

The March 1985 AA Grapevine, pp 12-13, featured the following story, apparently by Felicia Gizycka Magruder, Alcoholics Anonymous author of Stars Don't Fall in the second and third editions. **The Lady and the Bum** followed her AA Grapevine article over seventeen years previously in the November 1967 issue, **At Last No Longer Apart**.

AA Grapevine

March 1985

The Lady and the Bum

The only difference was AA

Not long ago, I went into New York from the suburb where I live, to do some shopping and then meet an AA friend for dinner. I shopped too long and walked too far, carrying packages. There was I, just after my seventy-eighth birthday, feeling depressed and sorry for myself. So many of my friends in New York have died or moved away. It was about an hour before my early dinner date. I was a poor, elderly orphan with no place to go. Where could I go and sit down? I found myself saying, "God help me." My lips moved. People will see you talking to yourself, I thought; they'll think you're senile. So now I prayed silently, "God help me not to feel this way."

And then I saw this little coffee shop on 58th Street. I went in gratefully to sit down at a table, dump my packages, and order a cup of coffee.

"You have to sit at the counter," the waitress said.

"I'm so tired, and I have all these packages."

"It's a three-dollar cover charge."

"I don't care," I said.

As soon as she'd served me, a poor, ragged, dirty, unshaven man came up to me and asked me for a dollar. "I need it for food," he said.

The manager, who was standing in back of the counter, shook his head. Then he said, "Go on! Get out of here."

The man's hands were shaking. "Please, quick!" he begged me. "Quick! Just a dollar."

The manager said, "Lady, don't give it to him. He's just a bum. He'll spend it on booze."

"Of course he will," I said. "He needs a drink. He has to have one."

I whipped out a dollar, and the man snatched it, said, "Thanks," and fled.

"Whatcha go doing that for?" the manager wanted to know. "Now we'll have a bunch of them in here."

"I know what it is to be desperate for a drink," I told him. "I'm an arrested alcoholic. The only difference between that man and me is that I've stopped drinking. If I had one drink, I'd go on and get drunk and be just like him."

"And I suppose you'd look like him? Come on, lady! You're a nice lady."

"Well, quite a few years ago, I was anything but!"

"You've got to be kidding," said the manager, who then turned away to wait on customers.

But it's true, of course. I was never as filthy as that poor man, but the difference between us was purely economic. I did not hit skid row. But if I'd been broke, I would have.

Thank God, I found AA and a wonderful sponsor. I've been sober and going to meetings for a good many years. I keep working the Twelve Steps, I try to help others.

As I sat there resting and drinking my coffee, I thought of the time I'd paced back and forth in front of a bar opposite Grand Central Station. I was hoping desperately that it

would open before I had to catch my train. It was just a few minutes before opening time. Could I run in there, gulp a quick one, and run for my train? But the bar did not open on time. I shook like a leaf all the way to my suburban destination. The kind friends who met me at the station had to wait while I went and got a drink.

Now, a young woman came up to my table and stood there smiling. She said, "That was very nice of you, giving that man a dollar."

"Well, he needed a drink," I said.

"Yes, I know," she said. "I heard what you told the manager." She patted my arm.

I began feeling good. Why, here I was, sober, solvent, happy, and healthy, with work I enjoy and lots of people left whom I love. Of course, I miss my friends who have gone, but perhaps I'll see them again someday.

I felt even better when the waitress handed me my check, which was for sixty cents. "I can't charge you three dollars when you gave that poor fellow a dollar," she said.

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