

Heard at Coffee With Friends

A high-angle photograph of three white ceramic coffee cups with latte art, each on a matching saucer with a spoon. Two small glass water tumblers are also on the table. The table is made of dark, rustic wood. The background is softly blurred, showing a green chair and some foliage.

A collection of recovery wit, wisdom and wonder shared by the lovely misfits and everyday geniuses in recovery groups.

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Introduction

Often when meeting with friends in recovery over the past 30 years, someone has shared how they handle life on life's terms and it sparks a connection with me that I just have to write down. When I write it down, somehow it becomes a part of me - part of my truth and what's real for me.

And every once in a while, I'll read over my collection of this "wisdom to know the difference" that still lifts me up, makes me laugh, makes me reflect, and allows me to see myself. That's why I wanted to share it with you.

If you, like me, are continually drawn to honest, open and wise people, then I think you may come across something similar to what you've shared with others. You may hear the voice of someone you saw on a zoom screen. You may recognize the voice of a trusted friend or counselor.

Whatever the case may be, I hope that you find something in these pages that makes a difference for the better in your day...and the next time you have coffee with friends.

Anne



What It Was Like

- I didn't drink in kindergarten, but I could have used one.
- Because I was a compulsive liar I thought everyone else was lying, too.
- I was no longer my mother's daughter.
- My parents gave me the choice to either go to a psychiatrist about my drinking or get married. I got married.
- I was an over-feeler and an over-thinker.
- I was gonna be a cowboy.
- I was going to be an airline pilot. Then I was going to be a priest...
- I thought I had to figure everything out by myself.
- I could be in a crowd of happy people at a party and still be lonely.
- I felt like I never fit in.
- It felt like everyone else had the answers and I didn't.
- I lived by "Let go and let ME"...I tried to fix everything.
- I always had to be in charge and it pissed people off. I was a big mouth.

- My ego was not my amigo.
- I was all I could think about... and I hated myself.
- I had a super power to avoid pain.
- If you didn't like me, I didn't like me.
- I thought I deserved a lot of pain - like I wasn't a good enough person for recovery and what you people had.
- The actions I was taking were eating holes in me.
- Every time I graded my own paper, I got an A+.
- I couldn't see the truth.
- Fear ran my life.
- Shame ran my life.
- I was so disconnected from reality and myself - how could I think I was connecting with other people?
- I was going to get a beer to prove how upset I was.
- I couldn't control my drinking when I wanted to enjoy it, and I couldn't enjoy it when I was trying to control it.
- It's easy to stop. I've done it hundreds of times.
- I thought the bad circumstances of my life caused me to drink, but really, I drank whether things were bad or good. It didn't matter in the end.
- I was afraid I was going to miss something if I didn't go to that bar.

- I was sure they were having more fun at the next bar down the street.
- I was a daily drinker.
- I was a binge drinker.
- I drank only on weekends.
- I drank at work.
- I hid it.
- I stole it.
- I protected my supply.
- I loved it.
- I started drinking because my older brother did.
- I started drinking at 12 years old.
- I started drinking in high school.
- I started drinking in college.
- I was my father's drinking buddy.
- I could drink more than anyone else I was with - from the start.
- I started drinking a lot when I retired.
- I started drinking after my mom died.
- I kept trying not to slur my words.
- I made an ass of myself - again.
- I hurt people's feelings when "I was just being honest." I could be cruel.
- I couldn't stay stopped.
- I knew inside I was going to drink again, even when I said I was done.

- I denied how serious it was to my own children who saw me every day.
- I thought that everyone gets at least one DUI.
- I thought I could still smoke pot.
- I could drink a lot more if I was using cocaine.
- I was a thief.
- He said I was disgusting.
- I just felt guilty all the time. I knew I had to stop, but I couldn't.
- I couldn't find a reason to stop.
- I hated people telling me I needed to stop.
- I was scared of what would change if I stopped.
- My alcoholism was like a can of Campbell Soup. I already had the "ism" - I just needed to add the liquid.
- It was like I was looking at my life in one of those Fun House mirrors - everything was distorted.
- I felt prettier and smarter when I was drinking.
- I kept telling myself I'll stop tomorrow.
- I would say that at least I wasn't as bad as my pill-head sister. I was.
- I had a beer truck deliver enough beer to fill my garage. I thought that way I wouldn't get another DUI.
- I said I drank to fall asleep, but I was really just passing out.
- I told myself that booze helped me relax, but it just made me depressed.

- I liked drinking when I was mad. I'd sit and figure out what I was going to say the next time he hurt my feelings.
- I let my kids down - over and over again.
- I was angry all the time.
- I let people take advantage of me.
- I didn't remember how I got home.
- I drove drunk with my kids in the car.

Notes



What happened was...

- I had a rude awakening.
- I had a spiritual awakening.
- I saw the writing on the wall.
- I had a vision of what my life would be like if I kept drinking.
- I heard the message, "What are you waiting for?"
- I heard the message, "Go back to the meeting and be teachable."
- It was like a hand on my shoulder and the message, "It'll be ok."
- She said she was leaving if I didn't stop.
- I scared my kids - that was enough.
- Sobriety got in the way of my drinking.
- My brain needed to be washed.
- I relapsed because things didn't change the way I wanted them to.
- I always had a few good belts before a party, but this time I showed up drunk at my kids birthday party. I was asked to leave.
- When I tried to be sober, I always felt sorry for myself.

- I woke up from a black out to find that my son had died in the accident.
- I “came to” from a black out while I was in jail. I still had on my black dress, my pearls and my high heels.
- I killed someone driving drunk. She was a mom. I got a 23 year sentence.
- I lost it on a neighbor kid.
- I lost it on my daughter’s teacher.
- I was “that mom”...
- My DUI ended up costing me about \$10,000.
- I walked into a family intervention - for me.
- I wasn’t allowed to see my kids without supervision.
- I lost custody of my kids.
- I started drinking in the morning after I swore I never would.
- I had become my father.
- I had become my mother.
- I had to wear an ankle bracelet and the steering wheel in my car had a breathalyzer.
- Going out at night was more important than staying home with my kids.
- I saw a video of myself drunk.
- I heard a voicemail of myself drunk.

- My daughter told me she smelled pot on me.
- My boss smelled booze on my breath.
- I hated the person I had become.
- I dropped my coke spoon on the table at the restaurant by accident.
- I had to use before doing anything - even going to my son's football game.
- I went to my son's basketball game drunk and told off his coach.
- I couldn't remember the last time I didn't use something.
- I was paranoid all the time.
- I had no more cards to play.
- I kept waiting for them to fire me.
- I would always quit a job right before they were going to fire me.
- I couldn't wait anymore until 5:00pm to start drinking. I'd say, "Well, it's 5:00pm somewhere," and I'd start making drinks.
- I "drank my lunches."
- I got high in my car at work.
- I diverted pain meds from babies at the hospital.
- I used my daughter's urine for my drug test.
- I faked a fall to get pain meds.
- I had teeth pulled for the opiates.
- I had shoulder surgery for the drugs.
- I had back surgery for the drugs.
- I had cancer so I said, "F it."

- I didn't think anyone could help me. I thought I was beyond help.
- If he drank, I drank.
- Going to treatment was not in my plans.
- I ran out of ideas.
- I thought other people made me use.
- My promises not to get high didn't mean anything anymore.
- I controlled my supply of drugs and booze. I never ran out so I never tried to stop.
- I thought everyone drank to black out.
- I thought everyone drank as much as me.
- My friends were only people who drank like me.
- I was afraid things would never change.
- I was afraid things would change for the worse if I stopped.
- I had a civil war in my head: "Yes, I'm an alcoholic," vs "No, I'm not."
- I compared myself to my brother who was a crackhead. I told myself he was way worse.
- I told my doctor I had a "sinus infection," and he laughed at me.
- My doctor explained what alcohol was doing to my body.
- My doctor explained what the drugs were doing to my body.
- I didn't draw a sober breath the whole time my husband was dying.
- I had seizures if I stopped drinking.
- If you didn't drink, I didn't trust you.

- I told myself it wasn't that bad because I still had a job.
- I was afraid I would be a different person.
- I resented them for talking to me about my drinking.
- I said "I'm sorry" all the time.
- I asked for help.
- I asked God to help me stay sober today.
- I decided to change my life.
- I don't know why I relapsed.
- I relapsed because of my resentments.
- I talked to people already in recovery and did what they suggested.
- They told me alcohol was a drug, too.
- I realized that everyone got clean for different reasons, but they all stayed clean for the same reason - to have a better life.
- Someone told me don't use today and come back tomorrow. I did, and I've continued to do that for a long time. It works.
- I heard people tell about their worst times without being ashamed.

Notes



I Knew Things Were Getting Better When...

- My husband and I started laughing again. That took a while.
- I was invited for Christmas dinner.
- The daughter who I thought would never speak to me again called me about her car. That was her way to let me back in.
- My co-worker said I seemed happier.
- My boss gave me a compliment about a job well done.
- My son told me he was proud of me.
- My ex-wife asked if I wanted to go to church with her and the kids.
- I made my kids laugh again.
- I had money for child support.
- I finished probation and still kept going to recovery meetings.
- For a whole day, I didn't think about drinking.
- My kids were so proud of me on my anniversary.

- My wife stopped giving me the “sniff test” every time she hugged me.
- I stopped fighting everything. I stopped saying “no” all the time.
- I listened to people without figuring out what I was going to say next.
- I went for 24 hours without telling a lie. Even to myself.
- I came out of denial about my marriage. It was too late to change it.
- I didn’t get so mad anymore.
- I paused during an argument with my wife and asked if we could reset.
- I automatically got on my knees in the morning.
- I was ready to change.
- I felt calm.
- I could understand what I was reading again.
- The anxiety and racing thoughts calmed down.
- I slept through the night.
- My appetite came back.
- I could drive past the liquor store without freaking out.
- I didn’t go down the liquor aisle in the grocery store.
- I erased all my using buddies from my phone.
- We asked people not to bring booze to my daughter’s birthday party.
- I enjoyed swimming again.
- I had no more debt.
- My bills were paid for this month and I had enough money for next month.
- I was approved for a loan to buy a house.

Notes



What It's Like Now

- I've become a person I admire.
- I feel I've become the adult version of myself.
- I've quit judging myself for what I didn't know back then. I wasn't capable of changing what I couldn't see.
- I thought my life was over, but it was the beginning of something else.
- I just do my best today. I don't try to be perfect anymore.
- I started therapy to heal the wounds from my childhood.
- I learned that my attitude determines everything.
- I can restart my day at any time.
- Learning hard lessons is what gave me a great life - not the easy stuff.
- I had to clean up my past.
- I had to make amends to everyone I hurt - even if I didn't like them.
- I made amends to my mother at her grave site.
- I make "living amends" to my family every day.

- Life gets "lifey." "Peopley," too.
- It's not "More will be figured out." It's, "More will be revealed."
- I can still get scratchy.
- I don't have to relive the past.
- I can't change the past.
- There's no better time than now.
- I don't have to go to every fight I'm invited to.
- I've learned there's 2 kinds of business: my business and none of my business.
- I still care about things, but I don't hold them so tight to my heart anymore.
- I still get scared about things, but now I have the courage to handle them.
- I thought that staying sober was like a magic trick. Instead I found out it was a new way of living.
- I'm learning that I don't need to be the smartest person in the room.
- I want to hold on to what I've found.
- I trusted my friend to tell me how I came across to people. That was really hard to hear. I thought I was being funny, but I wasn't.
- I'm not the same person I was when I woke up this morning. I'm changing and growing all the time.
- I'm more patient with myself and others.

- I have a choice today.
- There are no bonus points for degree of difficulty.
- I still work a recovery program because I still have character defects and I still don't want to drink.
- Things got better at first, then worse for a while, then different. Different was good.
- I'm doing it for my future self.
- What someone else thinks about me is none of my business.
- When it comes to power, alcohol and drugs have more than I do.
- I can't do _____, but I can _____.
- When I forget I'm not alone, self-pity isn't too far behind...
- Nothing's perfect, but it's way better.
- Today I know how to act my way into better thinking.
- Feeling something all the way is how I let it go.
- Whatever I focus on gets bigger and eventually I want to fix it.
- When I hear myself being grandiose, I ask myself what am I afraid of?
- I forgave myself.
- What I don't share becomes a toxic brew in my head.
- Sometimes I forget to take the boiling pot off the stove.
- I try not to make the moment too big.
- I used to blame my bad decisions on my addiction. It turns out I can make them sober, too.

- I may not know what to do all of the time, but I'm better at knowing what NOT to do.
- There are no more big deals. I've already had them.
- Changing how I react to things goes a lot better if I don't use a baseball bat on myself to do it.

Notes



About Spirituality...

- I chose to believe there was a force for good in the universe.
- I can't control how things are going to work out. I don't have that power.
- I choose to believe that everything is happening exactly as it's supposed to right now. There are no accidents.
- My spiritual life is my inner life - my thinking, my feeling, my intuition.
- I try to keep a channel open to God.
- Your gut is your intuition. If you listen to it, you'll know what's right and what's not.
- God is a conglomeration of all the good stuff. That's my conception of God.
- I don't understand God. I just know I really need one.
- Before recovery, I thought spirituality was about what happens when you die. I know now it's a way of life that uses reflection, prayer and meditation.

- I was reborn.
- I am in eternity now.
- I talk to God differently now. There's no more "let's make a deal."
- God is love, and love is God.
- I punished myself long enough for sins from my past.
- Freedom is not being able to do whatever I want when I want. It's about not being burdened with mistakes from the past or worries about the future.
- God can move mountains, but you better bring a shovel.
- Rededication is easier on a daily basis.
- I still go to meetings to see HP at work.
- You can still be dying inside, even if you're sober. You can still have a wound that needs to heal.
- A problem shared gets cut in half.
- I have a great and abiding faith that comes and goes.
- My first prayer was, "Lord, save me whether I like it or not."
- Sometimes my fear does an over-ride on my serenity.
- The best thing I ever did was pay attention.
- You can always talk to God.
- Let go.
- Hand it off.
- Turn it over.
- Keep moving forward.

- I am limited; my Higher Power is not.
- You can see the world differently each time you open your eyes.
- Everything is going to be ok - not because you'll get what you want, but because you're clean and sober and you'll be able to handle whatever happens.
- Sobriety was my entry point into life.
- I'm too blessed to stress.
- You can't control the outcome. You don't get to pick how things are going to work out, but you can get good at accepting that you don't know.
- Bless them, change me.
- My Higher Power does not work at my speed.
- Start with being kind to yourself first.
- The Higher Power gives me the space to use the PAUSE.
- Meditating is letting go of whatever you're holding on to.
- I don't feel so alone anymore.
- You can't give away what you don't have, so how can you give someone forgiveness if you haven't given it to yourself?
- Don't you want to be free of the mess you've created in your life?
- The universe has a way of working things out for the better.
- You have a second chance.
- You have a chance to start a new life.
- You have a chance to build a new past.

- I had a psychic change.
- I came back to myself.
- I know I'm not in charge. I just forget sometimes.
- When you trust, you're saying you'll still be OK even if some people think you were wrong.
- Don't take credit for what God is doing. It clogs the channel between you.
- God makes a way where there is no way.
- God is the river, the flow of things.
- Letting go can be like turning a blind corner. You do it before you find out what's lies ahead.
- Being OK with where I AM rather than where I thought I SHOULD be is a great gift of sobriety for someone who never fit it anywhere.
- I finally forgave myself. Who was I not to? My God already had.
- I never calmed down by someone saying to me, "Calm down!" I did when I found out how the Higher Power can work in my life.
- Letting go is a lot like sailing a boat. If I let go of the sail when it's rough going, the boat will right itself.
- I want to make something good out of what happened - something helpful to someone else.
- My serenity comes from knowing it's OK if it's not my will.
- Some of the best prayers are grunts and groans.

- I was of the educational variety when it came to finding spirituality. It took me some time to let go of my resentment towards God before I could see the bigger spiritual picture.
- I didn't have a bright light experience. I had a dimmer switch.
- My God didn't TAKE my friend from me. My God RECEIVES all of us as we are.
- My spiritual life is about the bigger picture. It's knowing that there's something else bigger than me in control and that there's a bigger story going on that I can't see right now.
- My friend said that if I didn't believe in a Higher Power, I could just believe that HE believed.
- Prayer eases me into meditation.
- It took a while, but I learned that when I'm anxious, I can use the PAUSE and do some deep breathing. I later came to see the PAUSE and other tools were how God could work in my life if I wanted.

Notes



Relationships

- The greatest amends I can make to anyone is to stay clean and sober.
- What's familiar is not necessarily what's safe.
- I try to stay in my own hula hoop.
- I have boundaries today.
- I was addicted to drama.
- I stopped trying to repair my family.
- I can't change anyone. I can't get inside them and make them feel what they don't.
- I can't fix anyone else. They have to want to change, just like I did.
- I had to change playmates and playgrounds.
- I had to grow up.

- Carry the message - not the mess.
- If you rescue someone from their consequences, you delay their chance to recover.
- Enabling someone else is something you do for YOU. It's selfish.
- I'm no better or no worse than anyone else.
- I had to learn how to be alone AND have friends.
- You may have to eat some crap if you don't want drama in your life.
- It's not worth having conflict with someone who can't hear you.
- I try to keep my side of the street clean.
- It's pointless to be mad at someone who's still growing up, like we all are.
- Sometimes you have to ask yourself, "Why do I want this person's approval?"
- I try not to judge other people's paths. They have their own journey.
- I cannot make life perfect for my children.
- Be a little deaf sometimes.
- Your responsibility is to make a good life for yourself even if the other person doesn't get sober.
- Listen with your heart.
- Speak from your heart.
- Your boundaries - when appropriate - will protect you well; there's no need for an all-out war.

- You can grieve the loss of someone and still be ok. You can breathe through the anger and guilt that goes with it. It is endurable. Ask for courage one moment at a time, and strength will eventually come.
- You are meant to be human - not perfect. Not God. Be yourself.
- By being honest with yourself, you'll learn how to live peacefully with other people.
- I made him my God.
- I thought I couldn't live without him, but I did.
- Ask yourself, "How important is it?"
- I was a people pleaser. If you were happy, I was happy.
- I was arrogant. It took me a long time to see that.
- I wanted my kids to accept me back into their lives sooner than they wanted to be. I learned to give them their own space, and eventually they came around again. They had to see that I changed first.
- I learned how to be a happy giver - with no strings attached.
- I knew who my enablers were and I had to stop using them.
- I didn't date anyone for a year. I needed a relationship with myself first.
- I moved in with her after our second date.
- I thought he was going to save me.

- If someone told me they loved me, I said it back, even if I didn't mean it.
- I compared myself to the woman he left me for - for a long time, and I never measured up.
- My decision making was based on, "Ready! Fire! Aim!"
- I denied the trouble I saw because I was afraid to be alone.
- I learned to detach with love, but not right away. First it was, detach with hate, detach with disgust, detach with anger, etc.
- I had to face facts. He loved the drugs more than he loved me.
- My family is a group of mixed nuts.
- I'm a member of the CIA - Catholic Irish Alcoholics.
- I learned that worrying changes nothing. It's a waste of time.
- Screw guilt.
- He left me while I was in treatment. I thought it would kill me, but it didn't.
- I tried to force him into the picture I had in my head of what life was supposed to be like.
- Gossiping made me feel better than someone else. And I'm not.
- Intimacy is not sex. It's an emotional connection. Sex is the icing on the cake.
- I have to check my motives and ask, am I being honest, unselfish, and loving with no hidden agenda?

- I felt sorry for him, so I stayed. Then I learned about martyrs and realized I was living with one. I couldn't keep feeling so bad all the time. I left.
- He would get mad at how I reacted to the times he abused me.
- I finally had enough.
- I had the maturity of a 16 year old when I got sober at 42.
- I'd never been on a date clean and sober.
- Sometimes I feel bad about how I was with my kids when they were young, but then I remind myself that I'm not like that today.
- I would never do the things I did if I was sober.
- I had to stop with the sarcasm.
- We were two sensitive alcoholics.
- If I'm taking things too personally, I'm usually being self-centered.
- Give it 24 hours.
- My parents had forces beyond their control that determined what their lives would be like - just like I did.
- I can forgive one day at a time.
- Why should I forgive? Because I want to be forgiven, too.
- I can use my sobriety as a way to honor someone who has died.
- I can honor my friend who's died by stopping in my day and being present to the moment. He would have liked that.

- Pick your battles wisely.
- I don't have to go to every fight I'm invited to.
- I don't have to lose myself by finding compassion for someone else. I have boundaries today.
- They told me I could have any idea of God that I wanted. It just couldn't be me.
- I saw that I had been spiritually immature. I used God like Santa Claus.
- I eventually chose to believe that a power greater than me could restore my thinking to reality, to sanity. I chose to believe it.
- It took me a while to believe that there was a God who cared about me.
- I saw that God had never given up on me. I had given up on God.
- I choose to believe that the Higher Power is always available to me - ready to restore me emotionally and mentally.
- I don't know what I believe about God, but I think I'm more sane than I've ever been since getting sober. If that's God, I'm good with it.
- Today I ask myself does it need to be said, does it need to be said now, and does it need to be said by me.

Notes



Working a Program of Recovery

- It was suggested that I list the ways that drinking and drugging made my life unmanageable; those things were proof of my powerlessness over alcohol. They were how my disease works on me and wears me down.
- My friend said I had to learn how to live without drinking for 24 hours, then we'd work on my shitty personality.
- I had to admit that I chose alcohol over my kids on some days. I had to be insane to do that.
- I was scared to drink again, so I became teachable.
- I had to admit I couldn't stop on my own.
- My bottom became the foundation for my recovery.
- It was the fact that we all admitted the same thing - powerlessness - that kept me coming back to recovery meetings. I wasn't alone.

- I didn't feel relief right away. It was really painful to admit what my using life had been like. That pain changed me, though. It pulled me forward to find a Higher Power to handle the pain.
- My cravings were bad, but I kept them to myself and suffered. When I finally told my friend about them, she said they were normal for early sobriety. She said not to "romanticize" the drink and the things I missed about it, but instead just admit it was a craving and go do something else - anything else. Just change the energy. That worked.
- I wouldn't have told you my life was unmanageable when I was drinking. I was managing my household, my kids, our family life and I thought I was doing a good job. Turns out when I really looked at it, I was barely hanging on most days.
- It helped to get it all down on paper. There it was - in writing. I finally got it out.
- I had to admit that I didn't have the power to change my drinking. I had already tried everything.
- I have a body that can't handle it and a mind that can't leave it alone.
- I came. I came to, then I came to believe.
- I was of the "educational variety." It took me a while to sort things out between religion and spiritually.
- I didn't have a "white light" experience. My awakening was more like a dimmer switch.

- The first proof of Higher Power in my life was what I found at recovery meetings. I calmed down. I didn't know how to calm down on my own.
- It doesn't matter what I believe specifically, as long as it helps me handle life and be a better person today.
- Hand it off.
- Set it aside.
- Let it go.
- Offer it up.
- Turn it over.
- Trust.
- The more I understood how the Higher Power worked in my life, the easier it became to ask for help.
- I hadn't decided to do anything just for me for a long time, so making a decision about how to have a relationship with God was foreign to me.
- Move a muscle, change a thought.
- I learned a lot about how people work things out by going to Group Conscience meetings.
- Meetings help me get back to center.
- I learned that alcoholism is a 3 fold disease - Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years.

- The decision of whether or not to go to a meeting was taken away from me. Going to a meeting just became a part of me.
- You'll find there's no need for "righteous guilt" - that guilt about something you just can't let go of. All of it has to go if you want to have a sobriety that's worth keeping.
- My resentment was like a knot that needed to be loosened.

Notes



Take Aways

- GOD = Great Out Doors
- GOD = Good Orderly Direction
- GOD = Group of Drunks
- EGO = Edging God Out
- TRUST = Try Really Using Step Three
- WAIT = Why Am I Talking?
- SOBER = Son Of a Bitch, Everything's Real!
- DENIAL = Don't Even Notice I Am Lying
- FAITH = Finding Answers in the Heart
- HOW = Honesty, Open-mindedness, and Willingness
- FEAR = before recovery: False Evidence Appearing Real
- FEAR = in recovery: Face Everything and Recover

- KISS = Keep it Super Simple
- The RIDs = Restless, Irritable and Discontented
- "ism" = I, Self, and Me
- No more COWS = Could's, Ought's, Would's or Should's
- AA = Attitude Adjustment
- ABC's = Acceptance, Belief, Change
- DETACH = Don't Even Think About Changing Him/Her
- FINE = Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional
- GUT = God's Undeniable Truths
- HALT = Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
- SLIP = Sobriety Loses It's Priority
- YET = You're Eligible Too

Notes