

Stories of Recovery

from the

EA Big Book

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The following are stories from the EA Book. They are written by EA members who wish to share their experience, strength and hope with others.

Come Fly with Us - Jane



My name is Jane and I am powerless over my emotions. I am a very different person than I was when I found the program almost eight years ago. Before EA I was an empty shell, and, yet, I thought I knew it all. I thought if I just figured out how to fix everybody else I would be happy. Since EA, I have learned that I know very little. I now leave other people alone to make their own mistakes and to win their own victories. I am working on trying to fix the only person I can, me. I recently graduated from the State University with honors, and I am currently in graduate school. My goal is to be a therapist. I know first hand that without mental and emotional well-being we have no life at all. The brilliant insights and wisdom of those early EA members who were here when I got here have allowed me to learn a healthy way of life (have actually allowed me to live a life) beyond my highest expectations. The thirty or so people whom I have sponsored over the years have also inspired me, with their honest and courageous actions, to grow along with them. I will always be indebted to my first sponsor, who showed me God. I am a miracle of this program and living proof that the steps work. I am a real person today.

When I came into the program I was thirty years old and ready to die. I didn't know who I was. I had been drinking since I was thirteen and drugging since I was sixteen. I had my first death wish at age twelve and tried to kill myself, but I was too scared to jump off the pier. I sat on that pier half the night, crying and praying for an end to my miserable life. I tried again when I was fifteen. That time I took seventeen downers, wrote half a dozen good-bye notes and was astonished to wake up the next day and find that it hadn't worked. I was supposed to be dead! In my stupor, I dressed for school and actually made it there but was sent to the nurse's office on suspicion of being high. The hopelessness of that moment still tugs at my heart. I never felt more misunderstood. Of course, I denied being high. I wasn't high; I was suicidal, but they never knew that. They just let me sleep it off until it was time to go home.

My third and most serious suicide attempt was at age twenty-four. My drug-addicted husband had beaten me for the hundredth time - punching me and kicking me until I was half-senseless. My two babies were sleeping peacefully in their cribs. I went into my bedroom and swallowed the remainder of my new tranquilizer prescription—about twenty-four pills. I woke up in the intensive care unit three days later. I couldn't believe it. I had failed again.

That attempt left me with substantial memory losses. Ironically, I lost those parts of my memory which had given me some measure of pleasure and self-esteem. I remembered being a good singer, but I forgot how to sing, and I forgot all the songs. I remembered being a gourmet cook, but I forgot how to make even the most basic meal. I remembered being competent in several other areas but could no longer function in any of them. I withdrew into myself even more than before. I began to develop phobias—especially answering the phone, answering the door, or going out. Only with daily use of marijuana and beer could I function at all.

I went in and out of depression for the next six years and the thought of suicide never left me. I tried everything I could think of to help myself, to improve myself, when I had the energy. I wanted so much to be normal and, especially, to be happy. I tried going to church, going to school, going to the gym, going to the beach, drinking less, not drinking, reading self-improvement books, listening to inspirational tapes, attending motivational seminars, and taking trips. I tried nutrition, kinky sex with my husband, community involvement, psychiatrists, psychologists,

counselors, crime, violence, avoiding my parents, seeing my parents, working, not working, being sweet and docile, being a raging maniac, but nothing ever made me feel better for long. In fact, most of these extreme behavior shifts exhausted me and sent me back into depression. I hated myself so much.

Eventually, I just hung on for my babies who were getting bigger every year. I felt that I would live until they could fend for themselves, and then I would kill myself and get it over with once and for all. I was so sick and out of touch that I thought my children would be able to handle losing their mother to suicide when they reached ages six and seven.

The year my children reached six and seven I had a nervous breakdown. I didn't have another suicide attempt in me. I just retreated from the world, from my family, and from my life. In a bizarre re-creation of that lonely night spent crying and praying on the end of a pier, I cried and ranted and raved for twelve excruciating days. I spent some of the time on the bathroom floor, begging God to help me, asking why God wouldn't help me. But most of the time I was in bed with the pillows and the covers over my head alternately sleeping and crying. I had reached that awful impasse of being too afraid to live and too afraid to die. Having tried everything to help myself, and having failed, I had reached the bottom. I was thirty years old, and I had wasted my life. I felt worthless, despicable, ugly, and helpless.

At that time I had very little understanding of my situation and no awareness at all of why I ended up emotionally and mentally shattered by age thirty. I thought there was something intrinsically wrong with me. I thought I was a bad person because I could not overcome these problems on my own. I now know better than that. I now know I am a good person, and that God does not make junk.

As a last ditch effort to find some measure of relief from the pain and constant disorientation that plagued me, I went to my first EA meeting. I found the people there to be attractive, funny, welcoming, and amazingly honest. Why, this bunch talked about feelings of jealousy, hatred, anger, frustration, anxiety, and depression as if these were normal topics of conversation! They made it look so easy. Here was a group of people who were talking openly about all my secrets and shameful feelings. They had them too! It was quite a revelation. For the first time in my life, I felt real hope. I was not alone!

I began working the steps after attending meetings for about six months. My sponsor directed me to get a better perspective on my childhood, so my first real inventory was of my childhood, of what was done to me.

My grandfather died about six weeks before I was born. Though his death had nothing to do with me, I believe now that his dying at that particular time probably saved my life. My grandmother, bound by a death-bed promise to never wed again, sold her home and all her belongings and came to live with us in our little two bedroom row-house in Boston. She was still young and beautiful, and she was willing to take care of me and my older sister, who was one and a half, so my mother could go to work full-time. My grandmother took care of the house and the cooking and sewing and did all the things for us that mothers do for their children. Everyone who saw us assumed she was our mother.

My father and mother, both products of Hitler's Germany and both traumatized by World War II, became workaholics. Neither of them had any time or energy for their two little girls except to lecture and punish in large measure. Every Sunday after church we were told about how great Hitler was. It always started with a headline from the newspaper about some mugging or murder or robbery which, according to my father, was proof that the United States needed a Hitler too. I cannot count how many times I heard my father begin a family lecture with, "If only Hitler were running this country ...". In those Sunday talks, my father would advocate mass public hangings, mutilations, and torture of law-breakers. My mother quietly agreed.

My father had a violent temper—we lived in constant fear when he was around. Like many other members of EA, I

suffered a lot of physical and emotional abuse disguised as punishment for things that were really just mistakes or fumbles. I remember when I was four, I was told to set the table. For some reason, my father was already seated at the table and was watching me carefully to make sure I did it right. I was so scared and self-conscious that I dropped the last plate in my hand which would have been the plate at his place. He beat me severely about the head and torso, called me names, accused me of deliberately breaking the plate, declared me unfit to be in his presence, and sent me to my room without food or water or bathroom privileges for a day. Scenes like that were common occurrences in our house. No one was safe.

When I was very young, I remember that my mother tried to be loving toward us, but, as I got older, she grew colder. When she lost her temper, her rage didn't fit the situation. She would go berserk over things that weren't that bad, and her rage didn't burn off for a couple of days. She hit us with hangers, broom handles, vacuum cleaner extensions, and any other weapons that were handy. By the time I was a teenager, she was slapping me hard in the face on a daily basis. The last bad beating I took from her was when I was twenty-six. I couldn't escape her then because I had a broken collar bone. I thought she hated me.

There, in the midst of so much pain and violence and humiliation, was my grandmother. She shielded us as much as she could and compensated with unconditional love, good humor, and generosity. She probably saved my life just by being there. I was twenty-three when she died from injuries sustained in a car accident. I didn't know it then, but I lost the only person who cared about me. By that time I was so wrapped up in a self-destructive lifestyle, I was incapable of feeling my grief for her death. I felt nothing except an all consuming hatred of my parents. I never appreciated my grandmother when she was alive. I took her for granted. Only the trauma of my parents' violence was real to me. I had become addicted to violence and addicted to pain. In spite of my best efforts, I just didn't know the way out.

My marriage was in many ways a continuation of my childhood pain. I tried to make it work in spite of incredible emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. I blamed myself for many of our problems. After all, I was depressed and paranoid so much, and I had no self-esteem. I couldn't really blame him for the way he treated me nor was I capable of leaving him and being independent. However, Emotions Anonymous changed all that.

I worked the steps continuously. I turned my will and my life over to the care of God, as I understood God. I became of service to others and, eventually, spreading the message of the Twelve Steps became more important to me than reviewing my own miseries. After one final marital humiliation, I threw my husband out and filed for divorce. The loving support I received in meetings during that terrifying and torturous period carried me through to freedom. I made amends to all the people who had suffered because of my illness, and I paid my debts. I forgave my parents because, first, they can't really hurt me any more and, second, because hating them was hurting me. I am slowly building a relationship with my father based on mutual honesty and respect. This is a gift of the program which was never possible before I worked the steps. Sadly, my mother remains unapproachable. The program has taught me that in EA all things are possible, so I will leave that relationship in God's hands for now. My children have also benefitted from EA. They love having a reasonable, rational, trustworthy mother. The younger one asked me once to promise I would never stop going to meetings.

The members of EA are now my new family. They care for me in times of illness. They comfort me in times of trouble. They lend me their strength when I haven't enough of my own. I am often reminded of a story I heard at a meeting. It compares us to a flock of geese flying south for the winter. When a goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the goose immediately behind it. By flying in a V-formation, the flock can travel more than twice as far than if each goose traveled on its own. When the lead goose gets tired, it falls back in formation and another leads for a while until it gets tired. The geese in the back honk to encourage those in the front to keep up their speed. When a goose, for whatever reason, drops out of the V, it feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone. It works very hard to rejoin the group in order to take advantage of the lifting power of the goose in front of it.

Being in EA is like that. I quickly learned that life's journey is much harder and slower when I try to go it alone. I need the uplift of the others in my group. I need the encouragement and the rotation of leadership. I have a long way to go on my new adventure, but with the love and support of my EA family, I am likely to go twice as far as I ever could on my own.

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night - Mark



My name is Mark, and I am powerless over my emotions. I used to think I was vulnerable to most of my emotions, but certainly not powerless. I am sure this misconception only made my problems worse.

I was raised in a small town in southern Indiana. I am the oldest of four children from a typical Scandinavian family. We were not an expressive group. As children we were taught to keep our emotions under control. The old sayings, "big boys don't cry" and "children should be seen and not heard" were our way of life. We were taught to stuff our feelings, especially our anger. Don't let anything show. My mother was a "fixer," always trying to keep the peace at any cost rather than let the emotion of the minute run its course and try to deal and learn from it. I think that this stuffing allowed for an emotional build-up that was released in totally inappropriate ways when something occurred to set it off.

We were taught that perfection was expected. There was rarely an encouraging word when something was done well, but a lot of condemnation when something was done wrong. I learned to beat myself up pretty well when I didn't perform to the very best even when I knew I had given my best effort. Perfectionism and low self-esteem can be a very deadly combination.

After I finished high school, I went to a small church college. Here we lived in a strict environment where the lessons I learned at home were reinforced. It didn't help that I studied a rigid, precise curriculum either. Following school was work, marriage, and a family. The pressures that came with these were even tougher to handle. I was totally unprepared.

I was introduced to EA at a time when what I believed to be important elements of my life were being systematically stripped away. My family was breaking up, I was losing my home, my economic security was in jeopardy, my job was miserable, and what was left of my self-esteem was being totally destroyed. Maybe I could have handled these things one at a time, but when they came all at once, the load was just too great. I was a mess.

At this time I was working with a man who had been in EA for many years. One day he walked into my office and dropped the EA book on my desk with just a few words, "Maybe something in here will help you." There were no explanations, no shoulds, just a maybe. Being in an agitated state of mind, it took me a few weeks before I even started to read the book. When I finally did, I was ready to grab on to anything that would give me some serenity. My journey in EA began.

Things that I read struck a receptive chord, and I made the decision to go to a meeting. I called the EA Service Center and was told where meetings were being held. Even then, I had several second thoughts; thirds and fourths, even. When the day finally came, I got in the car leaving early to be sure I could find the meeting place in time. I almost backed out several times on the way. Every intersection was another opportunity to quit. My expectations were that this would be a group of women discussing their feelings, and I would be totally out of place being a male. Besides they would probably be talking about something I knew nothing about. I went anyway, and I am so very glad I did. The first person I met was exactly the person I needed at that time. She welcomed me and did her best to make me feel comfortable when that was the last thing I was feeling. The first meeting for me was on Step Eight—

not a good beginning. I had hurt so many people and making a list of them would be a difficult task. I wasn't sure I would come back again if it was all going to be that tough. However, I did learn something very important that first night - I was not alone. I was surprised when the meeting was over and several people came over and offered hugs. It was the first time in over two years that I had had a hug, even from my own kids.

The first few weeks were difficult, but I kept going. After a month or so, I started going to a second meeting-the same one my mentor went to. It was a good move as I was able to get a wide range of perspectives from the people at the two groups. My regular group was composed of people who had been involved in the program for five or six years where the second group had people who had been active fifteen years or more. I was doubly blessed.

Gradually the program started to take hold. I started to think, to feel, and to evaluate how and what I was feeling. This was new behavior for me. I struggled to do some of the steps and when I couldn't do them according to the standards I had set for myself, my old tapes started to play in my mind. "I'm not good enough; I can't do anything right." Fortunately, Harold held my hand through the tough times and kept me from quitting.

I had the hardest time with Step Four, the inventory. My education had taught me to analyze everything in detail, and this was how I approached the step. I caused myself much unnecessary pain. I had reached the point where I had to do a Step Five even if it wasn't perfect in order to move ahead. I approached that meeting with much trepidation nonetheless. Here I was going to tell another person how bad a person I really was, and he was going to agree with me. I wasn't sure I would be able to handle the censure. I was wrong. It wasn't nearly as intimidating as I had expected. My inventory wasn't perfect, and that was all right! It surprised me that I realized that.

I have often said to my groups that the greatest benefit I have received from the program is a sense of awareness. I can see how my thoughts can lead to a feeling—good or bad—that can impact how I relate to those around me. I can see in advance how something I might do or say can give me discomfort. I am able to experience my emotions as they occur. In the past if I felt a need to cry, I would question why and try to stop. Now, I don't fight it, I just let it flow, and I am better for it.

The second benefit I have received is acceptance. I can accept others and myself. I still have the need to do things perfectly, but if I try my best I can accept it if I'm not perfect. This is freeing. I cannot remember the last time I put myself down or got angry with someone else. I never thought I would be able to say that.

EA has given me tools to live with. The slogans are my constant companions. I refer to them as my mental choke chains, reminding me to think. The Just for Todays are my help when things get rough. The EA people are my second family, and they accept me.

My story has no ending. I am a becoming. I can find so many ways to grow in the EA program. I continue to go to meetings, to the one day retreats, the weekend retreats, and the conventions when I am able. It is a rich experience. Above all, I try to work the program the best I can. I'll try to get it right, but if I don't, that's okay. My Higher Power guides me, and my EA friends support me.

My Life Will Be Great When ...Susan



When I came into the program over twenty-four years ago, I had been suffering severe depression for two years. During that time I was so unhappy with who I was that I came very close to suicide twice. I was married and had two lovely children, so I had many of the things that are supposed to make us happy in life. But I didn't like myself or my life, and I came very close to ending it.

One of the most significant areas of my past was my attitude toward being a woman. I had the idea that every little girl grew up to be a wife and mother. There were few other acceptable things to be. I wanted to be the perfect woman, have the perfect house, and the perfect husband and children. Obviously, I wasn't going to find perfect anything, so I was very disappointed.

I married my high school sweetheart when I was eighteen. He wasn't sophisticated enough for me (he was a farmer), but I decided I would change him to suit me. We had identical twin girls nine months after we were married.

As a perfect woman I knew that to be successful I had to make my husband successful. In those days everyone who had a degree was successful. I did get him to quit his job and attend college. It was tough in student housing with two small children, but I was building for the future. Today didn't matter much.

I lost a lot of weight after the babies were born, and, when I began to gain a little back, my doctor put me on something wonderful - amphetamines. I had so much energy for work, at home, and attending school. When I quit taking them I crashed. My doctor didn't know what had happened, and that was the beginning of the downward spiral. Much more was involved, including a kidney infection, but the bottom line was there were many things I never acknowledged or dealt with.

I discovered I had always had a low self-image and was basically a shy person even though I put on the show that I was an extrovert. I always told myself a woman had to be ten times better than a man to be equal. The real fact of the matter was I had to be ten times better than anyone else to feel equal. This goes back to my feelings of inadequacy.

I tried a professional, pills, a pastor, a marriage counselor, and couldn't find any of the answers. I expected the answers to be handed to me on a silver platter, but the answers had to come from within me. With those expectations, a professional could not help me.

I attended an EA meeting a few times and backed away from it. There were too many steps that mentioned God. I didn't think that would work. Then, as each possible solution failed, I eventually came back to the program. I also accepted the fact that the answers had to come from within me.

Adopting our interracial baby should have made me feel much better because we had put him off for so long. While the baby brought much happiness into our lives, I had to deal with what was within me.

My husband had started this program when we first found it, and he remained there. I eventually came back because I saw him changing. He stopped playing the sick games we had always played, and he was feeling better about himself. He had a lot of friends who cared about him. This seemed like hope to me. I went to a different meeting than he for at least three years. I often joke that when we first started the program he was a real jerk. He has turned into the neatest person (maybe he always was), and he is now my best friend. I never thought that would have been possible before the program.

I searched for a Higher Power. My concept was hell, fire, and brimstone which wasn't conducive to working this program. I heard people in my group talking about their Higher Power. Although I didn't know exactly what they had, I wanted the feelings they described. I searched for months and found a real God, one who is loving and forgiving. It was totally different from the God of my childhood. It has been one of the best things that happened to me through this program. I know that each of us finds God in our own way.

The program taught me that if a degree is important to me, then I needed to have that as a goal for me - not for my husband. I returned to school part-time, worked full-time, and took care of three children and a house. I didn't maneuver that on my own. It was obviously God's will for me.

During the years my husband and I were raising our three children, there were wonderful times with them, and times

that were not so wonderful. We ended up dealing with dependency issues with two of our children. It was very painful, but I learned a lot and became closer to them by working through the situations. I've had the privilege of watching all three of them grow up to be very special, wonderful adults. They are my friends, and I know they are always there for me. Our family has become more healthy through dealing with the problems.

My career grew by leaps and bounds after I received my degree. Within a few years I was asked to transfer to Seattle, Washington. My husband was delighted. This was really positive for my self-esteem. A few years later I was again asked to transfer, this time to Ft. Worth, Texas to help start a new venture. A few years later I went to yet another subsidiary, still in Ft. Worth. I was then able to work less overtime and devote some time to myself. I completed the CPA exam and lost 117 pounds after battling a lifetime with weight problems. I had completed all of the goals I had ever set for myself, and I felt good about myself - or so I thought.

Then in late 1992, I experienced another round of deep depression. I didn't believe that after all these years I could again return to those depths. I would have told you I had dealt with all my issues prior to this time, but I discovered my mind had not let me see yet what all the issues were.

I don't completely know why it happened then, but my mother had a heart attack, and I went home to spend time with my family. It was so enjoyable. I guess my mind finally told me it was safe to work on the issues I had tucked away. I also had surgery earlier that year. Everything was fine until I accidentally took the pain medication thinking it was my potassium, and it threw me into a tailspin that I couldn't stop by myself. Within a short time I was suicidal again. I experienced severe pain that I didn't know was still possible. It was very frightening to go through this again.

When I experienced my first major depression twenty-six years ago, I tried professionals and pills, and they didn't work. This time I discovered what advances had been made in the field, and what competent professionals in my life can mean. I remember twenty-six years ago asking if what I was going through could be a heredity condition. They said no, it was just a trauma I was going through. Today the first thing the professionals said was that they thought I had a chemical imbalance because of my family history. My father had a nervous breakdown when I was born, his mother had died in a mental hospital, and his sister had also gone through a breakdown. I discovered what medication can mean to me. It can help me feel like a normal person. I will be on medication as long as my doctor thinks it is necessary. It is like blood pressure medication. If my body needs it, I will take it.

During this episode of depression I kept sinking, and eventually we decided that a partial hospitalization was indicated. I couldn't go inpatient because of the images of my father being carried off and locked up. That was too frightening to imagine. The partial hospitalization was every evening of the week for a couple of months. This was one of the best things I've done for myself because it was a concentration of working on the things that my mind was slowly letting me remember. I thought I knew all about myself after working my fourth and fifth steps, and all the years in the program. I knew only what my mind would let me know. Now I needed to get rid of the tormenting images that I had locked up.

There were many childhood issues that I didn't know were there. There are memories I still can't access, only bits and pieces. The therapists I dealt with seemed pretty sure of the nature of this trauma, and I dealt with it as if. It's not important if I ever get the memories back. I have dealt with the general nature of the abuse.

I also discovered I have an eating disorder. Whenever I heard this term in the past I would recoil, for certainly I didn't have that. When I sought help I had many symptoms of anorexia, and I am bulimic. I'm not anorexic anymore. Through my healing I have gained some of my weight back, and I feel confident that when I am fully healed, and my thyroid condition is under control, my body will let the weight come off.

I have had many physical problems in the past few years, such as diabetes, ulcerated esophagus (which may not

have been caused by the bulimia), and, most recently, hypothyroidism. But, having worked through some of the issues in my life has helped me to become healthier.

EA is a wonderful support program. It doesn't replace the professionals in my life when I need them. I'm sure this is why so many professionals refer people to EA - to have support and to learn how to live a new way of life.

I know that my mind is like a computer, constantly recording events that happen. When it is safe for my mind to deal with the issues, it will allow me to see them. It is very uncomfortable at times, and someday I may know myself entirely.

I am very thankful to God for my husband, children, and new grandbaby, as well as parents and sister and brothers. I am also very grateful for EA, that I found it when I did, for it has kept me alive all of these years as I've dealt with a chemical imbalance I didn't know I had. I know that life is a gift, and to keep the gift I need to be working on myself.

Trying to Find the Real Me - Ray



My name is Ray, and I'm powerless over my emotions. I came to EA searching for a new way of life. After a series of long depressions, manic-episodes, and psychiatric hospitalizations, I knew I needed to find some guidance and a sense of peace and stability in my life. I needed to ground myself firmly in something that had strong meaning. My illness was ruling my life and the medication wasn't working. I had been given just about every anti-depressant on the market, plus tranquilizers, anti-psychotic pills, mood stabilizers, and I even had electric shock treatments. Nothing would relieve the deep depressions and mood swings which tore my life asunder.

After my last hospitalization I started to lose hope. I could no longer adjust to normal everyday living, and the depression started to hit me hard again. I became extremely frustrated. No matter how hard I tried, I seemed unable to get the help I so desperately needed at the time. It seemed to be a never-ending battle.

I knew I couldn't handle this condition on my own, so I started reaching out to others for support. No matter to whom I spoke, no one really seemed to want to listen. It was as if they didn't want to be bothered or they didn't really care. I felt hurt because most people I approached were close friends and family members. They didn't understand what I was going through because none of them had any personal experience with my situation.

I became even more frustrated until I received a phone call from a very special friend who had helped me through my last hospitalization. She too was a patient. The reason she was so special was because she demonstrated a great deal of compassion toward me, even though I kept to myself a lot and looked as though I didn't want to be bothered. She seemed to know something about me that I didn't. She was a very spiritual person, and her words were always very encouraging. While in the hospital, she showed a great deal of personal motivation which seemed to rub off on the others around her. This helped me get involved in many of the group activities, even though I was so deeply depressed.

One of my special talents is writing. At the time, I had already been published several times and had a great deal of recognition. I soon started sharing my work with many of the other patients, and they were very impressed. Even the staff members were impressed. It felt great to be recognized again, not only as a writer, but as a human being.

I was soon released from the hospital, but as I stated earlier, the adjustment period was just too much for me to

handle. When I told this new found friend over the phone what a hard time I was having, she mentioned a support group which she had been attending called Emotions Anonymous. I asked her clarifying questions, such as: "What is this group all about?" "Will this group really help me?" She replied, "The only way to find out is to attend an EA meeting." Once again I knew this woman was steering me in the right direction, and somehow I knew I would be forever grateful.

I took her advice, and to this day I still remember that first meeting. I was very nervous, but I was also very optimistic, hoping that this would finally be the place where I would get the help I so desperately needed. I didn't quite understand what was going on in the proceedings because I was unfamiliar with the structure, but I was aware of the general sense of well-being among the participants. I was also surprised to see so much enthusiasm and, most of all, the driving desire of the group members to get well. These people had been exactly where I was right then, and they had no intention of going back.

As the group sharing continued I became more and more nervous. Finally it was my turn to speak. I just sort of trembled as if about to say something, but nothing came out. I passed, and in the process, I learned my first slogan, "This too shall pass." After that I sighed with relief and felt much more comfortable just listening to the others speak on the step or story we had discussed earlier in the meeting.

After the meeting the same woman I mentioned earlier must have noticed some uncertainty on my part about my willingness to return, so she said to me, "Give it at least six weeks, and if you're still not sure, we'll give you back your misery."

When I got home that night, I started to think about my first depression and how miserable I had felt. The event occurred a few years after graduating from high school. Immediately upon graduation, I had been fine. I had a lot of friends, a job where I was able to make ends meet, and, other than the job, no major responsibilities. I didn't attend college, although I knew I had the ability if I wanted to apply myself. Instead of pursuing a vocation, I took a vacation from the real world and shunned the few responsibilities I did have. I needed to find myself, to find the real me. I wanted to escape from reality, but all I found myself doing was stalling for time. I did nothing but hang out at bars and lounges. It was great until all my friends started to drift away. I got used to simply hanging out, I really didn't have any direction or path to follow. I had no idea what I wanted, so I continued to hang out, still searching for the real me.

During this period of my life I had no idea who I was. I became very lonely and depressed. I started drinking more heavily until I reached the "pint" of no return. Everything started to fall apart. My whole life was deteriorating before my eyes, like an old structure about to topple.

Finally that structure did fall and things seemed to change for the better. I felt good again, perhaps too good; in fact, I had never felt better. This led to my first manic-episode; although, at the time, I had no idea what was taking place. The depression had lifted, and after so much suffering over the previous months, this feeling of euphoria really felt great. I was full of life and energy, moving nonstop. I didn't let anything or anyone get in my way. I became very flamboyant, going through my entire bank account. I had even joked with the teller, telling her that I had just suffered a severe depression, and that at the time, I was experiencing withdrawal symptoms. With my happy-go-lucky attitude, she found this information hard to believe.

Suddenly I became a rude, obnoxious, and very belligerent person, but I still had that wonderful feeling of euphoria. Once again I found myself in the psychiatric unit of a suburban hospital. Thereafter, I continued to experience states of depression and manic-episodes, all requiring hospitalization. I was hospitalized so many times the psychiatric unit where I was staying seemed to have a swinging door. On the outside of the door was the sign, "Manic-Depressives Only." Underneath that line it read, "Do Not Disturb . . . Any Further."

After going over these dreadful experiences in my mind, I knew for sure I should return to EA the following week. I also followed their advice and kept coming back. I still attend EA meetings regularly.

I started to feel good again, but didn't experience the euphoric feeling I had before. Instead I felt peace within myself and with the people and things around me. I learned to live with unresolved problems, enjoying each and every moment. My life was no longer an emotional roller coaster. I actually felt that sense of stability which I had been seeking for many years.

I developed self-awareness by doing a daily inventory. I did this by reflecting on my character defects at the end of each day, picking out the ones I needed to work on. In Step Four I did a complete inventory and discovered that one of my biggest character flaws is impatience. That defect alone can lead to fear, anger, and guilt—three of my biggest nemeses. Every night I pray to God, asking Him for patience. I say, "Lord, give me patience, and I want it now!"

Step Two is where I really learned about God. I now consider God to be my Higher Power, after years of disbelief. I used to pray to God only when I needed things. This reminds me of a story about an old man who desperately needed money: He started praying to God, saying, "Lord help me win the lottery." Still no money! Finally he said, "Lord, are you listening to my prayers?" The man heard the voice from Jesus saying, "I am listening to you, and I heard all your prayers. I would love to help you out, but you have to buy a ticket!" Of course this story is only an analogy, but it's a good one. In Step Two I learned we are not handed anything, and we really have to believe in something before it comes true. Before EA, I had no faith at all and didn't believe in anything. I had no goals or direction; in fact, I had no guidance whatsoever and no path to follow. Now all that has changed because I have found something to believe in.

I now have goals and ambitions. One of my biggest goals is to keep on writing because this is a God-given talent, and it is a good way for me to express myself. Through EA I have received a lot of encouragement. Besides being published in the EA Message magazine, I have also written a lot of humorous and inspirational pieces which I shared with the group on numerous occasions. I have become a role model to others in the group. Since I have undergone a lot of pain and suffering, and these people have always been there for me, I feel it is my turn to pay them back by sharing my experiences. I now can be a positive effect on the other members, especially the newcomers.

My keen sense of humor has created an atmosphere of fun at EA meetings and in my social life. I became involved in many EA activities by using my creative talents. I wrote songs and sketches for the EA Christmas party and the 1993 convention, which was held right here in Memphis.

Most of all I learned a great deal about myself as an individual person. I learned how to forgive and forget by making amends. By making amends I got rid of a lot of guilt feelings that seemed to build up inside of me. How do I spell relief? A-M-E-N-D-S! I also learned that EA is a 24-hour program, which plays a very significant role in everyday living. I have been attending EA meetings for the past five years, and I will continue to do so in order to maintain the sense of stability which I now possess. Since joining EA I have not been hospitalized. I can honestly say this is the best I have felt in my entire life. I finally found the real me, and I like what I see. For that I am forever grateful.

*These and other stories can be found in the EA Book.
The book is available on this web site at the EA Store.*