

Long-Timer's Interview with Ray T. Interview conducted by Cyndy Mowbray. November, 2019.

My name is Ray T.

*And you are an alcoholic?*

I am an alcoholic.

*How long have you been sober?*

Since Nov. 7, 1974.

*And where did you get sober?*

In Concord, California.

*And what brought you to Concord, California from Rhode Island?*

I moved and did a geographical to get away from my family in in the height of my drinking. In 1958, I moved from Rhode Island to California.

*And when you made the move to get away from your family at the height of your drinking did it help or did you continue drinking?*

I arrived in San Francisco on a plane. I'd never flown before. It was a prop plane and I arrived drunk and I continued my drinking.

*Did you get a job out in California?*

I transferred out here with an insurance company as an insurance adjuster and I worked for that company.

*Did you get married?*

I got out of here in 1958 and I got married in 1966 if I remember correctly.

*So from 1958 until 1966 you were a bachelor? Were you just drinking and working?*

I lived in Oakland, California and transferred down to Long Beach, California and then moved back to Oakland again and I was an alcoholic and a workaholic.

*That's not much time to find a spouse was it?*

She happened to be working for the company I was working for at the time.

*And how long did you stay married?*

17 years.

*And did you have children?*

Five.

*And what happened. Because you didn't get sober right away so was she a drinking partner?*

She was not an alcoholic. She would take an occasional drink. It was a dysfunctional marriage. I was not welcome really at home and I had a lifestyle of working and drinking until the bars closed. Then I would go home and do that again the next day.

*That's a tough lifestyle. So what made you decide to get sober?*

I would drink and blackout . My lifestyle of drinking and blacking out on the daily basis I could forget my problems for a while. I had picked up a couple of drunk driving's and it didn't bother me. Finally the alcohol stopped working. I was miserable not drinking and I was miserable drinking. The blackouts weren't working anymore.

*Let me ask you something about the drunk driving. What was the penalty back then for drunk driving?*

Drunk driving in those days was kind of easier than it is today. It was easier in terms of what it cost you. The first drunk driving I got, I got an attorney and got it reduced to a lighter sentence or a misdemeanor. Even the drunk driving was a misdemeanor but we got it reduced to reckless driving. Mainly this was because I didn't give them the test. They told me to give them a urine test and they took me to the hospital and when I got there I told them I couldn't urinate. The second drunk driving I'm trying to remember. I think I got three if I remember right. The second one I'm trying to remember where I was and what I was doing. The third truck driving is when I finally realized that I needed to go to AA.

*So how did you hear about AA because it wasn't as well known then as it is now?*

My mother years ago, before I move to California said she knew he was a real nice guy, everybody liked him and he went to AA. In fact he was the president of the thing! That's all I knew about AA.

*Was your mom talking about Bill Wilson?*

No, she didn't know Bill Wilson. She didn't know what AA was. But I remembered that. When the alcohol stopped working I asked various people what I should do about my drinking because I didn't think I was an alcoholic. I didn't even give alcohol a thought. All I knew was that the alcohol wasn't working so I told people that I had this drinking problem and I was miserable and I didn't know if I wanted to live or die.

I got as many answers as people I talk to. I talk to a pastor of a church and he told me to say the 23rd Psalm everyday which I did, but I still drank too. Finally I was in a Bible study of all things at this fellow's house and he was a nice guy. He was an attorney and professional man. He had a nice wife and kid. His name was Hal. I thought maybe Hal could help me because he had a good head on his shoulders. He gave me the answer about what to do with it. He said, "Go out and drink everyday but just have two drinks. Don't miss a day. And he said if you have to go to a wedding or something have your two drinks a day there." So I thought that was pretty good advice so I took Hal's good advice and went out and had two drinks every day. Then I thought to hell with Hal! So back to Hal I went and said, "This isn't working for me." And Hal said to me. "Ray you don't have a drinking problem, you have a following instruction problem because you

had more than two!” So back and forth I went to Hal several times and I finally picked up another drunk driving. After that, when I got out of jail the next day I think it was, I got a hold of Hal and said, “Hal, this isn't working for me. I will go to AA.”. He said, “Ray, I've been in AA for years. I didn't want you to go to your first meeting drunk or caught short.” I thank God for Hal because when I walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous I didn't even give it a second thought that I was... I didn't know what alcoholism was but I knew I couldn't control my drinking. Hal prove that to me.

*I'm a little stunned. That's amazing. Did Hal tell you what meeting to go to?*

No, I called Alcoholics Anonymous. I looked up the phone number and I called the central office I guess I was living in Antioch, California which is in Contra Costa County. The central office was in Long Creek. I asked them about meetings. I wasn't going to go to a meeting in Antioch because that was where I lived. So I went to my first meeting to 15 miles down the road in Concord, California. It was a mixed discussion meeting if I remember right.

*So back then where most of the meetings open meetings or closed meetings?*

There were open, closed, women's meetings and men's meetings. It was the same then as it is now.

*Were there a lot of people there?*

The first meeting I went to there were about 20 people there. Now I forget if it was a mixed meeting or an open meeting or what it was but I remember that meeting clearly and what went on there.

*So what is it that you heard that struck you the most?*

What struck me the most at that first meeting? They talked about alcoholism at that first meeting in and they explained to me the disease of alcoholism. They explained that it was a progressive, degenerative fatal disease. I remember that they said if you walk like a duck and quack like a duck and you're around other ducks chances are you're a duck. I thought about my life and everybody I knew. Most of the people that I worked with we all drank every day for sure. We

would go out in San Francisco to some fancy restaurant to eat and get drunk. They would go home but I knew where the after-hours clubs were and I wanted to go do some serious drinking after being with them. And that was my lifestyle. So when they said that at the first meeting about the people I hung around with I was sure I was quacking like an alcoholic and hanging around other alcoholics. When I left that meeting after they explain the disease of alcoholism to me I was relieved in one way because I knew I had a disease. I knew what was causing it and I knew that because Hal told me I shouldn't be drinking because I was an alcoholic. I walked out of that meeting knowing that I was an alcoholic.

There was a new guy there named Dan and Danny had a Big Book in his hand and he said, "Get one of these." He was excited about that. I guess Danny was about 14 or 15 years and I took Danny's advice and took that Big Book. When I traveled around town I would read the Big Book. Probably about 8 months or a year after that, Danny didn't come into the meetings anymore because Danny went out and drank and died. This is a fatal disease and Danny died. I thought the world of Danny.

*How did your family respond to you going to AA?*

My wife at the time was furious when I sobered up. She did everything under her power to get me to drink.

*How about the kids? How did they feel?*

They were young so they didn't have so much to say. In '74 my oldest one was... she was born in '66 so she was about eight.

*How about your friends? How did they react to you getting sober? To you saying I drink too much. I am an alcoholic?*

If I could count my friends, I could count them on one hand I guess. I didn't have any friends. I just had the people at work. That was my lifestyle. I had no friends. So about the people at work. I tried to keep it anonymous but I think everybody knew. My boss would come out and there was a fellow who would come into the office and my boss would say, "Don't trust Ray.

Ray doesn't drink.” My boss lost a drinking buddy. We would get drunk sometimes. After about a year-and-a-half or two years, this guy came into the office and said, “Ray is okay even though he doesn't drink.” My boss never did anything about his drinking.

*Did you stay with that company? Did you retire from that company?*

Yeah I worked for that company for over 25 years or so. But that was not the company I came to California with. I changed and this was the third company. Funny thing is I interviewed this company and I would see people punching a time clock so I picked up my briefcase and walked out of the office and didn't go on with the interview. Five years later, I interviewed with them again and went to work for them because the company I was working for wanted me to take a job in their New York office which was the headquarters. I didn't want to move from San Francisco to New York.

*So you started going to meetings and reading the Big Book. Did you get a sponsor?*

I went to meetings every day. They said go and I did 90 meetings in 90 days. So I went to meetings every day and sometimes went to more than one meeting a day. The Concord Fellowship was open 24 hours a day and they never locked the door, so I would go to meetings there and on the weekends I'd go on there. I would be there until it was time to go home to bed. AA became my life at the Concord Fellowship. After I sobered up, there were a couple of old-timers there that were pissing me off. After the meeting they would say, “Meet me tomorrow morning for a drink,” and they didn't invite me. I'd go down there the next day and they'd be at the meeting. Finally it dawned on me what they were doing. They were telling me, “You just worry about today. It's a day at a time program and we don't worry about tomorrow.”

After I was in the program and was sober for and not drinking for months, maybe even over a year (the time is a little not clear in my mind) I went on what I would call a “dry drunk.” I drove around all the bars. Some were closed and some were open. I didn't go in the door of any of the open. I don't know why I did that because the Concord Fellowship was open 24 hours a day so I walked into the Fellowship. Of course nobody was there and I sat down and I looked at the sides at the wall that said “One Day at a Time,” that's all we have and I thought, “What have I not done? What have I not done that these people have been telling me? It dawned on me I didn't

have a sponsor. So that was a Friday and I went home and Saturday morning I went down there and there was a man named Earl who had a good head on his shoulders. I asked Earl if he would be my sponsor. He worked at a shop and he had some work to do. He said, "Why don't you come to work with me today." It was Saturday so the shop was closed and he spent the day with me and he turned my life around.

*And how long was he your sponsor?*

He was my sponsor oh, I never did fire him. But I didn't have much of a social life if you know what I mean so I found another guy who was in the program who was about my sobriety. Dave had about maybe six months more than I did and I asked him to be my sponsor and he said he would and he said Earl was his sponsor too and that they used to drink together in the back in the day. Dave was 50% American Native from the Miami Tribe. I don't think Dave graduated from high school but he had a lot of common sense and a good head on his shoulders. Dave and I became best friends along with his wife Dorothy. I kept Dave for a sponsor until he died. That was about 12 years ago I think.

I was in the Verdi Valley and I used to go to meetings there. I ask this fella that had long-term, more sobriety than I had, to be my sponsor. He said, "Ray with your sobriety you don't need a sponsor." He was wrong. Everybody needs a sponsor. So eventually I had to leave my wife and we were most motor-homing full-time so I gave her the motor-home. I got a car and I moved near Laughlin near the river because the hotels were cheaper there. I went to the Alano Club for Thanksgiving dinner. They told me there was an AA Conference in Vegas, so I went to Vegas and I didn't know what to do with myself so I went to Flagstaff. I always like Flagstaff. I got a hotel there until I got an apartment. There was this fellow in Flagstaff named Sam who had a good head on his shoulder. He had a lot less sobriety than I do, but I asked Sam to be my sponsor and Sam is my sponsor now.

I don't think you need to sponsor that has as much or more time than you do. I think you need somebody that you can relate to that has a good program that has a good head on their shoulder that you can trust. That's what my three sponsors had. I could trust them.

*So when did you get to Reno?*

After I got the divorce from my second wife, I lived in Flagstaff for 6 months but I had to leave because the divorce was in Texas. We were full-time motor-homers registered in Texas with a motor-home club called the Escapees. So I moved to Texas because I didn't want the venue to be changed. I had to get out of Arizona in 6 months. So after I got divorced, I motor-homed alone for a couple of years. I used to come to Reno to drink when I was drinking because I was living in California in the Bay Area. And I had two children in Reno, a son and daughter. My daughter Krista, she's in the program, and my son lived in Reno. I would have bought in Flagstaff but I came to Reno and bought this house and put a couple of hunks of furniture in it and took off motor-homing. Then after a while I was driving on the road and started thinking, "I was too old to be doing motor-homing stuff," and I moved here about eight years ago. I bought the house 7 years ago.

*When you were doing the motor-homing and traveling you were able to go to a lot of different meetings in different states? Was there any place that stood out to you as having as either really good meetings or not-so-good meetings?*

The only good thing about motor-homing and AA is that there were meetings all over. Wherever I was going, before I got there or shortly after I got there, I would look up meetings. I did this on the internet and I would call central office to find out the times and places. I always went to a lot of meetings. My second wife asked me why I was going to so many meetings and I told her that people don't know what happens to people who don't go to meetings.

I find that what really stood out to me and still does is that our program, thank G-d has the traditions. The meetings are the same wherever you go. The people setting up the tables are the same. We have in common the one thing we all have, which is that we have a desire to drink and can't drink because we cannot control our drinking. Other than that, we come from all walks of life and we enjoy sitting next to each other. I like to think we are like a can of mixed nuts. But the meetings are the same because we're all alcoholics and we think with our alcoholic mind and we have that alcoholic way. We have similar experiences and we share with one another which keeps us sober.



I went to a meeting up in Canada and they said, "Are there any visitors here?" It was a large meeting probably about 80 people there so. I put up my hand and they said, "Good you're the one that is going to share tonight." It was a speaker meeting. I hadn't really spoke much but I toughed it out. The second night I went to the meeting and they said, "Are there any visitors here?" I put up my hand and they said, "You're the speaker." The third night I went to a meeting and they asked if there were any visitors and I didn't put my hand up! (Laughter).

I found if I couldn't find a meeting in the city I was traveling in I would go first to the fire department because chances are there's an alcoholic in there and they know where the meetings were. If that didn't work, I would go to the police station and they knew where the meetings were.

I have two home groups. My first home group is Happy Hour and that meets on Tuesdays and Fridays over on Foster by the high school. And the second group is in Verdi and it's a meeting on Sunday nights. That's a good meeting.

*So you really still travel to go to your home group because both of those are quite of a distance from your home?*

When I wanted to drink I would drive 50-60 miles to get a drink and not even think about it. That's what I was told. If you could drive for a drink, you could drive for a meeting.

*Is there any significant change that you see in AA from when you came in until now that you think is a good change? Is there any progress that we've made that you think has benefited new alcoholics coming in?*

Undoubtedly there's more meetings because there are more people. We have more meetings and that's beneficial. I think that when you think about it there's a lot of recovery homes. We go to those and I think that's good. I think there's less opportunity for 12-step calls because I could remember when I was first in the program my sponsor took me to my first 12 step call at a fellow's house. I don't think we have that.

I think in groups now it is just natural for a few people to get together and know one another good and some go out to dinner afterwards or for coffee. I think there was more of that when I came in to the program. I think I went out to coffee after every meeting and we would talk about things. I remember I was at one meeting and there was a time when there were newcomers like myself that would be there. I had left my wife and felt some security because I took the savings book. I came to find out that she wiped out the savings account without the book. I was sharing this at a meeting and these guys had a little sense of humor so they said, "Do you got any change in your pocket?" They said, "Take it out and rub it together." And I said, "What is this for?" They said, "It's all yours!" We'd go to Denny's or to some restaurant around and we would talk for about 3 or 4 hours after the meeting. That was really good Fellowship.

What really helped me when I first came into the program was that there were for about four of us that we get together and do things on the weekends. Four guys. We used to go camping and fishing and we would bring the AA books with us and those Hazleton books with us too- the black one and the red one and the 24-hour book. We would talk about our problems and how terrible our lives were and all kinds of things. But we stayed sober. We kind of had equal sobriety and they all stayed sober. I don't know one of them who went out. One of them passed away now but none of us got drunk. I don't know that we do that as much now, although maybe some because you know some of the women get together and go to a ball game and stuff. We *used to go to the AA campout too.*

*Is there any change that you feel is not so good for AA as a whole?*

I can't really think of any changes that's really bad for AA. I think there could be more communication with what's going on in the district and reasons for it. In the meetings there was allowed crosstalk. I think in a small meeting a certain amount of it is okay, but in a large meeting you should stick to AA and not get into a discussion about what's going on out there in the world or marriage counseling or relationship issues. I think one of the dangers and one of the happenings in AA that is bad is gossip. I think we need to be aware of gossip and how damaging it is. Particularly when somebody goes out and has a slip and now the group gets together and start talking about this person. They're an alcoholic doing what alcoholics do. It is a disease!

*So is there anything else that you want to add before we wrap this up?*

No. I think we have very good AA here in this district and in this region. We have the 24-hour answering service run by alcoholics which is a good advantage. Anyone who does volunteer stuff like answering the phone is doing 12-step work. Going to a meeting is 12-step work by being present at the meeting.

*You sponsor people?*

I do. I don't sponsor very many but I have sponsees. I brought a fella to a meeting down in Concord, California. I guess he has about 32-33 years of sobriety now and we're still friends. And there's another one I'm going to go see next week back in Cape Cod that has 30 years. I didn't sponsor him the all 30 years but I met him in Gold Beach, Oregon at a meeting. We was from Massachusetts and he was at Gold Beach and he had a little problem and we started talking about it and we became close friends.

I think one of the biggest blessings we have in AA is one another.

*Thank you very much Ray.*