

## **In memory**

David L. (aka Indian Dave), a long time beloved member of AA, passed away this June. He will be missed. He was very active in AA speaking at meeting whenever he was asked. Dave had 50 years of sobriety (DOS 5/11/1973). He was interviewed last year by Kevin G. and the following has been excerpted from that interview with his wife's permission. (Edited by Charlie M.)

Kevin G.: Tell us a little bit about your life before you got to AA. How did you get here and what is your life like now.

Dave: I was born August 20, 1938 in Lincoln County New Mexico which was up in the mountains. Billy the Kid was a big hero back then. My life was pretty good. We didn't have much money. We were just poor people. I lived with my great grandma. My dad had worked for the CCC and then got a job at a VA hospital which treated veterans with tuberculosis. My dad contracted tuberculosis in the hip bone and they shipped him out. I never saw my dad again. I had a younger sister and life was good. My great grandma would plant vegetables in the summer, we'd kill a deer and make jerky. She raised chickens and hogs and we had a milk cow. When I was 13 years old, I worked in a drug store before and after school, cleaning up the place. My drinking started when I went to high school. A bunch of us guys would get a bottle of tequila and drink it with seven up before a dance. When I went to high school, I played football and I was pretty good. I played right tackle and defensive guard and played for 60 minutes.

Kevin: What happened after high school?

D: I joined the Marines and that's when my smoking and drinking took off. I went to boot camp in San Diego. I received a stripe right out of boot camp and after a 30-day leave, I was sent overseas for 14 months. I went to Tokyo and then to the Philippines and trained with the Philippine Marines. Went back to Tokyo for training on heavy artillery. When we were training out in the jungle in the Philippines, we would drink every day. I liked the local San Miguel beer and we would trade c-rations for Rum. I liked that rum. I was still able to do my job and they gave me another stripe.

My job was a radio telegraph operator. They shipped us to Korea in 1958 and I was on ship to shore transmission duty. I was given an order to send a coordinates message at a certain time and a wind blew the message away. I got really scared and I prayed to Jesus's mom. I was in a fox hole and I looked up and a piece of paper blew by and it was the coordinates, Whew!

I got out of the Marine Corps in 1961. I got married and didn't drink for a while. I got a job as a radio setup man in Hollywood. I was doing great at this job and the engineer said why didn't I go to college and get a degree? At this point I hadn't drunk since I left the Marine Corps. I finished one semester and got a C average which was good for me and I went to a bar to have a beer to celebrate and I don't know what happened. The next thing I remember I was in Tracy California, 400 miles away. I had a wine bottle in my backpack and was picking strawberries drunk. I lost that job and I went back home to

Albuquerque and my mother got me a job loading freight cars. I started drinking heavily again, crazy drinking. The family did an intervention on me and I went to a Catholic retreat for a week. It didn't work. I went to the nearest bar on the way home.

One day I was sweeping snow and picked up a paper which said it was 75 degrees in Daytona Beach. I packed up the family in an old GMC truck and drove to Daytona Beach. I got there with nothing. I got a job with a guy who was a drinker himself so I could drink on the job and still do my job. I went out drinking with a new buddy of mine and we ended up in a bar fight. I don't remember a whole lot of this but the guy pulled a knife and either my buddy hit him or I hit him and he fell on his head and died. I had a good lawyer and got charged with assault and battery and wound up doing a year. I got out but that didn't stop my drinking. On my last drunk, I'd been at it for about a month, I was drinking that Mogan David, and I went into a black out. I don't know what happened but I wound up in Memphis, Tennessee. I somehow got back to Jacksonville and my family called AA. And a guy named Lee took me to fourth Street drunk. I got in a fight there and they called the cops and I threw two cops off the balcony. Then they put me in the drunk tank and I lay there for about two days. I was throwing up and couldn't eat anything. The two cops came back and they were really mad at me. They gave me a hellacious spiritual reading and put a gun to my head for some reason. I said, "before you pull that trigger let me ask god for his mercy". They left and I stayed on my knees and something happened and I knew that I would never drink again.

Two days later I went to my hearing expecting to be sentenced from 2 to 5 years for assaulting a police officer. The judge said, "It seems to me like you have a problem. I am going to suspend the five years and give you three-year's probation. If we find any booze in your system, and we are going to check weekly, you are going to prison." They sent me to a drug program in Palatka but the man running it was in AA and said I could go to AA meetings in St. Augustine if I preferred. So that's where I started.

This wasn't my first experience in AA. Years before a friend of mine took me to an AA meeting at the Rainbow Club in Marietta. The men were all dressed in coats and ties and the women in dresses. I was dirty and smelly and sat in the corner with a garbage can. I got sick several times. After the meeting they all came up to hug me. As bad as I smelled they didn't reject me. They all gave me a hug. I'll never forget that. So, I told Johnny that was why I wanted to go to AA.

There was only one meeting at that time in St. Augustine. It was at the old Flagler Hospital and I went to that meeting once a week with my wife. Right away three guys befriended me, Buddy, Luke and Charlie. I was so sick with a bad liver that I couldn't work. We moved into a shack by the St John's River and I did odd jobs for the lady who rented me that place. These guys would come by and take me to a meeting every day. Everyone would get in the car and would go to Palatka, San Marco, or wherever the meeting was that day.

K.: Tell us about that meeting at the hospital.

D.: When I started going there were only three women attending, Dotty, Maggie and Alice. Alice just passed away. The meeting got larger so it left the hospital and split into two groups one at the Trinity Church downtown and one on King Street, The Old City Group. The King Street group started having meetings once a day at 8pm.

K.: Did you get a sponsor?

D.: Buddy L. was my sponsor. It took me 3 to 6 months to ask him. I said, "Buddy will you be my sponsor?" He said, "You know what Tonto, I'll sponsor anybody". He started calling me Tonto and then the group started calling me Indian Dave.

At the Trinity Church the men would meet downstairs and the wives would meet upstairs at an Al Anon meeting. My wife met some terrific friends there. Everyone just took us under their wings. We would all get together for coffee after the meetings.

K.: Do you see any other differences from the way we do things today?

D.: Whenever we went on a 12-step call no one went by themselves because that's what they taught us. At first, I just tagged along, they were teaching me how to live sober and carry the message. Today everyone seems to come from rehabs I don't think I've made a 12 step call in over 10 years except at a meeting where I go up and introduce myself to a newcomer.

We had a lot of fun. One time Buddy was coming up on an AA birthday and we got a piece of foam the shape of a cake and covered it with icing. When Buddy tried to cut the cake with a butter knife it wouldn't cut and he kept jabbing and jabbing at it. We all just roared.

K.: What type of meeting did they have when you came in?

D.: The Old City Group only had speaker meetings. The Trinity Group had only discussion meetings. We had no trouble getting speakers. We frequently got speakers from Jacksonville. We had one guy that was in charge of getting speakers.

K.: What kind of service work did you do?

D.: You cleaned ashtrays, made coffee etc. For the first ninety day you got a free ride. At 90 days I was stopped at the door and handed the key to the meeting. I was told that I was chairing the meeting the next week and to get there at 7 for an 8 o'clock meeting. I was told to set up the tables and chairs and make the coffee. I didn't know how much coffee to use and it came out colored water. Talk about alcoholics complaining they sure beat up on me. I chaired the meeting and that was my first time.

K.: What about sponsorship?

D.: I sponsored a bunch of guys. By this time, I was back at work at a construction company and I got along really well with the boss. He was in the program. He introduced me to Jeff who was a drinker and I started taking him to meetings and ended up sponsoring him. Jeff was my first sponsee. Later I became my boss's sponsor. Jeff died two years ago of cancer and died sober. I haven't sponsored anyone in the last ten years.

One day I was eating my lunch in a park, all dirty from working. Two little old ladies came by and one took out a dollar from her purse. The other lady said not to give him any money as he'll only use it to buy wine. I didn't get that dollar but it made my day.

K.: What changes have you seen over the years?

D.: It doesn't seem we are as close as we used to be. My sponsors and my sponsees are my friends. Currently I am working with about five guys from way back and I usually have 2-3 sponsors. We help each other. I've got to keep these guys close as I've got to stay sober.

I went to the intergroup banquet in November of 2021 and was the oldest AA there. I had the pleasure of giving a Big Book to the youngest AA member who only had a few days., She was very nervous and I wished her well. I plan to speak at a retreat in Boone, North Carolina in June (2022). We'll take a group from here and all go together.

K.: Thank you Dave.

D.: It was an honor. Bless God and bless you guys.