

## A VISION OF RECOVERY

*A feeble prayer forged a lasting connection with a Higher Power for this Mic-Mac Indian.*

I THOUGHT I WAS DIFFERENT because I'm an Indian." I heard that statement from many Natives at my early A.A. meetings. I would only shrug and say to myself: You think you're different, what about me? I'm a red-headed Indian.

I grew up on a reservation in Canada. As a young fellow, I was a proud Mic-Mac Indian. My family had a reputation: They were hard drinkers, violent and tough, and I was proud of this. I was told that my grandfather had been the chief of our band, but he had to step down because he went to jail for shooting a man. Jail was almost a badge of honor in my family, or so it seemed to me. As a small boy, I remember standing on top of a case of beer (there were always lots around the house), saying to myself: In a few years I will be this tall.

There were times, though, when I witnessed my father's rages and I was full of fear. I swore that I would not be like him, but I didn't see that alcohol and the rages were related.

I always thought I was different. On many occasions I wished I had black hair like my friends. Mic-Mac was the language in our home, but I would not speak it. All my family spoke Mic-Mac, but when they

spoke to me, I would answer in English. I believed I couldn't speak Mic-Mac as well as my parents, so I resolved not to speak it at all.

I was ten years old when I had my first drink of alcohol. On New Year's Eve I stole two glasses of vodka from my parents. I can't say that it did what it was supposed to do, for I got deathly sick, threw up, and had diarrhea. The next day I was full of fear that my parents would find out. I learned my lesson for a while.

A few years later, in junior high school, a few friends and I got a bottle of rum from a bootlegger. I got really drunk, and it was great. I remember having a feeling of complete freedom. I drank for the next fifteen years. Drinking became a major part of my life and I thought it was normal. Then came the violence, the fighting, the illegal acts, and the image of "the tough guy." My family was proud of me, and some relatives would actually encourage me.

I spent a number of years in and out of juvenile correctional facilities, and after my eighteenth birthday, I began spending time in county jail. I actually got a high when I came home, knowing that my friends and relatives would respect me more because I had been in jail and was becoming a man.

While in a juvenile detention center about 500 miles from my home, I received word that my mother was dying of cancer. I was able to get a pass and return home to spend time with her. One evening my family asked me if I would stay home with my mother and give her the medicine she was required to take. I had already had a few drinks and was anxious to get out and party with my friends, but I reluctantly

agreed to stay. Self-pity set in, and all I could think of was the good time I could have been having. I got very impatient with my mother, and when she refused to take her medicine, I almost forced it into her mouth; then I left to join my friends. The next morning I woke up in county jail, about 100 miles from home. I had attempted a break-and-enter, and was caught by the police.

That very evening, as I sat in jail, my mother died. I was allowed out for the funeral, and I still recall how alone I felt, even when I was with my family. I felt shame and remorse, and for years to come I believed I was somehow responsible for my mother's death. This incident haunted me for years. Alcohol would take it away for a while, but the remorse always returned. I tried to comfort myself by saying that my lifestyle was a part of my destiny just like many of my family members, but this did not remove the remorse.

I can remember only one good thing that happened during this time. As my mother lay dying, I talked to her in the Mic-Mac language. She seemed so happy, and she told me that it sounded beautiful to hear me speaking Mic-Mac. I cherish this memory.

I was to meet a young girl and have a son. Proud, I named him after myself, and my drinking slowed down for a little while. One day I promised my son that "tomorrow" I would take him to the movies. I really meant it from the bottom of my heart, and I was looking forward to it. That night I took a drink, and it led to many more. The next day I was hung-over, and even though I had promised to go to the movies that afternoon, I took a drink to fix myself up. That drink

was followed by many more, and I justified them by telling myself: My son is so young, he will never remember the movie. The day after the promised movie I was guilty and remorseful, and felt I was just no good. I faced my son, only to hear him talking excitedly about going to a movie. I couldn't say anything, for the movie was no longer playing. I left his mother to explain.

The next few years saw me living back in the old home with my father, as my girl had left me, taking my son. My drinking escalated even more, as did the guilt, remorse, and fear. I was hospitalized for dehydration, had a mild stroke, spent a week in a psychiatric ward, and suffered a number of alcoholic seizures. I lost the trust of my family and friends. They simply could not rely on me for anything. I would stop for a while, but I always drank again.

I can certainly identify with our co-founder Bill W. when he says on page 4 of the Big Book: “. . . the old fierce determination to win came back.” I would take a drink, and then I knew everything was going to be all right. I was going to clean up my act; everything was going to change—you'll see. It didn't; nothing changed. I tried so many ways of beating the game: I went to church and took a pledge; I went to a Native sweat lodge; I would do something so I would be put in jail; I vowed to stay away from hard liquor. Nothing worked. Then came the pills to stop the shakes and get off the sauce for a while.

One evening during a party at my home, an argument led to fighting, as usual. One of my brothers stabbed me in the back with a knife, and I fell to the floor unconscious. I came to in the hospital. They told

me that one lung had collapsed, and they had a drain in my lung that came out the side of my body. The very next day some friends came to visit me, bringing a bottle of liquor. I still had that pride. I was still the tough guy. I lay there in bed with tubes draining my lung and smoked cigarettes and drank liquor. Later, in A.A., I had the nerve to question Step Two and wonder why I had to be “restored to sanity.”

I can honestly say that nothing worked for me until I joined Alcoholics Anonymous. Eventually I ended up in a treatment center, and after a twenty-eight-day program, I began attending A.A. meetings on a regular basis. The treatment center introduced me to the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I left there knowing that the only hope for me was the Twelve Steps.

I was told that A.A. is a spiritual program and that I had better have a Higher Power. I knew nothing of God or Higher Powers, and I began trying to find one. At first I thought that since I was a Native, maybe I should practice the Native traditional ways. Then I thought maybe I should go to the church on the reservation. Then I believed that if I went to enough A.A. meetings and just sat there, I would have a vision and achieve recovery. One day a member asked me if I believed that there actually was a Higher Power. I did believe there was a God of some sort or another. He told me that was enough. He said with that belief and attending meetings, I would find a Higher Power of my own understanding. Today I am thankful for that advice.

After three months in A.A., I returned home one evening after a meeting to hear the music and laughter of a party next door. Some of my drinking buddies

were at that party, and I just knew I was going to end up there. I did not want to drink, yet the party was like a magnet. I was full of fear as I ran across the street to a pay telephone. I called my sponsor, but there was no answer. Panic set in as I ran home. In the house I went into my bedroom and sat on the side of the bed. I looked up and said these words: "Well, Buddy, I guess there's just you and me." Believe it or not, it worked; those simple words worked. Something happened: A little peace came over me, anxiety left, and then I lay down and fell asleep. I slept well that night, the first good sleep in a long time. That feeble request to God worked. I was honest and really wanted God's help. From that day on, I knew that I had found a Higher Power and that He would help me.

Over the next few months my life slowly began to change as I worked on Step One of our recovery program. I listened to speakers and began a Big Book study with an older member. In Mic-Mac folklore there are little people we call Bugalademuj. They live in the mountains, but they often sneak into our homes to play tricks on us, usually at night so we won't see them. When I noticed that Chapter 4 of the Big Book, "We Agnostics," had appeared to change, I told A.A. members that the Bugalademuj were fooling around with my Big Book. You know what—they are still at it today.

I now understand that the spiritual malady should be my main concern and that the more faith I have, the fewer problems I will have. Today I have more faith than I ever had, and as my faith grows, my fears lessen.

For a guy who has spent years in jails, hospitals, psychiatric wards, a guy who just could not stop drinking, there was only one answer—Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps. I was very fortunate that I was steered in the right direction. A dramatic change has taken place in my life. Soon I hope to celebrate my second anniversary of continuous sobriety. In two years my whole life has changed. Today I sponsor others. I understand the word *compassion*, and I feel it. I am working on Step Eight at the present time, and I just know that more happiness is to come into my life as I “trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.”