

Bob G: Okay. I am Bob G and today is Thursday, August 31st, 2023 and I am going to interview Randall and first of all, I want to thank you, Randall, for agreeing to spend time with me this afternoon.

Randall: My pleasure.

Bob G: I'm going to be asking you some questions about your time in AA, your recovery from alcoholism, some of your service work and the past in turn practices that you could remember about the program. So let me start by asking you, when is your sobriety date?

Randall: It's April 12th, 1983.

Bob G: Okay. Well, do you want to tell me just a little bit about your life before you found AA, when and where you were born and some stuff about your childhood?

Randall: Sure. I was born in Jesup, Georgia, down in South Georgia, and I actually lived in Hazlehurst for the first four years of my life and then we moved to Jesup. Jesup had a hospital, so I was born there, but my dad was a cabinet maker. My mother was a kindergarten teacher and a housewife and really sweet people, great people. I was fairly normal growing up in a small town, no problems, loving parents and did well in school. I was Baptist church raised, and as I started partying more and drinking more in high school with my friends, of course the church kind of slipped away and I didn't like all the guilt and shame attached to the sermons anyway, so I kind of let all that go and just started enjoying myself and I didn't really get in trouble in high school or drink more than most folks in high school. I did get drunk a good many times.

I remember the first drink of wine I had at my friend's house. Her mother gave us some wine and it was the best feeling. I felt all grown up and it was warm and beautiful. That was my initial experience with alcohol and then it grew from there, then I went off to college. I went to North Carolina kind of far away from everything so that I didn't really know anybody much and I could discover who I really was and I really ended up, I'm a musician too, so I was always playing on weekends. Drinking and partying on weekends, and I did okay.

I did real well in school actually, and only in my senior year did partying kind of take over, and that was when there was all the protests against Vietnam and against a lot of things that UNC where I was and school kind of shut down and we were all taking drugs and stuff too. So I was supposed to go on to seminary actually, and I got accepted and everything, but then when it came time I got a high lottery number. I didn't have to go to Vietnam, so suddenly I didn't want to go to seminary anymore, and I just wanted to play music.

So I came to Athens where I had some friends in the music world, and basically we just partied and had a great time for several years, many years actually. Although, I was really free to do whatever I wanted to. I didn't have a real job. I was just playing music

and having fun, starting to record some and it was very exciting, but it was also everything accelerated alcohol and drugs and do you want me to go on?

Bob G: Well, so then when did it get out of control? It sounds like you're having a good time and you're fitting into a group of people and a culture of Athens, which we know, but then how did it get out of control?

Randall: Yeah, I was hanging with some people who were serious drinkers and drugging people and the musicians and older than me, some of them and anyway, I started recording over in Atlanta at a studio where there was a lot of drugs and alcohol available, and I ended up in the hospital one night just, I didn't mean to almost kill myself, I just took some downers and drank a lot and I ended up going to the hospital, having being taken to the hospital. So that was in my early 20s though, so that's pretty bad, but it didn't phase me. I just thought I won't mix those two things together. That was my solution.

Bob G: Well then how did you know and when did you hit bottom?

Randall: Well, I mean, I had some places, times in my life where I knew I was in trouble. Later on in my later 20s, I would actually try to control it because people were telling me I need to cut back and, "Do you remember what you did last night?" And I'm like, "No." I started having blackouts and I started to get in more trouble. I got two DUIs and every time I would sort of hit a little bottom where I would stop drinking for a while or cut back for a while or switch over to something for a while, but I didn't really hit the bottom until I moved. I move to New Orleans so I could get away from a lot of stuff up here that I had created my divorce and just wanted to live in New Orleans where I could do what I wanted to and I loved New Orleans.

So I went down there and I met this woman who is now my wife, and I really hit bottom down there because she was about to kick me out, but I had had several times where I really realized I was going down the tubes, but I couldn't do anything about it at that time, and I would just give up and drink some more. So I was at the bottom in New Orleans, but when she was giving me the ultimatum, it was in a beautiful, loving way like we can't stand to see you kill yourself, so get help or you got to move and I just didn't want to leave. I loved her and so I called a treatment center and got some help done there. I didn't go to treatment, but they sent me to this person who saved my life, basically.

Said, "I want you to go to this meeting, this AA meeting tomorrow. Can you make it through the night?" And I said, "Yeah, I guess I'll try." It was hard, but I made it and I went to the meeting and that's how I got started in New Orleans.

Bob G: Wow. So your first meetings were there.

Randall: At Tulane University. He had somebody meet me there and that started me off and I loved it.

Bob G: Well, did you sober up right away or did you ever leave AA after that?

Randall: No, I did not. I was one of the lucky ones squared. I took to it immediately. I took it seriously, and I did have to start over in about a week, because I didn't realize you couldn't take drugs and be sober. Nobody told me that. I just didn't hear it. So I took some Valium or something but anyway, I had to start over after about a week, but since then I just pretty much did what they said. I went to tons of meetings and it's been working.

Bob G: Did you get a sponsor at that time?

Randall: Yeah. Well, it took me maybe two or three months to finally ask somebody, but I did get a sponsor and did work through the steps then with a real sponsor.

Bob G: Okay. Can you describe a little bit about your relationship with the sponsor? Did you meet in person and...

Randall: Yeah, he was a guy. New Orleans meetings were really different than meetings up here. They were just wild and they would go on, you would come in and sign a legal pad and they would call on everybody so it could go on for two hours and there was no stopping point and people would talk about everything and it would go on. Anyway, this guy, I kept watching... He made an impression on me because he would talk about his dad suicide and how it affect, he talked about his feelings of anger and stuff. So I got up the nerve to, he'd been sober about seven years. I got up the nerve to ask him and he said, okay, I'll be your sponsor and come over to my house and we'll work through the steps and that's what we did.

Bob G: Okay. Well, in those early days, which of the literature did you find most helpful? Big Book, Twelve and Twelve, Grapevine? Did you do all that or some of that?

Randall: Yeah, the Big Book. I did spend a lot of time in the Big Book and also, it's funny, they had what they call a Little Red Book study at this clubhouse that I went to on Sunday mornings and the Red Book because we don't see it much anymore, but it was sort of like Twelve and Twelve going through the steps and stuff and so we would go through that every week. So that and the Twelve and Twelve. I don't think I had much Grapevine experience at the time. New Orleans, I didn't see... It was so loose down there, which I thought was normal, of course, until I came out here.

Bob G: So you came back to Athens?

Randall: Yeah, after. I worked for a while as a plant waterer for these huge oil buildings for this company that I've met in the program, these two guys and I pushed a little card around, I gave up my music career, because I figured there's just not much happening anyway, and I didn't know how to stay sober and play music, so I wasn't writing anything. Anyway, I watered plants until I got so bored with that for three years and I went back to school a little while in biology in New Orleans at UNO and then I said, that's not really for me either. So I applied up here to Georgia for social work, master's in social work. So I came up here in '80, no, yeah, '87. So I had four years of sobriety, and I moved up here with my family, talked them into coming up, and I got most of my social work degree,

halfway through it and then I got a call to be on a big tour, which I hadn't even played music in my sobriety much at all.

So the social work school said, "Yeah, go do this tour. You can't pass this up." So I did that, and that kind of got me, but I finished my social work degree and did some social work for family counseling, but music became more and more important. It came back into my life. I had let it go and like they say, if it's supposed to happen, it'll come back and it came back in a big way. So I let the social work go eventually.

Bob G: So how'd you find your way into a new home group here and a new sponsor here in Athens?

Randall: Yeah, I had several sponsors here. It was really hard for me to get a sponsor, because I'd loved my old sponsor so much. He had died in New Orleans, actually, but he stayed sober. It was hard for me to find anybody that I thought was up to him and the meetings didn't seem right. They seemed too uptight and too religious and too rule bound and all that, because I was-

Bob G: What was some of the groups you went to in the early days in Athens?

Randall: Here?

Bob G: Yeah.

Randall: I pretty much camped out at Noon Cobb. I did go. I started on Row Road over there in that little place by the chicken plant. That's where I would go first and then the Cobb Group and all over at the Cobb House, I went to a lot of meetings over there, noon mostly, but happy hour or two and I went to a lot of night meetings around Athens for a while, but I don't know, I get camped out at a place and I just keep coming back. Noon seemed to work for me in my lifestyle, so I just go to Noon Cobb all the time.

Bob G: Did you start sponsoring other people?

Randall: Yeah. I was in school though when I first came here, so I didn't have a ton of time, but I did sponsor. I heard a lot of footsteps and a few people that I stuck with over the years or stuck with me, but a lot of people just kind of pass through it. We'd do a fifth step or something, then I'd never hear from them again or something. So I did sponsor people and I did get several sponsors, but they were brief.

Bob G: What about any other service work through the home group or district-

Randall: ISGSR for Noon Cobb, was that Noon Cobb?

Bob G: Yeah.

Randall: I guess it was. I don't know. My memory's pretty bad, but I think it was Noon Cobb. I was Treasury of the Cobb, the... Oh God, what's it called? Maintain the Cobb House and I did

things like secretary and treasurer sometimes for the group, whatever group I was in, Noon Cobb mainly.

Bob G: Well, so you've been in the program for a very long time, and I'm wondering, and we're interested in how AA has changed. Now, I see you at meetings now, and so think about meetings now over at Noon and how it's changed since you started in New Orleans or then first came to Athens. Have the meetings changed in your mind?

Randall: Well...

Bob G: Did they have formats, you know how we do it?

Randall: Yeah. The formats in New Orleans were similar, although they would have a chairperson and then a moderator.

Bob G: Two people up front?

Randall: Always, yeah. They do that in New York and a lot of places, but mainly, and when I go back to New Orleans and go to a meeting, it's all tightened up down there too. So it must be the general service thing said, you guys need to tighten up and stop talking about all this other stuff and drugs and gambling and everything else, but I think it's pretty much... I mean, to me it's opened up a little bit, it's not like... I don't know. I don't want to get in controversy, but people feel, I think, free to talk about their feelings and on the other hand, everything seems to be pretty contained. You don't hear people going off and talking about gambling or their relationships too much like I did when I was coming up and things are pretty focused on alcohol, not so much drugs as it used to be either. So I think it seems to me like in a pretty balanced place right now.

Bob G: Okay. Well, thinking back to when you first got sober, how did the community perceive alcoholism as well as AA, as a treatment program compared to how it's perceived today and how friends and family might think about AA and you going if they know you go?

Randall: Well, it's much more accepted now for sure, but I remember my father-in-law saying that, I told him I was an AA, and he's like, "Oh yeah, I got a friend who's a big wheel in AA," and that's probably the way the community thought of it. It was some kind of club and you could work your way up to be a big wheel. So I don't think people knew much about AA.

Bob G: Well, you're a big wheel in our home group.

Randall: Yeah, yeah. I pretty much rule over there.

Bob G: You're the guy.

Randall: But I think people understand now a lot more about AA and the principles and the steps and all than they used to. It used to be thought of as a religious thing, and I don't know, people didn't understand it. I sure didn't. I'd never even heard of AA except for the

movie I saw the last weekend, that black and white movie, and they had an AA meeting, but I didn't know anything about AA and people, everybody knows about AA now, whatever their opinions are.

Bob G: What are your thoughts about the application and technology, Zoom meetings?

Randall: I think it's been great.

Bob G: Have you participated in that?

Randall: Oh yeah. During the pandemic, I was in New York, meetings all the time and wherever I wanted to be at, and it was really good. I learned a lot. I like the way the New York meetings are run. I like the open sharing that they have and honest sharing and the three minute timekeeper that every group has, our spiritual timekeeper, three minutes are up and everybody says, "Oh, okay." There's no argument.

Bob G: No, never.

Randall: I like that and Zoom saves my butt.

Bob G: And you alluded to it, but what are your feelings about the singleness of purpose and the focus on alcohol versus other addictions and it disperse into the meeting? I know there's strong feelings and some people feel they're too strong. What are your own personal feelings about that?

Randall: Like I was saying I think it's a good balance right now, at least in the Lumpkin group that I go to. I don't go to tons of other meetings, hardly any other meetings right now. I think it's a good balance, like you say, and most of the meeting formats say we focus on alcohol, that's what we're here for. I think it's good. You can mention drugs are a part of almost everybody's story, and I like the way people say, "Yeah, but I'm not going to... They were part of my story, but I'm not going to dwell on that because this is an AA meeting." I think it's a good thing, and I think it's pretty balanced right now.

One thing I did not, early on coming here, there was a lot of shutting people down by old timers or whoever thought that they had to shut people down and they'd interrupt them and tell them. I mean, sometimes you should stop people, but there was, to me some shaming of people going on, and I just didn't like it. That I don't see anymore. Maybe it happens, but I don't see it like I used to. Some of the old timers were just kind of pissed off that AA was changing. It felt like it was getting watered down. I kept hearing that from a lot of old timers, and they did not like it. They were mad and they didn't want to hear about this, this and this and feelings and all that stuff. Talk to your sponsor if you've got feelings. So they would just shut people down sometime and I think that's not what we want in a meeting.

We want it to feel open, but we also don't want go on and on about relationships and gambling and everything else.

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Bob G: Right. Well, okay, we're coming to the end here. Are there any other comments about the program or Athens as a recovery environment? It's famous for a drinking environment, but any comments at all you'd like to close with?

Randall: I think Athens has a really good AA. It's got a good balance. It's got the clubhouse and it's got lots of groups, and it just feels like a healthy, I guess I would say, a healthy AA community here. Of course, I've never really, except for New Orleans, lived in a place, but I've been to lots of meetings all over the world, and this seems good. It seems just the right amount of structure, I guess, and just a lot of connections, a lot of people that really care and participate and help each other. I think it's a really good AA community.

Bob G: Okay, Randall. Well, this is going to be part of the history of our group. It's going to be part of the history of our district. It'll be on our website shortly, and the transcript will be there as well and we want to thank you for taking the time and for sharing your story.

Randall: Thank you. Appreciate it. I appreciate it. Thanks for having me.