk. The other friend, everybody knew that she was an alcoholic. She had passed out in my dining room this one day. By then, I was such an expert on A.A. because I had gone to those meetings with that friend. I gave her a little kick on the back of her ass, and I said that, "You ought to get up off that floor and get to A.A." And I had a bad habit of telling that to everybody that I thought was a drunk for a number of years! That woman, that I had given a little kick across the butt that day, that night, said that for years she could hear me saying, "You ought to get your ass up off this floor and get it to A.A." And one day, she did.

I hadn't seen her in quite a long while. And one day, I was coming home from visiting some friends over in Orange County, and I stopped off at a bar that I had frequented frequently. And the woman was there, and she walked up to me, and she said, "I don't know if you remember who I am". And I did. She said, "I've been looking for you for the past three months. I've been sober in Alcoholics Anonymous for two years now, and I was looking for you to make an amends." And I thought that was just wonderful that she had finally gotten sober.

For the next couple of years, that one made sure that I was around her and her A.A. friends a lot! She never once accused me of being an alcoholic, but she made sure that I was around her and her sober friends a great deal. One of the times I was there at her house, I got talking with a woman that told me how many times she had been arrested for drunk driving, for drunk and disorderly, and all those other good things like that. And I said to her that "I guess if I ever got picked up and thrown in jail, I figure that finally I had a drinking problem". All exactly one year, coming home from having visited a friend that day, I stopped a liquor store, and as I was leaving the liquor store, all of a sudden, my car stopped right in the middle of the street. It took me a second to realize that the reason why it had stopped is because the nose of my car was buried in the side of somebody's car who was coming down the street.

Well, I backed up and took off, like any good drunk would do, not knowing that directly behind the car I hit was a cop car. So, while I was sitting in jail that night, I remembered what I had said to that woman a year before. So, when I got out of jail the next morning, I called that long term friend of mine, and told her that I thought I probably needed to go to A.A. And the reason why I said that is because as I was sitting there in jail, I had been around her and her sober friends enough to hear them say and talk about the fact that if you got in trouble with the law behind your drinking—and this was in the early '70's remember—and you could tell the judge that you were going to A.A., that they would be

very lenient on you. So, I decided that's the way I was...I needed...I did it to manipulate the court. I did...they just gave me a warning and some heavy fines and that was the end of it. It didn't even go on my record.

I didn't drink for a year and a half. I don't like to say I was sober during that period because in that year and a half, the only thing I did, that people in the program had told me to do, was that I went to a lot of meetings. I averaged a minimum of 8 to 10 meetings a week, and sometimes even more, like for example on Saturdays I might go to a morning meeting, a noon meeting, an evening meeting, and a midnight meeting, so as well as going to daily meetings. I read the Book once, and because I read a lot that was all that was necessary for someone with my reading skills to do. I never asked anyone to be my sponsor, because looking around those rooms, I couldn't see anyone who was worthy to be my sponsor. Of course, I didn't write any steps, do any steps, because I didn't have a sponsor to make me do them. All I did was go to meetings, and I didn't drink for a year and a half.

When I went back to drinking, I did something I had not done since I was 21 years old. I ran home to Mama back in Tennessee. Now...

Jim: Did you stop going to meetings before you started drinking again?

Jane: No, I had gone to a meeting the night before, and I had stopped at a grocery store to get some food for dinner that night and get some milk, and as I was going over to the milk counter, I went passed the booze section. And when I came back with that milk, as I went through the booze section, I reached over and picked up a bottle of scotch, which was my drink of choice in those days. And as I did it, I said to myself, "You don't really have to do this. Take it on home with you. You don't really have to check it out." And after, I had checked it out, I said, "Well, sometimes we have friends over who like to have a drink, and so, I'll just take it and store it until, you know... So, I got into my apartment. I did not set down my purse. I did not take off my coat. Instead, I reached in that bag of groceries, pulled out that bottle of scotch, and standing there at the counter, reached up, took down an 8-ounce glass, poured it full of that scotch and stood there and drank it right down.

Jim: That is a vision.

Jane: Ah uh, telling myself the whole time, I wasn't going to do it, because by then, I knew that I was an alcoholic. But I wasn't ready to stop drinking yet is what it got down to. For the next year and a half, there wasn't a day that I didn't say, "Tomorrow, I'll go back to A.A." Also, during that period of time, as I said, I moved back with my mother and was living in a little with her in this little, teeny, tiny apartment.

Jim: In Tennessee.

Jane: Back in Tennessee, in Nashville. When I was working...I was a licensed L.V.N...a licensed nursing home administrator. I also did staff development at convalescent hospitals. So, I knew a lot about caring, about keeping of old folks. And my mother was in her late '70's at that time. And I told her that it was good for people her age to have a

little bit of alcohol before they went to bed every night, that it would improve their appetite, their sleeping pattern, make them more relaxed. And that's true. I wasn't lying to her. As far as I know, my mother had never had more than maybe a little sip of whiskey in her eggnog at Christmas time, you know, occasionally. She agreed, that if I thought it was good for her, she would do that. But the only thing that she would drink was Mogen David wine, which has to be the most syrupy, sickening stuff I can imagine. She wanted me to put...to have a glass half and half of Mogen David and water and then 3 teaspoons of sugar in it. And I would gag every time.

Laughter.

Jim: Disgusting, absolutely disgusting!

Jane: But once I got that into her, then I could take my coffee cup and put about a half an inch of coffee into it, just enough to give it color, and fill the rest of the way up with whiskey. And she wouldn't smell it because she would think it was her own, right? She saw me with a coffee cup. She thought I was drinking coffee.

Jim: Sounds good to me.

Jane: Yeah. The hardest thing in that period was getting rid of my bottles, because I couldn't put it in our trash because Mother might see it. And I couldn't put it in the neighbor's trash can because the neighbors might know so. I had this purse that was big enough to hold a pint bottle, and that's what I would buy. I would put that in the middle of my purse, and when I got to work or to school, I'd find a trash can when nobody, where nobody was looking, I'd dump that into the trash can. I got wored (sic) out with that. I really got tired.

One night, after about a year and a half of doing that and saying every day tomorrow I'd go to A.A., I was sitting there drinking one night and realized that I did not want to drink any more. Now it wasn't a big not want, but there was just a subtle shift inside of me where I wanted to be sober a little bit more than I wanted to drink. The next day I went to down to the Al-Anon Club there in Nashville...

Jim: You mean Alano.

Jane: Alano Club. What did I say?

Jim: Al-Anon.

Jane: No. No.

Laughter

Jim: Well, they would have sent you in the right direction anyway.

Jane: And went to a meeting and went home and drank that night. Then a couple of days later I went to another meeting and two or three days after that I drank again. The first



time I went to A.A. in '74 was in March and what made the difference that day I don't know. But on March 12<sup>th</sup>, I went to a meeting, and I have not found it necessary to drink since...

Barbara: May, May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Jane: May 12<sup>th</sup>. What did I say?

Barbara: March.

Jane: March...May 12<sup>th</sup>. So, it took me three months to get there, but I finally got there, and as I said, I've not found it necessary to drink since then. However, I did not stop wanting to drink. I had a raging thirst for about 2 years. I would have to talk myself passed every bar and every liquor store I came to. "I won't stop at this one. I'll wait and stop at the next one." And then, back in Tennessee, the bars closed, and liquor stores closed around about eleven o'clock at night. And so, "I won't stop tonight. I'll wait and stop tomorrow". And that's how I got through those 2 years without drinking. But it wasn't easy.

And also, during that period, I did get a sponsor. And she was exactly what I needed. She was a tough old broad. I was being kind of persnickety about my anonymity and about not letting anybody in my family know and all that. And she said to me one day, "Jane, I'll bet that you're the type that used to brag about how much you could drink. Why can't you brag about how much you're sober?" And I thought, "Oh, well, yeah. That makes perfect sense to me." And so, to this day, I have no...I don't worry about my anonymity. I will take care of your anonymity...I won't, I won't...but I have no hang ups about it. My mother, when I'd start to talking about being in A.A. would kind of wince a little bit and say, "Do you have to talk about that?" And I'd tell her, "Yeah, I do. 'Cause it helps me remember where I am and what I'm supposed to be doing."

About five or six years after I got sober, my sister, one of my sisters got sober also. And this was a sister who had given Mother a lot of problems. She would call her up like at three o'clock in the morning and tell her how any problem that was going on in her life right then was Mother's fault, though she hadn't lived at home for years. She finally got sober, and she came up to visit Mother and they spent a week doing a lot of stuff around Nashville. And Mother wrote me this letter and told me about the visit from sister and said that, "I haven't had so much fun with her since she was a little girl. There's not a day of my life that I don't thank God for A.A." And from that moment, you had to be careful because she'd break your anonymity! She'd be talking to someone, and then say, maybe talk about a husband or somebody and say, "Well, you ought to send them to A.A. I have two daughters in A.A., and they are just doing wonderful. And it's such beautiful program." And you know what? I thoroughly agree with her.

Back in Nashville they used to say when they would introduce themselves, "My name is Jane, and I'm an alcoholic, and here and sober today only through the grace of a God and the help of program." And I had no interest in the spiritual aspect of this program. But that tough sponsor of mine said, "Jane, God is not contingent on your state of belief. You act as if anyway. You do it the way it tells you in the Steps. And you don't have to

believe anything, but just do it.” She told me I had to pray every night and every morning, every morning to pray that I get through the day without a drink. And every night, thank whatever for getting through the day without a drink.

Now, I had a real antagon (sic)...I’ve always said the chapter to the agnostic ought to be the chapter to the antagonistic ‘cause I was very antagonistic about that spiritual aspect of the program. But one day, Mother and I were going to have to find a new place to live, and we had a very short period of time to find that place. And any time I wasn’t working or at a meeting, I was looking for a place. And one day, my first recognizable miracle. One day, she and I were on our way to that grocery store, and she said she was worrying about here we only had about another week and a half to two weeks before we had to move. She said, “What are we going to do if we can’t find a place?”

And I said, “Mother, I’m doing what they told me to do in the program. I’m doing the footwork to the best of my ability. So, we’re going to be OK. We’ll find a place.” And Mother looked at me, and she said, “Well, Jane, I think your faith is stronger than mine!” I said, “No, I’m just doing what they told me on the program.”

We got finished at the grocery store and came back home, and as we opened up the door to walk into the apartment, the phone was ringing. On the other end of the line was a woman that I had never met, but she was a friend of a friend of mine in the program. And that friend had been talking about the fact that my mother and I needed a place to stay. This woman was the manager of an apartment building, and she said, “You and your mother sound like the very people that I like to rent to. If you’re interested in an apartment, you can come on and take a look at it. And you could move in by this weekend.”

And as I was driving over to look at that apartment, I thought, “Well, I did my footwork, and my sponsor said that if I did my footwork, things would happen. And look at what’s happened!” And what I have found over the years, that when I do my footwork to the best of my ability, and don’t try to manipulate the result but just wait for whatever the result comes out, that I always end up getting better than what I had anticipated, and I always get a little lollypop. A little lollypop that that apartment building was...we were up on the second floor. In back of us, there was nothing but a little brook and some trees and a grassy area so that you could sit on the balcony of that...it was like you had your own little private garden out there. And for me that was, and for Mother also, that was an extra lollypop. And the Higher Power of my understanding always does, gives me that lollypop if I’m doing my best.

I don’t have any belief in the kind of god that most people talk about. I don’t believe that there’s any entity out there that gives a good running damn about me personally. What I do believe is that if I’m doing my best to do my best, positive things happen. And so, for me that’s my spiritual program. It’s doing my best to do my best. There are lot of days when I don’t do very well at all. But if I keep trying, then it works. If I keep doing my best, and I don’t try to manipulate the results...if I keep an open mind and an open heart and a damn good sense of humor...I mean you have to have a good sense of humor in this program if you’re going to be happy in it as far as I’m concerned. And I think I’ve got all three of those.

I got the sense of humor from my mama. She always had a good one no matter what's going on. But that open heart and my open mind, I got from the program. I learned how to love unconditionally through this program. I learned how to be not quite as judgmental as I had been all my life. There's not a morning of my life that I don't wake up, and look out my window, and say, "I am the luckiest human being I know." And if that's my morning prayer, then that's my morning prayer.

I do pray. I don't pray for things like, "Please, God, give me a million dollars" or anything like that. I pray for things like if you're not feeling well, "Please help Jim feel better." And I don't say "God" I don't believe in that or "Our Father" or anything like that. I just sort of throw it out there. The reason I pray is because I truly believe that when I'm praying in that manner, I'm creating an aura of positiveness. And that's what I have to look at and hope for is that sense of positiveness.

Jim: You said something before...you were talking about doing the next right thing...and you said that "As long as I try..." And you then talked about not manipulating it.

Jane: Yes

Jim: It sorted sounded to me like there was a difference between trying and pushing.

Jane: Yes, yes. That's exactly, you know that always before in the past, I would set a goal for myself, you know. And I would set up these expectations for the goal. And if things weren't working out the way I thought they should be working out, I'd get all discombobulated and negative and angry and all the rest of it. Now I can set that goal, and then OK, I want to go from this point to that point. But I can't look ahead to that point that I want to go to. All I can look at is what do I need to do today to take me along that path. That's what I mean by not manipulating. And as long as I can keep that and keep out of those expectations...I don't know about you, Jim, but I have never had anyone meet my expectations, including that entity out there in the universe that I pray to.

Jim: Including yourself.

Jane: Especially myself! And so, I try my best to stay out of expectations. Because when they aren't met, it just gets me angry, fearful, all those negative feelings. I'm addicted now-a-days to feeling good. I'm addicted now-a-days to feeling comfortable in myself and in my life. And I don't like being out of that comfort zone. I don't want to be complacent about it, but I do want to be able to continue to enjoy that sense of comfort and of wellbeing that this program gives me. I just feel...they told me one time, or I read some place that only one in thirty-three alcoholics who need this program get this program. And I thought how lucky we are, what miracles we are.

Three years ago, I was diagnosed small cell lung cancer. I understand the recovery rate from that is very small. Because my overall health was very good, my oncologist said, "I'd like to double whammy you and give you the full load of chemo and of radiation." And that's exactly what he did. And the only side effect that I had from that was becoming very, very weak for a period of time. And I also didn't have the big appetite that I usually have. I did not get nauseousness. I didn't have any other side effects. Six months from

the day the lump was found in my chest, six months later, there was no trace of cancer anywhere in my body. I've had six PET scans since then and there's been no trace of it. My oncologist calls me his miracle patient.

Jim: Hallelujah!

Jane: Yep! I truly believe it's from two things. That this program has taught me how to not be afraid of what is, because I didn't feel a sense of fear when I was diagnosed. And the second thing is that I had a lot of people beaming a lot of positive energy toward me during that period. And I believe between those two things...my doctor told me once that recovery from serious illnesses were about one half the medicines and treatments you get and the other half is attitude. And I believe because of this program that I was able to keep that positive attitude that helped me get through that. So, I owe this program a lot!

By the time I was 20 years sober, I finally got it that my life was full of miracles when I'd been denying it most of the time. And that was when I came to terms with my spirituality, and it may not be comfortable for any body else, but it sure helps me, and I feel very grateful that I've got that. And I'm very grateful that I'm an alcoholic! People used to say that, and I'd think, "How can anyone be grateful to be an alcoholic?" I was a gloom, doom and death and destruction teenager, maybe a ten-year-old when I got to this program, and I would have stayed like that had I not been an alcoholic. But because I'm an alcoholic and came to this program, I am no longer a gloom, doom death and destruction 10-year-old. You know, this program is helping me to grow up.

My sponsor's sponsor used to say that we must maintain eternal vigilance because we never stop being an alcoholic. I like...Barbara and I have talked about that, that we always want to maintain a healthy fear of our disease. And as long as we do that, and as long as we keep an open heart, open mind, and good sense of humor, then I'm going to be sober again tomorrow, I believe.

Jim: Good. You talked about your miracles. I want to hear from Barbara how the miracle of you two came to be.

Jane: Oh, OK.

Barbara: Oh, let's see. I had ah...I guess I met Jane when I had 9 months of sobriety, and we were in a meeting in Venice, I think it was a gay meeting. Anyway, she introduced herself to me and started taking me to meetings. I was still in the trembling stage and fearful of everything, and the more I got to know Jane, the more I realized I wanted what she had because of her sobriety. She was loving and kind and thoughtful and I thought she knew everything there was to know. And...

Jane: I did too!

Laughter

Barbara: So, we started living together when I was 9 months sober, and we've been together for...

Jim: What a minute! What I minute. I heard you say that you met her at a meeting in Venice when you were 9 months sober.

Barbara: Yep. It was only...

Jim: And then you, didn't you just say that you started living together when you were 9...

Barbara: I must have met her at 3 or 4... When did we meet?

Jane: The first time we met was over in Venice, and you had a month, about a month and a half of sobriety.

Barbara: Oh, OK. Alright, I was earlier in sobriety when we first met. I had forgotten that. Yep. You're right Jim. I made a mistake. That was 9 months when we moved in together.

Jim: OK. OK, so she really 13<sup>th</sup> stepped you then.

Barbara: Yes, she did.

Jim: Ah, OK...

Laughter

Barbara: She had a year and a half.

Jim: OK, sounds like some other people I know, but we won't go into that. When did you move up to the Central Coast?

Barbara: I was working in a place that was downsizing. It was a hospital I had been working at about 34 years, and they were eliminating my position. I was assistant manager at that time, chief tech of a laboratory in the hospital, and since they were downsizing, they offered me another job, and they said I could be the manager of another department. But for me, it was the miracle I had been waiting for, because I needed a nudge to move to Cambria. And I just celebrated the fact that I was...that my job was being eliminated, and I wasn't interested in taking any other new position. So, I...that's what happened. I moved up here. And then Jane had a business with some other people and had to close down that business. So, she didn't come at the same time that I did.

Jane: I had to sell my business. I had to sell my part of it.

Barbara: She had to sell the business. That's right, she had to sell her part. I came up in January of '88, and we had bought the house 10 years previous to that. My parents had lived here until both of them were dead. So, I came up here and I didn't go to work for a while. I started going to meetings and got a service commitment. Ever since my sobriety began, I tried to have a minimum of a service commitment in some meeting. If I go to more than one meeting, then I try to have a service commitment at all the meetings if



possible. And so, I did that. The only meeting in Cambria at time was the Monday night meeting, called the Pine Cellar Group, at a woman's house in her lower level. Now of course, we have lots of meetings. But Jane came up that summer. I think I was up here 3 months before she came. Then we just made this our home since then,

Jim: When you came up here, you said there was only one meeting in Cambria.

Barbara: Yeah, I went to meetings down in Morro Bay, in San Luis. The most exciting meeting I ever went to was at the Alano Club. It was a candlelight meeting, and right in the middle of the meeting, this guy walks over to the one sitting next to me and poured a hot cup of coffee in his lap. And they started fighting. They just went like...the furniture went everywhere, the candles went everywhere, and I was the first one out of the room. I ran as fast as I could.

Jane: There was this long table, and we were against the wall in the middle of the table, and I swear to God she went straight over the table...

Laughter

Jim: And out the door!

Barbara: I still had a lot of fear! The police were there in 5 minutes or so. But that's the only time that I ever had anything rowdy happen in the meeting. But that was quite exciting. But the rest of the time...we used to have a Step Study meeting that met in a little building on Moonstone Drive. You'd open the door and listen to the ocean while we had the meeting and studied the Steps. That was really, really moving. That was my favorite meeting.

Jim: You mentioned the gay and lesbian Alano Club down in Hollywood that you went to when you first got sober. Is that Alano Club still there?

Barbara: I don't if it is, but they moved, they moved it to another building. I think it was a one-story building, and we went there a few times after that. But I went, mostly I went in my early sobriety to that one. I went every week, two or three meetings there. I also went to straight meetings during that time.

Jim: Do you remember the location they moved to?

Jane: It seems to me...

Barbara: Fairfax?

Jane: Hollywood Boulevard and ...

Barbara: La Brea? I can't remember.

Jim: La Brea or Fairfax...

Jane: That crossed Hollywood Boulevard, and it was at like the southeast corner there, but that was years ago.

Barbara: I thought it was in Silverlake.

Jane: Maybe it was.

Jim: It was in Silverlake. The one that you went up the stairs.

Barbara: OK, yeah. That was the last time we went was at the one in Silverlake.

Jim: When you moved here, were there any gay and lesbian movies...movies, what am I talking about...gay and lesbian meetings?

Barbara: None in the county.

Jim: When did one start?

Barbara: I don't know.

Jane: Early '90's is the first time we heard of one, and it was down near that Lutheran church there in San Luis Obispo on Sundays.

Barbara: Sundays, yes.

Jane: Where the Melody group now...

Jim: Serenity Group?

Jane: Serenity Group, yeah. But it doesn't meet there now. Haven't been to that one in a long time.

Jim: You've been around for 33, 34, 35 years. Tell me about what kind of changes you've seen happen in A.A. since you've been in.

Barbara: No smoking!

Jane: That's the part Barbara likes the best.

Laughter

Jane: One of the biggest changes, actually two...when I first came in, if you mentioned the word "drugs" of any kind, like Valium or anything of that nature, someone would immediately challenge you about it. "This is an Alcoholics Anonymous program. This isn't a Narcotics Anonymous program." And we were talking earlier, there were even a lot of people who were writing in the Grapevine. So, there was an argument going on all over the United States. Very gradually people got it that they're both drugs. It was pointed out a number of times that Bill Wilson and the Big Book talks about other things

and the importance of making sure so many times that drugs will lead to people drinking and many times drinking will lead to people drugging, you know. So, they're kind of combined in so many ways. I think people finally started to get that, and now you'll hear at our favorite meeting at least a third of the people when they introduce themselves say, "I'm an alcoholic and drug addict", where before that would not have been allowed in the early and mid '70's.

The other thing is the acceptance of gay and lesbians in a more open manner. When I first came into...of course in Tennessee, it was even worse than it was out here. Even out here, it was like...well, you may be a sober alcoholic, but you're not as good as I am 'cause you're gay, you know, or you're a lesbian. That kind of an attitude, I don't see a judgmental attitude as it was in the '70's, and actually part of the early '80's as well. But by the mid '80's, you could see a loosening up of that, and you could feel a loosening up of that. And that doesn't mean that homophobic people weren't still around, but number one, if they were, they kept their mouth shut most of the time, and number two, there were fewer people who looked at you for your gay and lesbian stuff, and instead looked at you about your sobriety. And that became the most important part of you as far as the people we knew in the program were concerned. And that was not true when I first came in in the '70's. And so, I like that one...I like both...the fact that we're less prejudiced about drugs, and there is less judgmental attitudes about gay and lesbians.

Jim: And we don't smoke.

Barbara: And we don't smoke. And also, one thing, one thing I noticed is more and more meetings are getting away from saying the Lord's Prayer, and that was the only prayer that they said when I first got sober, and most of the time now, in the meetings I go to, it's the Serenity Prayer. They're trying to get away from being non-inclusive, so that all religions feel comfortable with the prayer at the end.

Jane: The Serenity Prayer is such a generic-type prayer. It could be for Muslims, for Jews, even for Buddhists, I guess, Hindus, almost anybody...

Jim: Or for the antagonist agnostic.

Laughter

Jane: Yes. Though I have to tell you that I would not use the "G" word the first 5 years in this program. Now I don't mind saying God.

Jim: We're about ready to wind up because you have some places you have to go and people you have to see.

Jane: Yes.

Jim: I'll start with Barbara. Anything special you'd like to say about your sobriety?

Barbara: Oh, ah, the inner peace. That's my goal every day, and most days, I can have it. And I can have it all day long, you know, if I choose to because I have the tools of

Alcoholics Anonymous to get back to that state if something is bothering me. I have some way to get out of that emotional pain now. I don't have to use or drink anymore. I can use the tools of the program. It works very effectively, and for that I am very grateful.

Jim: How about you, Barbara?

Jane: I'm Jane.

Jim: Jane, I'm sorry.

Jane: That's alright.

I think it's the fact that I don't feel like I'm carrying as much baggage around as I did for so many years. I heard someone at a meeting one day say that so many alcoholics are egotistical self-haters, you know. And that really struck home with me, that I spent a lot of time wallowing in my "I am the worst person in the world" type attitude. And I don't have to do that anymore. Sometimes when I'm feeling bad about something that's been going on, I really...I'm able to look at it now...do I really...is this something that is really a viable thing or is this some of my old baggage that's coming up? And 99% of the time, it's some of that old baggage. And I get better and better at recognizing that, where before it might take me months to recognize it. Now sometimes it only takes me minutes to recognize it, and that, to me is one of the most comfortable things about this program. As I said earlier, I'm addicted to the comfort this program has given me.

Jim: Well, I want to thank the two of you. It's been a real pleasure. And I like to...after we get this transcribed to a...I mean burned to a CD and transcribed, I'll be giving a copy.

Barbara: Thank you, Jim, for asking us.

Jane: It's very flattering.

Barbara: Yes, it is.

Jane: And we like being flattered.

Jim: Don't we all!