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Throwing Stones

"What in the world were you thinking?" "Looking what you've done now." "How could you?" "What is wrong with you anyway?" Does any of this sound familiar? I heard these and many others far worse. All lobbed at me from friends, family, that little voice inside my head which <sup>may</sup> have been a conscience, and, yes, the Law. Each morning, year after year, as I would pry one eye open and survey the damage - and not always from the vantage point of my bed.- I would try to put all the pieces together. Some years were worse than others, but inexorably I would pile wreckage upon wreckage. With each new day, that first drink gave the illusory clearing away of my past, every problem, and all my shortcomings. I couldn't see that every drink I threw back was just another brick used to wall me into my own prison of guilt and shame.

Eventually, beaten and broken, physically and spiritually, I had enough. Early sobriety required a bit of focused self-concern. I had been a self-absorbed jerk for the majority of my life, therefore I thought I <sup>could</sup> ~~could~~ handle it... until the Pink Cloud of new sobriety dissipated and my vision cleared enough to see the truth of my life. Then I hurt like never before. Worse than any hangover. This is the time when many of us decide to head out to the liquor store, but by some miracle a voice inside said, "Stick it out." I figured that *just this once* I would do what I was told by those in the program who seemed to have pulled their lives together. They said, and you already know the drill, "90 in 90, then regular meetings; sponsorship; read the Big Book; service; and work the steps with complete honesty, especially the inventory. I began this simple plan over a decade ago and try to work it the same way today.

The Inventory: Sobriety isn't just the story of one person's journey. It is a trek that implicitly includes everyone around us. Those we've harmed directly or indirectly, as well as those we love. How many inventories have I done over the years? Well, I couldn't begin to count, but I remember that I had to be corralled that first time by my "Old Timer" sponsor. The place was set: a local coffee shop. I arrived with my hurriedly scribbled inventory in hand loath to review the chaos of my past. It was a lousy attempt, but I showed up and I got through it. Though I didn't understand why this was such a pivotal part of my program at the time, the years have opened up to me a new appreciation for this essential aspect of sobriety. Today, I am the one trying to corral my sponsor for a little bit of time to go over my inventory. My sponsor and I still meet over the "time-honored" cup of coffee, but today it is at a literal prison in its visiting room; not the figurative prison that held me years ago before sobriety.

I believe the change that I've seen on my sponsor's face over the years during our "mini-AA meetings" has something to do with me. Her face seems to say, I think he is getting it. As the years have passed by I felt a certain depth to my sobriety. The program became part of who I am, and imperceptibly it gave to me a life of fulfillment that I could have never expected. This carried to my life away from the meetings, and yet it is always inextricably woven to the 12 steps and our AA community. It allowed for a maturity and a peace of mind to flourish in me in the seemingly worst of circumstances. It was a few years in to my prison term that I realized the most important truth of my life: The worst day in prison sober is always better than my best day in the "free world" drunk - every

single time, no doubt whatsoever. This is not a testament to me, but to the power of this simple program.

As you can imagine, there is a special place on my gratitude list for the inventory. An inventory shines light on one's alcoholic past and yet in doing this, it gives direction for a sober future. Do not think that after you complete one you can simply bundle up all of your past mistakes, toss them into a cardboard box, and store them in the attic. You must keep them in your heart at all times. These discoveries and reflections become a guiding light for the road ahead. A North Star. And just as ancient mariners had to constantly look up into the night's sky to guiding constellations in their journeys across the dark seas, the inventory must be reviewed periodically as it guides us forward as well.

Today, I know that I am truly sorry to those that I have harmed. No one can turn back time and change the past, but I do hope that in sobriety I have been able to help a few others like myself while attempting to right my own life. It certainly is never too late to take "the next right step." After you get and stay sober people may still "throw stones" at you and any good which you try to accomplish. I know. They throw plenty at me still. Stones from only yesterday, and some from many years ago. In my mind, they have every right. They could never know, nor would ever believe, the remorse that I feel. How could they? I have tried to amend my life as much for them as for myself. These stones which they throw are not empty accusations; they are in large <sup>PART</sup> my past wrongs and numerous shortcomings, and they guide my inventory work. I call these Inventory Stones. I have gathered many. Most do when they get honest.

These stones which cut, also heal. These stones I have gathered weigh me down for awhile, but also strengthen my legs for the journey ahead. These stones though painful have prodded me onward when the road became steep and tortuous.

Through <sup>years</sup> of rigorously working my program, I have continuously chiseled away at these rough and varied stones as a labor of love.

A love which I am only just beginning to understand. They have become companions to me as real as any others in my life, and have given to me new meaning to the words "touch stones." As hard to bear as some may be, I never let one out of my sight. They have come to me at great cost. In this way, these stones have been transformed. They have been worn smooth and polished into precious gems and for me they are much more valuable than actual gems, like diamonds or rubies. As you see, it was in this process of changing them that I was changing myself the entire time.

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