Janice J. is one of our AA pioneers. She has 45 years of sobriety (DOS 8/3/1976) Her story is taken from a talk she gave at the Trout River Club and an interview with John C.

Janice: I'm Janice J. and most of you are accustomed to me telling you I'm a real alcoholic. Before I get started, I’d like to read something from trusty my 44-year-old Big Book. From page 21 “But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career, he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption once he starts to drink.” Once I started to drink, I was off and running, I am a real alcoholic. I am very grateful to be here today and see so many people here supporting the Trout River Group and the Trout River Club. This group is special to me because my husband and I were part of the group that foundered this club. I'm very blessed to be able to know that I've been a part of this place for as long as I have. It's helped me a great deal. I look around here and see the faces of people who are such an instrumental part of my recovery. You help me stay sober today. I stayed sober all day today. I've been sober one day at a time every day since 1976 On October the third.

I'm going to backtrack a little bit and start with two days prior to that date. On October the first of 1976, which was a Friday, I had reached the bottom that was beyond anything I knew I could continue to live with. I had disappointed myself in every way. I was at that pitiful and in comprehensible stage of demoralization that I could no longer live with. I was dishonest, I had no integrity and that was not the way I had been raised. And it was not the way I knew I wanted to live. I checked into a motel over on the west side of town and took my 38 with hollow point bullets in it. I was going to take the ultimate trip. I'm not going to say Johnny Carson saved my life that night but this is what happened. That night Johnny Carson had his anniversary show. October 1. On his anniversary show he had the best guests and some of the best clips from his prior shows. I did love Johnny Carson. I happened to have the television on and I had the gun in my hand and I was drinking. I fell asleep watching Jonny Carson. I had told my daughter-in-law where I was and She called me next morning about some family business and woke me up. In the light of day, I couldn't do it. She told me my husband was drunk, so I ran home to make sure Bill was okay. Those of you who suffer from codependence can relate tom this. I'm not taking care of me but let me make sure I take care of everybody else.

All day Saturday I retreated to the back bedroom. On Sunday morning I said to Bill, “My life has to change”. He happened to think about Alcoholics Anonymous because he worked with a fellow who had gotten sober in AA. He picked up the phonebook and called the number in there. A live person answered the phone and told him there was a meeting that night on Cassatt Avenue. We went to Westside group that night, Sunday night. When we walked into that meeting something happened. People made me feel warm and accepted. I had drunk up all my friends except bar people and you all know about bar friends. Hey, Bill, hey, Janice. People made us feel at home. I don't ever want to forget that first night. Bless the speaker that night, his name was John G. and he told my story. He had been a blackout drinker and a daily drinker. He had not measured up to any of his expectation. He had done all the things that I had done. He was a man but I could relate to all his story. And I don't ever want to forget how powerful somebody else’s history can be to me. They said that the group had a meeting the next night and Bill took me to that one as well. Bill told me that he felt rea warml about the people receiving us in that group also and he decided that maybe if Janice was going to quit drinking, he would too. He was a worse drunk than I was. I came in to AA and found a home. I found a peaceful way of living through this program. I found people that accepted me. They didn't have to ask who I was and what kind of history I had. But we wound up knowing each other's history. They didn't ask what my credentials were or if I could afford it, they just said keep coming back. And I was received with warmth, and love and understanding, acceptance. I was accepted for just who I was and who I am now.

I'm going to backtrack a little bit now and go back to where I came from. I'm an only child and I was raised in the woods in South Georgia. I was right in the middle of a 20 mile stretch of dirt road. We had no neighbors but did have some aunts and uncles a few miles away but no kids. For my first three years of school, the bus ride was an hour and a half one way and the shortest bus ride I had in 12 years was an hour. My first exposure to other children was when I was in first grade and I was six years old. I didn't know how to act, I was insecure. And I was extremely unsure of myself. I was shy. I didn't know how to talk or play. I was willing to learn but I was intimidated. I learned how to not feel okay with me. I didn’t know who you were and I didn't know who I was. I didn't know what you expected me to be. I tried to measure up to everybody's expectations and that can be very difficult.

I was raised by normal parents who were self-sufficient farmers living in the woods. We grew everything we ate there. You went to town to get coffee, sugar, flour, mustard, and ketchup. You raised everything else. I grew up having farm chores. And I thought that everybody was supposed to live that way. I don't have any bad memories of my childhood. We were poor and I had no idea we were because we had everything we needed. And in that respect, I was okay. I had World War clothes made out of feed sacks. I always felt like I was dressed okay. That was how I was raised. We were honest church going people. My parents were normal. I wasn't beaten. I got spankings whenever I needed them and I'm glad I did because taught me a little bit of respect and how to act.

We always had some moonshine around the house and if you were sick, you got some honey and whiskey. I learned early on I didn't mind being sick. That should have been a clue. When I was 16 years old, we were spending Christmas holidays with an aunt. Everybody had gone somewhere and I was left in the house alone. My cousins drank a lot and there were always whiskey bottles on the kitchen counter. I decided to have me a drink and I drank just like I did the rest of my drinking, I drank to excess. I blacked out. When the family got back to the house this quiet sweet child had become very mouthy and told people about their business. And it was very, very unlike me. And I woke up next morning with a terrible hangover. Over the years whenever I drank to excess, I had terrible hangovers. I was sick. And I was having to hear this recounting of how I had acted the night before. And I wanted to disclaim that, I wanted to think that what they were saying was not real, couldn't possibly be. That started my downward decline for the next 16 years. Every time I drank, I didn't always get real mouthy and tear you off your business, but I could, especially if you were in a position of authority. Authority still intimidates me. That was my first real episode of drinking to excess and I drank by myself.

I was good in school. I made good grades. I got a college scholarship to the Woman's College of Georgia and graduated. I drank every time I had an opportunity. I got a job in Blackshear GA, working for the Department of Public Welfare. I couldn’t drink around where I worked and I somehow hooked up with two girls from Waycross. The three of us would party all over the place, Brunswick, St. Simons, Waycross and even Jacksonville. Getting home was always a challenge. I was about to leave with my boyfriend to New York when I met my soon to be husband Bill. I met him at my mother’s house my mother's house and he asked me out the next Saturday night and 26 days later we got married, we don't mess around. I found a man who liked to drink, who could afford to buy me all the whiskey I wanted to drink and just put up with me just fine and thought that I was wonderful. The flip side of that is he had six children Yeah, bingo. They would live with us on and off and as one would get mad at mama, they would come live with daddy awhile. When they got mad with daddy they’d go back to mama. Those six children are all deceased because of the drug additions and alcoholism.

Okay, Bill and I began trudging the road drunk. And we live together for the next almost nine years drinking. I was also a drug addict, I loved amphetamines. When I combined in black beauties with a little drinking, I was off to the races. Bill and I couldn't agree on what to drink because he liked bourbon and I liked scotch and he couldn't quite accept mine and I didn't like bourbon. We decided on blended whisky. However, I would drink most anything that was around. I despise to beer but if there wasn't anything else I would even drink beer. I was not the person I wanted to bent. I tried swearing off. Sometimes it could last a whole day and sometimes it lasted a couple of hours. One year I made an effort to quit smoking and drinking for Lent. That was the longest Lent I ever experienced. I didn't really make it with the drinking that did with the smoking

I reached that point where I've done everything that I didn't want to do. And I wasn't doing anything I wanted to do. Something had to change, it was time to in life. The 38 hadn’t worked. Fortunately, I found Alcoholics Anonymous and it has opened up a whole life a way of living for me. It superseded everything that I had ever hoped for or dreamed about. It taught me how to be an honest person. I can be honest with myself and I can look the world in the eye. I don't have to avoid you because I feel like I'm not good enough to look you in the eye.

Bill decided to quit drinking the same time I did. He died after 32 years of sobriety and he died sober, and peacefully and surrounded those last few days with love. People came to our home and visited with him. It was the most beautiful thing. I love Alcoholics Anonymous, the honesty, the hope, the integrity, the joy that has been given me is beyond description. There is nothing is like the feeling of being able to be surrounded with people, by people with love. When I walked in that night those people at the Westside group gave me hope. They made me want more of the fellowship. They reached out and made me want to come back the next night and then the next night. And we kept coming and became a part of rather than apart from. What a wonderful gift getting reacquainted with God.

Big Jim, the man who was the greeter at my first meeting, became my first sponsor. He was my mentor. Big Jim opened the Big Book for me in a way that I am so grateful for. Jim would come to our house on Trout River to fish. I would go down to the dock with my Big Book and Jim would share his experience and hope with me is such an open way.

Coming to AA and doing the steps got me reacquainted on a different level with the powerful, loving God I have today. I can accept life on life’s terms. I have watched people get sober and their lives straighten out. They become productive and useful parts of society.

I want to read the final two paragraphs from our big book, the first 164 pages our basic text. “Our book is meant to be suggestive only. (Boy, I'm glad I could follow suggestions) We realize we know only a little God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with him is right ang great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is a great fact for us. Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to him and to your fellows. clear away the wreckage of your past. give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you until then.”

Thank you Janice