

(Editor's Note: I did not transcribe the questions, only the answers that John gave to the questions.)

This is an interview with John F.

My sobriety date this time is June 26, 1976.

I had a good deal of sobriety before that time. I originally came into AA. On February 10, 1962 in Honolulu. I had a good sponsor and I really liked AA. My original sponsor went and moved to San Francisco and got married to a woman. He had strong, solid sobriety and she didn't. I think her family was wealthy and they obviously approved of Van. He was back and forth for a while and we lost touch for a little bit. And then I started going to a meeting that Van called the Slippers Meeting because it was that's exactly what it was.

Just after I was sober 5 years, I lived in Honolulu at the time, (and I was a lot younger than that I am now) I was walking down the street called Kalikow Avenue where people hang out. There were a lot of little bars then, now there are hotels. I looked in the window and there were all these lovely young tourists. I thought I was sober a long enough time and I thought, although I knew better back then and I thought I could have a couple of beers. That it couldn't have hurt anything. It was like a glass of water when I ordered a beer and then I decided to have another and you know where it went.

Shortly after that I met what is now my current wife. Fortunately at the time I was drinking so I had all this liquid courage. I wasn't drinking a lot, but I was drinking enough. Within a year we got married. She was Australian. Here she sits 49 years later.

The very first night I met her, the Honolulu streets were very busy, and I had to think of a way to meet her or at least to talk to her without embarrassing her. So what I did was to find a place where the fence came up to the sidewalk. I went behind the fence and waited for her to walk up and then I said, "Where've you been? I've been waiting for you." I didn't embarrass her too much and it went from there. I was still drinking. After we married I waited seven years before I came back to AA. Those years were like hell. You know I had a belly full of booze and a head full of AA. Of course in that length of time I never forgot how much I liked AA and I did! I kept thinking about going back to meetings but then I thought it was embarrassing. I had tried to help people while I was in and well it just wasn't good. We got married in Honolulu and then after a while it became obvious to her and she didn't like the drinking so after a couple of years she went to Al-Anon. And then she became a real good Al-Anon. It became more and more obvious that I was kind of a bad drinker.

After about 7 years we moved to Reno which we both liked. I was in Reno about a year and she said one day to me, more than once, "I don't know if you can't quit or won't quit but either way I'm not putting up with this." That stopped me in my tracks and in a very short time I stopped because I didn't want to lose her or what we had. We had two children by then so I stopped. My mind was not really in a good place and I had not yet gone back to selling cars yet. I was doing different jobs but they weren't me. Within a couple of years I was back to car sales and that's when things started to get better.

I went to AA here in Reno and my first home group was the Every Day Group at 8 a.m. I was selling furniture so I would go to the meeting every day and then go to work. I am a believer that if you're going to do it, do it. So I did. I got sober and our finances improved and everything improved. I got a sponsor and I started working the steps. It was easy to get back to doing everything because she had laid it on the line and I wanted to be married to her (Michelle). You know when you are drinking everything does not go well in the family. It affected both of us. Anyway when I stopped our marriage really began all over again. And it was really good and I've been sober ever since.

I became a better father, at least I think I did. My oldest son was about 4. I would take him out to golf and he would caddy. He would ride in the cart with me. One day I had him in the cart with me and he said to me, "You don't drink anymore do you Daddy?" And I said no. He saw the beer in the closet. I told him I had forgotten it was there and I had to take the six pack that was in there and break every bottle that was there. To him it was poison and I couldn't give it to anyone else because I would be giving them poison. So I had to break every bottle so he would know it was gone. Our other son is a Down syndrome boy. He was born one year before I came into AA. He's obviously a happy boy. He's been with us ever since. He was born a year before I got sober and I was there when he was born. When I talked to Michelle the next morning she said call the doctor. And when I asked if something was wrong she told me to call the doctor. So I called the doctor and he asked me if I knew what Down syndrome was and I said no. I knew what was wrong. It struck me blind. He seemed like he was just like the other baby and the doctor even said that it didn't show until the next morning. The only thing I could think of was what are we going to do? What am I going to say to my wife? We were expecting and got this beautiful baby boy only he wasn't so beautiful. We got this lovely boy and I didn't know exactly how to take it. I wanted to see what Michelle thought and I went in and that was all I could think of was, what do I say to her? I walked in the room and she said, "Aren't you glad that we have him rather than someone else who might mistreat him?" There it is. I'm not going to say I was all thrilled up but we did everything we could. She put them in different things and found out who it was and who he was beautiful baby, happy. And has been all these years. We never even thought of putting him in a home somewhere. They have some good places but we have him. He's 43 and we are so happy with him. He's in a good place. He goes to school every day he has his own room just like any other kid.

Is 1976, going to meetings at that time there were a lot of meetings to go to. It's not anything like now, and most of the meetings were at night whereas today we go to meetings during the day. There were quite a few differences. For one thing, the people that were coming in were younger. The meetings were smaller. I used to take, because everybody didn't have cars than those days, I used to take people to meetings all the time. I took Mary D. to meetings and at that time she had 17 years. At that time I got to talk to her a lot. She was more of a sponsor to me than anyone, although I didn't say that to her. I talked with her a lot. She would say take your own G-damn inventory. I heard a lot from her more than anybody else. I talk to all the guys like Johnny V. Johnny V. had been in the military. He had been in the Marine Corps as had I and he talked to me a lot. Pete T. was very active then. In those days, when AA was smaller we got to talk to people a lot more. The only real person that came near being a sponsor to me was Mary D. We didn't go through the steps then the way we go through the steps now. But we did go through the steps. I always liked AA and was always happy here.

Being able to be around these guys and being able to speak to them created a lot of Fellowship. We used to go practically after every beating go and have coffee. And we would take a lot of people to AA so a lot of people were a lot closer than they are now. We had a lot of people going to meetings but we were closer then. We had the meeting after the meeting and we developed friendships. There were very few cliques back in the day. Today, meetings are much larger and a lot more people are coming to AA. And they're coming in at different ages, some are older and some are young. AA is reaching out much more. There's a lot more emphasis on the steps than when I came in. I think that's a really good thing for the new people coming in. They all have to be reached. And some people won't talk to anyone else. So the fact that we have so many more people means that a lot of people are willing to take sponsors and some aren't.

(One change that is not so good) is that the vast majority of the people that are coming in now are also drugs addicted. And I don't think that's a particularly good thing but that's the way it is now. Because they're dually-addicted. When we came in we were addicted to alcohol. But we weren't druggies. In fact we used to sit in the bars and talk about people in their drugs. I don't think it's easy that they have to deal with both. Judges are sentencing people to AA and they're coming in from different doors which is different. When I came in it was because I was an alcoholic. I didn't come in through rehab. Not so many come in just off the street the way I did. I think rehab is necessary. We come in the way we come in. When I came in, I remember I had been in AA in Honolulu and then in Reno. If I had gone through a rehab my family would have been on the streets. What would they have done? It wasn't a choice for me, I just came in. I didn't go to a hospital because it wasn't in the cards. I had to work.

I still go to meetings of course. And now Michelle goes with me. We go to at least two or three meetings a week. The benefit of Reno is that we have so many open meetings so Michelle can go with me. We consider our AA meetings to be a spiritual experience. Once again, many of the people who came in when I came in were really agnostic. They didn't really have a higher power. Over time, and you hear it over and over again in meetings, they find a higher power. I think we're doing enough in that way for the newcomer. I would urge people to get a sponsor today because there's so many more people to sponsor.

I would want the newcomer to know that people like me; I am in my late eighties and I don't drive anymore so it is difficult for me to take on sponsees, come talk to me. More often than not, I will encourage you. I don't take newcomers because I haven't had a sponsor for a long time and I don't drive so it's hard, but I'm sure as hell they're admitting to answer your question. I will definitely talk over the phone. Some don't ask. I think people, (I have 43 years) and I think that some people they really think that because they are new and don't know anything that we don't want to talk to them but we are and we do. Talk to me, there I am. I will talk to anyone. I will talk to anyone who wants to come to talk with me.