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Triangulation in Monument Square

S.B.

Tonight I sit here in my kitchen, ready to begin this story. It's one o'clock in the morning, and there is a thunderstorm going on. My poor cat slipped out of her flea collar last night, and got loose in the neighborhood. Tonight she will have to sleep under a car somewhere.

I am waiting for my cup of Green Mountain coffee to finish brewing, and I keep looking at the painting of a sailor that my friend Sarah gave me. It looks down at me and appears to be a combination of Brutus and Popeye. It could be a child of triangulation between Olive Oyl and her two cartoon friends. Someday I'll figure out whether this painting belongs here at all.

A little over a year ago I was in another state, living in a two-man pup tent. It was right next to the power lines and railroad tracks. On the occasion of a thunderstorm it was pure shit. I'd usually have to sit there and bail out the tent. I'd be soaked, and scared about getting hit by lightning. After it was over, I'd go out to the railroad tracks and shout to God what kind of parents I had to bear me into this nightmare. Fortunately, there were few storms during the two and a half months I lived there.

I was living in the tent because I had run out of friends to live with, and I wanted to spend my money on cocaine and beer for one-night parties for myself. The last home I had was in a crack house, where I went insane with the drugs, the inhabitants, and the clientele.

Finally, the summer was ending, and I knew it was time not only to end my camping lifestyle, but my twenty-five years of drinking and drugging, which had led to this unmerciful bottom in my life. I talked it over seriously with my parents, the last two people I had in my life, and decided to move to Portland, Maine.

The only way I could accomplish this was to save some money. First, I tried getting locked up in a detox. That only lasted four days, and I drank as soon as I got out. Then I tried working for a friend who was a drug dealer, fixing his limo, but I only used the money for alcohol and cocaine.

In the detox, I had learned from heroin addicts about another detox, where they locked you up for ten days minimum in a state prison. So I tried this, and stayed twenty-three days. I had my money saved and had stopped the desire to use drugs.

Then it was back to the little green prison of the tent to prepare to leave for Maine. On that last day I had planned a schedule to get the money out of the bank,

S.B. is a member of the Portland (Maine) Coalition for the Psychiatrically Disabled.

buy clothes, get a ride to Boston, and get to Portland by bus. I knew I also had to get into a homeless shelter by five P.M., so timing was important. That last night I couldn't sleep, and paced the railroad tracks, taking a mental picture of them, which I still haven't forgotten.

Departure day happens, I say a quick goodbye to my parents in Boston, and ride a Greyhound up to Portland, cursing the state I had just left. There wasn't much of a mind to curse with. I got to Portland with a half hour to get to the shelter. As in the past, having good luck asking people for help, I had gotten somebody to ride a bus with me to a downtown terminal, where I connected with a bus to the shelter.

At the shelter I balked when asked for my license, because it had a warrant on it. I really wanted to leave the past and all of its shame behind me. I remember my mind's being pretty fried during this process. Over the next few days, I found myself living the life of the homeless. I walked the streets, and once went into a bar instead of looking for work.

I checked the bulletin board at the shelter, which announced NA meetings, a Prolixin clinic for the mentally ill, employment counseling, GED preparation. Also, there was confidential AIDS testing. Yes, I belonged in all these programs. I was in that class of people who had hit the bottom, and I felt it.

After a few days I made contact with some people, and arranged to stay with them by simply getting drunk and passing out on their couch. Again, I was lucky being helped out by people I didn't know. For three weeks I stayed there, and finally, after one of many drunken parties and brawls, I left for my own apartment. (Having recently gotten a job, I had some money, and found an apartment, and moved in within an hour.) Moving in was easy; all I had was a gym bag and a six-pack for company.

So, in three weeks I had a job, an apartment, and some drinking friends I had to avoid because they were too violent, and a refrigerator for my beer. I needed it to fuel me for work. There was one disturbing fact; I had just learned that my mother and brother had cancer. I postponed thinking about this news and built up my strength by isolating myself, working seventy hours a week, and drinking heavily. I *thought* this was building my strength.

This went on until my birthday. It was then that I sat down after a good day at work. I had had the opportunity to teach a bright young apprentice some tricks of the trade, which I had become good at despite my drinking. It was rare that I had a good day at work.

Suddenly, all these emotions, the good and the bad, caught up with me. I sat down and cried for hours over my family and my life. I was very lonely. I became very sick then, mentally, physically, and spiritually. I knew this was from alcohol. I lasted two weeks on the job, and burned out after working seventy-two hours in five and a half days.

I quit my job, went back, and screwed up again, drinking on the job; I then went back home on a \$1,200 drinking binge. My goal in the binge was to kill myself, but I couldn't.

I went back to Portland and quit my job again. Any ideas of getting stronger were gone now. I stayed home and debated seeking help for what I was now considering alcoholism. I couldn't leave the house for days, thinking God was going to strike me down for my drinking. I finally went to an AA meeting drunk, then approached some

friends up the street for some help. The next day I went into the program at the Salvation Army. I told them I had been sick for a few weeks and needed counseling.

Although I stayed at the Army for a few weeks, the experience was not good. Group living and its restrictions bothered me. It didn't work. I was thrown out on the street on an eight degree day in January, and for the first time in my life I was grateful I was sober.

I went to see somebody at Community Alcoholism Services and got to talk to another recovering alcoholic. This was a great amount of relief to me. Since then I've learned just how much it can help to talk to another recovering alcoholic. I found myself another place to live, a room this time, and again, began the struggle to piece my mind together. I sat for hours next to an AA meeting book, holding on to what little peace of mind I had left.

This house was supposed to be alcohol-free. Not so, as the house manager was drinking himself. In three weeks' time, a familiar period of time, I threw away two months' sobriety, by having the so-called manager buy me some beer. After I passed out, I woke up and went out and searched for some help, any kind of help. I was filled with despair. Nothing could be done. I returned feeling angry, and abused by the world, full of self-pity and loathing. I took a razor knife and cut open my arm. At last I could feel myself again. The blood told me I was a living person. I used my anger to cup deeper into the vein, but couldn't. I knew at this point that I wasn't going to die, and would somehow ask for help again the next day.

The suicide attempt got me into Jackson Brook Institute for the next twelve days. For the first time in years I felt that I was being cared for. I left feeling like a new person; I actually liked myself.

I was placed in a transition house with a reputation for bad conditions, and they were bad. For a while I made it, despite everything. But I wasn't ready for sobriety yet. On the night that I picked up my thirty-day chip, I turned it all over with a 4,000 milligram overdose of Thorazine.

What happened next was that I asked for help again. An ER nurse later told me that I'd been comatose and couldn't be revived. I remember a doctor telling nurses to hook me up to a heart machine quickly, because I was "going." This was six months ago, and I'm grateful to be alive.

I was discharged from the transition home for unclear reasons, and once again became homeless. That evening I was standing in front of the house where I'd been on my last drunk, thinking about going in and asking for a couch to sleep on. Right at that moment, the person who had discharged me from the transition house that morning came along and asked me caringly how I was doing. My faith in people was restored. I avoided drink and found another place to stay that night.

I went into another transition home and stayed for three and a half months. I stayed sober. It was still group living, and hard to take, but I grew in sobriety. Unfortunately, I became homeless again and began deteriorating in the last six weeks. One thing though, I got approved for Social Security Disability, and have been able to get my own apartment, a car, and furniture. I have a chance now, and do feel happy occasionally.

I have written this story, not only to share with others, but to help myself. I returned to drinking after four months of being sober. I can't stop and am scared, and will be sick and desperate soon. This is a hard disease, and I know I can't be helped until I want to help myself. ☹️

August 1991