

GLORIA K. is one of our AA pioneers from Jacksonville. She has 43 years sobriety (DOS 11/3/1976). She recorded her story earlier and the following has been excerpted from that tape with her permission. (Interviewed by Loretta K., transcribed by Sally F. and edited by Charlie M.)

Gloria: My name is Gloria K and I would like to tell you a little bit about my life before I found AA. I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, May 24, 1944. As a child, I really didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. I had a car wreck and something happened in that car wreck which caused trauma to my sister and I went into this deep depression. I didn't know at that time what was really wrong with me but I think I knew that I was really depressed. My next door neighbor started talking to me and I was telling her about my depression and she offered me a drink. I didn't think I really wanted anything to drink but I took that drink and when I took that first drink, it seemed like that depression just went away. After that first drink I wanted another drink. I don't know when it got really bad because I didn't think I was really an alcoholic; I just liked the effect of it. When I started drinking and I liked that feeling and I started stealing alcohol from my mother and she didn't know I was drinking. I was stealing alcohol and getting high. I also got to the stage that I started acting out and doing all crazy things. I got violent when I drank. My mother thought that I needed to be checked out for psychiatric help. So my mother took me to the hospital. I got to the hospital and was admitted for psychiatric evaluation. That was the first time. After I got out of that, I was alright for about a month or so. But I drank again. I really liked the way it made me feel. I didn't

realize that I was really acting out. I just thought that I was acting normal. It got to the stage that I craved it so bad that I just had to have it. And it really means getting it any way I could. I dated older men to get money for alcohol. I realize now that I was doing this because I needed that drink. I know now that I was hitting bottom.

My mother put me back in the hospital a second time and so I did good for a little while but I drank again and I would go find another man to support my habit which was always the alcohol.

L.: Did the hospital send you to AA?

G: No. When I was in the hospital the second time, I was assigned a psychiatrist and he told me to go to this halfway house. I can't remember the name of it but it was on Curry Street, I think, on the west side. So I went to that halfway house and there were all kinds of people at that halfway house so I fit right in, but that wasn't for me and I ran away from that. I came home and started back to trying to find me another old man to support my habit. I started with the AA after the halfway house thing. Then I got out, I drank and got abusive. My mother put me back in the psychiatric ward. This was the third time. This time the psychiatrist sent me to Al Smith, a counselor at a outpatient treatment center and I gave him the run around because I was playing with him. I would never go to sessions drinking but I would wait till I left him and go get drunk. I kept going to Mr. Smith but one time, he came to my house and caught me drunk. And he told me, he said, "I want to see you in my office in the morning." So I went to his office that morning and he told me, "Do you want your children?" He had threatened me with

everything else but when he said, “do you want your children?” I knew right then I had hit bottom. That is just how far down I had gone and the only thing left that could help me was to threaten to take my children. He had me go into treatment as an outpatient. I would go to see him two days a week and then I would go to AA. That’s how I got into AA. After fooling around with it a little longer I finally got sober on November the 3rd. 1976.

My first meeting was at First Baptist Church of Oakland, 1025 Jessie Street which is still there today, and The Eastside Group at First Baptist Church of Oakland. I was there because I had to go, I had no other choice. I was desperate. So when I made up my mind and got threatened, I got sober in 1976.

When I really got serious with it, I was real smart. I would never miss meetings. I would go to all different kinds of meetings. I got a sponsor. And she would carry me to all kinds of meetings. Two days a week I would go to treatment and three days a week, I would go to an AA meeting. And so, I really got into it.

L.: What were meetings like when you got here?

G.: We did all different meetings.

L.: Were the meetings like they are now?

G.: No, the meetings that are going on now are not like the ones when I came in.

When I first came in, we went by a format. We read the twelve steps, the twelve traditions and how it works. It was alcoholics talking about alcohol. If they were using drugs we never heard about that. It was straight Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn’t know

anything about a treatment center but I knew about detox. When I first came in, I didn't have a sponsor because I really didn't know what a sponsor was. I was made to come so I wasn't looking to do anything extra. I was just going to do what I had to do and keep my children. Miss Delphine came up to me and she asked me, "Do you want a sponsor?" I didn't know what a sponsor was so I said yeah and she got to be my sponsor and she is still my sponsor.

L.: What type of sponsorship do you have with her?

G.: She's been with me since the beginning. And she is still with me. So I have a good relationship with her. She's been my only sponsor and we're good.

L.: What meetings did you go to?

G.: We had the Eastside group and the Alexis group and we went to prisons and the detox. We also went to a lot of other groups around town.

When we first started, we had open discussion meetings. That's what we had but on the fourth Friday we had speaker meetings. We didn't read from the books. We didn't read the promises but did read from the twenty-four hour a day book as well as How It Works and the Twelve Traditions.

L.: So you didn't have any Big Book or Step Meetings?

G.: No

L.: You would read the step explain what you thought it meant and the members would give their feedback.

L': So you didn't do it out of the Big Book?

G.: No we didn't have a Big Book. When AA started in our area the only two meetings I knew about in the area where I lived were at the First Baptist Church of Oakland. There weren't that many people in the group when I came in, I think we only had about six members. All of us were new and we didn't really know too much about anything so we just came together and just talked to each other. That is what we did.

My sponsor is the one who kept me sober all these years. I realize I don't meet with her regular like I used to do. My sponsor keeps me straight. And my belief in God keeps me straight. I've got to believe in God, my higher power. I hear a lot of people saying the group keeps them together. The group has done a lot for me. The group keeps me sober but God is my co-power. And my sponsor is my second lieutenant. And I have people that believe in me. When I say I am fine about today, it's not how I look to another person but how I feel about myself.

Of the twelve steps the one that stuck with me was the first step. That step stuck with me because that was the step that was so hard to keep. Before I got to the second step, I had to mess up about five times with the first step. Now I'm all the way down to the 12th step.

L.: Do you sponsor women?

G.: Yes. When I work with a person I try to find out what is precious to them and to point out as forcefully as possible that they will lose that thing if they keep drinking and using. I had to be threatened with losing my children before I became willing. I always tell my

story to people that I sponsor. I also tell my story at different churches and at different AAs meetings. When I tell my story I like to make it a little funny so that people can say, "She can laugh now. After what she's been through she can laugh about it." That's recovery. When I was going through it I cried because I was pitiful. I was really pitiful. I was 80 some pounds. I would get up in the morning and shake; I couldn't hold anything in my hands. That was miserable.

I can say today that I have been working ever since I got sober. I haven't missed a day's work in all these years and I tried not to miss church either. I work at the same place where I go to church. My church is my work. So when I am down here working, I am still at church. But I can go back to the days when I was drinking and I would see people going to church and I would say, "I don't see what they are going to church for". And stuff like that. But since I got sober and turned my life over to the will of God, I see now that you go to church because you got something to praise. Where in the past the only thing I had in my life was where I was going to find that next drink. And I would have bad hangovers which would mean I was sick every day. And then I had to try to see how I was going to get a drink today. I'd go back to the old man. And when I get tired of doing that, then I would find me another old man. I had to find somebody to keep me drunk. I couldn't hold a job because I had to have alcohol every day, all day. I would be so sick in the morning and I would throw up but as soon as I would throw up, I would have to find me that drink.

Then I had one man that would keep me drunk. He knew that I had to come back. He knew that. And he knew that she'll be back. That is just how he played me. I had one

old man do this. This was really degrading. It was degrading that I had to keep going back to somewhere I didn't want to go. But I needed that drink. And so I tell anybody – I have been there, I did that and I don't want to go back. I think another reason that I stay sober is because I don't want to go back there.

And these days I pinch myself and I can't believe this is really me. So long as I have that fear of going back to that life I can stay sober. I just know if I drank I might never come back. So I stay sober, one day at a time. I tell people that I never, never say I'm going to be sober tomorrow. I can't say that. I ask God to keep me so I will be sober tomorrow. I can't say I'm going to be sober next week. I can say I am sober right now. And that's a lot. And so I put it in God's hands and that's why I stay sober. I hope some of the things that I've said can help somebody else.

When I was a child, I didn't have any idea that I was going to grow up to be an alcoholic. And I did not know what an alcoholic was. I thought I was a drunk. The doctor said, "You are probably an alcoholic". I said, "No, I ain't no alcoholic, I am a drunk". I didn't know the difference. Now I can get up in the morning and I don't feel sick. I can get up in the morning and get ready to go to work. And that's God. That is my higher power.

One day I was going to work and I saw people across the street hollering at me and being paranoid. When I got sober, I thought they were talking about me because before I got sober, everybody was. And I been talked about so bad that I just got used to it. So that's the way, I just stayed paranoid and I just came on in to work and when I was leaving, a guy came across the street and he said, "Miss Gloria we were talking to you".

And I said, "You were talking to me"? "Yay, we were talking to you and said "hey Miss Gloria". I said, "I did not recognize that". I was never called that. I was called everything else. But I was never called Miss Gloria. People may not believe this. I just heard some people talking about me. In reality, they were just giving me respect. And I never had that, and I never had Miss Gloria. In fact, I never had Gloria. They made me feel good and stuff like that keeps me sober.

Now my children can say Mama. My mother kept my little baby from knowing I was his mama. And one time something happened, and I said to him, "You know what, I am going to spank you because I am your mama". And he said, "You are my mama?" He said, "I didn't know you were my mama" and right then, that should have shook me up. When I asked my mother about it, later, after I got sober, I said "mama how come you never told him that I was his mama"? And she said, "Well, I didn't want him to know". That was just how far down I had gone. Now my children call me mama. People call me Miss Gloria. And so I have got a lot to be thankful for.

So when you see Miss Gloria and you see Miss Gloria come here, she is a girl working. And if you see Miss Gloria, if the Lord will, this time next year, Miss Gloria will still be coming here and working. And God gave me my life back. I couldn't have done this work 42 years ago, I couldn't have done anything. Besides that, who was going to hire me anyway.

So the pastor stopped me one day when I first came here and I liked to help set up, and the pastor came in and asked me what my name was. And I told him and he said, "I

see something in you". I said a prayer right then because I didn't see anything in me. So he saw something in me that I didn't see in me, myself. And it paid off. One day I got up and I said, "I see something in me" and that's when I got to find what I had lost. And that's my motto, "I see something in me". That's my story.

L.: Thank you very much