

Ann's Story – Women in My Life

When I first attended AA meetings, I did what all good alcoholics do. I drank coffee, smoked cigarettes, and ate lots of cookies. These helped me accomplish my one purpose in life, not drinking. And those crutches really helped me stay on course. Compared with drinking alcoholically, it was a much better way to live, though obviously not a good choice as a way of life long term

Sugar and alcohol have played featured roles in my life since I was little. My mother was a good cook. She baked a fabulous chocolate cake which passed as breakfast food when the party was over. We ate meals regularly as a family until I was 9. That's when my father progressed deeper into alcoholism. By the time I was 13, our family table was a distant memory and home life was characterized by verbal and emotional abuse. I'll never forget the day dad called me a drunk and a tramp even though I'd never even kissed a boy.

When I was 16, Dad deserted the family and, perhaps predictably, I took up drinking. I was still a sugar junkie too, and I power ate my way through hangovers. Life continued this way into adulthood. Mostly, I ate alone. But if I had a dinner date or business dinner, the evening was much more about alcohol than food. There was no family table in my life. Even after I got married and had a child, eating at tray tables in front of the television set was our standard, no sign of the family gatherings of my early childhood.

It goes without saying my self-esteem was in the gutter. It was a shame; I'd started out life bright and beautiful. But chronic drinking ravaged my complexion and years of eating piles of cookies and cake had packed on a lot of extra weight. I can't imagine what was going on in my guts. One day I thought I was bleeding to death in the toilet, until I remembered the pound of twizzlers I'd eaten at one sitting. I felt awful. I experienced thunderous heart palpitations. I had no peace. For a long time alcohol was more important to me than peace, and then one day that switched.

The unmanageability of my life finally drove me to a leap of faith, and I became willing to stop drinking. I found sobriety through the grace of a Higher Power and the fellowship and principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was still overweight, still smoking, still eating ridiculous quantities of sugar, but I was sober, and have remained so for 10 years.

It was four years before I succeeded at quitting smoking. But I finally accomplished that too, which left me with food. By this time I was in my second marriage and had a partner in eating. My new husband and I both loved cinnamon buns, ice cream and cheesecake, and we ate out several times a week. It didn't matter that I was unhappy with my weight, the urge to eat this way prevailed and eventually I just accepted middle-aged sprawl as inevitable.

And then the palpitations started again. I'd had heart palpitations in my drinking years, but here I was, sober and having panic attacks in sobriety. It got so bad I went to a cardiologist. I was instructed to stop drinking coffee and tea, which I was willing to do, although I was not willing to give up chocolate. Miraculously, the palpitations stopped! Coffee-induced palpitations were my first wake up call that what I put in my body seriously affected how I feel.

I applied the skills I'd learned in AA to cleaning up my eating habits. Consistency became the order of the day, no empty carbs at breakfast, some protein at every lunch, and fresh fruit or yoghurt to quiet sugar cravings. The same miracle happened with food that happened at AA: I lost craving. It took a long time to get there, but the miracle did happen. Vanity was very motivating, and success had its own rewards. I lost 20 pounds and never strayed so far I couldn't retrieve myself.

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All of this happened before I attended Suppers for Sobriety. I had even steered my family back into eating most meals together at a table. So when my AA sponsor told me about Suppers, I already knew most of what they were saying about nutrition and the importance of family tables. What I longed for was women in my life. I still found it difficult to allow people to play an intimate role in my life. So for me, the most important thing taking place at those tables is the camaraderie. Sure, I have been able to make better food choices based on what I learn at Suppers. I've also had the opportunity to share time with some lovely women to whom sobriety *in its entirety* is as important as it is to me. Their company is nourishment for me, just as sure as the food is. The learning and sharing continue to add to my emotional and physical sobriety one day at a time.