

A Very Grateful Sea Going Alcoholic

A Most Satisfying Adventure

Rick R.

I started drinking at the age of thirteen in a Smokey city of Pittsburgh Pa. right near the steel mills. I have five brothers and four sisters and seven of us drank heavily. By the time I was seventeen I was a problem drinker and dropped out of school in my senior year in 1959 to join the Navy as four of my brothers did before me and boarded my first ship in Newport RI. During my time in Newport my whole family left Pittsburgh and relocated to Los Angeles, Ca., and I never got to see them for three years. I did, however, bond with the crew of that first ship and still meet with them every two years or so. I managed to get through my first hitch with typical alcoholic behavior and was very good at my job, but I longed to get home to my family. I completed my tour and when discharged, I flew right over Pittsburgh to L.A. and worked in the Swimming pool business where I was an Iron worker. My drinking escalated and I found myself circling the drain again within three years and started thinking about how well I loved *the discipline and structure of navy life and decided to give it a second chance. I reenlisted* in Oct. of 1965, and was shipped out to Pearl Harbor for a two-year tour on a destroyer. I got married and had a child and was divorced during that time and continued drinking unabated. My first wife took my son and moved to Huntington Beach, and I was shipped to San Francisco Bay. I continued to get worse at drinking, but I never missed my responsibilities when it came to child support and alimony. Finally, I was transferred to a ship in Long Beach and got an apartment. I was an E-6 (BM1) in charge of a deck division and slept in three Mondays in a row and didn't go aboard ship until after midnight to not bring attention to myself. After the third time the captain had me come to his cabin to explain what was going on with me. My record was clean, and I was excellent at my Job. I explained my domestic situation and that I reenlisted on the condition that I be transferred to a ship in Long Beach to be close to my son and get visitation and I discovered that this ship was scheduled to deploy to the western Pacific in two months and I would be gone again, then I added one more thing to my exclamation; I said, And Captain, I have a drinking problem. With compassion, he seemed to understand that I was sincere, and he said, "Do you want to be transferred to the ARC (Alcoholic Rehab. Center) on Base. (The only one in the Navy at that time) I responded: No sir, I had attended my first AA meeting the day before and thought that I had the answer to my drinking problem but going back to sea in such a short time had put me in the same dilemma that I shipped over for. He had the legal officer work with me to get a humanitarian transfer to a ship that stayed tied up to the pier for the next year. My first Meeting in AA was on October 15, 1969, and I have never wanted a drink since that day. I spent the last thirteen years of my Naval Career sober and was on the leading edge of the rehabilitation movement in the Navy. Three years after I got sober there were ARC's on virtually all the naval stations of any sizable number of sailors. The ARC in Long Beach was renamed the Alcoholic Rehabilitation Service (ARS) which directed all the ARC's. I was sent to school in San Diego, Ca. to become a Collateral Duty Alcoholism Consultant. (CODAC) There I was educated in the knowledge of the nature of the disease in the different cultures throughout the world and was responsible for educating the crew (via quarterly classes) on the different commands that I served and to counsel the commanding Officers as to what best could be done in cases that involved the use of alcohol and drugs.

My career after October 15,1969 was the most satisfying adventure that any sailor could have asked for. My whole attitude changed from one of that caricature that you see in the movies shouting orders to one of compassion and understanding and one of responsibility and accountability. My last command was Recruit Training Command in San Diego, Ca. where I ran the Company Commander School Training Company Commanders (Drill Instructors) to train recruits how to become adults and sailors. I retired from the Navy as a Senior Chief Boatswains Mate in 1982, and tears come to my eyes when I remember how the captain of my first sober ship intervened to let me begin that wonderful journey.

Yours in Love and Service

BMCS, Rick R, US Navy Retired