

Trudging Through Transitions

by Harry Haber

In the last four years, two important transitions have changed the course of my life and opened up a new world for me. It all started one December night when I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting to get in out of the cold and have

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some hot coffee. Something happened—as these people, people just like me, shared their own stories, I started to identify and relate to them. For the first time in my life I felt hope.

At the same time I felt afraid. If I took the first step, where

would my life go? How could I live without drugs and alcohol? What would become of me as a person? In the process of getting clean and sober, I found out that it would be difficult for me to try to do it alone. I started by asking a Higher Power every morning to help me to stay clean and sober *just for today*. I got a sponsor and a counselor because I knew I was going to need direction on how to live a better life. Sharing my feelings and emotions with my sponsor and counselor helped me to break down the wall and take off the mask I was hiding behind. This was the beginning of feeling good about myself and of trusting someone else.

There were certain changes I had to make if I was to stay clean and sober. First, I had to change the people I hung around with and the places where I hung out. I started associating with other people who were clean and sober, and

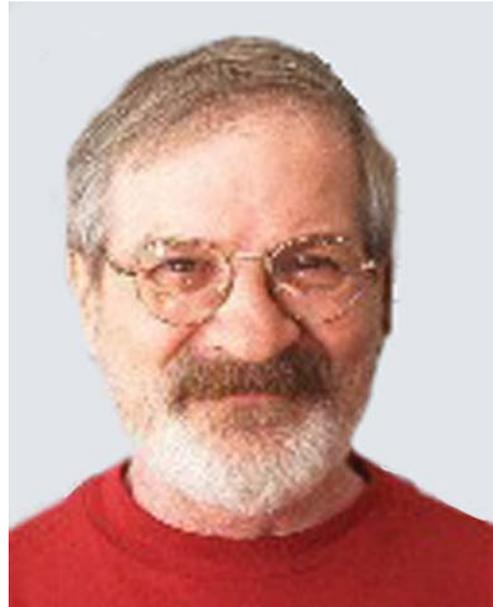


Photo courtesy of the author.

of course, I went to meetings. My attitude toward life and people started to change as well as my behaviors.

Feeling good about myself, the way I was living, and the person I was becoming, opened up doors to new opportunities. I have an interest in computers, so when I learned about a free Microsoft word processing class, I jumped at the opportunity. Later, I got into a self-paced program in Microsoft word processing where I could earn a certificate and did so. Completing both of these programs increased my self-esteem immensely, but when it was over, I wasn't sure what to do next. My counselor sug-

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gested going back to school. My first thought was, "Oh sure, I'm fifty-eight years old and someone suggests that I go back to school! No way, I am *too old*, and, what good would an education do me now?" Even when I began to consider it, I was held hostage by the fear of the unknown. Would I be able to adjust to going back to school after forty-two years? Would I be able to get good grades?

My counselor encouraged me by reminding me that I already got my certificate in word processing. That proved that I could do it. And yes, she was right. I did want to learn more about computers, such as taking them apart, putting them together, repairing them, and troubleshooting.

I had to change my thought process from, "I'm too old," to, "I'm never too old." From my old way of thinking, "I can't do that" to a new way of thinking, "let me try it...."

I would like to eventually get a job working on computers in some capacity. Why not go back to school and learn about computers?

Going back to school at Middlesex Community College was really scary.

As a matter of fact, I was ready to quit before the end of the first day. With encouragement from my classmates, I continued on. By seeking help from my classmates, instructors, tutors, and studying hard, going back to school has become a welcome and fulfilling challenge. Here I am after three semesters—I am not only doing well, but am also enjoying it.

Neither of these transitions would have been possible if I hadn't had the courage to ask for a lot of help from a lot of people. I also had to work hard. I have a willingness to go to any length to have a healthy life and maintain a constant vigilance that keeps me on track. I am feeling better about myself and my life.

Has the road to recovery from alcohol and

drugs been easy? No, not at all. I am trying to live a life today that goes against everything and every way I lived before. I had to, and still have to, make a lot of changes, especially in my thinking, my attitude, and my behaviors. Has the road to an education been easy? Definitely not. I had to change my thought process from, "I'm too old," to, "I'm never too old."

From my old way of thinking, "I can't do that" to a new way of thinking, "let me try it, do it to the best of my ability, and see what happens."

It is hard to express how these two transitions have changed me, the way I live, and how I feel about myself today. I no longer have low self-esteem. I am a better person to the people around me. I have changed my attitude and my behavior toward life and others. My dreams today aren't just dreams anymore, they can come true. Going back to school is one dream that I am finally fulfilling. I have friends in my life today that genuinely want nothing but the best for me. Most importantly, I no longer have to resort to stealing, cheating, lying, and being dishonest.

I learned that I can't do it alone. It is better to have someone walk through the fears *with me*. Sometimes we just don't know the directions so we need to ask for them. Sometimes two heads are better than one.

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