

Life's terms

I write this 40-some days shy of 40 years clean. That's a long time. Long enough that I've changed greatly, in many ways, from who I was when I cleaned up this time. My mind and spirit, no longer shriveled into tiny, hard shells, are open and willing to try new possibilities. Most importantly, today I truly give love and accept love.

However, my circumstances are rough. Though not without shelter, I *have* been homeless for the past eight months. Throughout these months, *every* night of *every* week, I've worked midnight shift at any of four locations, assigned with no routine or regularity. This has done much to remove me from both society at large and the NA Fellowship. It was only a month and a half ago that I again joined a home group, sacrificing both sleep and money to be there each week—none of which is particularly unbearable for me. Difficult? Certainly. But not unbearable. Life's terms are sometimes hard, even harsh. I've been alive long enough to know that, and clean long enough to accept it easily, because it's so obviously something "I cannot change."

What *does* fill me with shame and anger (at myself) is that despite all my years, I still mishandle many practical things, especially money. I make little more than minimum wage, have squandered an inheritance, and cashed in several savings plans. My finances are lousy and it is entirely of my own doing. I've wasted opportunities to learn and discipline myself better. Being so long clean and yet so fiscally unchanged—again, not circumstances, but *me*—fills me with shame.

So, when I think of celebrating 40 years clean, my failings shout at me while my advancements whisper. Other folks tell me I'm an example of "staying clean no matter what" because of my circumstances; I know I'm an example of being so much less than I could be. I've questioned whether I ought to celebrate at all. I've questioned whether I ought to even make the effort to reach the milestone. Deliberate relapse or actions even more drastic have rolled through my head with strong motivations pushing them. Yet, I've stayed clean. How is it that I don't succumb to the despair?

- Cleantime. Thousands of todays in the habit of staying clean today.
- Our literature. "We need to ... go to one extra meeting ... and help a newcomer stay clean one extra day."*
- Friends: From those with 30+ years who know me so well to those with 30+ days who are getting their first impression. Importantly, friends who are not afraid to be honest with me.
- Service. I keep purpose by giving goodwill.
- Our steps. If not every day, or even every other day, still—*some* days.
- NA meetings. Meetings I like, meetings I don't like. Meetings I'm late for, meetings I leave early. One in two weeks, four in one week. Meetings. NA meetings.
- The Spirit of NA. The Fellowship of NA. Each a strength and each a comfort since my very first days.

And today, *just* for today, I'm willing to do the work to reach 14,610 days clean. We'll see.



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*Basic Text, "More Will Be Revealed"