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## WINNER TAKES ALL

*Legally blind but no longer alone, she found a way to stay sober, raise a family, and turn her life over to the care of God.*

MY PARENTS WERE very much in love and had been married a couple of years when they decided to start a family. They were so excited when their first son was born. They owned their own small business, and with the arrival of their son their lives seemed perfect—until tragedy struck. When their son was about two years old, my parents were eating at a local restaurant, and he was dancing to the music of the juke box and having a good time. He followed some older children outside and was hit by a car. My parents carried him in an ambulance to a hospital thirty miles away, where he was pronounced dead on arrival. My parents were stricken with grief.

One miracle that brought them some joy in the midst of all the pain was that Mom found out she was pregnant. When this little girl was born, she brought them great joy. She did not take the place of her brother, but in her own right she did bring them joy. They tried again to have another little boy, but they had me instead. Not only was I a girl, but I was also born legally blind. A year or so later they finally did get the boy they wanted, and there was a big party to celebrate his birth.

From the very beginning I felt different and unwanted. At a very young age, as children do, I had to make sense out of my life, so I came to the conclusion that I was bad and God knew I was bad, so God made me handicapped to punish me. I thought that the undertow of sadness in my family was because of me. Later I realized that a part of it might have been due to my handicap, but there was still a lot of grieving going on. My father turned to alcohol and was a very angry man. When we were growing up, he was very critical. I was told things on a daily basis, like I was dumb and lazy. When I started school, I truly realized how different I was from other children. Children were very cruel and made fun of me. I could tell you many stories of times I was treated badly, and although the stories would be different, the feeling was always the same. I was not good enough, and I hurt.

Special education was mostly for the mentally retarded, so I did not get much support from my teachers, though there were two teachers who made a difference in my life. One was a third-grade teacher who got me large-print books. It felt so good that someone understood I had a problem, but that was overruled by the embarrassment I felt trying to carry those big books around. The other teacher was a freshman high school teacher who flunked me. It was as if I heard her say, "You can do better." All the other teachers just let me pass, whether I knew the material or not. When I got out of high school, I felt as if I had gotten out of some kind of prison. I graduated 150th out of a class of 152, and I felt that I was dumb.

It was during my high school years that I discovered alcohol, and my problems were over. Now I was pretty

and smart. For the first time I felt as if I fit in. I still could not see—oh well, no big deal, I felt good.

I got married and had two children. I married a man who was not or could not be honest. For several years after we were married, I did not drink. My sister went through a divorce and moved to the town I was living in. To be a good sister I went out with her, for she knew no one in the town. We went to a country western place that had a beer bust. You just paid a certain amount to get in, and you could drink all you wanted to drink. I thought I had arrived in heaven. We did this several times a week, and then she started meeting people and started dating. Well, I couldn't drive, so I started drinking more and more at home.

Several years later alcohol had control over my life. I had a tee shirt that I just loved; it said, "I used to hate myself in the morning. Now I sleep till noon." That described my feelings totally.

When my daughter had to go to the hospital, I stayed sober for the five days she was there and told myself that I had licked the alcohol problem. On the way home from the hospital, I got drunk again. I cannot tell you the number of times I tried to stop on my own. My son would look at me and say, "Mom, why do you have to drink so much?" He was about eleven years old at the time. So one night I got on my knees and said, "God, change me or let me die."

It was at this point in my life that I called Alcoholics Anonymous and asked for help. They sent two ladies over to my house. They sat with me, and I told them that I drank because my marriage was bad. One of the ladies held my hand and said, "That is not why you drink." I told them I drank because I was part

German. She patted my hand and said, “No, that’s not why you drink.” Then I told them I drank because I was legally blind. They said, “No, that’s not why you drink,” and they started to explain to me that alcoholism is a disease. They shared their stories with me and told me how alcohol had taken over their lives.

I started going to meetings, and my story sounded so dull next to some of the stories I heard. The most interesting thing I could think to tell was about the time my friends, who were also drunk, let me drive the car. I almost got us all killed—but what fun! Legally blind, drunk, and behind the wheel of a car. God was really taking care of me and the other people on the road that night; I just didn’t know it at the time.

The truth is, most of my drinking was done at home alone. I would call people and talk, and the following mornings were awful, trying to piece together what I had said. I would say things to my husband like, “Wasn’t that an interesting call last night,” hoping he would volunteer information. My hands were beginning to shake without the alcohol, yet when I got to A.A., I wasn’t sure I belonged because my drunkalog was not exciting.

Then one night at an A.A. meeting a friend said that even though he had been in jail and done lots and lots of stuff, he was no different from me. He felt the same things I felt. It was then that I knew I was not unique, that the people did understand the pain inside me.

I met a lady who had a handicapped child, and we learned so much from each other. One important thing that I learned was that *handicapped* is not a

four-letter word. *Handicapped* is not a dirty word. I learned that I was not bad—that I was one of God's special children, that God had a plan for my life. The people of A.A. showed me how my past could and would become an asset. I got a sponsor and started working the steps. The promises of the Big Book started coming true for me. The feeling of uselessness and self-pity went away, and I could see how my experiences could help others.

When I was three years sober, I made one of the most difficult decisions I had ever made. I left the marriage. I did not leave because I didn't love him. I still love him, but the marriage was not a healthy place for me to be. I found myself with two children to support. I was legally blind and had no job skills. When I moved out, I first moved into public housing for blind people. This was a shocking experience for me, but it was full of growth. For the first time in my life, I was learning to accept my handicap. Before this I would plan out my day as if I could see and then plan it out again based on the fact that my vision was limited.

Through the commission for the blind, I got involved in a program that helps blind people become self-employed. After three months of training, I moved to a city a couple of hundred miles away where I knew no one. I lived in an apartment that was about a mile from a coffee shop that I operated. I would walk to work at 6:30 a.m., carrying \$200 in opening cash on a dark road, and I was afraid. I had two people working for me, and on my second day one of them did not show up. I had never run a business before, and my three months of training just didn't seem

enough. It was a hard time for me. A lady from a major food company came by to take my grocery order, and I didn't have a clue how much coffee, bacon, or hamburger meat I needed. She shared with me what the previous manager had ordered and helped me place an order.

God only knows how we got on the subject, but she was a member of A.A. and later would become my new sponsor. She picked me up and took me to meetings. At one of the meetings, I met a guy who for the next year picked me up and drove me to work. I paid him a dollar each morning. I am sure that did not cover his gas, but it helped me to feel I was paying my way. For the first time in my life, I was now supporting myself.

This is just an example of how God works in my life. No longer did I have to drink, but it was much more than that. Everything I needed was provided. I had a God of my understanding that helped me in every aspect of my life.

In working the steps, my life changed. I think differently today; I feel different today. I am new. We have a sign at the A.A. meetings I go to that says, "Expect a Miracle." My sobriety is full of miracles. When my son filled out an application for college, I filled one out too, and was accepted. Soon I will be a senior, and I have a 3.71 grade point average. Thanks to A.A. I have come a long way from being near the bottom of my high school class. It takes me a lot longer to read the material, so I have a CCTV (I put my book under this camera and it comes out in big print on a monitor). I have a talking calculator that helped me get through statistics and a telescope that

can help me see the board. I accept help from the disabled student services and gladly make use of the volunteer notetakers.

I learned to accept the things I could not change (in this case my vision) and change the things I can (I could be grateful for and accept the visual aids instead of being embarrassed and rejecting them as I had when I was younger).

I have already told you about some of the miracles that have happened. However, there's more. I want to tell you how I feel inside. I am no longer spiritually bankrupt. It's as if I have a magic source in my life that has provided me with all I need. I just celebrated my twelfth year of sobriety a couple of months ago. When I first came to A.A., I didn't know who I was. My sponsor said, "Great—if you don't know who you are, you can become whomever God wants you to be."

Today I am doing things that I never dreamed possible. More importantly, it is the peace and serenity I feel inside that keeps me coming back. I have been through hard times in and out of sobriety, but before A.A. it didn't matter how good things got—I always had a feeling that something was wrong. Since A.A., it doesn't matter how bad things get—I always have a feeling that everything is going to be all right.

In working the Twelve Steps, my life and my old way of thinking have changed. I have no control over some of the things that happen in my life, but with the help of God I can now choose how I will respond. Today I choose to be happy, and when I'm not, I have the tools of this program to put me back on track.