

Soberilla Segment – 1/29/22 – Zack B – 164 Group Member

My name is Zack and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is November 25, 2019. I am so grateful to be here to speak at Soberilla. I was here at this event for my first time – two years ago. I had about two months clean at that time. If you told me that I would be speaking at this event just two years later, I would have thought you were out of your mind. It's an absolute miracle that I am here, able to stand before you and share my experience, strength and hope that I got through the truly miraculous program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sticking with the theme of this event – I have been asked to tie parts of my recovery to some of the promises in the Big Book. To be honest, this was difficult. The difficult part was I just had to pick a couple. Because as I go into just my third year of sobriety, I have found that all of the promises found in the Big Book have come true for me. That was something I didn't expect. In fact, I experienced just about all of the promises in my very first year. But I thought long and hard about this and I came up with two key promises that were very important to my recovery. Before I get into those promises, let me give you a little background of how I got here.

I was born and raised right here in Tampa. So, I guess that makes me a native tampon.... Or Tampan. I never know which one to use. I had a great childhood and family. My parents were excellent in raising me. While they did get divorced, they never divorced me and were still a constant in my life. I did well in school, however, I was bullied quite a bit as I got into middle school and high school. Let's just say I saw the inside of a lot of trash cans as a freshman in high school. Those pesky upperclassmen can be mean, man.

I found that I never fit in a particular group in high school or even social settings as I got older. Some say I was a nerd and yes I embrace the nerdiness now, but back then I was always trying to "fit in" with whoever I was hanging with at the time. I was the very definition of a self-seeker. Doing "nice" things for others just to make them like me. That, as I found out, does not really work out so well. Sure, you get a host of "fair-weather" friends, but do you really get any true friendships? No.

I never really knew my true self. Who was the real Zack? I wasn't being a real person. This pattern of behavior continued into my adult life and later on, I discovered this was a contributing factor to my alcoholism.

And as for my dating life? Let's just say it was non-existent. But it wasn't for a lack of trying. A show of hands, how many have you seen a Hallmark movie or romantic comedy? Do you guys know that character that is the girl's best friend, but he secretly wants to be with her? I AM THAT GUY! I could play that part and win an Oscar for it. If you guys ever need advice on how to get INTO the friend zone, I am your guy. Yes, I developed the nickname "Friend Zone Zack." I had a lot of women that I was interested in, but for some reason I always ended up being the brother to them. The shoulder to cry on. However, as a benefit, I learned a lot about what NOT to do as a boyfriend from these women. I lived in the friend zone and it really started to take a toll on my self-esteem and ego. By the time I had reached my 20s I really had zero confidence in myself.

I had my first drink of alcohol when I was 21. Yes, in true nerd fashion, I waited until it was legal for me to drink. But, I really didn't like it at the time. My story isn't the kind of story where it was love

at first sip. It tasted odd and I didn't really like the feeling that it produced. So, my alcoholic "switch" didn't get flipped right there.

It got flipped at the age of 23 when I got blackout drunk for the very first time. Me and my buddies took a trip to Gainesville to watch the USF Bulls get beat down by the Florida Gators. Binge drinking was a necessity, according to my friends. And binge drank, I did. I blacked out. And for those of you who aren't familiar with alcoholic blackouts, I am not saying I passed out. No, I was fully awake and doing things. I just had no recollection at all. BUT, when I awoke the next day, the stories my friends told me were amazing. Apparently, I was the life of the party. I had talked to girls and they were talking to me. I even found some girls phone numbers in my phone! What the heck! This was unheard of for me. Now, I realized what I had been missing in my life. ALCOHOL. All that time I was trying to be goody two shoes in school. Waiting until I was 21 till I drank. No, no. ALCOHOL WAS THE ANSWER to my social problems. There, my switch was flipped.

From that night, things went downhill for me fast. That night was in 2010. In the course of nine years of my drinking career, I experienced alcoholic blackouts almost every weekend earning me the nickname Blackout Zack, I did things drunk I would never think of doing sober, became verbally abusive, lost countless friendships, estranged my family, contemplated suicide many times, and most importantly hurt the people I cared about most. I am lucky I never killed anyone. I am sure that was coming next if I continued down this lonely road. And I knew loneliness just like the book described. I was in a living hell and I didn't think there was a way out for me.

I had been in and out of these rooms over the course of my drinking career. From the very beginning, my father had begged me to give AA a fair shake. He had threatened to Marchman Act me. For those of you that don't know what that is, it's when you get a judge to court order you to drug and alcohol treatment or you go to jail. So the first time I went to AA, you could say I wasn't doing it for myself. I was doing it to avoid a Marchman Act. And, just like the book describes in Chapter 4 We Agnostics, my face rose when I heard you all talk about your alcohol problems. I had found something in common with you all and maybe you guys did have a way out. However, my face fell immediately when I heard you guys start talking about God. There was something I could not accept.

I had a complicated relationship with God. I was not spiritual at all when I first came into these rooms and I did not want anything to do with religious people. I thought they were righteous, holier-than-thou people who looked down from some sort of moral spiritual hilltop. They disgusted me. I wouldn't call myself an atheist, but I was definitely a stout agnostic. I believe there may have been a God but he left a long time ago. There was no power greater than me. IF I wanted something done, I would have to do it myself. There was no praying for me.

So, this is what turned me off at first to AA and of course, I went back out and experimented some more. But after a while, this really started to take a toll on me. Financially and mentally. My finances were close to ruin. Somehow, I managed to keep my job through all of this, but I was definitely spending more money than I made. My mental state was severe depression and suicide was a constant thought. I was becoming increasingly isolated and I really did feel that I was at the end. My father, who I credit wholeheartedly with starting me on this wonderful journey of sobriety, was not going to let this happen anymore. He was hellbent on getting a Marchman Act for me

unless I went to treatment. And that's when I landed in Clean Recovery Center. My father found this treatment center for me and it really was life changing.

Of course, I still had some stumbles in that treatment center. I relapsed in treatment. Anyone can relate to that? But luckily, that turned out to be my last relapse. It was right before Thanksgiving 2019. Somehow, in the course of my drinking career, I never missed a family holiday. I always managed to sober myself up and be at family gatherings for holidays. However, this was not the case in Thanksgiving 2019. I got too drunk the night before Thanksgiving and I was too hungover and sick to make it. My mom and my little sister came over to see me and I'll never forget the look on their faces. The disappointment and shock. I was in treatment but I was still doing this to them. Seeing them like that this time really shook me to my core. I knew something had to be done about this. I was done. I was finally done. Alcohol had beaten me down to my knees. I felt at this time, I was really ready to do anything to get sober.

So, I walked back into that treatment center and the rooms of AA with a new attitude. A willing attitude. I listened to the stories, the therapists and more importantly did the work. It was at that treatment center that I was introduced to my home group, the 164 Group, which meets every Tuesday at 7:30pm at the Northgate Baptist Church. At that group, I have met some of the most amazing people and I have an amazing sponsor.

Doing the work is the key phrase here. Sure, I could have a willing attitude, but without action on my part, nothing was going to change in my life. Faith without works is dead, as they say in the Big Book. And that's a promise. In order to do the work, I had to accept one thing. That there was a power greater than myself. How was I going to do that? I had been agnostic and non-spiritual all my life. How could I accept that there was something greater than myself? To answer this question, I started to think back over the last nine years of my drinking career. And as I recounted all the dangerous situations that I put myself in, I had one question to ask myself. How am I still here?

There had to be something, someone out there watching out for me. Maybe God was there in the front seat of my car when I was driving drunk, holding the wheel. But all I know, is I survived some scary experiences. And there has to be a reason for that. It had to be more than just luck. I definitely was not in control of my life – in fact, I was doing everything I could to destroy it. But there was something out there that made sure I didn't go off the rails too bad. When I started to think about that, I opened the door in my mind that there was something greater than myself out there. I don't understand it and I never will understand it but I believe that it's there. And once I opened that door in my mind that there was a power greater than myself, my life changed and I found myself.

Immediately after making this decision, I saw that the first promise for me came true. And that promise was, "He (meaning my higher power) has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do ourselves." My worry about things that were out of my control vanished. I stopped obsessing over things that I couldn't get. I finally felt at peace with myself. Something I never felt in my entire life. As long as my decisions were made on a spiritual basis and guided by my higher power, life will be OK. And I can tell you, it only got better from here. I got my family back. My mom and sister trust me again. I am able to have meaningful friendships and relationships now, that aren't based on superficial things. But most importantly, I have not thought about using alcohol once – even during the tough times. Staying in contact with a power greater

than myself has allowed things to happen in my life that I would never think happen. It also has allowed me to go through the tough times and face them head on.

But, speaking of tough times, last year was a very tough year for me. My father, who was essential in starting me on this journey to recovery, decided to take his own life last April. Even worse, shortly after that happened, I contracted COVID and was unable to attend my father's funeral.

It turned my entire life upside down. The amount of pain I felt was enormous. The old Blackout Zack would have probably drunk himself to death. But, because I had built such a solid foundation in this program, I did not pick up a drink. I really saw the truth to this promise in that moment: "Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. There you will find release from care, boredom and worry. Your imagination will be fired. Life will mean something at last. The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead. Thus we find the fellowship, and so will you. (152) You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning "Love thy neighbor as Thyself" (152)

My sponsees became my sponsors. The fellowship rallied around me and offered nothing but support. I could not believe the amount of love and friendship that was around me through this program. They got me through probably the worst point of my life so far. I am beyond grateful for this fellowship and most importantly, I am grateful that I am still sober. You would think that it's a miracle that I made it through this time without a drink. But really, it's not. Thanks to the program, the obsession has been lifted and alcohol was no longer my solution. The fellowship and my higher power were.

You see, this is a "design for living" that works even in the rough going. It's not just a program to help you stop drinking. You have to remember that liquor is just a symptom. The real work begins right here (point to your heart and head). You have to change your whole way of thinking and view of the world.

The most important thing that you have to remember about the promises in the Big Book is this: You have to work for them. Nothing is given to you in this program. Get a sponsor, get through the steps and then start helping other alcoholics! I'll tell you nothing keeps you sober like working with and talking with other alcoholics. This always succeeds when all other methods fail. It is true. I am living proof that you should be able to get through anything in life without alcohol as long as you have the fellowship and your higher power on your side.

I still miss my father terribly and wish he was here to see all the progress I am making. But then I remember, he does see it. Because I live life on a spiritual basis, I believe that he is always with me – guiding me. And I know that he is proud.

You can have this life too. As the Big Book promises, "It really does work – if you work it." Thank you all and God Bless You.