

My Road to Recovery, Bill Hayden

Introduction by Jason Holmes

Good morning everyone! My name is Jason Holmes, and I am a child of God. That's something I didn't realize until I came to this church almost 18 years ago, and it has saved and transformed my life. I realize today that I am loved, and I *am* a child of God, as all of you are. I'm grateful to be a member of the Celebrate Life service in the evening, and I'm grateful to be here on this special Sunday morning as we enjoy the experience of the evening service.

My job now is to introduce the speaker. Traditionally, we have a speaker who comes up and shares testimony, parts of their life and how they transformed. This morning, we have a dear friend of mine, Bill, who's been very instrumental in my journey.

I met Bill when I came into this church just short of 18 years ago. Bill has been very instrumental in my recovery and the recovery of many, and I'm really excited that he's here today. We did have him booked last year for the anniversary, and unfortunately, he was ill that morning and couldn't make it, so you were stuck with me! This year that's not going to happen. Bill's here this morning and I don't have the words to say enough about my gratitude towards Bill and what he does for this community. He's definitely a child of God who does good things. Please give a nice warm welcome for Bill Hayden!

Message by Bill Hayden

I haven't done this before. I've done it at Celebrate Life. I'm here because of Celebrate Life. Danny was a really good friend of mine — I knew Danny before he came here. He jumped on me right away when Celebrate Life started. So did Muriel Green, who was on the board where I worked. I think she asked me the first time. When I came here a number of years ago I was touched gently on the back after I spoke and told that Jesus loves me, and as a result I became a member of this church and have been ever since.

But why I'm here today is because they want me to talk a little bit about my recovery. I'm an alcoholic. I've been sober for over 62 years, really one day at a time. I became an alcoholic, I'm not sure why. I think we all set up differently. My childhood was not great, sometimes okay, sometimes not. I think probably when I was in my early teens, back then I'd have been called a juvenile delinquent. Today we just call it 'misguided youth' and blame the community.

One of the things I had was the ability to learn almost anything, and I did all kinds of different things. I won't take you through my military service, but I did a year and a half in the Special Forces and six years in the military before I left because of my alcoholism. I was a pretty good senior NCO I think. My commanding officer used to tell me I was like a nursery rhyme. *'When I was good, I was very, very good, and when I was bad, I was horrid!'*

For about a year and a half after that, I drifted into a lot of things you don't even need to know about, none of them good, then I got a job with a company I really liked, in sales. It was up in the Barrie area, near Lake Simcoe. During the summer it was very, very busy, but come the Fall I had time on my hands and money in my pocket. I got heavily into drink again, and I lost that job because of drinking.

Thank God that the Twelve Steps worked, because that's all there was back then. A manager from one of our stores phoned me and asked me if I thought I had a problem. I really would normally say no, but in this case it seemed like a way out, so I said yes. He said "I'm gonna come and see you." He came and told me his story. He came from Holland to get away from booze. He'd lost the business over there and found out when he got here that we had more booze here than they had there! He told me his life story and then he said "Do you want to go to a meeting?" I thought, oh boy. Deep down I didn't want to, but thought probably the answer was yes, so he took me to my first meeting. It was in a little church in Elmville, which is just outside of Barrie on the way to Wasaga Beach.

We pulled into the parking lot and there were a few cars there. It was an anniversary meeting in that group and back then, they probably had a big crowd, about 25 people. I was quite nervous going into a church at that time. (I thought yeah, you know, downstairs for a couple weeks and then they dragged you up and made you ride a donkey!) Another thing. I come from a large family — there were 12 of us — and they didn't want anything to do with me at that time. Here I have 25 people wanting to shake my hand and telling me they're glad to see me, and that unnerved me.

My story went on from there and after a period of time I maintained my sobriety. Actually I got the job back with that company and I worked with them for 21 years. The only stipulation they made is that I had to go to the 21 customers I had and tell them I was an alcoholic, and I was going to do something about it. They backed me tremendously. I couldn't believe how much they backed me. When I left that company I was the general sales manager. Then they did something I didn't like, so I realized I had a choice and I left them.

I went back to school. I was hired by their Addiction Research Foundation and spent almost a year at school for addiction studies, although I'd done some addiction studies at Mac when I did marketing way back when I was in the Niagara Peninsula.

When I first went into AA in Barrie, my group was Colliers Creek United and I was probably 15 years younger than anyone in the group. Then I moved from there to the Niagara Peninsula, and my group was in Hamilton at another United Church. There were a lot of young guys there. At that time there was no detox or treatment center so we got a lot of 12 step calls. It was nothing for us to be sitting by a bed at 2am waiting for someone to come out of the DT's. It was very different, but we were young and didn't care. We sort of sectioned off that part of Niagara. We were trying to get people to come to AA who didn't even drink! I call that the missionary stage.

So things progressed. I went to Ottawa and joined AA there and worked for a company in Ottawa for nine years. I met my wonderful wife Susan, who I've been with for over 43 years and who's here today and a great support for me. I could go on and tell you stories for an hour about different people I have learned from. First off, in any occupation, ego is involved. When you're in recovery, you know you're going to '12-step' this person and that person. I went ahead and 12-stepped a Finlander, and I realized it was ego. No one else would work with him. He was great big guy from Finland and had been an ironworker in Hamilton for 18 years, and swear words were really his only English! And I didn't speak Finnish. Still I picked him up and drove him to a Monday night meeting in Oakville. The lady on the door who was greeting people had just come back from Helsinki and spoke Finnish — that got my attention.

There were lots of things that happened like that and some were humorous. Like my best friend Adam, just before he got sober, used to take a taxi to work because he was too drunk to drive his car. He drove a bus.

I got to work for ARF, and after my training I coordinated the detox units from Kenora to Cornwall (there were 27 treatment centres in the province). They were treatment centres and I trained the new detox attendants. The travelling was quite crazy — it's a big province. Someone offered me an opportunity to come here to Brockville and see if I could do something with Brock cottage. Because I grew up in the area of Port Hope on the water, a small town like Brockville sounded great. Sue is from Ottawa originally so that was good for her too. We came here and for 20 years. I was the director of Brock Cottage. During this time about 2000 people came through there. A lot of them made it, but some of them didn't. That wasn't up to us. I

never ever took responsibility for what happened to someone. Recovery is an inside job, and if they choose not to, that's OK. But a lot of them did choose to and are still around here.

The other thing I talked about before was my sister Joan who'd been in treatment, really mad in booze and drugs. She got out just before I came here and she started back in after about a month. I went and saw her and she didn't know who I was. I went with my brother Bob. She said "Well I had two brothers, Bill and Bob". But she didn't know it was us. She died about three weeks later. This disease does a lot of things to a lot of people; it doesn't matter what your background is. I did the 12 steps with another guy who went to talk to someone who was really sick in hospital in Ottawa. The next day he became a trade commissioner in one of the Asian countries. So it doesn't matter what background you come from. Alcohol takes everybody

While I was working here for the research foundation, I found out there were very few treatment centres for women compared to men. Because of my work with health and housing I knew how to write a proposal, and I thought I'd get the money. I wrote the proposal. The minister of housing was Chaviva Hosek, who was quite a militant feminist. The proposal said that in Ontario at that time there were 218 beds for men and only 12 for women. I got the money — \$500,000 within three weeks — and Tenant House came to be. I had a lot of help. I got information from someone that did that in Sudbury and someone in Ottawa, all recovering people who had done this before. There were about 18 women on the advisory board.

I could tell you stories about people for hours, different people I've met in recovery. One just phoned me yesterday from his home in the Bahamas. He shares my birthday in March, and was with me for a year and a half. When he came he was 18 with long hair and he had some convictions and he had a bench warrant out for him. After about three months, he had his hair trimmed and he was back in college. He went back to Toronto to face the bench warrant and the staff sergeant who convicted him saw him and withdrew the charges, because he was in recovery! He's got 32 years now and he and his wife are very well off.

These stories are all about recovery, because it's an inside job and the addicts do it. One of the things I realized early on is **everybody counts or nobody counts**. Another thing I've learned is if you're working with people, you have to treat everyone as an individual, because we're all different. Sometimes I get in trouble because I always ask what they do and how they do it. It's not for any reason, I'm just interested. I still really believe in everybody being the same. One of my favourite words that everyone would recognize because I use it a lot with people in

recovery is **mendacity**. It's the ability to lie to ourselves and believe it. Alcoholics do it. "I'm only going to have one. I'm not hurting anyone but myself." Think of the list. As human beings, I think we all use that line periodically.

I really like Brockville. We've been here 37 years now. I have no problem with anyone else. When I first got sober and started going to meetings I went to 4 or 5 every week and that's how I learned. I had no social skills at all. I was a good soldier, but this was a different world. I learned most of my social skills from AA members. If I said something and they didn't agree they would point it out to me, and most of them would tell me why. It was an education in itself.

I got this booklet here about 58 years ago at a little meeting outside of Grimsby Ontario. It was left over from an AA conference. Here are a couple of things they had written in the front.

The first three steps taught me how to give up. The 4th and 5th taught me how to own up. 7, 8 and 9 taught me how to make up and 10, 11 and 12 taught me how to grow up.

For the first couple years in AA I didn't function very well. The fog lifted periodically. I had been in the hospital when I was 26 in Quebec, and my family were told I probably wouldn't be back. I made it through that, and I often think how fortunate I am. Healthwise, I was diagnosed last spring with lung cancer in both lungs. It shook me up at first, then I realized when you're living one day at a time, *you live one day at a time*. I got a good doctor and he said "For 91, you're in really good shape so we'll do some immunotherapy." So far no side effects at all, one day at a time. They said they'll do this for two years. So I'm just going to do my AA thing and live one day at a time. I'm glad I'm healthy at my age. In March I'll be 92 – if I get there – one day at a time.....

In this booklet they have a description of the AA way, and back then it really worked for me because I understood it. I'd like to read it.

The AA Way

I found myself in a bottomless pit of sorrow, woe and despair, when a ray of light revealed to me the steps of a winding stair. In vain I tried to reach these steps; by myself it could not be done. When I cried for help a voice replied, 'You're standing on step number one'.

Whose voice it was I could not tell, and I asked 'Just who are you? Please don't go away. You're helping me.' He said 'You are standing on step number two'.

I found a friend who had helped me out. I trusted in him whoever he was, and he led me to number three.

I sat on this step and thought of myself as I had never thought before; of my wasted life and the harm I had done. He showed me to step number four.

Then I said to this friend, whoever you are, I'd be better dead than alive, for I'm a cheat, a liar and a thief. He said 'You are standing on step number five.'

With you as a friend to help and guide, I can rise from this terrible fix. Although as you say if you lead the way. He said 'You are now on step number six.'

I know I'm not worth the help you're giving me. It's like manna from heaven. I'll do my best to mend my ways. 'You are standing on step number seven.'

I harmed my wife, my children, my friends ... but will amend before it's too late. Then the voice by my side so gently replied 'You're standing on step number eight.'

I will make amends wherever I can, when the power to do so is mine. Again came the voice more clear than before, 'You are standing on step number nine.'

I'll admit if I'm wrong but want to go right and stand as a man amongst men. Again came the voice of the man of my choice, 'You are standing on step number ten.'

This man by my side, such a wonderful friend, he was surely sent from heaven. I shall always be thankful for what he has done, then he led me to step number eleven.

Lo and behold I'd reached the top; the day was bright and fair; and I thought of those I had left behind in the bottomless pit of despair. The ray of light which came to me and revealed the winding stair, came from the torch in the hand of a friend. I must show my light in there. This torch is the guide to show the way, I must see that it's always lit.

Without this light I can easily fall to the depth of the bottomless pit. I must never forget this wonderful friend in who's joy I now can delve. He is with me each day and I hear him say, 'You are now on step number twelve.'

To steer self clear of this bottomless pit where woe and sorrow are rife, there's one sure way. Take it day by day, and follow the AA way of life.

Thank you.