

Delphine L. is another of our AA pioneers. She has over 41 years of sobriety (DOS 11/25/1975) She taped her story last year and the following has been excerpted from that tape with her permission. (Interviewed by Mary D., transcribed by Rhonda B. and edited by Charlie M.)

Mary: Please tell me a little bit about your life before you found AA; when and where you were born and what kind of childhood did you have?

Delphine: I was born in Chicago but moved to Jacksonville at an early age and attended public school here. I lived with foster grandparents and I was the only child in the home, I was a pampered child. I was only exposed to alcohol about once a year at Christmas time when family came. They enjoyed what they called the "spirits" and it was over. So, that's what my childhood was like. I grew up in this area and went to public school here. My first experience with alcohol came in the middle school years. My aunt that lived next door entertained at a club and they had drinks. I helped set up when they had these affairs and this particular time I asked if I could share what they were drinking and she was very nice about sharing it with me. She fixed such a large glass. She was trying to be certain that I didn't really want to stay with it and she succeeded with that because I was not able to really handle it. My bed was spinning around and I decided I better stop drinking. Later when I was in the finishing years of high school and beginning college, I decided that I needed to identify with my peers and my peers were able to go out and drink. My early experience warned me about drinking and if I had really listened to that I probably wouldn't have tried again. However I wanted to be a part of the people that I was with and in order to do that you've got to drink, so I learned how to consume alcohol. It was a pleasant experience to begin with because it was a social thing and it was what I thought all Americans should do. I thought that we should be able to sit and have a drink and just laugh and talk and enjoy ourselves. That was short-lived.

M.: So that's when your drinking got out of control?

D.: It started I guess several years into it because as I said we were working as groups, having social affairs, and apparently going well, but then I began to have problems as a result of my drinking and I went into serious depression. Depression so serious that I could not identify any of the good things that were happening in my life. I could only see all that did not work. So, depression led me to attempted suicide.

M.: Would you say that was when you hit your bottom?

D.: The first time? No because when I determined that I had a problem I went to a doctor who gave me tranquilizers to get me back on my feet and everything seemed to be back to normal. So then I thought maybe I can socialize some more. So, I tried it again. Again, I had the same result. That's the second time, right, and then I recovered again and I was doing fine. Again I thought I could go back to drinking. Again I tried drinking to socialize and have that happy life. My bottom came as a result of that third time. I was sitting in my living room and the TV announcer said, "If you think you've got a problem with alcohol, then probably you have," and I'm sitting thinking I've got a job, I'm taking care of my family, but then lurking in my mind, "But you can't stop when you come home from work, you start drinking and you don't stop." So, I pondered it and then I decided to see if I could really stop. I did that test of trying to have me two beers and stop (laughter) and the two beers were all right as long as there was nothing else in the house. I always seemed to need and have an extra supply in the house. That experiment didn't work out very well. Then I decided okay there must be another way. I called the Intergroup Office and they gave me a location that I could find a meeting place and I went over and it was not too far from my house, right off of Lem Turner, and there was a large group there; ready, willing and able to help this person who has a problem, but to me I felt like they couldn't understand me. The church that I grew up in was opening an AA meeting and I decided I'd be more comfortable there so I came in and I sat. It was a speaker's meeting that night and during that speaker's meeting everything that was said sounded as though it had come out of my history book and I decided that they knew too much about me. I couldn't go back in there. So, I took my little white chip and I went home and this is when I really determined that all had gone. So, I'm looking out of my bathroom window and I'm hearing voices coming from the wires (total insanity). I landed in the hospital and this is when members from the Eastside Group that I had come in to listen to came to the hospital, brought me a Twenty-Four-Hour a Day book, and just told me to, "keep coming back." So, when I got out I did come back and what I found this time was different. I was

able to really follow what they were asking me to do. I mean, why not? I had failed at everything else and I'm still saying, "I want this," so this is where I really tried to concentrate.

M.: You said that you called Intergroup and they led you to a meeting. How did you first hear about AA?

D.: That was the television, they said it and when they said, "You may need AA." I looked that up in the telephone book and they directed me to the meeting nearest me.

M.: Can you tell me a little bit about those early days; your step work and any problems you had learning the AA way?

D.: Yes, I said that I came in and I listened. I suffered with an ego problem, I always wanted to know what was in it for me. The group was telling me about twelve-step work and how I needed to reach out. At that time we were visiting newcomers who had called in for help. Two of us went to visit with them. We shared our experience, strength and hope. My big thing was, "Okay, suppose I do all of this and they do not hear me and they do not get sober. I'm crushed. I can't accept this." The person that went with me always was the person that really started the Eastside Group, John P., and he kept a big smile on his face all the time and he just kept saying, "You just have to be willing to give it away." I somehow got it in my mind I can say what's going on with me and leave the results to my Higher Power, whom I chose to call God.

M.: Did you have a sponsor when you first came in?

D.: I had no sponsor. I sought one but they told me I really did not need any help, so as I said John was here and there were a lot of us who were just beginning and he just kind of gathered us up like his little children and he kept us moving in the direction we were supposed to go, coming to meetings, going to do step work, sharing with others, and one day at a time even with that type of arrangement, AA began to sink into my mind as something that would work for me.

M.: So, you did step work as a group?

D.: There were at least two of us each time; never alone, and sometimes more of us because it depended on where we went and how many were available because the whole idea was that we would learn to share with others as we sought our own recovery.

M.: Your sobriety date is 1975. How many groups or meetings were there in existence then?

D.: There were a lot of groups. I don't know the exact number at that time, but all of the current groups that we have now, and I think we have 452 in the city. We might not have had quite that many but we had numerous meetings, and they gave me the philosophy 90 meetings in 90 days and I couldn't really make that because I had to work some of those days but every day that I did not have to work I went to a meeting. We had meetings at the Central Group, which was the initial group in Jacksonville. That was one of the groups that I attended regularly. We went to meetings at the JABA Club, Beaches Unity and a group over in Arlington with Mary A. She kind of aligned with John and helped us with this group. We went over to Arlington and they came over here. They were kind of like a mother group to us; just helping us as we went. We also had the Alexis Group that was already functioning. We had a lot of groups available. The idea was to get to the meeting and make sure we followed what we were asked to do.

M.: You mentioned John and Mary; were there any other individuals that were especially prominent in your early sobriety?

D.: Yes, now there were a number of people that were prominent in the city but directly with me it would have been Lynn W., Tom S., Irvin H., and several others that were very instrumental in just staying close enough to share their experience, strength and hope with me that I could glean the idea that it would work if I worked at it.

M.: What kind of twelve-step work was going on during that time?

D.: Twelve-step work was done with the individuals that were requesting help. We went to homes. We made phone calls. We made ourselves available for them to call. We went to prisons. We did all of the things that would allow us to reach out. We even started some new groups and that were outside of the state but we just kept working with the idea of giving it away.

M.: Will you tell me about your experience sponsoring others?

D.: I had a number of people that I sponsored. I think that the thing that I look for most in sponsoring is the ability to share with the individual. I would tell them, "I'm free for you to call me anytime day or night, and what I would like for you to do if you get the urge to have a drink, is call me first." So, I got calls at 2:00 in the morning, and at 2:00 in the morning I would get up and go to that individual and stay with them until I was sure that they had passed that crisis. It was that kind of thing that I felt I needed when I reached out, so I tried to share the same thing with others that were trying to do the same thing, and as I said I had to get over my ego problem because while they expressed great appreciation some of them didn't stay, but they expressed the fact that they realized that what could be done for them was done for them and it was really up to them. Now the ones that I liked best were the ones that would call before they picked up the drink, but if they had already done so, the idea was we can get back up again, dust yourself off and just get back in the race. So, I have had a number of them and a lot of those are still sober and for that I'm truly grateful, and for those that didn't make it, I'm grateful for having had the opportunity to try to work with them.

M.: That's all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything in particular that you would like to share before we close this interview?

D.: I would like to share that I'm grateful to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous because as I look back at where I was when I came in I know that the life that I have now would not exist had I not found this fellowship. So, I'm truly grateful for this fellowship.

M.: Thank you Ms. Delphine and I'm very grateful to have you in my life, you are definitely a shining light and example that this program does work. Thank you so much.

D.: Thank you Mary.