

## Web Exclusive

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## A Message from 1970

### An old promise to a friend helped him see the true nature of his alcoholism

#### New Years Eve, 2008

I celebrated as I usually did: I got drunk and passed out before midnight and then avoided my wife the following morning.

I was full of remorse and once again, made the vow to quit. Thirty-eight years of drinking had not served me well. My

wife gave me an ultimatum to leave. I was willing to trade family, home and the few friends I had for a cheap apartment and some time to drink myself into oblivion.



#### New Years Eve 1970

The word came there would be a cease-fire. No firing weapons unless fired upon until dawn. Even though we were "in the bush," we relaxed. From our night laager position, we could see celebratory flares from the firebase to signal the arrival of the new year.

I finished my guard watch at 2 a.m. and went to sleep. I woke amid the chaos and confusion of a sapper attack in the still dark morning. Screams, explosions, small arms fire, an eternity of terror in a few minutes. The battle subsided and I realized the skirmish had taken place behind me on the other side of a slight rise where my friend Hank was located.

I ran to check on him and found him lying on the ground. I said to him as I knelt down, "Hey, looks like you're going home before me." That's when I

saw his face and realized that he was seriously wounded. His eyes were closed and blood was bubbling out of his nose and mouth. He stopped breathing and I placed my hands on his chest and started to pump up and down.

He started to breathe again and then stopped for the second and final time. I cried as I hugged him and said goodbye. I wanted to see the spot where he was hit and walked over to his foxhole.

Lying by his rucksack was a letter he had been writing. I was to his parents and was unfinished and soaked in his blood. I decided to burn it and watched as it went orange to black to smokey oblivion with the last words he ever had. Goodbye Hank.

I commemorated his death every New Year's Eve with a drunk that we promised each other on our safe return from Vietnam. Over the years, the memory of that morning became just another excuse to feed the disease which had been growing inside me since I was a child.

Then came the day in 2008, January 25, when I was given the gift of a new way of living that let me be free of the obsession to drink and allowed me to unburden myself of the past. The fear, the anger and the resentment left me. All I had to do was follow a simple program, work the Twelve Steps, read the Big Book, and join a Fellowship. I had to be willing to give away what had been so freely given to me. I got back what I had been so willing to give up—my life! For that, I am eternally grateful.

*—Barry M., Oregon City, Ore.*

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