

The Step Five Ball and Chain

Freedom and Peace of Mind

By Rick R.

I do not think I have ever witnessed an alcoholic that came to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) that loved themselves or that was not riddled with guilt and shame. It is hard to understand why alcohol affects some people differently than others. I have observed members that came from good family environments that ended up on the streets and others that came from alcohol infested families that turned out normal as can be. In either case, the alcoholic seems to have something missing in their mental state that engender the need to find a way to neutralize this negative self-image and that first drink of alcohol does something that gives them the relief which makes them feel normal. I have heard it said that once a person starts to drink to cover up these feelings, especially in adolescence years, they stop growing emotionally and when they finally show up in A.A. they have the emotional state consistent with the age they were when they started drinking, absent of the coping skills of a normal person. They will have to revisit all those underdeveloped behavioral patterns and replace them with mature and healthy thoughts and actions. Easier said than done! When I look around the room at an A.A. meeting we all seem to look about the same in the way we dress and in our outside appearances. The only thing that makes us different is what is going on in between our ears. If we all woke up this morning with amnesia, we would all be the same. It is the tortures of the past that torment us and therein lies the problem and the solution. If we can understand and accept this well-established approach to our mental condition, we can take actions that will restore our self-esteem and we can live an incredibly happy and peaceful life. We cannot change one moment of the past, but we can resolve the issues in our lives that brought about the need to escape from those horrible memories of the things that we regretted having done. The habits and deeds that triggered the guilt and shame that led us to seek relief in the bottle can be reined in and if we are fortunate enough to believe this you may want to revisit the fourth and fifth steps, identify those deeds that we drag around like a ball and chain, and keep us from actuating the rest of the program. 12&12 pg. 56 "Even A.A. Oldtimers, sober for years, often pay dearly for skimping this step." Those things will not go away but the mental and emotional pain that we drank to nullify can be arrested and we can finally put it all behind us and live a wonderful life. I know this from experience. When I revisited my fourth and fifth step, I was stronger and talked to someone about those deeds from the past that plagued me and realized that most people who abuse alcohol have them, to one degree or another, and if they are willing to address them, they can be free from that *Ball and Chain* and my experience is that it freed me up to continue the rest of the step with pleasure. From the day I entered A.A. to the day I mustered the strength to do this, I had no comprehension of the effect it would have on me, for if I did, I would have cut to the chase much sooner and avoided several years of discontent. If those deeds were in the past and not habits of the present, this process worked exactly as it was intended as per the program. I hope that this encourages at least one person to find someone they trust and find the relief that I have experienced as the result of cleaning the slate and I wish them a happy life. It worked for me.