

Tania is one of our AA old timers. She has 41 years of sobriety, (DOS December 28, 1980)
(interviewed by Christopher G. and edited by Charlie M.)

Christopher G.: I am here to interview Tanja M. My goal is to hear your story of how you got sober and a little about your journey in sobriety.

Tania M.: I was raised and born in Kansas City Missouri. My mom was a blackout drunk. She drank every day from the time she woke up until she passed out. I would wake up many, many nights to my parents fighting and threatening to hurt each other. I would wake up and go listen by the living room door. I knew the fighting was based on her drinking and I learned to not like alcohol. At school I started smoking pot and then cigarettes regularly. Then I picked up my first drink. I had a neighbor over spending the night and we were hanging out downstairs and we wanted to do something different. I went up to my parent's liquor cabinet, and it was a big chest full of every kind of alcohol. I grabbed the first bottle I came to and brought it downstairs. After we drank about three quarters of the bottle, we filled it up with water and put it back. I thought they'd never know. That was my first drink and I was in heaven

C.: What did you want to be when you grew up

T.: I fantasized about being something important, like a doctor, or a lawyer. Of course, my alcohol and drug use interfered with that big time. I managed to sneak by and graduate from high school but I didn't go to college. The night I graduated my boyfriend came to the ceremony. I had all my stuff packed in his trunk and I left home with him. I didn't want anything to do with mom and dad. I got more involved in the drugs and alcohol. I could never get enough of anything. We moved to Kansas City and got married but that only lasted like a year. One of the most regretful things I've ever done is I got pregnant with this guy's kid and I got an abortion. I lied to my husband and told him I had lost it.

I decided to move down to Jacksonville, stayed about a year and then got lonely and called a guy I had met in Kansas City. And he came down and I ended up marrying him. So, there I am in my second marriage. Fortunately, he was an alcoholic and would drink with me. My husband enlisted in the army and we moved to Texas, to Fort Hood. I just knew that if I didn't do something about this intense need to get enough alcohol and drugs I would not survive much longer. Also, my diabetes was really bad. I called the local military base and ask them of any way I can get help? They said they had a treatment center and I could come in. I went in and started learning a little bit about the disease. I started having a little bit of hope. They transported us every evening in a bus to the only a meeting club house in Killeen, Texas. This is where I got sober and learned about the disease of alcoholism. I was destitute inside. My spirit was dead. These people were happy and laughing at themselves falling down drunk, and I thought, Man, that is weird. I mean, weird. You guys are weird. But I could so relate. I wanted to be able to laugh at me falling down drunk.

One more important thing happened at the treatment center. They were bussing us every night. One morning, I woke up and they said I'd have to leave. I said, "How come?" We know that you smoked some pot. On your transport to one of the meetings. I said I did not because I didn't. Now the driver had a beer which I shared the beer but didn't tell him that. So, I yelled and screamed, talked to the head

honcho of the whole treatment center and told them you guys are repulsive. I can't believe you're throwing me out for something I didn't do. They should know that I'm the Queen Sheba. I was a smartass, I was dirty talker, I was rude and I was crude. They threw me out. My husband came and picked me up. The first thing I did was drop him off back at our apartment, went straight to the liquor store, which was like a block away, picked up the biggest case of beer I could get. I blacked out that entire week. I had never blacked out from alcohol alone. I had no drugs in my system at all. I blacked out. I do not remember what happened. That Christmas. It's gone. It just vanished in midair. I have no idea what happened or how I survived or how I got more booze. My husband probably went and got many bottles. I just don't know. When I came to, I knew I had to do something. The only hope I had was to go back to where those people were happy, joyous and free. And I had never known that. I drove myself there and that clubhouse was open 24 hours a day for marathon meetings. And thank goodness because I stayed there for hours and hours for the next few days and I knew that this was my place. That was December 28, 1980.

C: What did that early sobriety look like?

T: I went to meetings regularly and became friends with a lot of people. And there was a lady whose name was Mary Alice. And she was a counselor at the treatment center on base. I started calling her and she started to help me walk through the steps. And that was phenomenal. I got my big book and went to this little park. I spent days in that park by myself on the ground, reading my big book and saying, that's me, that is me. That is me. I am home. I am home. I knew this was the only hope I had. I asked my friend Mary Alice to be my sponsor.

C: Did you encounter any problems as you went through the steps for the first time?

T: Mary Alice had me do my steps based on the big book, exactly to the letter. After we finished my fifth step, she asked me what did I want to do with all that stuff? I said, "I got no use for it." She took me outside and we burned it. I loved that. It was so phenomenal because it was like there went all that old Tania up in smoke, I loved it. I loved it. You know, it was just beautiful. I sometimes wish I had saved it so I could look back and remember how dark it had been.

C: What type of meetings did you go to?

T: We had one meeting six days a week. It was at eight o'clock every day and was a discussion meeting. evening. We sat in long, long, long tables and we drank coffee and smoked. I started to help them make the coffee and clean up. I got into the service within my first month. I became a part of and accountable to my group. There were no speaker meetings but we would drive to Austin to a speaker meeting and then they'd have a dance after it. It was a lot of fun. Our meeting was always packed. If you didn't show up before the meeting started you didn't get a chair around the table. You got one of the chairs along the wall.

C: What kind of sponsorship did you have?

T: I wish she would have been more direct. I wish she would have been more of a guiding force.

At one year of sobriety, I had already had my child, my only child with my second husband. And I would bring her in her little carrier to meetings and she would sleep through the whole meeting. She knew about AA from the moment I got sober. Husband two was now out of the picture and I'd married husband three.

He was sent to Germany and we lived there for three years and we started our own meeting because there was only one in our small town where we lived in Germany. Our meetings were at this small church. Maybe two or three people would show up and we would sponsor these people.

C: After Germany then what?

T: He got out. He had done his 20 years. We moved back to New York to Watertown, New York where he was from. I found meetings but it was cold. We'd go to bed and there was no snow. We'd wake up. And snow would be up to the ceiling. That's why I hate up north. We stayed there for three years and then we moved to Savannah, Georgia. The meetings were very different, the format, the types of meetings, etc. were all very different. I lost my brother in a bad car wreck and then my dad got really sick. So, we moved from Savannah to Jacksonville. That was in 1995 I've been here ever since. We lived in St. Johns County for a while and went to meetings at a firehouse. We used to meet in an old trailer next to where the firetrucks were. There's no longer a meeting there. My daughter was 17 and she graduated from high school. My husband and I were not getting along and we separated. He now lives in Colorado. He was a good stepdad to Trinity, my daughter. He did a good job.

I moved to a house in Mandarin and started collecting dogs. I mean, I had a menagerie of dogs. I love dogs, and had a screened in porch and Trinity and I thought it was great.

C: What about meetings? Are you still active?

T: I go to a meeting every day. They saved my life.

C: Wow! Who were some of the people who became important to you in Jacksonville?

T: First I have to tell you about Judy. She was my first sponsor in Jacksonville, she and I were buddies. I could tell her anything and she knew the program inside and out. She had worked the steps well and she sponsored other women. She's passed away. There was Joe in Killeen, Texas who would sit and talk to me like in between the marathon meetings. Then there was Bob, also from Texas who really knew the program and was living it regularly but wasn't perfect. He would talk about his struggles and difficulties.

C: Did your mother ever get sober?

T: She had quit drinking about 10 years before she passed away in 97. She went to a few meetings now and then but she never picked up a chip. Every year on my anniversary I always got a beautiful card in the mail. saying we're so proud of you. It was fabulous.

C: How do you sponsor women? Do you use the literature to help the newcomer?

T: I I couldn't do anything for newcomers for many years because I was still so engrossed in learning about sobriety for myself. I just felt so unqualified. I sponsored a couple of women in Germany but they weren't really serious. I was always into the literature. I read the 24 hours a day book every day never failed. That was my meditation book. I've got a couple new sponsees and I have them reading the first chapter or two in the big book, and the first step in the 12 and 12. I know that's where recovery starts. I'm committed to literature,

C: What meetings did you attend when you got here?

T: When I was in St. Johns my main group was the Switzerland group. When I married Brad, we moved out to the beach for three years and I attended the meetings at Penman. Meetings have been like a staple for me like eating and sleeping. I hope I never have to go without them. I've never had trouble finding meetings in Jacksonville. I'm a meeting person not so much a service person. My service is being at meeting as another sober member, to sponsor and to try to help people. I try to share about me and my life and to relate to them.

C: We've gone through this year of COVID and we're coming into a new era of our society. Can you talk about what it was like as you were going through this year and the changes you see for yourself and for AA?

T: I think we're going to continue doing zoom meetings. This morning, we had someone from Australia and someone from New Hampshire. It's wonderful to see so many more people connected through zoom. Can I share the message as well or just as easily through zoom as in person? That's a great question. When you're in a room personally it's easier to relate and connect with each other. I would miss not being able to hug people who came to me.

C: Is there anything you regret? any mistakes you made early on that you could share for the newcomer that that may help them?

T: I wish I could have finished college. I had trouble with my blood sugar and wasn't able to finish college. I wish I would have never had that abortion because now I would still have a child now since my daughter has passed away. I wish that one of my sponsors would have been more service oriented and helped me get to walk through the traditions and concepts. I'm still feel pretty naive about them even though I've been around a while.

C: What other highlights can you share.

T: I loved going to dances. There were dances in Austin with 20 or 30 of us going to this upstairs club house. And man. It was a blast and we had such a laugh at those dances. Brad and I used to go the New Year's Eve dance at Penman. They used to have a DJ at dances at San Marco.

C; How has AA changed during your time in sobriety?

T: I would say it's changed for the better 100%. I've never had one problem with any person, place or thing or location of any meeting in Jacksonville. I've always been welcomed with open arms.

C; Tammy, thank you very much