

EDITORIAL

On the 1st Step

The first of the 12 steps in the creed or philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous is, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable." By such an admission any alcoholic provided he is sincere, has achieved his first success on the road to well-being.

Such an admission is usually very hard for the alcoholic to make. The very nature of his disease makes him shun the knowledge of his inability to cope with the problems of everyday life. Hence his desire for something that will rapidly create whatever he *thinks* he lacks as an individual. With a few drinks under his belt he can fashion the most wonderful dreams about himself. These dreams *can* become his real characteristics - but only when he recognizes that he must dominate alcohol rather than have alcohol dominate him.

The sincerity with which the newcomer takes the first step is the gauge by which his

recovery through A.A. can be measured.

Over the years the alcoholic develops a three-dimensional ability at picture building, which is a kind of saying that alcoholics are adept liars. So that by really taking the first step - admitting freely without reservation that he is an alcoholic - a person starts to build a new pattern of thought. The whole, at last, is fabricated from truth rather than wishful thinking or fantasy.

"Ye shall know the truth - and the truth will make you free" applies certainly to the first step in this program - for truth, to the alcoholic, is simply admitting to himself that he can't handle alcohol, and because of this his life is unmanageable. To those who accept this first step the other eleven follow in the natural order of events - as the scope of the teachings of A.A. become realized and some small rewards have been received.

John B.

There, I looked up toward the heavens and whispered a confession of all my wrongs while I admitted these same wrongs to myself. Then I told my wrongs to a friend I had learned to trust in my climb.

Having made this confession, I proceeded to the Sixth Step, where I found that I had a desire in my heart to have my newfound *God remove all of my defects of character*. With this willingness in my mind, I went on to the Seventh Step. I realized I must now make sure that my defects were in the hands of my Higher Power. I knelt down and *humbly asked God to remove my shortcomings*. I prayed, "God, please remove all my shortcomings. Take away my defects of character. This, I beg of you!"

With this plea still fresh in my memory, I was easily able to ascend to the Eighth Step. In my mind, the names and faces of *all the people I*

had harmed appeared before me. My mother's dear face came to my mind, and I saw her as she had been the past few years — crying and begging me not to hurt my family any more with my drinking and trouble. Then my wife's face appeared, a face drawn with worry and clouded with fear of her future as a drunk's wife. My own feelings of guilt reminded me of all the wrong things I had done to this sweet woman. As her face left my mind, I pictured my two children, and I could once again hear the voices of other children taunting them. "Your dad's a drunk! That's why he never takes you anywhere or does anything with you."

Then I saw all the friends and many other people that I had wronged in the past. As I went on to the Ninth Step, I felt, for the first time in my life, really sorry for all the wrong things I had done. I decided

that I would *make direct amends to all these people, except when to do so would injure them or others*.

On Step Ten, I once again looked deep within myself and searched my life for all the flaws in it, and I *continued to take personal inventory* as I made my way to the Eleventh Step. Upon reaching it, I knelt down, looked toward the heavens in deep meditation, and prayed, "God, I ask only for *Your will for me and the power to carry that out*." As I finished this simple prayer, I got to my feet with the feeling that there really was something in my life much greater, more wonderful, and more powerful than anything I had ever known. My spirit was lifted to an alertness that made me a new person, a person with something to live for.

As I stood on Step Eleven, I could see the top of the Twelve Steps looming before me. With the pillar — a Power greater than myself — supporting me, with my newfound God taking care of everything in my life, I knew that the struggle had been a great one, but the rewards were many. With a great feeling of security, I moved up to the Twelfth — and final — Step. As I looked back down through the

months to the bottom of the Steps, I saw many other men and women looking up at the stairway, wondering if they should take that First Step of sobriety. I knew in my own mind that, since I *had received a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, I should carry the message to those who still suffered*.

I tried to look back at my sordid past, but my mind was blocked by thoughts of *today*. I tried to plan and concentrate on the distant future, but again *today* interfered. Then I quit straining my mind, took a good look at *today*, and decided that just this one day was all that really mattered. I realized that by living today to its fullest and staying sober, I would have a better tomorrow, filled with health, happiness, and some measure of success.

One day at a time, day by day, the old me fades into the recesses of my mind. I have a wonderful new vision of hope for myself as long as I continue to work and live this program of sobriety. My climb on the Twelve Steps was a climb to sobriety and peace of mind, but I must never forget what each of these Steps means to me on the new heights of my life.

V. R. C., Michigan City, Ind.

Emotional Growth

*It can be a sign of progress
when old-timers practice the AA principles
in the wider world outside*

CONCERNING the "Old-Timer's Dilemma" (a letter in the December 1973 Grapevine), may I suggest that this feeling of not getting what we need from the regular group meeting any more may be evidence of our own emotional growth and maturity. Maybe a Power greater than ourselves is trying to tell us to broaden the scope of our interests and activities — to spend more of our time practicing the AA principles among people in general, and to *use* the things we began to learn when we were new in AA, in order to live richer, fuller lives without alcohol.

New people in AA should be encouraged to chair meetings, talk at open meetings (I have been to open meetings recently where all the speakers had fifteen or more years of AA sobriety), make Twelfth Step calls, and, through their own activities and discussions, reach the point of accepting their responsibilities,

and so realize the true satisfaction of sober living.

I, too, went through periods of thinking that I and other old-timers owed it to AA to maintain the status quo. I no longer feel that way. I believe that AA will continue to grow effectively as long as each drunk who gets sober tries to carry the message to another alcoholic who wants to stop drinking. New groups are starting all the time. The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions are still there, and so are the Slogans. New people who sincerely want to achieve sobriety are achieving it just as you and I have done. A Power greater than ourselves is still available, too!

So let us old-timers in dilemmas remember to *Live and Let Live*, to thank God for the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and for our own sobriety. I refuse to be a bleeding deacon.

O. K. W., Lewes, Del.



A Suggested Program for Meditation

AT A RECENT AA meeting, we discussed the Eleventh Step, and one of the questions raised was "How do I meditate? What do I do?" I would like to propose one answer to the question. It is a simple, easy plan of meditation. Here it is:

Preparation for Meditation

For about ten or fifteen minutes, read some material that deals with the habit, virtue, or principle that you want to meditate on. This proposal rests on the assumption that you want something to "chew" on during the time of deliberation. Food is as necessary for the mind as for the body. Or, as they sometimes say, "You always have a better chance of getting something out of your head if you first put something in."

Meditation

1. Turn your mind to God by:
 - a. Expressing belief in His presence.
God is keeping the booze away from you today, so He must be

nearby. The Big Book was written to help you find a God who will solve your alcoholism. In fact, the first four chapters of that book clearly demonstrate that God can be found if He is sought. And the Eleventh Step suggests that an excellent place to find Him is in meditation.

- b. Thanking God for blessings received.

An old-timer used to say, "Think and thank. If you're really grateful, you'll never get drunk." Abraham Lincoln claimed, "Most people can be just about as happy as they want to be." You can get a start in happiness by counting your blessings — not just the big ones, like a new house or a narrow escape from death, but the so-called little ones that you take for granted, like good health. You can be sure you're grateful when you want to express your gratitude by helping other alcoholics.

- c. Asking God to help you to medi-

tate.

An AA saying suggests that you "Let go and let God." It means that God can and will do something for you. All he needs is your permission. Your permission is God's commission. There is nothing more natural than for a child to ask its parent for help. So be yourself and act childlike.

2. Apply your mind to the consideration of the desired habit, principle, or virtue by:

- a. Dwelling for a few minutes on some passages of the preparatory reading that are pertinent to its necessity, advantages, importance, desirability, and effect on your life.

- b. Calling to mind some instances when you practiced the subject of your meditation.

- c. Looking back on some examples of the desired trait as practiced by a person you highly esteem.

This individual may be either a real person or a character in a novel,

*Here are
step-by-step
directions
that can
help you
find the
way*

play, movie, or TV show. Many claim that good example is highly contagious and that imitation is the first offspring of admiration.

3. Make a decision to practice the desired habit, principle, or virtue by:

a. Marshaling the reasons that drive home the necessity for making the habit, principle, or virtue part and parcel of your spiritual life.

b. Asking God to help you practice the subject of meditation.

c. Making a resolution to practice the habit, principle, or virtue.

The resolution should be present, particular, and efficacious. The resolution is present when there is a determination to enforce it on the same day that it is made. The resolution is particular when it is concentrated or focused on a single habit, virtue, or principle, like self-restraint, and not spread thin, like a general decision to be good. Finally, the resolution or decision should be efficacious or have clout. That is, there should be a strong determination to practice the habit, principle, or virtue at specific times during the day. A meditation without a resolution is

good, but a meditation with a resolution is better.

4. Follow up.

Successful men and women in any walk of life have the knack of closely watching themselves and their business. And the business of meditation is no exception. The Big Book notes that a "business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke." Hence the need for a regular or daily check on the products of meditation. AA even suggests that "when we retire at night, we constructively review our day." Did you practice the habit, virtue, or principle on every occasion visualized in meditation? In what instances did you fail to carry out your resolution? Did you backslide into the contrary of your good resolution? What conditions, persons, or circumstances helped or hindered the practice of your resolution? Determine to take corrective measures for tomorrow.

After making your survey, thank God for progress — any progress. Even if you practiced the habit only once, that's progress.

Anonymous, California

'I never sobered up one drunk'

From Mystic, Conn.:

For two weeks, I carried the message to a seventeen-year-old lad. He blew it and landed in a mental institution and then went to a halfway house. He disappeared again last night. This morning, I called his mother and discovered that he was staying in a coastal New England town. I took the afternoon off and drove to the place.

As I started walking the streets of the town, I talked to my God. I said "God, I don't know where that boy is, but You do. I can't find him, but we can. I've got the feet — You lead me to him. And, God, it's a beautiful day. Let me enjoy the day, and while I'm walking, take away my anxiety and give me a calmness with the knowledge that all I can do is to carry the message that You gave me."

I walked and inquired, walked and inquired. I walked street after street. At the end of three hours, I walked the last street. My car was parked around the corner. At the end of that street stood the boy. He'd had a few. He didn't want the message. He said he wasn't ready to straighten out.

God gave me His message. He said to me, "Okay, Buster, you carried the message. Now bug off, man! You can't make one person sober, but I can. So back off, and I'll do the rest — but if I call you again to beat feet on the pavement, be there!" I got the message.

I told the boy, "You know where you can find help when you are ready to ask. See ya!"

My spirit was light as I drove back to my town. My mission had been accomplished, and I had gained a priceless insight. Now I know what they mean when they say, "I never sobered up one drunk, but I'm sober today."

AL R.

*When one has tried to
"practice these principles"
for a long time, helping alcoholics
evolves naturally into helping
people wherever there
is a need*

Evolution of the Twelfth Step

I HAD A TOTAL, absolute faith in AA when I became a member, in 1943. I was willing to try to do anything AA said I should do. At that time, not very long after Jack Alexander's *Saturday Evening Post* article, there was a great deal of Twelfth Step work to be done and not many members to do it. Within a few weeks of joining AA, I was asked to make some Twelfth Step calls. I most certainly did not want to; I felt that I knew almost nothing about AA. But the answer to that was "You know a lot more than the guy you're going to see." So I went.

That was the first of hundreds of calls, extending over perhaps eight intensive years. There were times



I was just a willing worker trying to do a little to repay the miracle that had happened to me, and to help a fellowship in which I had (and have) total faith.

This organizational work, along with my regular job, took more and more time away from Twelfth Step work. It seems to me now that this was a natural evolution. Older members can't do Twelfth Step work as well as newer AAs. It became harder and harder for me to completely put myself in the place of the still-suffering drunk. It wasn't that I ever had any doubts about my being an alcoholic, nor that I didn't want to help. It was just that I never thought about drinking any more and hadn't had a hangover for so long that I had to stop and think to remember what it was like. When I told my story at meetings, or to another drunk, I felt as though I were talking about another person.

when many of us were out every night for several weeks without a break — and I look back on it as one of the most important and rewarding periods of my life. It changed my habit of thinking only of me and mine into a habit of thinking about other people. Of course, I didn't notice the change while it was happening.

I worked for the Grapevine from the day it started as a regional paper in the New York City area, helped to get the local intergroup started, worked at Headquarters (now the AA General Service Office), doing whatever I could to help AA carry the message. In none of these activities was I an originator or a leader.

Anyhow, after the kids were grown and gone, my wife and I retired in 1965. For the past eight years, we have been moving around in a travel trailer, seeing the country and visiting our children and grandchildren. I have had the AA books



with me, have gone to meetings at various places around the U.S. and Canada, and have kept up a considerable correspondence with old AA friends. Daily, I try to live by the Twelve Steps and the general AA philosophy; the last thing I ever want to do is get drunk again. I have not been doing any Twelfth Step work, but a new kind of activity has come into my life since I retired.

After I got sober, I was in debt for a long time. I started learning how to do our own service work on electrical wiring, appliances, plumbing, carpentry, etc. — and found that I enjoyed fixing almost anything. So I learned more and more about it as a sort of hobby.

As we travel around the country, we stay in national and state parks, on campgrounds, and in mobile-home parks, sometimes for many

months at a time. Most of these places have a high percentage of retirees — the majority of whom are far from rich, being dependent on Social Security and small savings whittled down by inflation. Generally, there are gatherings like potluck dinners, parties, and shuffleboard games, so it is easy to meet people. In no time at all, we are acquainted with our neighbors, and we hear about problems they can't handle themselves and don't want to turn over to a professional repairman at \$11.00 an hour. So I offer my services — free. For example, in the last few months, I have fixed a gas water heater, the pilot light in an oven, and two water leaks, put an extra door in a mobile home, put up three metal storage sheds, installed two electric outlets and an exhaust fan, put castors on beds, fixed

shuffleboard cue sticks, built shelves and closets. And we take older people shopping if they are unable to drive.

This is now my Twelfth Step work. AA has given me a spiritual awakening, which is a long jump for a one-time atheist. I want to “practice these principles in all our affairs.” One of the things that means to me is trying to help other people.

In doing this, I have found, I have to make one deviation from AA tradition. At first, because of my AA training, I refused payment of any kind. Many people accepted the help gracefully and gratefully; but with others, I ran into a little trouble. Some people wanted to pay something because they did not want to feel under obligation, did not want to feel like charity cases, or felt that they were imposing on me. Others

were just naturally independent-minded and wanted to pay their own way. I found that if I refused any kind of payment, such people simply would not understand and would not call on me again. In these cases, since I wanted them to continue to call on me, I learned to say, “Okay. If you feel that way, let's make the charge a dollar or two.” In all the years I've been doing this, I've never had anyone impose on me. Not one person.

I'm still not doing anyone any favors. This old retiree's method of helping others keeps me from stewing in my own juice, getting bored, and slipping back into self-pity or self-centeredness, and it keeps me active and healthy physically. Seems like I'm the one who's getting all the benefits.

Anonymous

Beyond Step One

*Are we missing a great and thrilling adventure
because we cannot honestly say,
"Here are the steps we took"?*

BEYOND STEP ONE lies a country most of us never visited before, not even in our dreams. It is a new land, unexplored territory. Once we step over its borders, we can never go back and be entirely as we were. Who would want to?

Most people who try AA and go back to drinking (either to be lost forever or to return to AA at a later date) have not, I am convinced, gone beyond Step One.

They may think they have. Some will tell you they have always believed in a Higher Power, and this qualifies them as having taken Step Three. Others believe they have taken Step Five simply by unburdening themselves at meetings. And, of course, we have any number of fantastic twelfth-steppers who haven't bothered with Steps Two through Eleven.

I sat in a small Twelfth Step meeting not long ago with a group of people whom I knew to be active and activating twelfth-steppers. They

were persons who quietly inspire all around them, in and out of AA. As each one spoke on the subject, it came out that they clearly considered the most important element in twelfth-stepping to be having taken the other eleven Steps. The consensus was: You can't give away what you don't have!

Beyond Step One lies that mysterious phenomenon, the spiritual awakening. To me, this means a change within oneself which has not been accomplished by visible means, and which becomes apparent only *after* it has taken place — usually apparent more to others, at first, than to oneself.

A spiritual awakening cannot be forced. It can, however, be nurtured. The seeds to be planted are so simple that it is often difficult to convince the new person of their power to produce a miracle. We sow the seeds by attending meetings and by practicing the Steps without reservations.

I recently spent several hours trying to convince a woman I am sponsoring that the answers to the mental agonies she is going through are to be found in the AA meetings and program. She reminded me of myself a few years ago. I wanted to be shown *how* AA could possibly help me with anything but my drinking. How much hell I would have spared myself had I been willing to take *my* sponsor's word for it!

But we alcoholics can be stubborn. As we're going down for the third time, we finally decide to grasp the AA lifeline that has been thrown to us. No more questioning; we're ready to open our minds and hearts and venture out into the unknown — beyond Step One.

Now, we are no longer "dry, but

not sober." We may have problems, but they never again need overwhelm us. Now, we have a program.

Beyond Step One lies what is for us a new state — blissful unself-consciousness. This is a paradox, because it goes hand in hand with finding one's true selfhood. We who have searched the world over (including in bottles and in bars, but sometimes in other places, as well), looking for our true selves and getting more and more lost, have finally discovered who we are.

We have a birthright — our identity. We are not saints, but our everyday living is joyous and full of meaning. Beyond Step One lies spiritual progress, and it isn't at all what we imagined!

Sally H., Bellevue, Wash.

The Fifth Step

More Ups Than Downs

*Learning to see the ridiculous
in the things we are doing wrong*

THIS PAST winter, I drove down to our little park when there was a lot of snow on the ground. Some teen-agers began throwing snowballs at my car. One hit my windshield hard. I burst into a perfect rage. I almost ground my teeth as I stopped the car. The kids must have seen that I was furious. How gratifying! I got out of the car, and I can't tell you what my intentions were. Was I going to kill all the little darlings and chop them into small pieces? The absurdity of the thing hit me, and I began to laugh. I made a couple of snowballs and threw them at the kids. They threw a few at me. A good time was now being had by all.

So I said, "I think my score's pretty good for an adult." And I got back into the car and drove off, still

laughing.

I think it's perfectly wonderful when we can see a ridiculous element in something we're doing or thinking that's wrong. In the snowball episode, I admitted that I was being an ass. I didn't need God or an AA friend for that one, though I told on myself later.

Anger, like fear, is destructive and self-destructive. So are envy, resentment, self-pity, insecurity. Fear and insecurity can make us opinionated and domineering, which isn't good for our nearest and dearest. Good old aged-in-the-wood resentments can crop up with the right stimulus and make us take other people's inventories full-volume, or nag them gently and forever, so that life becomes miserable for our beloved victims. Resentment and envy

can make us malicious and gossipy, unpleasant company both for those other people and for ourselves. Have we looked in the mirror when we're feeling this way? It's revelatory.

Perhaps we haven't lashed out at anybody with words or actually done anything to them. Perhaps our anger is backed up into depression, and we feel like the wrong end of a worm. Self-pity. Yes, yes! There's plenty of cause for this — situations all the way from irritating to tragic. But we need to regain our inner strength, or learn to get some if we're new in AA and feel we never had any.

If we have taken Step Four, we have probably discussed some of our character defects already, so it's easier to remember them now. Step Five is a further sharing and verbalization of the moral inventory. We are beginning to learn that nobody is going to send us to the guillotine because of our shortcomings. We won't be rejected. We won't be punished. Not in AA. We can pray for guidance and insight, and we can choose someone who is wise, loving, and discreet to talk all this over with.

How many times I have taken this Step with myself, with my AA friends, and with God! And I haven't always done it too well. But I am learning, as I go along, to eliminate complaint and excuse and admit that I've done thus-and-thus to others or to myself, because of this or that anger or fear — or that I

have omitted doing what I really wanted to do, because kindness and consideration have been submerged by harassment or worry. When someone else comes to you for help, or you listen to others at a closed meeting and contribute some remarks yourself, you find, for the thousandth time, that you are not alone. Other people have these feelings. They have done the same things. It's perfectly astonishing how often we go back to thinking of ourselves as "special."

When I was drinking, I was an angry person who hated herself and took other people's inventories. When I was first sober, I was an angry person and went on taking other people's inventories. Now and again, I still am tempted to set somebody straight. If I do, I try to make amends. I am not as given to arrogance as I was, because I am slowly accepting myself, liabilities and all. I even think I might have a few assets. AA taught me that it was safe to evaluate myself.

Ten thousand thanks and a golden coffee mug to each of you, whom I love so much, who have listened to me so long, who have helped me to find out about myself. It's a wonderful feeling to know that you don't have to be a god or a goddess, a saint or a genius, to lead a reasonably happy, sober, healthy, communicative, constructive, and useful life — with some laughter thrown in for good measure.

F. M., New Canaan, Conn.

The Fifth Step

A Way to Stay High

*He felt he had found the secret
of flying without a machine*

OUR CO-FOUNDER Bill W. indicates in the Big Book that a return to drinking is a definite possibility if the Fifth Step is not taken conscientiously. I believe this. I have had faith in the AA program since my first meeting.

In the depth of my despair while drinking, and not thinking that I was an alcoholic, I was sure there was a force somewhere that could help me. It never occurred to me to stop drinking. The sheer logic of that never entered my mind. And I did not consider AA. But I was searching. When I arrived at AA, I knew the mirage of help had become a reality.

I realized that I needed all of AA if I wanted more than bits and pieces of sobriety. That meant taking all Twelve Steps. I began reading about them. I am sad for the people who do not read the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. This is the

most meaningful book I own. It is a million wise books in one. It's miraculous how AA books grow in impact every time I read them.

I was interested in Bill's explanation of the Fifth Step in the Big Book. In meetings, I told people about my drinking exploits, but something at the perimeter of my mind kept nudging me and saying, "They know all this. This isn't the Fifth Step. Tell them . . . something painful!"

I took the question to my sponsor. He talked about the misguided drive that some people have to tell all, over and over and over again. He advised me to look for "the exact nature" of my wrongs, instead of just drawing lurid pictures. In preparation for the Fifth Step, he said, I should think through the Fourth, counting my assets as well as my liabilities ("something painful"). "The Steps are there to help you, kid," he

said, "not hurt you."

I had already gone the clergy, doctor, and analyst routes. Now I wanted that "other human being" to be an AA. So I finally picked one and began talking as honestly as I could. When I finished, guess what this guy said. (I don't have to tell any long-time member.) He said, "Is that all? Wait till I tell you about me. . . ."

I felt as if I had discovered the secret of man being able to fly without a machine. What a high! And a safe one. I had been introverted and tense. I had been blocked by a fat ego that made sharing impossible, by a lack of communication, by a fear of love. The Fifth Step swept away all those barricades.

With some humility, I could begin to find joy in the simple delights of life. Sober-and-serene is much better than drunk-and-depressed. I plan not to drink today. The safest way I know to avoid it is to keep my ego down while building up my self-esteem, and the surest way to do that is to continue taking the Tenth Step — a comforting continuation of the work I finally did in the Fifth Step.

I believe in God. I have no secrets, and I fear no man. I am not anxious about death. I am alive, forever, within this 24 hours. And I stay high all the time, high on life, thanks to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

E. S., Brooklyn, N.Y.

December 1944

EDITORIAL

On the 2nd Step

Having taken the First Step of the A.A. program by admitting that we were powerless over alcohol, we were confronted with Step Two: "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

The second Step is often referred to as the first spiritual step; but is it or the subsequent steps any more spiritual than Step One? Is not anything spiritual which tends toward elevating us to the best and highest type of human being we are capable of becoming? The Second Step contains the crux of the A.A. method of getting well: it shows to expel that little streak of insanity which caused so many relapses into debauchery long after the normal drinker would have shrunk from another drink. This twisted kind of thinking is eliminated by faith in a Power greater than ourselves.

The question which naturally arises in the newcomer's mind is: "How can I acquire enough faith to get well?" The road to faith is by taking all Twelve Steps. Faith is acquired

by working for it; it is retained by continuous use of the Twelve Steps.

One who has gained faith in this greater Power finds such faith reflected toward himself. To the alcoholic this means faith that he will not take the first, fatal drink. But that is not all, for soon we learn that in some mysterious way our whole lives have been changed, our thinking changed, and our desires as well. Finally the realization comes that we no longer drink - because we just don't want to.

The greater Power now becomes for us the court of final appeal. Those harsh judgements of people, conditions, and so on, which we made in the past are now left to this court. This is the way of tolerance. Our own ideals, aims and ambitions are also submitted. This leads to progress, and it is by progressing that we become - and remain - well.

Horace C.

January 1945

EDITORIAL

On the 3rd Step

I was co-chairman of the Loop group a few months ago and the subject of religious experience was brought up. I answered this in my stumbling way by saying that each of us could have such an experience only when we 'got on center with ourselves'; if that were not clear we could express it thus: when we fully realized for the first time in our lives the essential dignity of ourselves as human beings. I also said that this realization could be achieved through return to the formal religion we once practiced but never knew, or by honest thought along our rough-hewn way.

I have lately come to think that the 3rd step on our guide post to the good life is the meat and drink of the twenty-four hour program. Without a complete, whole-hearted 'surrender' at the start of each day, much of the good that we think, or do, is lost to us. I must confess that in my own daily application of the program I had begun to slip on this point - if indeed I had ever really practiced it. But the tide of events swelled over me recently to wash this bad thing away. Unsatisfactory events, events, do not seem to be without compensation. Out of this turmoil and confusion on my business affairs has

come a deeper understanding, a peace and serenity, a clarity of outlook I never knew before.

I sometimes wonder how many of us, after early, diligent application to A.A., coast along without getting wet solely because of a thoroughly house-broken habit as far as alcohol is concerned. I have always thought that the man who was thoroughly sickened of the stuff, when he learns of A.A., has the best chance to pick up and go; but it seems to me that there is danger ahead for such a man sometime later, just because he won his 'strength' too easily at the start.

Walter L., Chicago, Illinois

EDITORIAL

On the 4th Step

Since I cannot speak for anyone else, I'll have to make my experience with the 4th step autobiographical. Before A.A., I tried almost daily to stop drinking. I hated myself constantly. I could not understand why such a wonderful person as I would do the things I did. I was in a constant state of mental turmoil and misery, and I knew that I could not handle liquor.

On coming into A.A., I had already taken the 1st step, but the 2nd and 3rd steps were discouraging, as I had no faith in a Higher Power. I tried to believe, and would have gladly forced myself to do so, were that possible, because I really wanted to succeed with the A.A. program. However, however, I skipped over these for the moment, as I was advised to do, and went on to the 4th step...

I tried to make a "searching and fearless moral inventory," and discovered that it was difficult to push my pride and egotism aside sufficiently to get a better view of myself. My first attempt was neither searching nor fearless, but it was a very important start, and I developed and revised it over many months. During this time, I began to see

myself as a person who was riddled with resentments, selfishly expecting life to treat me well; a super-sensitive person always inclined to feel hurt about everything that was not to my liking, and intolerant of any opinion differing from my own. I began to see that my thinking was based on fear and vague worries. I saw more. I realized that this very special person I had imagined myself to be could do nothing directly against the power of alcohol. But I began to see how the person I was beginning to understand could outflank old John and attack the *cause* of the drinking.

For years, I had wanted desperately to do something *about my drinking*. This, I knew, was impossible. But the 4th step taught me that I could do something about the *cause* of my drinking. By trying to do something about myself, I found that I did not need to drink. The 4th step showed me what was needed to be done. Without this knowledge, I doubt if sobriety would have been possible for me. The 4th step is just that important.

Richard S.

March 1945

EDITORIAL

On the 5th Step

Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

This is a tough step and takes courage to do. It is, however, a step that can be done if you make sufficient effort.

It is not new. The Catholic Church uses it in their confessional and the psychiatrist uses it.

Drinking is caused by inner conflicts and the only way to get rid of these conflicts is to bring them out in the open and destroy them. Wrongs cause conflicts, hence the necessity of this step.

Take the first phrase, "Admitted to God." How do you do this? First learn humility so that you can ask for help in a humble manner. If you have difficulty in admitting the actuality of a supreme power, work on the premise that there might be one. Once you get your mind in tune with the infinite it is not difficult to realize that you have no secrets from God.

"Admitted to ourselves." This can only be done when we are honest with ourselves.

In this program it is folly to try to kid yourself. Be ruthless in your soulsearching and come clean.

Great care should be taken in choosing "another human being." It must be someone you can trust. Your Lawyer, your doctor, your priest or minister, another A.A., or a friend: someone who will act as a sounding board and keep your confidence.

Once you take this step you will be astounded at the relief you feel. The burden of despair will be lifted from your back and you will be free.

It is essential for every A.A. to realize the importance of taking this 5th step. By so doing, all enmities, resentments and wrong thinking may be cast out and we can continue to the next step with a clear conscience.

It is advisable to repeat this step from time to time because it is human to err and even A.A.s are human.

Bert T.

April 1945

EDITORIAL

On the 6th Step

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

This step is most important because here we are ready for God (as we understand Him) to walk along with us and guide us as we seek to improve our character and eliminate the defects which contributed to our alcoholic problem.

With God's help we'll now apologize quickly when we are curt to others. We'll overcome our resentments. We'll become humble and remember it's our own character we want to improve, not the character of others. We'll remember that as we aren't perfect we haven't any particular right to be critical toward others.

We'll ask quickly for help each time we are aware of wrong thinking and whenever we begin to feel sorry for ourselves. When we wish to judge others, we'll remember that not so long ago we were in no position to judge anyone.

Resentments, our biggest stumbling block, can be dropped right here. Resentments against those who loved us and

tried to help us; resentments against the boss, against our fellow-worker, and all the million other little and big resentments must be turned over to a higher power.

At a later date, as our character becomes sound, we'll find that these resentments disappear.

We must ask God to help us understand others.

It takes a continued program of doing and thinking our best each day to lead us ahead, out into the open, where we can join the company of our fellow-men.

The same help we need in dealing with our alcoholic problem must be used to overcome our other defects. Knowing our problem is in God's hands will give us serenity and peace of mind.

In other words, we will turn our will over to God, asking that His will be done, and we'll work on our defects one by one as they make themselves known to us.

Mark H., Buffalo, N. Y.

EDITORIAL

On the 7th Step

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

We all know that it is God's will that we live clean, wholesome lives; that we think clearly and become persons of honest decision. This we know we cannot do until we become our real selves, so, in desperation, we alcoholics revert to prayer. We humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings; to restore us to our natural selves, so that we may think clearly on our problems.

Emerson says, "None will ever solve the problem of his character according to our prejudice, but only in his high unprecedented way."

Character is undoubtedly accumulative, and in removing shortcomings it stands to reason that we are striving to build character. This can be done by observing our errors, and, one at a time, correcting them on the spot.

We have already accepted this "Power greater than ourselves" as a reality. Something to which we can pray, expecting to receive help. So now we ask for courage to look at our shortcomings honestly. To recognize them for what they really are, and not what we might wish them to be.

What are some of our shortcomings? Let us list just a few: 1. Excessive drinking. 2. Resenting help. 3. Resenting the good fortunes of others. 4. Defending ourselves when we know we are in the wrong. 5. Jealousy and envy of all kinds. 6. Shunning responsibility.

Through the grace of God we have found A.A., which teaches us that we are sick

people and that alcohol in any form or amount is out. So we stop drinking. That takes care of our number one problem.

We must be willing to accept help of all kinds without resentment. This takes a little time, as we are the world's most sensitive persons. We know too well that we have neglected all of our talents and abilities for alcohol, and we have terribly guilty feelings, made more acute by persons who are already in better circumstances than we are. Nevertheless, we learn to suffer our hurt feelings and start building a constructive, happy life.

Defending what we call our "pride" is one of the most difficult shortcomings to remove. Many of us have thought of pride as something virtuous, something to be honored. Well, what we have left, we who are humbly seeking help, that we can put on exhibition as virtue? Often we cannot actually put our finger on anything in our make-up of which we are really proud. So we break down our false pride, and exchange it for humility.

The most beautiful art in the world is simple, with few lines, little fuss and complications. So we try being simple for a change. Just plain honest simplicity. We look for the best in our fellow man, "Pardon the wrong in him; hark to the song in him."

By accepting God's help we learn to think clearly; to play fairly; and to give generously.

Elizabeth W., Boston, Mass.

EDITORIAL

On the 8th Step

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all."

It was characteristic of many of us alcoholics to at least attempt to perform in a grandiose manner. And in harming others we usually succeeded magnificently. So, to say that the first phase of the Eight Step is a large order is to indulge in understatement which matches our bombastic style.

And yet, however extended be the list of those we have harmed, the fulfilment of this step's admonition need not be a tedious nor a burdensome undertaking. In the first place, let's examine the meaning of the verb : Amend.

Webster's New International Dictionary defines it thus - "To make better, especially in character; to repair, restore; to free from faults, put right, correct, rectify..."

There is the credo to which we of A.A. subscribe; the goal we hope to achieve through sobriety. It is both the manifestation of our adherence to the other 11 Steps and our performance of the Eight itself.

The definition continues:

"....to change or modify in any way for the better; to recover from illness." It was written for us!

We have often heard that our sobriety should be founded on unselfish selfishness," that we should strive to avoid a lapse into

drinking for the benefits we, personally, derive from abstinence. It's not sound, we have been told, to try to stay dry for the sake of a wife or a sweetheart or somebody else close to us.

When we first heard that plan of action outlined, we revolted mildly because it didn't seem to meet the specifications of true altruism. Many of us, as we entered A.A., still yearned for that mystic power to "handle" alcohol and it seemed then that the step we were taking - at least in part - a gesture of devotion to some loved one. Without altruism there didn't seem to be much motive to propel us.

Of course, we soon discovered that "unselfishness" was the firmest foundation for our recovery. We found, in the same way, that we try to help others, not solely through altruistic impulse, but so that we may gain strength.

The principle of "unselfish selfishness" is applicable again in the Eight Step We seek to identify all those we have harmed and we assume a willingness to make amends so that - recalling the definition of the word - we may "change...for the better" and "recover" from illness."

The alternative is retrogression. If we fail to "repair" we can only impair.

L.J.

EDITORIAL

On the 9th Step

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others."

Like others of the Steps, Number Nine is closely related to Number Three - "To turn our will and lives over to God as we understood Him." If we have accomplished this step to any measurable degree, we have attained at least a small measure of humility and a realization of our dependence on Him.

Having prepared a list of all people we have harmed and brought ourselves to the point where we are *willing* to make amends to them, our Ninth Step is one calling for positive *action*. There is a world of difference between being *willing* to do a thing and actually *doing* it. How many times in the pre-A.A. state have we said "I am sorry, I won't do it again" and felt that constituted complete amends.

A sincere apology, with a true explanation to the person harmed, of what we believe to be the reason for our past actions can quite frequently readjust personal relations - but the A.A. realizes that this cannot take care of the ones we have really hurt and invariably these are the ones we should and do love the most.

Most of us had at least a few years of real pathological drinking behind us when we first learned of the Twelve Steps. Those terrible years are the ones that become repulsive to us as we progress in our new-

found life program for order and happiness - years in which our every action was influenced by alcoholic thinking, with all its implications. It naturally follows that whatever our state in life may be, those close to us bore the brunt of our outrageous behavior. How can one make amends to a fear wife, son or daughter or parent who through no fault of their own truly suffered physically and financially and more important, mentally, the humiliation and embarrassment of going through life with a drunkard? A simple "I am sorry; it won't happen again" is not enough. It is not enough for us and it is not enough for the aggrieved person.

Direct amends, by all means, is a must, in restoring physical property to the rightful owner, paying debts willingly within our ability to do so and retracting the lie that hurt a reputation; but the real amends are made in scrutinizing our day-in and day-out conduct and keeping that conduct "on the beam." The loved ones whom we have hurt don't want their "pound of flesh." Whether they are still in daily contact with us or not, amends are best made to them by restoring the love and confidence and respect they once had for us by the *action* of right living. With that thought clearly in our minds that "first drink" is an improbability, even an impossibility and the well-rounded, good life we all yearn for becomes readily visible to us.

B.H., Forrest Hills, N.Y.

EDITORIAL

On the 10th Step

"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."

The admission of a wrong compares in its effects to a strong cauterizing agent. When applied properly it burns away the infection, but the treatment may be painful. How much mental pain an individual incurs by admitting a wrong depends not so much on the degree of the wrong as on how seriously he is afflicted with vanity and false pride. The more vain the person, the more reluctant he is to admit a mistake. The more false pride he has, the more imperative it seems to him to perpetuate the illusion of his own perfection.

Since we all know that vanity and false pride are distortions of the mind, perhaps the reason they are so common is the fact that, although we can spot them immediately in others, we have considerable difficulty in detecting them in ourselves.

Here the real value of personal inventory is self-evident. If it is honest and thorough, it will leave no vanities and false pride unrevealed. It is the means by which we can detect in ourselves the faults we note so readily in others and which we know are obstacles to the growth of an effective and happy personality.

The first inventory we take as we begin to apply the A.A. program naturally tends to be the most soul-searching and the most revealing. In most cases, it is the first self-reckoning we have undertaken in many years and most of us are likely to unearth a

great accumulation of debris.

This inventory provides the guide for basic, and usually drastic, correction. Subsequent inventories serve to show whether the first efforts toward correction have been effective and what additional correction may be needed. By this method of personal checkup, we can determine for ourselves whether we are actually moving forward or have slipped backward.

Continued personal inventory is also a medium for readjustment to new objectives. As the A.A. moves upward he frequently finds that he is constantly lifting his sights. What satisfied him previously does not do so any longer. When he was learning to crawl he looked ahead to being able to walk. When he could walk he wanted to run. His expanding personality demands larger fields. If the person he had wanted to be yesterday has come into being, he now wished to be a still better person.

The inventory, obviously, is only part of the treatment. The deficiencies it reveals must be made up. Or, in the thought of the 10th Step: When wrong, promptly admit it. That is putting the inventoried knowledge into action.

Haliburton once wrote, "When a man is wrong and won't admit it, he always gets angry."

Anger, as we well know, is particularly poisonous to us. How foolish and ironical to fall prey to it through vanity!

EDITORIAL

On the 11th Step

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

It is often wisely said in A.A. that we should not become over-anxious, should not expect to get the whole program overnight, but should take the steps one at a time when we feel that we are ready for them. This means that although we are not ready at a given time to take this step or that one and are, therefore, not then taking it, we should be disposing ourselves toward it. It never means that we should plan on avoiding any of the steps.

Practice of the 11th Step is the surest way of disposing oneself toward all the other steps. It was only through seeking contact with God through meditation and prayer that some of us came to believe in Him and became willing to turn our wills and our lives over to Him. The wish to improve that contact, the searching for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out, gives us strength to make amends, to do the things necessary to remake our lives.

Unless we improve our contact with God we will gradually lose it. There will be a slow return to indifference and we will suffer that let-down that so many experience after a few months in A.A. Gradually old desires return with increasing great urgency. The alteration in conduct that we have made for a few months has not been sufficiently sustained to lead to a change in character, and the deeper habit patterns reassert themselves. Growth in spiritual understanding alone will depose us to make the effort to recondition ourselves, to change our emotional attitudes and bring about a true character change.

For specific suggestions for practicing the 11th Step we turn to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, as we do on all A.A. questions, before going ahead on our own. Applying the wisdom we find there, we turn with newly awakened interest and intensity to the wisdom we find there, we turn with newly awakened interest and intensity to the practices of our religious denomination, if we have one; we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers; we may study the recorded thoughts of others; but in any event we make it a practice in the morning to

ask God to guide us during the day, and thank Him at the day's close for His many blessings. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends, but ask especially for freedom from self-will and knowledge of God's will for us.

Some of us have found the following verse helpful on awakening, when all our wishes and hopes for the day rush at us like wild animals; the first thing we must do is shove them all back, and listen to that other voice, letting a calmer, stronger life flow into us:

"Every morning rest your arms awhile upon the window-sill of Heaven and gaze upon your Lord, and with that vision in your heart turn strong to meet your day."

All of which, of course, is calculated to keep us from taking that first drink. It works - it really does.

R.D., Garden City, N.Y.

September 1945

ROCHESTER PREPARES NOVICES FOR GROUP PARTICIPATION

(Editor's note: This is the third in a continuing series of articles outlining the various indoctrination plans followed by different groups throughout the country. In forthcoming issues, methods used in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Cleveland will be presented.)

Dear Editor: The educational plan of the Wilson Club of St. Louis which was outlined in the June number of *The Grapevine* was read by the members of the Genesee Group of Rochester, New York, with considerable interest. As the education of our "novices" has been the chief concern of our group since its inception a year ago, we were all particularly keen to know that other groups are accenting that feature of group activity which we believe to be of the greatest importance.

Our Genesee Group plan utilizes the same technique as the St. Louis Group but has the additional, or more accurately, preliminary feature which seems to us of sufficient importance to justify this communication. We hope to invite comment, suggestions or criticisms from other groups or individuals who may have ideas along this line or who may have some other method of instruction which they are now employing. From such an interchange of thoughts and opinions through the medium of your columns much good may come. It might even be possible to evolve from such

discussion a coordinated general plan or framework within which all A.A. groups could work. Certainly, "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

Our plan differs from the Wilson Club plan in this respect: Our prospects or novices, as we call them, are given a personal "Canvass or workout" by their sponsor or sponsors before they are permitted to attend a group meeting. These personal talks follow the line set forth in a booklet prepared by our group for that purpose. It was designed to assist in bringing a prospective candidate up to his first meeting with a thorough knowledge of the aims and purposes of A.A. and the obligations he will have to impose upon himself if he undertakes membership in our group. It has been our observation that bringing men into the group indiscriminately, and without adequate preliminary training and information, can be a source of considerable grief and a cause of great harm to the general morale of the group itself. We feel that unless a man, after a course of instruction and an intelligent presentation of the case for the A.A. life, has accepted it without any reservation, he should not be included in a group membership. When his sponsors feel that the novice has a fair working knowledge of A.A.'s objectives and a sufficient grasp of its fundamentals, he is then brought to his first group meeting.

The time when the novice's progress has reached the point of acceptance of the program varies according to his mental capacity, his eagerness to learn and the sincerity of his self-examination. It is not measured by the yardstick of any lapse of time or the length of his sobriety. The sponsor's judgment of when his novice is ready is accepted by the group as final and the sponsor then brings him to his first meeting. There he listens to four successive talks based on the 12 Steps and the Four Absolutes. There are twenty-minute talks given by older members of the group and the steps, for convenience and brevity, are divided into four sections. The first three steps constitute the text of the first talk. The next four, the second; the next four the third; and the last step is considered to be entitled to a full evening's discussion by itself.

Following these constructive talks, a general summary is then given of the whole program. From this point on the novice is on his own and his growth and development in A.A. will depend entirely on his own sincerity and his active participation in all the group's affairs.

We feel that we have at least given him an opportunity to understand what A.A. is and it is his free choice from

that point on as to how successful he will be.

Of course, this plan is not a rigid one nor is it exclusive, but we have found in practice, at least in our own group, that it has to a great extent, not completely, of course, eliminated failures and has erased from our vocabulary that distasteful, inaccurate and much overworked word "slip."

It also helps us to develop a sense of leadership among our members, a prime essential in the operation of any successful group. We feel that the objective to which such leadership must devote itself is not, as some may think, a vague, idealistic formula. On the contrary, it is the essence of our way of life, the only way worthy of a free man. The basic concept of the A.A. way of life is the integrity and dignity of the individual human being. This same idea is the core of the Declaration of Independence and the principal concern of our Bill of Rights.

A.A.s 12 Steps comprise the Alcoholic's Declaration of Independence."

M.L. Genesee Group, Rochester, N.Y.

September 1945

Would They Try Again?

Dear Editor: As a point of interest I would like to say that it is my opinion that too many of us say that we have difficulty understanding or getting someone or more of the last 11 Steps. I firmly believe that if all adherents had the proper conviction on the 1st Step, namely, that we are powerless over alcohol, would there ever be any that would go out and try all over again?

C.B.C. Philadelphia

September 1945

Some of the Problems of 12th Step Work

After something more than two years of 12th Step work, it appears that the chances of success depend very largely on the prospect. However, results are so non-predictable that I frequently find myself trying to spread a little light when the patient is not willing to take the 1st Step.

As we all know, most hangovers can be helped by a patient listener who will be consistently sympathetic and not too demanding. Many times the victim will agree to and promise almost anything in order to get what he wants at the minute, be it "a last drink" or some new arguments to use with those he has let down for the 'steenth time. We do run into, rarely, youngsters who are ready and able to accept the experience of older people, but for the most part it seems that each 12th Step effort has to be tempered to suit the individual. An ideal combination to find in a prospect would include a recent and mildly disastrous bender, a combination of local problems to be met that involve home and other obligations to be faced by a socially minded and intelligent individual.

Conversely, the knottiest problems are personal pride which shows up as an almost impenetrable reserve or else a species of belligerency, an unwillingness to face the issues and to tell the truth, plus the many fears, real or unreal, that follow excessive drinking.

Example is a powerful help and if the

prospect can be brought in contact with a number of individuals whose fundamental characteristics are like his own and who have emerged from bondage, the prospect will see very quickly that other like him have succeeded and he is frequently aware of an unspoken challenge to do likewise.

Some newcomers respond to a logical review of their lives and actions together with definite suggestions for changing the pattern, while others, whose current despair offsets their ability to reason with active faith in life or themselves, respond to emotional prodding. The later type frequently reacts favorably to a direct spiritual approach.

One of the most effective comparisons I have heard is to picture the individual's life complicated by one new problem each time he goes on a binge as against the vastly improved condition resulting from no new problems and the improvement made by time and abstinence in clearing up old ones.

It is my belief that the key to success in 12th Step work is a humble realization that our efforts alone are of small avail and that the most we can contribute is a real sympathy for our distressed brother or sister, supplemented by our sure knowledge that God has all the tools needed to help every individual who earnestly seeks His aid.

M.A.C., Forrest Hills, N. Y.

EDITORIAL

On the 12th Step

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Very few of us know the exact hour and date we had our spiritual experience, and some of us are not conscious of ever having had one at all. However, our changed personalities and perspectives are definite proof that "something" happened to us somewhere along the line as those who knew us "when" will attest.

A.A.s refer to the 12th Step as "working with others," and this means we try to help the other person work out his or her problem. From our vast fund of knowledge on the subject, gained from our own actual experiences and often under similar conditions, we are perfectly qualified to exercise that sympathetic understanding that only another alcoholic can have and which is so important in talking to a person who, like ourselves, is allergic to alcohol. This is the crux of the success obtained by the groups throughout the country. This A.A. program, which is responsible for our own sobriety, and for giving us a new lease on life, was handed to us on a silver platter and without monetary cost. It is our bounden duty, therefore, to pass it on in the same manner to those who want it. It was not intended for us to keep it to ourselves.

We are admonished to, "Go ye and spread the gospel," and Webster defines gospel as : "Any doctrine concerning human welfare that is agitated as of great importance." Surely, to us alcoholics it is of the utmost importance. We carry out the 12th Step when we share our gift by telling others of the help we have found, by lending encouragement to those who find the way very difficult, by making calls when requested to, and by attending meetings to show the sensitive newcomer that he or she is not alone.

Sobriety, however, is not enough and length of sobriety is not so important as quality of sobriety. The A.A. program is a design for living normal, happy lives, and it is necessary that we practice the principles of tolerance, patience, unselfishness, humility, and that we curb all our human desires to criticize and bear resentment.

It is sometimes discouraging to talk to a person who does not immediately respond to our "pearls of wisdom," but right there is where we exercise patience and realize that once the seed has been sown, John Barleycorn is our best salesman. Two years ago O.L. was called upon in New York City and after three or four meetings considered himself "cured," and was in no further need of association with the A.A. group. Last week I was called to a hospital here in Atlanta, to interview a patient who turned out to be my

old friend O.L. who had sense enough to scream for A.A. and was now "ready" for the entire program. None of us can let our defenses down, for unless we keep everlastingly at it we are doomed.

Persons thank us for showing them the way, and relatives are inclined to credit one or another of us with the recovery of their loved one. It is then that we realize that "Of myself I am nothing - and we thank the power greater than ourselves for making us an instrument of His ways.

T.B., Atlanta, Ga.

October 1945

DEFENDS EARLY 12th Step Work

The article "Two Classes Who Fade - A Third Finds the Way," in the September 1945 *Grapevine*, seems to me based on misleading classifications, the third one dangerously so. One gets from this article the distinct impression that in proportion to the numbers arriving in A.A. a mere handful remain to work at the program and stay dry.

Since no particular locality was mentioned as the field of observation, it's to be assumed that the author's generalizing conclusions were based on extensive study of the approximately 500 groups now in existence. But let's assume instead that only a group or two, perhaps in a cosmopolitan area, served as research ground for the three classifications - which is more likely the case; for example, Manhattan, of which I'm a member, beginning my third year of sobriety. True, there's a discrepancy between the numbers arriving and those remaining, but it isn't nearly so overwhelmingly negative as indicated.

Large numbers of those placed by the writer of the September article in the first two categories are seldom seen in Manhattan any more. Some have joined groups in the environs, nearer their homes. Some have gone to other parts of the country, establishing groups in the communities where they've settled entered groups already under way. Some have been in the military services, some still are. Though they're no longer seen in Manhattan, many of these men and women are still in A.A. sober.

But it's not with the implied statistics, manifestly superficial and incorrect, that I'm especially concerned. The third classification, "those who find the way" and " ...do not approach a prospect until they themselves first have the program firmly in their minds and are on the straight and narrow path themselves," is loaded with atomic energy which, if released among us A.A.s, would surely blast us to smithereens, smashing the newcomers first. This classification, so neat, so orderly and so inexorable, is the one in which I belong - and at the same time, along with countless other A.A.s of my acquaintance who are also staying sober, definitely do not belong.

Certainly I'm not one of those who didn't approach a prospect until I had the program "firmly in mind." I was in A.A. two weeks when, knowing little of the program beyond having read the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and attending meetings, I felt strongly, urgently even, that my immediate salvation lay in trying to help others, and forthwith began, with an older member, doing just that. And I kept on trying, and on and on, and as I continued in my efforts to help other alcoholics the program gradually grew more meaningful, its radiant truths began to emerge and I was able, little by little, to begin applying, one at a time, the 12 Steps to myself and my daily living.

Today, after two and a half years in A.A., I don't have the program "firmly in mind." A program inherent in which is the very soundest admonition of mental hygiene - Know Thyself - is one of growth, not stagnation.

And as for being on a "straight and narrow path," God forbid! That's one of the most valuable lessons to be learned in A.A. - that life is never a straight and narrow path, but winding, divergent, and broad as the A.A. program itself is broad; dynamic, as is our program, to fit the needs of human nature, not static.

M.S. Manhattan

October 1945

PILLS AND 12th STEP WORK

(Editor's note: The following was written by an M.D. who was also is an A.A.)

The wide-spread, unsupervised use of the barbiturate group of drugs, luminal, seconal, nembutol and numerous other derivatives, has created, especially in the last decade, a public health problem which has deeply concerned the medical profession, police, health authorities, and many public-spirited people.

The acknowledged inadequacy and lack of uniformity in state and even municipal laws regulating their sale has made it comparatively easy for venal and uninformed people who want to obtain them. All too many otherwise intelligent people use them with a liberality that can only mean that they are ignorant of their dangers.

We in A.A. should take a grave and serious interest in the subject, particularly as we come across it in our 12th Step work. It is a startling and uncomfortable fact that 48 per cent of the victims of fatal or non-fatal poisoning by barbiturates admitted to Bellevue Hospital (New York City) were also alcoholics. (Please read that carefully; it does not say that 48 per cent of alcoholics take pills.)

The problems of the pill taker are the same as those of the alcoholic and the pill-taking alcoholic is just as incapable of safely using pills as he is of drinking - he simply doubles his risks. Just as the alcoholic in drinking dulls his awareness

of the unpleasant realities of life so does the pill-taker, in perhaps a more insidious manner, reach the stage of fantasy where only pleasant visions, if any, are allowed to obtrude on his consciousness. Unfortunately while pursuing this, to him, laudable objective, the alcoholic winds up dead drunk; the pill-taker on the other hand winds up poisoned. The results are identical; one drinks it and the other swallows it. It hardly requires the brain of an Einstein to figure out what happens when an alcoholic combines the two.

Alcoholics resort to pills to get out of a hangover, to prolong a binge in order not to have a hangover, or to fight the insomnia which is a product of their alcoholism. Much too frequently, they are introduced to this form of therapy by their doctor, who is unaware that they are alcoholic or unaware of alcoholism. Just as frequently, it is the fellow who is always around, that well-known character, the well-meaning and, of course, completely misinformed friend.

In defense of the doctors it should be pointed out that the barbiturates with proper precautions are very useful and effective drugs. Doctors, moreover, are realizing more and more that alcoholics should not be given the opportunity to dose themselves for an unlimited period. Active alcoholics, drunk or sober, should never have access to unlimited doses of

barbiturates. Acting on the usual assumption that if a little is good, a lot is better, they often step up the dose or the frequency of doses. When drinking, they almost invariably forget when they took the last does or how much they did take. The result is a tragedy or a near tragedy and, make no mistake about it, in a city of any size these are daily occurrences. (In a very limited experience, I have personally witnessed this four times.)

There is no defense for well-meaning friends and particularly A.A.s who cannot help but be aware of the dangers involved, especially if they have had any experience with 12th Step work. They are completely ignorant about such factors as drug idiosyncrasy, early signs of poisoning, and most important, and the most variable of all, the margin between the therapeutic dose and the toxic dose. The margin is different for each and every one of the members of the barbiturate group and when the patient has also been drinking it is extremely difficult and usually impossible for even an experienced physician to estimate it.

When, in the course of 12th Step work, you run into prospects who need medication or who have been dosing themselves, you should turn them over to medical supervision. A prospect in that

condition is not able to grasp or comprehend what you are driving at. To steer the prospect to this supervision is a self-imposed obligation and occasionally the prospect, because of gratitude, will give you an opportunity to approach him on A.A. Do not delude yourself, however, in feeling that when you give medicinal or custodial care, you are doing A.A. work - your job only begins when the other ends.

Should you have a prospect who is a habitual user of pills bear in mind the following revealing fact: A recent study of chronic users of barbiturates showed that 70.9 per cent of the pill-takers were found to be psychopathic personalities. These unfortunate individuals need to sober up, of course, but they also need intensive psychiatric help. Their drinking and their drug taking is a symptom, *not* a disease. We in A.A. should only concern ourselves with individuals whose *disease* is alcoholism.

LI M.D.

EDITORIAL

On the 1st Step...

"WE admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable."

(Editor's note: In response to numerous requests, the 12 Steps have again be selected for a series of editorials. Many readers have expressed the view that *The Grapevine* could scarcely find more pertinent topics than those presented in the steps which, in the wording of the A.A. book, "are suggested as a Program of Recovery," and which define the working principles of A.A.. In a number of groups throughout the country, the first series of editorials on the 12 Steps were used as the basis for discussion meetings. In this second series, the editorials will be written by different A.A.s than those who contributed to the first group, so that different views and interpretations will be presented, each, of course, the writer's own opinion.)

The value of this Step in the A.A. Program of Recovery was made self-evident when it was placed first in numerical relation to the other 11 Steps. The logic in placing it first is readily apparent. Unless a man is convinced he has a serious problem he feels no need to seek a solution.

Logically, it might even be said that no one can consistently come into A.A. until he has at least arrived at the conviction that he is powerless over alcohol. But, much that seems illogical is happening all of the time in A.A. The record is filled with apparent paradoxes. In fact, the essence of the story of A.A. is that of people who have recovered who weren't supposed to have a chance.

Inconsistent or not, many do come into A.A. while they are still debating within themselves whether or not they are alcoholic. Any suggestion that the door should be opened only to people who have already concluded they are alcoholics collides with the fact that some have made the discovery only through the enlightenment gained in A.A.

Again, as in virtually all phases of A.A. and of alcoholism, no stern and inflexible rules can be laid down.

Experience indicates, however, that the Program does not really begin, no matter how long "in" A.A., until one has rid himself of doubts about his inability to control alcohol. Experience also warns that as long as the individual continues the debate over whether he is or he isn't an alcoholic, he remains in a very vulnerable and precarious position.

One reason why this is such a difficult question to resolve is that alcoholism has many definitions and the alcoholic many variations.

Some are fortunate to gain conviction on the 1st Step as soon as they acquire a definition of alcoholism that fits them. They immediately feel the relief that comes with the finding of an explanation for behavior which up to then has shamed and worried them to despair.

For many, however, the admission of alcoholism is a fearful step. It is as though they were being asked to go down to the

public square and confess all of the crimes of mankind. They feel a great stigma is about to be attached to them and they will have to go about branded forever after.

Egotism and stubborn pride combine to generate an acute aversion to admitting helplessness over anything. Social custom and false values, mixed with pleasant memories, perhaps, of earlier drinking days act as additional prods to an attitude of resistance.

All of this is quite understandable. The difficulty of taking the first Step is very real to the person experiencing it.

Once taken, of course, it brings a blessed release. Strangely enough, too, when one admits that he is an alcoholic, the heavens do not fall. Nor does his soul shrivel. Life goes on.

For the alcoholic who has travelled his twisting, rocky road of unhappiness for years, this is where life really begins. Having come to the conclusion that he is powerless over alcohol and having admitted it, the conviction that he must do certain things to recover grows within. He then, and only then, has really begun his Program of Recovery.

T.Y., Manhattan

November 1945

12th Step Compromise

From St. Louis, Mo.

I read with a great deal of interest the two articles in different issues of *The Grapevine*, the first of which was, according to your editor's note, by a non-alcoholic friend of A.A. and the second by "M.S." of Manhattan. One of the points made in the first article was that nobody should try to do any 12th Step work until he had a good understanding of the program. The other article disagreed with that view.

In my opinion, the question here can be debated with good reasons on both sides. Undoubtedly, it's true that somebody who's been in A.A. only a short time is not likely to

be able to talk it very well. He certainly doesn't know many of the answers and he can't have much of a working knowledge of the program. His visit to another prospect may only confuse the latter.

It seems to me there is a perfect compromise on this. Why can't the newcomer be paired with oldtimers when they go out to do 12th Step work? That way the newcomer can learn much from the oldtimer about presenting A.A. to a prospect. At the same time he can participate in the 12th Step job with his own, more recent experience. Then everybody stands to benefit. - A.O.W.

EDITORIAL

On the 2nd Step....

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Here is the Step that makes the sugar in many an alcoholic's blood turn to acid. It is indeed the bitter with the sweet. Up to this point, the newcomer may have liked what he has heard about A.A. The 24-hour plan, the fellowship of others with the same problem, the familiarity of the language talked, the idea of helping still others - all of these things have appealed to him as logical, pleasant and practical.

But now comes "this God stuff!"

Not for him, he thinks. He can't take anything like that into his agnostic or atheistic system. He's allergic to anything "spiritual."

For many this is a serious mental obstacle that cannot be resolved merely by saying, "I believe," while really disbelieving.

The first three words of the Step as it is written suggest a wise approach. One of the most familiar of A.A. sayings can be applied. "Easy does it."

For many the incline from the abyss of doubt and disbelief to the peaceful plateau of knowing it is too steep to be made in one upward lunge. The climb must be made step by step.

First one begins with things more familiar than the unseen is to the doubting alcoholic. Does he believe in honesty? In justice? In fellowship? In being a "right guy?" Surely he will admit that the sun rises every

morning and he knows the stars are there in the sky even when he cannot see them through the clouds.

Then he does have faith in some things. Perhaps he will even agree that the influence of the A.A. group has a greater power than he has; at least it has helped sober up a good many alcoholics, which is more than he has been able to do for himself. Perhaps he can begin by believing that the power of 10 drunks who are dry is greater than the power of one drunk who is still wet.

That's a feeble beginning but it's a beginning. It's the first break in the agnostic wall he has built around himself.

Practicing the 12th Step in particular will help to promote an understanding of the 2nd. It so often demonstrates the operation of a "Power greater than ourselves." No group of ex-drunks, or any other mortals, could alone bring about the miracles that are accompanied so often in 12th Step work.

Bit by bit, if not suddenly, even the most doubting will eventually be able to say, too, that he "came to believe."

"Easy does it" will do for every newcomer if he keeps an open mind on the subject as he goes along in A.A.

The number is legion in A.A. who thought they would die before they ever could accept the 2nd Step and who now live by it, with deep thankfulness. - D.T., *Manhattan*

December 1945

ST. PAUL'S FOUR DISCUSSION GROUPS

A Method of Outlining A.A. to New Members

(Continuing the series outlining the various plans and methods followed by different groups throughout the country.)

The present plan of discussion for new members in the St. Paul group, with modifications during use, has been in operation for seven months. At its inception, about a dozen persons interested in the work met and formulated a tentative plan based on the experience of one of the squads and the material presented in the Washington, D.C., pamphlet and obtained from other sources.

Four discussions covering the A.A. program were outlined. Two members for each of these prepared and presented their discussions before the remainder of the group. Critical attention to these "previews" enabled each individual to reorganize or rewrite his discussion so that it would contain what the group as a whole considered an adequate presentation of the subject on the basis of their collective experience and what they knew of experiences elsewhere.

In general, the plan is to cover the A.A. program as clearly, concisely and completely as possible in four 45 minute discussions, with time for questions at the end of each. The arrangement of the club rooms permits all four discussions to be presented at one time, each in a

separate room, every Wednesday evening. New members are urged to attend all of the sessions in the proper order. It is emphasized each time that the discussions are not to replace any other A.A. activity, but to supplement them and to serve as an outline into which the new member can fit his past experiences, his present objectives and his progress toward these objectives.

AT every meeting the three objectives of A.A. are kept before the group: 1. To attain and maintain the FACT OF SOBRIETY.

2. To RECOVER from those things which caused us to drink.

3. To HELP OTHERS who want what we have.

By adherence to simplicity in concept and in presentation in all discussions, we try to give aid to the new member in understanding how to progress toward these objectives.

Attendance at discussions indicates the fact of sobriety, so that the emphasis is placed on a Program of Recovery. Each of the 12 Steps is considered in respect to its place in the whole program rather than for its value *per se*. The four discussions are integrated each time by brief review of what was covered before and preview of what is to be the content of discussion to follow.

Questions are encouraged at the end of the discussions and frequently require as much time as the discussion. Some attempt is made to consider questions of general interest here, while other questions seem best referred to discussion with the sponsors or others who may be better able to give help on them.

Older members also are urged to attend discussions and many do attend. Their contributions in the question period are very valuable. The plan in the present stage of evolution seems to show sufficient improvement over earlier methods to justify its approval for another six-months period. It is our hope that we can continue to progress in this as one of the ways of helping others.

Discussion No. 1: The Admissions:

1. The admission of alcoholism, as a result of our experiences with it - what we are and how did we get that way.

2. The admission that we want to do something about it - the qualifications for A.A. membership.

3. The belief that we can obtain help - which is not debatable.

A brief outline of the purpose and scope of the discussions is stated. A brief history of A.A. and a statement of the motives, methods and scope is made. A short consideration of what

constitutes an alcoholic and a statement of alcoholism as a disease, along with the progress in public thinking about alcoholics and alcoholism, are included. The objectives in A.A. membership are pointed out and certain mechanisms for getting over the tough spots are mentioned.

This material is covered by each of the persons giving this discussion according to his own methods and is varied to meet the needs of the group present so far as possible. At the end, each new member is given a small card. On one side of this card is a list of the activities at the club rooms for each night of the week, with the address of the club rooms. At the top is a reminder - "I made a 24-Hour Deal Today," at the bottom - "Easy Does It."

On the reverse side of the card is an outline of the Program of Recovery, which is also the outline of the discussions. Space is provided for the name and telephone number of the sponsor and co-sponsor. The new member is also given a single sheet of information about the St. Paul group and other brief information which may be of value to him.

Discussion No.II: Inventory and Restitution:

The steps concerned with inventory are read and discussed with regard to what constitutes an inventory, how to go about it and when to do it. Emphasis is on honesty, thoroughness, clear thinking and "follow through" in

practicing the 10th Step. Restitution is approached in the same fashion and the steps concerned are discussed as means to an end. The 5th Step is mentioned as a further aid in self-understanding and as a way to do something about our character analysis.

Discussion No.III: Spiritual Aspects of the Program:

Steps 2,3,5,7 and 11 are read and discussed in their relation to our objectives to the remainder of the program. Open mindedness, tolerance and personal understanding of A Higher Power are stressed as essential to progress in this part of the program. "Easy Does It" is the watchword in this discussion.

The 12th Step is used as the basis of a summary of the Program of Recovery, as our "insurance" in A.A. and as a way of living in keeping with normal human behavior and experience. The three parts of the 12th Step are discussed separately.

1. Spiritual experience is discussed as sudden conversion to a new way of life or the more common result of the cumulative effects of all experiences in working at the program which result in a personality change. Continuance of spiritual experience is emphasized.

2. Making calls on prospective

members is cited as only one of the things considered in working with others. Personal aggrandizement, zeal to reform and increased membership are discussed as unsuitable reasons for making calls. Sincerity of purpose in helping others, humility in the knowledge of our own power to help, and confidence in our understanding of our capacities in A.A. are indicated as states of mind likely to help in working with others.

3. The last part of the 12th Step is discussed as a way of life that encompasses our motives, our methods and our accomplishments in A.A. It insures continuance of sobriety, happiness in what we do and peace of mind in the knowledge that we are progressing in our Program of Recovery with the help of a "Power greater than ourselves." - *L.S.L., St. Paul, Minn.*

EDITORIAL

On the 3rd Step

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

When I came into A.A. four years ago, my will was very sick. I had been the confident master of my own affairs, heeding no desire but my own, yielding to no wish but my own. In the hour of disaster, I found myself alone and shaken, unable to think in consecutive steps, unable to arrive at decisions I could believe in, unable to enforce those decisions I did reach. I was so thoroughly in the grip of alcohol that my efforts to do without it worsened my nervous collapse.

I accepted the help of A.A. because I had to. But I accepted with strong reservation. I shied at the 2nd and 3rd Steps first because I didn't believe that this vague something in the universe that we call the Supreme Power had anything to do with me personally. There were other reasons. As a newspaper reporter I had had many contacts with missions dealing with drunks, and I didn't like the "Brother-you-have-been-saved" guys I used to see running missions. And my pious, non-drinking, church-going friends who had suggested that I needed to mend my ways aroused me almost to assault and battery.

So, when my sponsor mentioned the 3rd Step, I winced.

But I had to have help, and if I was willing to look up into the sky, I could look straight ahead. If I rejected a power higher than myself, I could accept a power other than myself. I could lean on the shoulder of another alcoholic and talk over my problems with him. I could go to meetings and make hospital calls. And when I could do none of these things, I could go off by myself and hold a mental conversation with my sponsor.

As I conducted my moral inventory and did it the way I knew my sponsor would want me to do it, I thought of all my troubles, of my waywardness, of my egotism. There was a slight shift. I was no longer talking mentally with my sponsor, but with something I had not identified. I thought of all the rules of life, the rules of people who don't get into trouble follow. I thought of the men who gave us those rules, some of them long, long ago.

Strangely, I needed little instruction. I knew what was right, and I was recognizing now that I couldn't shade the rules to suit my own pleasure. These rules guided men and women in civilized society for centuries. Great men and small had learned that in their lives something else must come first, that instead of looking within themselves they must look out. Great men and small had learned the value of self denial, the need for unselfishness, the need for doing for others. These are universal rules, and those who disregard them come to disaster eventually.

I denied those rules and came to disaster; to escape disaster, I must obey.

The rules belong to the realm of what is good in life, and thus to the Good. As I look up to them, and talk mentally with myself about them and about my performance, I find myself looking to the source of Good, talking with that source, asking to be judged according to whether I measure up to the standards.

What, then, is this? It is a power higher than my own, and it is the source of my help. It is the same power that I see at work in the group, whether individuals in the group recognize their dependence upon it or not.

I no longer worry what the Supreme Power is. It is enough for me that my experience has taught me that the Supreme Power is. It is enough that my experience has taught me that the Supreme Power exists, and that it is my great help. And as long as I strive to place myself on the level which I know this God exists, I keep out of trouble. -

Fred S., Cleveland

January 1946

With Humility and Charity, What Greatness Is Possible?

(Editor's Note: The following excerpts from a talk by a Wisconsin A.A. at the second anniversary dinner of the Des Moines, Iowa, Group, seem particularly meaningful and cogent as The Grapevine makes its second New Year's appearance.)

You who two years ago were not to be trusted by man in the most trivial affairs of life, are this day trusted by God in the most important business on earth....trusted by Him to preserve and to pass on the mighty miracle of release from alcoholic obsession.

You who two years ago surrendered to a power greater than yourselves know now that you had returned to you a power greater than you surrendered.

You who two years ago were skulking through the back-alleys of life, picking as boon companions in your unholy misery those whose kinship you recognized by the madness in their eyes and the terror in their souls - you now stride the highroad of life, the A.A. road map to destiny in your hands.

You who two years ago were chained to the degrading slavery of drunkenness have now bound yourselves to the magnificent freedom of sobriety.

You who two years ago strutted and pranced in the devil's dance, have traded your swagger-sticks of defeat for batons of victory.

You who two years ago relied upon self, know now that there is not enough horse-power in will-power to raise a man from the stinking swamps of drunkenness to the clean heights of sobriety.

Surrender Is Victory

For during the past two years you have learned the great, central paradoxical truth of life - that man gains total victory over self, only through unconditional surrender to God.

Before any man can take even mere sobriety *out* of our program he must read *into* it, those minimum qualities which lie deep within the language of the soul. Some of us, alas, are content with a bare minimum of sustenance from the fabulous wealth of A.A. Others fired by their first glimpse of true riches, are alert and eager to accumulate the greatest possible wealth - not to hoard - but to *give away*. For the law of spiritual economy is that our wealth increases in the exact ratio of our disposal of it. It is only in the currency of God that man can spend his way to ever increasing prosperity.

Why Does It Work?

Though we in A.A. may sometimes disagree on how best to take the 12 Steps of

our program, I think all of us to agree on their composition.

Some of us, perhaps, do not care of what they are made so long as they support our rise to freedom. This is understandable. Also understandable is that decent curiosity of many who know wherein these 12 magical steps whose broad treads and gentle rises lifted us from death to life, wherein they differ from all other steps in this world....just why these steps, and these alone, of all those fashioned in time, just why they support so securely, so comfortably our own sobriety and the weight of some 23,000 other former helpless, hopeless, despairing alcoholics.

Let us bend down and examine them briefly. Surely all can see on close inspection that each massive tread is hewn from the stoutest tree of life - charity. And as we look closer we see unmistakably that the handiwork is that of the most silent of the giants of virtue - humility.

Charity and humility. Humility and charity.....the two great virtues which very nearly comprise the total essence and well nigh the entire genius of Christianity itself. For what greatness is possible without them? And what greatness is impossible with them?

Take the 1st Step of Alcoholics Anonymous....."We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable." A haughty man

cannot set foot upon that step, and a proud man will not. Only the truly humble can crawl to it in desperation for support.

We cannot conceive of the imperious and pompous taking our 3rd Step: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." No, only the spiritually lowly and submissive can take this high step to freedom.

And what person on earth with a vestige of supercilious vainglory could possibly take our 5th Step? For this reads, "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Each A Step In Humility

And so they go, these 12 magical steps of ours, each, as is evident and obvious, a step in humility. For without humility we cannot, I think, sustain our sobriety, and without sobriety we perish.

We hear much of humility in A.A., but seldom do we hear it defined. And without definition it must remain a vague and cloudy concept. But each of us must define humility - as all else in A.A. - for himself. In doing so surely none of us will be satisfied with less than the ideal.

If you will not think me presumptuous I give you some of my thoughts on humility, what the ideals appear to be. It is well to remember that when we kick the "I" out of any ideal, we have remaining only an idea. We may make money when we get an idea, but we shall make spiritual progress only when an ideal gets us.

To me humility is the most delicate, and certainly the most difficult, flower to cultivate in our gardens of sobriety. How much easier it is, for example, to be honest than to be humble.

As I see it. For it is in the soil of humility where grows the tallest tree in life - charity. And it is the same mother soil which nourishes the roots of faith and courage, duty and honor.

Humility means a total lack of boast and bombast, of pride and conceit. The truly humble man recognizes the truth - the fact - that all that he is, has or does which is right and good, is through acting in accord with the will and grace of God. The humble man not only acknowledges this to himself but is prepared to admit it to the world.

There is in true humility no connotation of servility. To the contrary. Only the slave must be servile; only the free can be humble.

Nor does humility imply a pious air stirred by the self-conscious air of sanctity. Humility is never abject before man, though always submissive before God.

Humility is ready to compromised a policy but never a principle.

Humility is the eye of judgment turned inward upon itself, seeing clearly its own numerous faults. Thus when it looks outward, it cannot in honesty and dare not in arrogance, judge the repeated failures of others.

Humility lowers a man to his proper size without degrading him and thereby increases his stature without inflating him.

Modesty is born of knowledge; humility is conceived in wisdom.

Our Attitudes Reflect It

Humility, as I see it, is man's relationship with God born of knowledge and admission of his complete dependence upon Him which is reflected back in all of his attitudes towards men.

Most of us find it easy enough to be humble in trial and defeat but once we become again strong and victorious we are inclined to throw off the quiet dignity of humility and don the flamboyant cloak of pride. Surely this is one of the most unlovely sights on earth - especially in A.A.

To sum up.....humility, I think, is the tray on which we offer to man the things we have received from God. Let us keep it clean and bright, free from the corroding stains of pride and arrogance.

And what of charity, out of which the hand of humility fashioned our 12 Steps? Again., what is the ideal towards which we should make progress?

Well, what is charity? One definition is - "the will to help those in need." Another is, "liberality to the poor - the poor in fact and the poor in spirit." A further definition is, readiness to overlook the faults of another." And a final one is, "spiritual benevolence." These things are charity.

No Quibbling

And they are not things we *may* do, they are things we *must* do, things we *will* do -

and keep on doing regardless of human failure - if we have taken the 3rd Step of our A.A. program. For we know what the will of God is, and therein we surrendered to it, without reservation. He has not only told us His will - He has commanded us to it - "Love thy neighbor as thyself." There it is. We cannot duck or dodger it. It is not a question of what we would do in any given situation, but what almighty God commands us to do in all situations. "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

And how do we translate this Commandment in A.A.? As in all else, each decides for himself.

Each of us freely admits that he is here only through the grace of God - through the charity of God. Each of us knows that had he been judged according to his merits, none of us would be here. Had Almighty God become outraged at the insults we hurled to the very throne of heaven, had he become righteously angry at our lies, deceits, disgrace and repeated failures; and had He become out of patience with our broken promises and hollow oaths, not one of us alcoholics would be here today. Think of it! This indeed is something to ponder when considering the concept of charity. We have received forgiveness time and time again. And yet we who so long delayed atonement, found redemption in an instant. How? By merit of our own? No...by the charity of God.

Can we therefore, conceivably give less to our brothers than we have so undeservedly received? Can we and sensibly hope for continued charity to ourselves?

Can we serve God in humility while serving our brother in judgment? And yet do we not sometimes attempt this impossible feat? Do we not upon difficult occasion ignore the fact that charity is not a quality of the mind but a virtue of the heart?

Do we actually believe - have we learned fully - the simple lessons that man becomes wealthy only by what he gives to others, and remains poor only by retaining to himself? Do we believe this? And do we know that the greater the poverty we serve, the richer we become? Do we believe these things - believe them in our heart and soul - those seats of wisdom infinitely higher than the chair of intellect?

Or do we sometimes try to make our charity in A.A. "Practical?" If so we make mockery of Christ's words. For He said, He commanded, "Give him that asketh thee; and from him who would borrow of thee, turn not away."

Is that "practical?" It is not. But it is divine command. Do any of us, by our own admissions unworthy recipients of God's unlimited mercy and charity, dare do less than commanded?

It is not given to any of us to say what we would do in any given situation, but it is given to all of us, given clearly and unmistakably to know what we should do in all situations. "Judge not that ye be not judged" and "give to him that asketh thee." There it is. We can take it or leave it. It is as simple as that.

But what of the "phony?" we ask. What about the man who, in our exalted and infallible judgment, comes to A.A. not to recover from his obsession, but to impose upon its members? What about the man who, in our critical judgment, does not want to stop drinking...who uses A.A. to his own selfish ends...who puts the bite on wherever possible? What about him? And what about the psychotic whom "we can't help?" Should we be charitable to him? Is it common sense to do so?

So Much to Gain

Why, oh why, are we in A.A. so afraid of being "imposed upon?" We....of all people on earth? How many times did we impose upon others - frequently with even less honest intentions than the man we now judge "A phony?" How the very angles of God must weep at the fantastic sight of one common drunkard, redeemed by the limitless charity of God, refusing, actually refusing another common drunkard on the grounds that he is a phony!

Could there be any more ironical spectacle on earth than this ghastly travesty on charity? We are not invited, we are commanded to give him who asketh us. To give not only money, to give of ourselves. Almighty God did not say that he who asketh us must be "worthy" in our critical judgment. He said, "Give!" True charity is no more concerned with "practicalities" than is true faith. Either each transcends all "practical" evaluation or neither is what it pretends.

Suppose - according to worldly opinion - we in A.A. are repeatedly "taken in." What of it? Suppose we do give our time, money, effort, sacrifice our comfort and convenience for one whom we do not benefit (so far as we know - and we know very little of such things), for one who remains (outwardly) indifferent and ungrateful? Do we know that God considers not so much the merits of him who receives - worthily or unworthily - as of him who gives?

If it turns out that the man to whom we have given is unworthy, do we not know that we have nevertheless given to humanity. This is the meaning of charity. For charity.....true charity.....is not a gift to man at all, but a payment to God. This simple but profound truth we should never forget. With most of us, payments are long overdue.

What Can We Lose?

What if our charity in A.A. is misplaced - misplaced, that is, so far as we can foresee? It is merely misplaced. It is not lost. Does not God give His charity to the worthy and the unworthy alike, every hour of the day?

Let us remember this when, in our tired impatience, we are tempted to turn from the man we have helped six, eight, fifteen times, apparently without result. How many times shall we help? Surely there is a limit? Yes, there is. But one none of us is likely to reach.

What a magnificent thing it would be if Alcoholics Anonymous, the most effective agency under heaven for rehabilitation of the obsessed, became rightly known as the most charitable fellowship on earth!

But sometimes in our exasperation and annoyance do we not cry out that we are not a charitable organization? But aren't we? Are we not proof of someone's charity? And if we are not, isn't it time we became a charitable organization? Charity, remember, means infinitely more than giving money, though it certainly includes it. It means giving of our self, our time, effort, energy, comfort and convenience.

Yet do we not sometimes hear that weakest and most specious of arguments - that we may do more harm than good by extending charity in certain situations? What nonsense. What an ineffectual sop to guilty conscience. Who are we to judge? "Judge not...." - this is the order.

Charity does not mean an abandonment of prudence, common sense or intelligence, but it most definitely does mean a recognition of our inability to know the heart and soul of another. It does mean that we are content to give of the abundance we have received from God and let Him determine the result. There can be no excess in true charity.

We in A.A. are under no fiat to understand our brother, but we are under orders to help him - and to help him as many times as God gives us that privilege. I think we in A.A. never have the right to start judging or to stop giving. To help....that and that alone, it seems to me is our mission in A.A. All else we leave to Him. This is both a duty and a privilege....an order and an honor. Do we dare reject one while accepting the other?

And let us not forget that no matter what we do in A.A., unless there be charity in our hearts, we are but animated marionettes, still

indulging in materialistic exhibitionism, still spending our way to self-satisfaction rather than feeling our way to atonement.

It is not the greatness of our works but the greatness of our motives which will be evaluated in that quiet counting-room of God where eternal values are computed.-

H.A.R., Eau Claire, Wis.

January 1946

Faith Paramount Issue

From Lansing, Mich.

As a reader of *The Grapevine* and one who has enjoyed A.A. and three years of sobriety I wish here to recall a letter in the October issue written by a Marine in the Pacific, "Dick F.M."

I wish to call to mind his "well put" ways, as he wrote: "We have the help of a Supreme Power (God) as we understand Him and A.A. and the ammunition is free." What a wonderful thought for us A.A.s and all to keep in mind. It is truth that no man can deny.

I write as one who knows from my own past - 35 years of alcoholism - that without a knowledge and faith in a Supreme Power we cannot carry on in sobriety.

I write a few lines to help someone else to understand this great Power....as I came to understand, for I have observed many who have trouble in making A.A. click....those who do not understand and accept this 3rd Step.

What made us drink when we knew we were drinking to our own destruction? Surely this Power of our own salvation did not make us drink or do wrong. We must then

concede two powers greater than ourselves....the Voice of the Holy Spirit and the voice of Satan....Therefore, everyone is a power in himself for good or for evil...I will quote from a Scripture that helped me to get both feet on this 3rd Step:

"God created all mankind in His way of the Holy Spirit, as the likeness of his own angels, to dwell at peace in this world and maintain it for our own and His own spirit, the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of evil also came and he came only to corrupt and destroy and he, too, has power over the mind of all mankind."

It is proven that this 3rd Step must go hand in hand with A.A. or we cannot put away or control this power of evil, which is also greater than our own.

A.A. works when we join together in any way to promote our own betterment. We bring the power of the Holy Spirit....and we join with a Power greater than our own to lick this power that is out to destroy us.

This mind of ours is a house divided against itself and we ourselves have the right to choose the good or evil - A.A. and sobriety, or alcohol. - *L.F.M.*

EDITORIAL

On the 4th Step

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

Self appraisal which attains any real accuracy is unquestionably a difficult process. We all find it so easy and pleasant to view ourselves through a rosy hue of complimentary half-truths and so hard and unpleasant to take a look in the uncompromising and glaring light of the unvarnished truth.

The 4th Step, is indeed, a real challenge in honesty with oneself. In this way, it is both preparation and a complement to the 5th Step. To make the "searching and fearless moral inventory" called for in the 4th Step, one must first of all be searching and fearlessly honest about himself. The degree of honesty one can achieve will determine the accuracy and therefore the usefulness of the moral inventory.

One practical way of starting this very practical Step - or at least a way that helped one newcomer - is to prepare a record sheet with two columns, one headed, "Liabilities" and the other, "Assets."

Under "Liabilities" can be listed personality deficiencies and faults, such as intolerance, selfishness, indecisiveness, fear, indolence, a bad temper, impatience and a whole host of other qualities which most everyone at his early stage discovers he has in abundance.

Under "Assets," if any, can be listed the opposite positives - tolerance, generosity (and this does not mean giving the poor bum a dime for a cup of coffee and feeling noble about it for two blocks), thoughtfulness of other people, humility, patience, and a few other attributes. Few persons, if honest, ever work up so much of a list on this side of the ledger for their first moral inventory.

The actual process of deciding what to put in each column consists of asking oneself some pointed questions. Am I tolerant of other people's peculiarities, other creeds, other colors, other races, other opinions? Or do I dislike somebody because of the way he combs his hair or ties his tie? How many favors will I do other people without expecting one in return? Will I really go out of my way to help someone, or only when it's convenient? Do I feel superior to others? Am I impatient of others' shortcomings, while being very patient of my own? Am I honest, or do I practice deceit and double-talk, and then excuse myself afterwards with some fancy rationalizing? Am I kind, considerate, gentle?

The more questions one asks himself along this line the clearer become the entries he should make in each column.

If this is the first moral inventory one has taken of himself, or at least the most honest one, he will find it most trying. But he also will find that in itself it will give him a

certain feeling of relief. Eventually he has begun to face facts. Finally he has worked up enough courage to face himself as he really is, and not as he has been dreaming he is. This is a courageous step forward. It is another step on to the path of sanity, stability and happiness.

The first inventory should not be the last by any means. In fact, the principle and the technique of the moral inventory become a vital part of the new life. The first is the most difficult. Subsequent inventories show where progress has been made, where more effort still needs to be placed. If an inventory be taken at regular intervals, one has at hand a guide for keeping on the beam.

The moral inventory is one of A.A.'s most effective techniques. Of course, as with other A.A. techniques, its effectiveness depends on how well it is used. The inventory will not work by itself. The benefit comes about through the efforts made to change that which the inventory reveals should be changed. - *T.D., Manhattan*

EDITORIAL

On the 5th Step

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

We have made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; at least we have tried, and even though our first efforts at this sort of thing are far off the mark, we have come up with an ugly assortment of defects of character and shortcomings. Were we to stop at this point, that is after completing the 4th Step, there would be nothing for us to do but get very drunk in order to forget it all. Our program, however, provides for carrying on the process to recovery and this 5th Step is an important link between the recognition of our faults and their correction.

The 5th Step encourages us to think of our faults from several viewpoints. We consider how God regards a fault, or how our neighbor regards it, how we ourselves regard it, and we force ourselves to take a position on how we will act in the future.

Further, by admitting to someone else the exact nature of our wrongs we are doing something about them, not just sitting and bemoaning them. We are practicing humility and recognizing our dependence on others

which helps us overcome the self-obsession that was leading us to destroy ourselves.

All of this is another way of saying that confession is good for the soul. It is one of the earliest discovered spiritual laws and its observance is just as necessary to our well-being as observances of any of the natural laws we take for granted. The only reason for attempting to analyze how it works is to make clear why it should be a continuing process. Our spiritual development proceeds in a spiral. The first time around the circuit, or through the Steps, we accomplish much, learning more about the preceding Steps as we perform each subsequent one. Because we learn something that is applicable to an earlier Step after we have passed it we are impelled to make the circuit again to apply our greater knowledge. We move on a slightly more advanced level the second time around, but again we recognize development as we proceed and we know that we're in a position to do a still better job than formerly - and so the spiral continues - onward and upward and ever away from the kind of thinking that leads to the first drink.-

Bob D., Garden City, L.I.

EDITORIAL

On the 6th Step

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

For one who has been following the Steps in the order in which they are presented in the book, the application of the 6th Step would come about almost automatically. However, few do follow the Steps in their numerical order, and it is not necessary to do so. After concurring in the 1st Step, which of course is the compelling reason for anyone seeking A.A., many have progressed by taking the other Steps in the order in which they seemed to come most easily.

Nevertheless, the 3rd, 5th, 6th and 7th Steps seem to fall into a natural group. One leads to another, the practice of one helps in the practice of the other three.

Certainly anyone who has applied the 3rd Step and "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him," is at least nearly ready "to have God remove all these defects of character."

Being "entirely ready" is vital phraseology. If one is "entirely ready" he has rid himself of the last vestige of reservations. He is ready to go the whole length in making use of the Power.

All of these Steps, in fact, are a conditioning for the application of "the thing that works" in A.A., to express it as countless many have expressed it and countless others will express it in the years to come.

Logic suggests that the 6th Step is preparation for the 7th. And the preparatory stage is important. In this Step, the action is mostly spiritual, or mental, if one prefers the latter word. It is, in any event, attaining a certain state of mind. This state of mind is one of acceptance and of complete willingness to try what in many cases is a new idea, or an old idea long forgotten and now newly revived. It is a state of mind in which there are no longer any reservations. As long as reservations remain it is doubtful if the individual is "entirely ready." He may be almost ready but not "entirely."

One approach to the development of this desired state of mind is through a review of the drinking history and of the repeated failure to control the drinking. Through this procedure, one again reminds himself of the fact he has finally had to face - that he cannot do it alone and that he must have help. The group will help, of course. All of the technique of A.A. will carry the individual a long way a long time. Some say indefinitely, but no conclusive measure is yet available.

On the other hand, many believe by virtue of their own experience and the experience of others, that when one qualifies on the 6th Step he stands at the threshold of true and lasting progress, of real growth and of an unprecedented happiness.

Many have come up a long way in A.A. without applying the 6th Step, and are still traveling upward. The 6th Step cannot be said

to be an early "must" in the program. There are few "musts" in A.A.

Furthermore, many will apply the 6th Step without being aware of it and without considering it separately from the other Steps. Some, in fact, have already reached the state of acceptance called for in this Step, by the time they seek A.A. Others reach the same receptive attitude when they become receptive to the 3rd Step.

Whenever and however it occurs, the application of the 6th Step is furthered by the development of a hope, at least, that an unlimited Power can be drawn upon for help. Even if the individual has no more than a hope in the beginning, he can attain a state of readiness.

The development of such hope may be furthered by giving thought to the fact that the experience of many in A.A. has demonstrated that the great promises implied in the 6th Step can be fulfilled in abundance.

April 1946

Premiums Must Be Paid

From Denver Colo.

The day we came to A.A. and professed our faith and belief in its principles and methods, "The 12 Steps to Recovery," we took out an insurance policy for sobriety. Now then we all have other insurance of various kinds and know that we must keep our premiums paid; if we do not the policy will lapse and we have no insurance. In A.A. the 12 Steps are our premiums and if we do not pay them (by working them), our insurance will lapse and we will end up drunk again.

When I came to A.A. there just was nothing else and you may be sure that had there been I don't think I'd have accepted any part of A.A. As I was completing a course at a Chicago sanatorium I was given the book to read, but what could a bunch of ex-drunks tell me? I knew all about drinking, that was certain. The day my wife told me I was an alcoholic really called for me to pound some sense into her head. So when the grand finale came I had nothing left and when asked if I'd let these A.A. fellows come and talk to me I said "Yes, I'll even let them come," so you see there just was nothing else, and if this did not work I was a dead pigeon.

It was not just a marvelous thing - one big happy family where everyone wanted to help in any way possible, not something that brought peace of mind, contentment, happiness and all out of chaos, *but the only thing.*

Therefore it was necessary that I accept anything and everything that was told to me, completely, entirely and wholeheartedly. I certainly was in no position to question anything nor argue any points, for after all here were men who had made a success of their home life, their business life, were contented and at ease with the world and themselves and I was the one in trouble.

These men did not have to jump every time the phone rang lest it be a call they did not want to answer. They did not have to go through the agony of going into the office next morning, eyes bloodshot, cold perspiration on their foreheads, shaking so that to even make the letter X was a task, let alone sign anything. They did not have to cross the street in the middle of the block to avoid meeting some one. They ate their breakfast that morning and I had a time drinking mine, keeping the first drink down, even with bitters, pepper and all.

I'll never forget that afternoon when they made their entry - one big fellow looking every inch a plainclothesman and his partner considerably shorter and bordering on being plump. They looked like the two who had answered a call from my wife the night before except they were not in uniform.

They invited us to an open house that Saturday night but I did not think I could make it - my back hurt (on account of the fall I had

the night before), my head was twirling and the entire Russian Army had marched through my mouth, boots and all, so we would make it some other time. My wife made up our mind, however, and we went; found several neophytes that night who felt as bad as I did (one could hold out only about an hour and a half) so I had found companionship; a few others who felt as I did right then, and also many who once had, but now were enjoying themselves.

It was good for my wife, too, as she found that there were several things that I had not as yet got around to doing, though it was only that I had not thought of it or else just was not in a position to do it. That is why today I tell a new man that if he did not steal the pennies his wife was saving and had hid away high on a shelf in the clothes closet it was only because either they did not have any pennies or else he did not think of it.

A.J.S.

April 1946

STUB OF A PENCIL

Having been particularly blessed by the opportunity of being in the right place at the time to found an A.A. group, I would like to pass a few observations on the growth of a member.

From the first contact in Utah in November, 1944, to the most recent addition to the group of a few weeks ago, a pattern of the struggle for calmness, serenity and sober happiness seems to shape itself. As I have watched this ever changing, yet fundamental sameness of pattern form I have likened our 12 Steps to tools, tools with which to hew a future. To me, at least, there is only one piece of matter for us to carve from: our past. When given our first kit of tools, many, many things can, and usually do, happen. Normally our enthusiasm is greater than our reasoning and we injure ourselves. Perhaps our hammer of admission of self defeat is used so strenuously that our uncalloused palms are blistered. Quite often our chisel of introspection has lain too near the fire of hate and resentments for too long a period and we are badly burned. Many are the mishaps of the initial handling of our tools because of abnormal gratitude. This period of growth in A.A. takes its toll of craftsmen and some disgustedly cast aside their tools for a time. These men are not in the majority, however. Mostly we lay them in an orderly arrangement in front of us and approach them a bit more calmly. One at a time we heft them,

evaluate their usefulness and study them conclusively. We spell our doom or interminable happiness by our final decision.

At this juncture the pattern begins to shape up. This is the period I have found to be the line of demarcation between thought and action and I am completely satisfied that this period continues on for the balance of our lives. As the tools before us are perused and studied there is noticed a little stub of a pencil almost hidden by the larger equipment. This small pencil, difficult to find, as is so often the case in life, is the most necessary tool of all. Craftsmen all know that plans must be drawn before constructive action can be taken. We pick this stub up and find imprinted on it, "I turn my will and life over to God as I understand Him."

From the outset we are prone to do our constructive work without the use of this pencil in drawing our plans. Time and time again, we miserably hold back and hunt for this little stub of a pencil. Always we have difficulty in laying our hands upon it. Often after it is found we thoughtlessly stick it into our pocket instead of using it. Periodically, in utter futility and desperation because of the chaotic mess in which we find our handiwork, we dig up our little pencil and use it. Is it not amazing that the point is never dull nor broken, that the print which it draws is always precise and

exact, that our construction immediately begins to shape up before our eyes. A structure founded upon right thinking, will evaluate its spires into the clouds of happiness and calm serenity.

In summary: We of A.A. have our raw material from which to build, our past, comprised usually of (1) self indulgence, with varying degrees of lying, cheating and stealing to perpetuate it; (2) environmental pampering - the whole world seemingly contributes to this; (3) kidding and dishonesty with one's self, super-imposed on our minds by years and years of wrong thinking. These and numerous other ego-centric traits comprise the material from which we can do our building. We of A.A. have tools, 12 tools, which have graciously and unselfishly been bestowed upon us.

With raw material which we ourselves have supplied, and with tools that have been bequeathed to us, we have the wherewithal to build calmness, serenity, and sober happiness, the degree of which is governed only by the frequency of the use of "the stub of a pencil." - G.O.L., Salt Lake City, Utah.

EDITORIAL

On the 7th Step

"Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings."

Severe words, but what a challenge!

If we alcoholics can bring ourselves to accept it, we have reached the starting point for complete readjustment beyond the stage of mere sobriety.

Assuming we have put some honest effort into applying the first 6 Steps of the A.A. program to our individual needs, we have taken some big strides on the road back from despair. We have already accepted belief in a Higher Power, made a decision to let God, as we understand Him, take charge of our lives, made an inventory, admitted our faults and have become ready to have God remove our "defects of character." Certainly, it is logical we should next ask Him to remove the maladjustments and wrong thinking that caused our bad drinking habits and made us totally inadequate human beings.

The moral inventory, if "searching and fearless," has indicated to us the nature of most of our shortcomings and the admission of these "to God, to ourselves and to another human being" has brought them into proper perspective so that we have a very good idea of where we need God's help in getting off to a fresh start in life.

There is, however, additional significance to the 7th Step. It surely, is the connecting link between the first 6 Steps and the last five.

Before we are able to make adequate amends to other human beings for harm we have done them as the result of our alcoholic obsession, we must first be in a position to convince them of our sincerity. Unless our own conscience is good, how can we be convincing to anyone else? And can we be at peace with ourselves unless we have tried, in all humility, to get in tune with the directing Power of the Universe? Without first taking the 7th Step, it would seem difficult to persuade ourselves of our ability to right, in any appreciable measure, the damage we have done to our family, our friends or our employers and if the job of making amends is undertaken only half-heartedly, we may run into our old enemy, frustration.

The 7th Step takes us still further into the program, for the 10th Step suggests we continue "to take personal inventory" and when we were wrong to "promptly" admit it. But to whom? First to God (refer to the 5th Step), then to ourselves, and finally, now in the proper frame of mind, to the injured person.

Again, the 11th Step asks us "through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." Knowledge of His will for us would seem hard to attain without admission to Him that we haven't done very well on our own and now have an honest desire to clean house with His help.

Finally we are ready (the 12th Step) to help others, until, in all humility, (a tough word for any alcoholic but, properly construed, an entirely honorable one), we have asked that our faults be removed? -

A.T., Greenwich Group, New York City.

May 1946

A New House

From Santa Anna, Calif.

I started out some three years ago to build myself a new house in which to live and I'm still building it, or remodeling it. I have taken on a lifetime job, I know, but I get a little better all the time. Here are my specifications: I thought they might be of interest to others. I have used the 12 Steps for them and find that they cover every phase of construction.

1st Step: In this step I found the reason why all my previous buildings collapsed. I had built on the insecure footing that I could find a way to drink like other people, and as long as I continued to try and build that way, my structures warped, crumpled, and finally collapsed. But when I admitted I was an alcoholic, I removed the faulty cornerstone and replaced it with one around which I could really build a house.

2nd Step: Here I found the sand, rock, and necessary reinforcement to make a real foundation.

3rd Step: Here I found the cement to bind these ingredients into a lasting and secure foundation. In the first eight words of these 3 Steps I found the real and only reason to do anything in life whether it be making a cake, taking a trip, or building a

skyscraper. I admitted a need, came to believe, made a decision!

4th, 5th and 6th Steps: Here I found the specifications to show me how to rip out all the old rotten, decayed and useless timber and material that was in the house I had tried to build. They also showed me how to detect any flaws that creep into my new structure.

7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Steps: Here I find the necessary specifications to provide the windows, doors, joists, sewage disposal system, ventilation that I will need to give me fresh air, light, sunshine and warmth.

11th Step: This provides me with a roof to protect me with a roof to protect me from storms of all kinds and, through continually seeking guidance, I can always find the leaks and stop them up before it is too late.

There you have a building that will stand fire, earthquake, storms, floods, or the ravishes of time.

12th Step: To be sure that I'm on the safe side, I have taken out an insurance policy and I may my payments regularly and often, by working with others, attending meetings, and doing all I can to make other happy and give away all I can of what I have found. - J.F.H.

EDITORIAL

On the 8th Step

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all."

The list that some of us had to make in applying this Step would compare in length to current real estate lists of houses and apartment applicants. The length of the list of people we had harmed grew with the degree of our honesty and the accuracy of our memory.

Perhaps some people do come into A.A. with a fortunate record of having harmed only a few. We doubt, however, that anyone need turn in a blank piece of paper - not if he thinks long and honest enough. What, for instance, of the business associates who took on some of our work during our absence from the office or on those days of the shakes and low efficiency? What of the friends whose time we wasted with such very boring blabber? And too, there are those intangible but damaging effects of the example we set for others; the good we might have done but didn't; the contributions we could have made to helping some one else in some way, or just making a moment or two more pleasant - but didn't; the success of someone else we might have boosted along but didn't.

Anyone except a saint will find that he has harmed someone, somewhere, and that he has harmed society and his fellow man by failing to do the things for which he had the time, the talent and the opportunity, but not the sense of responsibility.

Even the rare, quiet and so-called well-behaved alcoholic can make a list. And the ordinary variety of drunks, which the great majority of us, can easily make a list from here to Timbucktoo, beginning with the wife, the youngsters, the relatives and the boss, and extending on through the people we borrowed from and didn't pay back, the people we lied to - and so on and on and on.

The challenge of making amends is a formidable matter to contemplate. In some instances, even to make amends to some one person, such as a particularly hated enemy, seems more than anyone can undertake.

But this process of self-inventory and self-cauterizing also offers one of the most restorative experiences to be found through A.A. The experience begins to unfold, too, while making the list of people we have harmed and becoming "willing to make amends to them all."

Let us note that wording - "became willing to make amends..." Circumstances may prevent us from making amends to all, and there may be reasons why we should not undertake to make amends to some - as suggested in the 9th Step. But there is nothing at all to prevent us or to restrain us from becoming *willing* to make amends.

The point here is that in order to become *willing* to make amends we have to admit to ourselves without reservations and without quibbling or reciting reasons why we did it that we did commit the harm. We have

to attain the attitude in which we say to ourselves that whether or not the other person was wrong or right, we were wrong. Maybe the person we harmed was a louse. That doesn't make our brand of lousiness any better. It's no excuse. The louse we harmed must go on the list along with the good people we've harmed.

Reaching the degree of self-analysis and honesty which carries us to a *willingness* to make amends to all helps to set the stage for the beginning of real progress in A.A., or real progress in any way of life. This part of the conditioning process for attaining honesty and humility and helpfulness; part of the process of fitting ourselves again into society; a very vital step in the rehabilitation of the alcoholic.

We know that when drinking we are selfish, self-centered, egotistical and self-dramatists. We are filled with self-pity over the great wrongs everyone has done us, how we are misunderstood, how thoughtless others are towards us.

The 8th Step is an excellent purgative for the kind of thinking, as well as acting, that we've been doing. Drink long and deeply of this Step, because while it may taste very bad going down, the effects are miraculous.

EDITORIAL

On the 9th Step....

"Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

"The amends we make must be *direct*. We must pay in *kind* for the hurt we have done people. If we have cheated them, we must make *restitution*. If we have hurt their feelings, we must ask *forgiveness* of them."

These words are our guide posts, which we follow while taking the 9th Step on the *Road of Repudiation* of our former way of life.

Here - in the 9th Step - is where we A.A.s have a Heaven-sent chance to prove ourselves - in the eyes of our loved ones, with our families first of all, with the ones we have made to suffer such keen anguish because of our uncontrolled drinking; to redeem ourselves in the sight of our friends and our business associates.

Performing the 9th Step helps us to rid ourselves of the oppressing and tormenting feelings of remorse, of agitated memories and agonizing regrets. It helps us to regain a clear conscience, a peaceful, contented mind, a buoyant disposition, and some long-lost tranquility. We're getting back again to acting like the sober people that we were once upon a time, long ago, and observing the little amenities of life, being courteous and considerate.

We make direct amends wherever possible. If we encounter a situation in our lives where this is not possible, we make

indirect amends by resorting to the 5th and 7th Steps. In such a case we admit to ourselves and to God our past wrongs and we humbly ask *His* forgiveness, in lieu of being able to make direct amends. If the matter still presses heavily upon our conscience, we can, if we wish, talk the matter over - and out - once and for all with a person who has an understanding heart and a closed mouth; one who will never violate our confidence.

In making amends with regard to our financial affairs we make recompense in kind, with dollars and cents.

Now let us take the words : "Make direct amends, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Amends are never to be made rashly or indiscriminately without careful forethought. Causing injury to others isn't making amends at all; it's merely making an existing, lamentable situation deplorable, and we are placing ourselves in a position where we'll be making amends for having tried to make amends. A general fiasco would result, of benefit to no one.

Here is a quote taken from the big book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, with reference to the 9th Step: "Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, but he is yet a long way from making amends to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience which wives have had with alcoholics (I'd like to a d d :

which husbands and children have had with alcoholics, too).

.....There is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We (alcoholics) must take the lead (in making amends). A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fit the bill at all.

I revised the preceding passage just quoted - applying it to myself as follows: "Certainly I must keep sober, always, but I am yet a long way from completing amends to my daughter, whom I hurt so deeply and so often. Passing all understanding was her patience with me, the alcoholic mother."

We have said it before: "We're sorry." And sorry we stayed until the next border. Then remorse set in and we couldn't stand it, and we became intoxicated again because we felt so remorseful. Then we said, "I'm sorry," all over again. But that is not the way we are going to say it this time, if we are sincere about the 9th Step.

Do we then ever become articulate and express our regrets to those whom we have hurt? Obviously! It's the only decent, Christian-like thing to do. We should.

You can take it or leave it; I took it several times with gratifying results. But if you are one of those persons whom false pride, or a past hangover from alcoholic egotism, holds back from saying: "Forgive me," then I feel sorry for you. And I'll tell you the reason shortly.

There are on my list of amends five persons. Specifically then (besides living the 12 Steps), how did I commence to make

amends to those whom I had hurt? I'll use as an example my employer.

My employer is a "prince-of-a-chap." He's a charitable, tolerant and extremely good-natured, all of which fine attributes "alcoholic me" has taken advantage of for two years.

I set a goal for myself. For six consecutive months I would not, while working for him, be absent from work one day, barring illness or something over which I had no control. That I have done, my longest period of non-absenteeism in the past ten years.

Now when the chief steps into our office in the morning on his way to the San Francisco office his eyes are brimful of twinkles and he booms out at me in a voice one can hear on the next floor....I'll bet, while we're exchanging greetings, we're both thinking the same thing:-"Teddie wasn't drinking yesterday. And today, too, she is sober thank the Lord!

He did a favor for me not long ago, which I appreciated, and thanked him, for I am indebted to him for that and for past consideration. I said, "I don't know how in the world I'll ever be able to repay you." He said something like this: "You just keep on being a good girl - like you are now - and that's how you'll repay me." I thought to myself: He means keep on being "good and dry."

T.L., Oakland, Calif.

EDITORIAL

On the 10th Step...

"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."

This Step is really an extension of the 4th Step. It is the "follow through" on that long list of things that we put down on paper after reading the 4th Step. The new twist is the part about "*when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*" The going may get a little rough when we try to put this Step into practice.

It is easy to write down our good qualities and our bad qualities honestly if it's done privately and we are sure nobody else sees it. If we are honest, the list of bad qualities will be very much longer than the list of good qualities. If we are trying honestly to live the A.A. program, we try to do something about that longer list. We make resolutions. We plan to "turn over a new leaf." Then, unfortunately for most of us, we tear the list into tiny pieces, burn it and carefully bury the ashes.

Admission of an unknown remark to somebody or a persistent feeling of resentment is an overt act which means a growing maturity. And it is a matter of a person's emotional maturity. Perhaps a better word would be childishness. How often have we acted like a child when we should have acted like a man?

A man admits his mistakes and tries to make amends; a child pouts. As problem drinkers, we were problem children. As problem drinkers, we sought to escape the consequences of voluntarily childish acts through alcohol. As arrested alcoholic cases, we must learn to face reality and responsibility for our acts if we are to "stay on the beam."

The 10th Step is simply a device we use in attaining maturity. None knows better than we how hard it is to admit to our wife, or our boss, or our friends that we have been wrong about so many things. And yet, if we follow this device and make our admissions *promptly* we go a long way towards attaining the maturity necessary to a happy sobriety.

In a way, this Step is tied to the old standbys in A.A., tolerance and humility. To admit that we were wrong is truly to show humility; to revalue our own importance is truly to be humble. If we are trying to be tolerant, we are trying to understand the other fellow's point of view. And if we understand his point of view, we are much less likely to treat him unkindly.

To "*continue to take personal inventory*" means to know ourselves. It's so easy - and so human, too - to feel a little proud of our sobriety at times. How often we have said to ourselves: Poor old Willie! He was so drunk at the office party. What an ass

he made of himself! What makes him so stupid? Why doesn't he get smart and come into A.A.?

This type of thinking is very dangerous. As a matter of fact. Lots of persons at the office party probably thought that we were becoming a very stuffy individual. If we were smart, we would thank God that we were able to live through the office party without drinking. If we were honest, we would get down on our knees and thank God that we found A.A. And, as for criticizing Willie! We should try to secure our own sobriety by helping Willie instead of kicking him around.

The 10th Step is really a reminder. It reminds us to be alert about ourselves. It reminds us that we are only an arm's length from a drink and a slip. It is very important step. We would do well to learn its implications - J.T., *Greenwich Village*

August 1946

The 4th and 10th Step

From Linda Vista, Calif.

I have received so much benefit out of the 12 Steps as Specification for my New Home that I would like to pass on to others the way the 4th and 10th Steps work in them.

I used the 4th Step to detect the flaws and faults that were in the existing structure I had when I came into A.A., or rather I should say when A.A. came and got me, because that is what happened that night when a couple of strangers walked into a dark, rotten and decaying structure and brought with them a ray of light that has been my salvation since.

The 10th Step I use to detect the cracks and weak spots as they show up in my daily life, so that this home I have started will not fall and destroy me with it.

A set of specifications is drawn up so that we can detect the flaws and faults in the structure we are trying to build. So we examine it to find not the good but the bad, knowing that if we remove the bad parts the good needs no attention and with the flaws out we have left only good.

When I'm called on to examine a structure, I'm an inspector, I look for flaws. I don't set up a balance against the bad and decide that as long as some are over strength that they will take care of the weak members, but I have the weak parts of the structure removed so that an excessive strain thrown on the building will not come on a few weak spots and thus warp and destroy the building.

I am not trying to strike a balance or set up an inventory sheet to prove to someone that I have enough assets to justify a loan, but to clean out this house I live in and make a home of it. That is the danger in looking for assets instead of liabilities. We are apt to get so engrossed with the good, if any. Personally, when I took my inventory about all I had left to build on was a job and a fair amount of health. We cover up with paint and putty the faults and flaws in our characters. But when we make a list of our liabilities they stand out in such bold relief that we have to start to remove them if we wish to attain complete physical and mental sobriety and we must have mental sobriety above all else.

Remember that A.A. deals only with mental sobriety. We can find physical sobriety any place or anywhere that we can go to have ourselves dehydrated or dealcoholized. Mental sobriety can be attained only by a complete purge of our flaws. This we can do if we are completely honest and always look to our God for guidance and help.

God who is the Master architect designed and specified a perfect structure and to have that it behooves us to remove and keep out the faults and flaws that develop if we dwell too much on the material side of life.

I have found out since becoming a member of A.A. that I live within myself. And that I can only be happy if I become honest, patient, tolerant and humble.

Remember that a house is only a shelter from heat, cold and storms, but a home is a place where there is happiness, peace and contentment. That is the kind of home I want and hope some day to have, but can have only if I remember that we are not and never can be perfect but must always strive for perfection. - J.F.H.

EDITORIAL

On the 11th Step

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

Here, again, is the freedom to worship according to one's understanding of the spiritual, and it is the saving grace in a Step that otherwise might make many balk in the Plan of Recovery.

To pray and to meditate according to denominational and dogmatic definitions and restrictions would be extremely difficult for many, at least at the beginning of their efforts to rehabilitate themselves. For so long so many have been rejecting prayer and meditation and have had no consciousness of the spiritual in any respect. By the time anyone has come far enough along the road of alcoholism to want and need A.A., he usually has been out of touch with anything spiritual for a considerable time. For him suddenly to accept all that he has been rejecting would be nearly impossible.

Even where the individual has been "going to church" and perhaps even saying words in the name of prayer he usually has lost "conscious contact" with the Spiritual Power. He may still be "religious" yet not spiritual. He, too, has need of meditation and the improvement of his "conscious contact with God," *as he understands Him*, even if he returns to the church of his choice or, in fact, has never left it.

The principle of freedom embodied in the 11th Step opens the door to any individual seeking spiritual help by whatever path and through whatever concepts he himself prefers.

Fortunate, indeed, are those who have clung even to the mere framework of religion, and of a teaching with which they once agreed. Usually, though not always, theirs is a shorter journey back to the spiritual life.

But there are many who have saved no contact at all or who never had any in the beginning. For them in particular, the words "as we understood Him" are appealing. Here is no dictation of teachings or concepts which they do not understand; no required acceptance of things they disbelieve.

Standing, then, on the privilege of exercising one's own understanding, we are invited to "improve our conscious contact with God" through prayer and meditation. Neither the prayer nor the meditation need be formal, or orthodox. The style or the stance are only the means, not the end, and how one reaches a "conscious contact with God" is not paramount, just so long as he does reach it. At least this is the writer's opinion.

Another way of expressing "conscious contact" might be "a working knowledge." It is an awareness or a feeling, and finally a conviction of the existence of the Higher Power and of it as a source of constant help. Once this conviction has been gained it is constant and the infinite help that it brings

operates in the daily life.

How to get that conviction is, of course, the cardinal question. But the answer is here in the 11th Step. Prayer and meditation yield the answer. True, sometimes, the conscious contact is slow in developing. Yet, experience has proven for hundreds of members of A.A. that persistence in this direction, when combined with an open mind, inevitably produces that which is sought. The peace and the strength that are the rewards are infinitely worth whatever persistence is required.

September 1946

FINDS LORD'S PRAYER KEY TO STEPS

Just recently, after more than four years on the ball in A.A., several of the 12 Steps were made simple and clear by a new approach. The light that clarified these Steps for me may appeal to some beginners who, like myself, find the program in its entirety hard to take.

Four years ago last February Jimmy B. caught me between drinks, after a post-graduate course at Samaritan Institute. I thought at first my name was on the sucker list - there must be a dotted line somewhere in the offing. But my curiosity was aroused; and I knew something had to be done about my drinking.

From occasional drunken sprees in 1916 to continuous drinking and frequent spells of complete disability (hospitalized twice because of uremic convulsions followed by D.T.s; hospitalized for attempted suicide; failure of the Samaritan cure in 1940 and 1941; loss of two businesses and innumerable jobs; divorced once and on the brink again), February 1941 found me desperately seeking an answer - so I attended my first A.A. meeting.

That meeting convinced me that this was it; the people I met had regained health, stability, self-respect and a place in the community. If it worked for them it must and would for me. I went home filled with enthusiasm and elation. But one nagging doubt, a real fear, assailed me. What of the 12 Steps to which I

must subscribe and which I must practice? What of all this spiritual approach; the requirement that I acknowledge and turn my life over to God? Those were staggering thoughts.

I told my wife about the meeting and my hope that it was finally a way out for me. Then I went out to the park to thrash out alone the need to accept God. And I knew I could never hurdle those Steps. For a few years I vainly called on God to help me. (I know now that I'd actually attempted to trade with God - only when in a very bad trading position). There was much to think about, so I wound up in the rear booth of a taproom. Not to drink, of course. It was cold in the park and I needed to be alone with my thoughts. That was Thursday night.

Fortunately I sobered up enough by Saturday morning to remember mention of a downtown clubhouse, quite near where I lived. Somehow I found it - and the answer to my problem.

Jimmy B. arrived soon after I did. He and several other members told me to forget about the 12 Steps - to skip the "God part" of the program. "If your sure of the 1st Step hang onto that. Stick around here awhile with an open mind. Anything you don't like, just skip it. And remember, easy does it."

So I stuck around there, a few hours every day. Attended all meetings; went on calls and visited alcoholics in the psychopathic wards of the city hospital.

There was just one reservation in my mind. I'd not be a hypocrite by reciting the Lord's Prayer when I couldn't subscribe to a word of it. Of course I rose with the others - it would be too conspicuous to remain seated - and with gritted teeth remained silent.

I couldn't help hearing that prayer; hearing it spoken in frank sincerity by a group of people who had suffered all the reverses that had plagued me. Sometime during the first few weeks I began to follow the prayer as I heard it; to think it and think about it. Within a year I was saying it aloud at meetings and meaning every word of it.

For over three years I've had a comfortable feeling of peace and serenity. Some of the A.A. Steps have remained high hurdles, perhaps through that early habit of thought regarding them. Then a few weeks ago at a meeting the Steps were discussed in a way that started a new train of thought. After several days it dawned on me that I'd accepted those toughest steps some three years ago. I'd found comfort in the Lord's Prayer. I'd been thinking and saying it - and meaning it. I could start with -

"Our Father Who art in Heaven" and end with "for Thine is the kingdom and the power"- and there was Step 2.

"Thy will be done" is certainly Step 3.

"Forgive us our trespasses.....and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" was a way of practicing Steps 6 and 7.

And when the Lord's Prayer has been uttered sincerely and humbly Step 11 has truly been accepted.

The Lord's Prayer, beautiful yet simple, easily understood, has cleared up finally, for me, much that has been difficult in the 12 Steps of A.A.

- Bill C., Philadelphia

EDITORIAL

On the 12th Step....

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The 12th Step is the climax of the other 11. Without the 12th Step, the conception formulated in the other 11 would be like faith without works and the body without the spirit.

Here is the plan put into action, and it is a two-way action. Through the 12th Step, one receives as he gives. He gives to another what he has learned and in so doing receives new strength for himself. And it is through this two-way action that A.A. grows not only larger but stronger, for it is through the 12th Step that new members are made and old members extend the length and quality of their sobriety.

When the 12th Step operates as it is intended to it precludes the development of the stultifying results of the ordinary debtor-creditor relationship. Although the A.A. engaged on a 12th Step mission may appear to be the donor - donor of a priceless gift which has helped thousands of others - and though the distraught recipient may feel grateful either then or subsequently, there is a powerfully restraining factor in the transaction. The A.A. cannot feel smugly virtuous as bearer of this gift when he knows that by giving it he keeps it and that 12th Step work is the best way he helps to preserve his own sobriety. He is not likely to get a fatally

righteous and inflated estimation of himself when he remembers that in 12th Step work one receives at least as much and usually much more than he gives. He cannot well fancy himself becoming a saint when he remembers that through 12th Step work he helps to keep himself from becoming a drunk again.

Even for the newcomer who discovers A.A. by way of some member applying the 12th Step in his behalf, there is an equalizer. He may always feel grateful, but as he learns more about A.A. he realizes the necessity of the 12th Step work to the do-er as well as the receiver and thus is relieved of any sense of imposed obligation. And he in turn can embark on 12th Step work knowing that he is doing it for himself more even than for others and certainly without the duress of paying off a debt.

By virtue of these factors, 12th Step work is both inspirational and practical, often the spark that rekindles the fires of shining hope, and at the same time a completely realistic approach to a very tough problem. Few situations arise anywhere that offer a greater challenge to one's ingenuity, resourcefulness, perseverance and the best of his brains than those which arise commonly in 12th Step work. Nor, it should be added, are there many things that man does that require more hard work than is so often needed in the completion of a 12th Step task.

In 12th Step work, one is dealing with the most exasperating, stubborn, conniving, prevaricating, baffling, unpredictable, twisted and messed-up human being at large - the drunk. Successful 12th Step work calls for practically all of the virtues and talents given man, and often, even if any A.A. had all of the virtues and all of the talents, they would not be enough.

Yet, 12th Step work also offers more drama, more comedy, suspense, thrills and excitement than one will ever find on any movie screen. And it is real. It is life in the raw. It takes care of any idle time that may have been dragging heavily. And it has given to many an A.A. experiences that yield the greatest happiness of a lifetime.

Finally, of course, 12th Step work is certainly one of the surest, if not the surest, way of keeping sober. The reason it is so effective is that it almost compels one engaging in it to keep thinking in the direction that preserves sobriety. It is, at the same time, a reminder of what has been and a warning of what could be again.

But, more even than its value as both a reminder and a warning, 12th Step work is the practice of the basic principle of a way of life. The principle has been voiced in many different phrases - as "Do unto others...", and "My brother's keeper," or "Brotherhood of man," and simply, "Helping others." So, likewise, is 12th Step work helping others, keeping the brother, doing unto others as we have been done unto. And doing it without expectancy or repayment or bouquets.

EDITORIAL

On the 1st Step...

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable."

Since nearly all alcoholics are ardent individualists, we frequently stress that there are no "musts" in the A.A. program. However, experience has taught us that without unqualified acceptance of the 1st Step any recovery for the alcoholic is practically impossible. Even those alcoholics, and there probably have been a good number over the centuries, who have managed to escape by other means than A.A. from the toils of John Barleycorn, seem to have accepted the principle that alcohol had them defeated and was the primary cause of most of their poor adjustment to normal living.

Many newcomer to the ever growing ranks of A.A. still seem to find an almost insurmountable obstacle to getting started with the program in the admission that their drinking has gotten completely out of control. Sometimes those who are ready to admit they are powerless over alcohol, will not concede that their lives have become unmanageable for that reason. They prefer to blame their difficulties on an unfeeling boss, a nagging wife, an unhappy love affair or inability to pay the rent.

A new member of A.A., who as yet perhaps has not taken a very severe beating, may sincerely wonder what constitutes an unmanageable life. Let us cite briefly one example. A man, who had achieved considerable success in his profession, had

just completed a job of which he was justifiably proud. He had, at the moment, no particular worries and some free time ahead which he planned to spend with old friends and to do some pleasant things for which he ordinarily did not have the time. He was resolved not to drink enough to even dull the enjoyment of his little holiday. Within forty-eight hours he made himself so ill that he was unable to leave his apartment for four days. This episode convinced him that his life had become unmanageable through alcohol and, for the first time, he became willing, having now taken the 1st Step, to give himself a fair chance with A.A.

Unfortunately some, who have at the start apparently accepted the 1st Step with relief after years of struggle with alcohol, begin to wonder, despite the record, whether perhaps they can now do some controlled drinking. If they wonder long enough, they usually experiment and there has yet been no recorded case of the experiment turning out successfully.

Into the lives of most members of A.A. are likely to come, at some period, emotional disturbances of such alarming proportions that momentarily the program as a whole may seem of little avail. For those of us who run into such crises, it would seem all important to recall again our initial acceptance of the 1st Step. The storm then will always pass and we can once more chart our course by the entire program. - A. T., *Greenwich Village, N. Y.*

November 1946

The 12th Step

From Linda Vista, Calif.

An understanding of the 12th Step is one we all hope to reach some day, and if we live long enough, maybe we can begin to put it into real practice. In the 12th Step we have a complete summing up of the teachings of the other 11 Steps. It is really those Steps in one. It holds out to the new member a promise and hope that he, too, can someday, if not at once, have his spiritual experience. And to the older member, as he begins to understand the true meaning of the 12th Step, it opens up an unending vista of a serene and happy life.

But to understand the 12th Step one must have made a real and fairly successful attempt to perform and practice the other 11 Steps. "Having had a spiritual experience as a result of these Steps" - there is the promise to the new member that regardless of his start or conception of God when he comes to the program, he too, can and will have his spiritual experience as he tries to and does complete an understanding of the other Steps, and that as we progress on the other Steps, we will undergo that change in thought and action that will give us the spiritual life that we want.

"We tried to carry this message to others" - What message? The message that there is a way out of the nightmare of alcoholism for those who sincerely and honestly want to live a life free from the remorse, fear, want and hunger that is the life of the alcoholics; the message of hope and help for others; the message that by an honest attempt to understand the other Steps, will give them release and make them happy men and women again.

"And to practice these principles in all our affairs" - What principles? The principle of live and let live; the principles of honesty, tolerance and humility; the principle of being truly grateful for the blessings we have and not being envious of others; the principles of allowing the other man to live with his own conscience and to keep ours clean so we can live with ourselves.

An honest attempt to live by the teachings of the 12th Step offers happiness and contentment, and leaves no room for any fear of what our future life on this or any other planet will be. - J.F.H.

Editorial

On the 2nd Step...

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

The most interesting characteristic of this Step is its effect on the new person in A.A. Some newcomers, perhaps most, already have accepted the doctrine that there is a Power greater than themselves. Others, more cynical, have difficulty believing that there is *anything* real unless it is another person or thing. "Some do and some don't; others will and others won't" as the old couplet goes.

And yet the 2nd Step is the very heart of the A.A. Program. Without it, the most carefully planned approach to the problem of alcoholism fails; without it, the most stubborn and determined fall. Unless there is acceptance of a Power greater than ourselves, the other Steps become meaningless. They become men on a team that is without spirit; they become form without substance.

There are many things in our lives that we *cannot* change. Some of these things, or our inability to change them, may be the underlying causes of our alcoholism. They may be the things that we are trying to escape through alcohol. When we become sober and start out on the A.A. Program, these things remain with us. Of ourselves, we can do nothing about them. They are insurmountable. It is at this point in our lives

that we draw strength from this Power that is greater than ourselves. Having turned these things over to it, they need no longer concern us. At long last they reveal themselves in their true perspective.

On the other hand, there are many things in our lives that we *can* change. Some of these things, or our failure to change them, may be the underlying causes of our alcoholism. Usually we have lacked the courage to change these things. We have been unable to summon the courage. Immature and emotionally unstable, we have evaded reality by escape through alcohol.

When we accept the fact that there is a Power greater than ourselves, it is not too difficult to call on this Power for the courage and wisdom necessary to face even a bleak reality. In other words, we have found an understanding and helpful friend who cannot fail us. We are relieved because we know that we are no longer alone.

Many newcomers to A.A. are troubled with what they call the "spiritual" part of the Program. They rebel at the thought that any part of A.A. is "religious"; that they must be "saved" in order to recover. This point of view is not only understandable but natural to a certain extent. The disease of alcoholism is a serious illness. Its victims have suffered. They have been either beaten or disillusioned and, if they have progressed far along the road of alcoholism, they have seen the failure of the

purely "religious" approach. Indeed, they may have tried it - without success. They have become cynical and have retreated into themselves.

Let us give a word of hope to these cynical newcomers to the Program. Look around you. There are more than 40,000 persons in the world today who have recovered from this illness. Many of them, too, had trouble with the 2nd Step. Many, like you, were cynical. But they *continued to try to believe* and they *kept an open mind!* Today, they are well. If they remain on the Program, they will keep well.

There is no set pattern for realizing the 2nd Step. Many attain belief suddenly; others, more slowly. The "bright, shining light of understanding" does not come to all at once. Acceptance of this Step comes to many men in many ways. You will get it eventually. When you do, you will understand when an A.A. says to you: "Gee, this thing isn't so tough after all. I don't seem to want to drink anymore!" - *J. T., Greenwich Village, N. Y.*

December 1946

"In All of Our Affairs

From East Orange, N.J.

I eagerly look forward to the arrival of *The grapevine* at home and read it as soon after it is received as possible, usually the same evening. I have been particularly interested in the series of editorials on the 12 Steps, but I was somewhat disappointed in your editorial on the 12th Step. There is a very potent phrase ending the sentence stating the 12th Step - "and to practice these principles in all of our affairs," but this is not once mentioned in your editorial.

It seems to me that this little phrase, which is a big order, and which is the real key to our new way of life is too often overlooked in concentrating on the first part of the 12th Step. We have brought that about by our familiar reference to "12th Step work," "12th Stepping," etc. The fact remains that in order to succeed we must practice the principles embodied in the preceding 11 Steps in *all* of our affairs, and that is a tall order. Certainly your editorial completely covers the two-way benefits of working with others, and I agree that it is one of the surest ways of keeping sober, but not a permanent one. In the words of the first part of the 12th Step we have only had a spiritual *awakening* as the result of those Steps. To attain the new way of life, the complete personality and character change, the peace of mind, the complete happiness which makes us and keeps us well, we must PRACTICE THESE PRINCIPLES IN ALL OF OUR AFFAIRS. And the more and longer we practice these principles in all of our affairs, the better fitted we are to carry this message to alcoholics. - *W.J.R.*

Editorial

On the 3rd Step

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

When one comes up against this Step, he is likely to ask: What does a decision of this nature entail? Does this mean that forever I must cut myself off from all of the things and all of the people I have known? Must I become a hermit? Must I lead a purely esthetic life?

The initial reading of the 3rd Step often conjures up in the mind of the newcomer some pretty drab images of a dull and barren life he thinks he is going to have to live. In fact, sometimes the first reaction is, "I'd rather be dead."

The reason, of course, is that in the early stages the newcomer has great difficulty imagining any kind of life except in a monastery from which drinking has been deleted. Because he has included drinking in so many of his activities he cannot see how they can be continued without the drinking.

Experience proves that anyone can do virtually anything without liquor that he did with it. There will be, of course, a number of things which he won't care to do that he formerly did while drinking. But this choice is voluntary.

Turning "our will and lives over to God" does not impose severe restraints or require isolation from normal activities. It is not a shrinking process based upon a series of negations and prohibitions.

To the contrary, this is an expansion. The application of the 3rd Step opens up a whole new world of activities which the alcoholic usually has forgotten about or never really knew. Even when measured from a wholly realistic and practical view-point, the turning of our will and our lives over to a Higher Power unfolds new interest, new enjoyment and happiness greater than ever experienced before.

No one has developed an extreme aversion to anything relating even remotely to "religion" need have any fear that this is an invitation to join a church or participate in any ritual. The careful wording of the Step resolves that obstacle with the phrase, "to God as we understood him."

Some may not "understand" Him when inside a church. Some may find it easier to direct thought in this direction while shaving in the morning or after retiring at night, or at some other time in some other place. That is their privilege, and it is one of the key principles of A.A.

The decision is one exercise of the privilege. We make it with a free will. We do it voluntarily. And we find we have much greater freedom than we ever had before. Where previously we could do very few things without the up-propping of liquor, we now find that we can do all of those things and many others, without it. We learn that we have added to, not subtracted from, our lives infinitely by making this decision.

Of course, at the point of development at which we usually take up this Step, considerable courage is required to make the decision. A look around at others who have taken the steps helps. Are they hermits? The fact is that anyone who is operating on a negative basis and who has surrounded his life with a chain of "don't" has miscued somewhere. Proper application of the 3rd Step is a wholly constructive and positive evolution to which "do" rather than "don't" is the key. It is a Step towards a prohibitive and limiting theory of life.

This Step is a key that opens - not closes - the door to a rich and virile and happy life.- T.Y., Greenwich Village, N.Y.

January 1947

Patching an Old Coat With New Cloth

From Manhattan

Somewhere in the Bible it says, "A man does not patch his old coat with new cloth." Perhaps I have not quoted it correctly but that is certainly the general idea. It bears thinking about.

At first I said to myself, "Why not? Suppose that you have to make your old coat do for another year? Why not patch it as strongly as possible with the best new cloth you can get? You can't go around exposed to the weather, shivering while you wait for the time you can afford a new one. Yes, patch the old thing up and wrap it around you. It will, at least, cover the rags beneath."

When we come into A.A., our lives are just about that threadbare. We clutch our old coats to us, hoping that no one can see through the holes; see the selfish, impoverished little personalities that we are. We have used that old cover-up so long that we are afraid to let it drop. At our first meeting we picked up an idea here and another one there. Patches. We grasp them eagerly and try to incorporate them into the old life.

"We are sick people." Ah, that's fine. A good dose of meetings and a little 12th Step work.

"Don't take the first drink." Swell, as far as it goes. But many of us hardened sinners

have known for years that we were alcoholics and were quite aware of the fact that alcohol in any form was poison to us. Why didn't we stop drinking? Because our personalities were such that we had to have the illusion of warmth that we got from it. We had to feel, that we were really remarkable people.

We are not remarkable people. We are, most of us, rather mediocre individuals who couldn't bear the hard work and sustained effort that it would have taken to lift us above this level; flash-in-the-pan people, who achieved a small success early in life and have lived on the memory of it ever since.

Throw the old coat away. Patches won't do. We must accept the whole A.A. program, from the 1st Step through the 12th. We must make our moral inventory realistically, from the point of view that, on entering A.A., we were failures in life and were regarded as such in all eyes but our own.

Our new coat may have to be a very plain one. Our new life will perhaps be quite prosaic and humdrum. Well, so be it. It will be far better, far more satisfying to ourselves and those who depend on us than those sleazy old rags of remembered glamour that we hugged about us for so long. - *M.N.*

EDITORIAL

On the 4th Step....

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

We once had a college professor who said: "If every man in this room would take five minutes a day alone with himself, I would have half the world's most industrious class in Chemistry I." We think we know now what he meant. And we believe he meant that every man should take a daily personal inventory.

Now that we have taken the first three Steps of the program, we come to the 4th Step. We have admitted that we were powerless over alcohol; that we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity; that we made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. At this point, we begin actively to do something about our alcoholism.

Experience has proved that the beginner in A.A. should make this personal inventory alone - preferably in the quiet of his room. Obviously, he must be honest about it. He should enter into this self-analysis sincerely and with determination because this Step in the long run will give him peace of mind.

Because there are so many ways to take personal inventory as there are individuals in A.A., there are no rules about the process. Some persons make use of a list

of questions. Others simply take out a "quiet time" to meditate on themselves. At least two members we know not only use a list of personal questions about themselves but score themselves daily.

Such questions as - Am I in the habit of lying? Am I being honest with others? Do I have any resentments? Am I phony? Am I tolerant of the faults in others? Do I really want to stop drinking or do I want to learn to drink like other persons? What is my motive in joining A.A.? Am I desperate enough to put a higher value on my sobriety than on anything else? Am I joining A.A. to help myself or to please somebody else? - would do to get you started on the inventory. These questions are merely suggestions, however, because only you will know what questions to ask.

Again, experience of ourselves and others in A.A. has proved that once an honest personal inventory is made, the person is rewarded with a feeling of relief. Psychiatrists call this a catharsis: a cleansing or purging of the mind. In any event, once the person analyzes himself honestly, he feels tremendously improved.

The next step is to do something about the things that you have found wrong in your life. Sometimes it isn't easy. Sometimes it's almost impossible. But if we are to arrest the terrible compulsion of alcoholism, a *sincere effort must be made to correct our*

faults. Generally, the person will find many things in his life that he can change easily. He will find that many of the worries and frustration of his life no longer exist in the cold light of sincere reasoning.

At a meeting recently, a member remarked: "It's your thinking that's stinking, not your drinking." How true it is. How often have we rationalized about the things in our lives that are directly concerned with our drinking? Serious effort with this 4th Step will do much for your thinking because if you are honest with yourself, you can't possibly be honest about the A.A. program. And remember, if you don't face the issues in your life, you are not fooling anyone but yourself. You're the sick guy. Do something about it! As it has so often been said: "Count yourself again, you ain't so many!"

EDITORIAL

On the 5th Step

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Admitting "the nature of our wrongs" to God and ourselves sounds much easier than confessing to another human being. We can do the first in complete privacy. No one is listening, we say. Yet, it's not so easy that we all are able to accomplish this Step in one sweeping confession. Several false starts sometimes are necessary before we find both the courage and the insight to admit to ourselves the true, unvarnished nature of our wrongs.

One of the obstacles to applying this Step is our deep-rooted habit of refusing to face facts, or admit the truth even to ourselves if and whenever the truth was unpleasant. We are grooved in the pattern of glossing over, covering up, beating around the mulberry bush, sticking our head in the sand - or any of the other old cliches which are simply an indirect and longer way of spelling "l-i-e."

The truth is that during the active drinking period the patient has been doing more lying to himself than to anyone else and even after he has decided to turn to the truth finds the way strange and difficult to follow. After 15 to 20 years of self-deception the truth is not easily recognized.

At first, the application of part of this Step may seem to have been achieved. The newly enlightened patient has had a heart-to-heart talk with himself. He has admitted to himself the nature of his wrongs. Or, has he admitted only part of the nature of his wrongs? Has he spared himself just a little, left just a little of the varnish on the truth? Has he spared himself again in just a bit more self-deception, in just one or two self-pitying reasons or explanations of the wrongs?

Frequently, a second and a third confession, or more, is needed before the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is brought to light. Sometimes a great deal of digging is needed to get beneath the many layers of self-deception that have been piled on each other and become virtually petrified over the years.

Courage implemented by searching analysis and perseverance are needed here, the courage to face and admit the truth as it's brought to the surface, and the perseverance to keep digging until it is.

Usually the presence of an audience intensifies the difficulties of admitting self-truths, even when the audience is a sympathetic friend. Sometimes the mere voicing of inner secrets is a wrenching process, especially for anyone who for years has been hiding all unpleasant facts even from himself. Furthermore, one must forgive

himself before he is ready to forgive the world of which he has been so resentful.

For these reasons many who have succeeded in the full practice of this Step recommended that it be started with one's own conscience as the sole audience. Better begin there, they say, first to learn what there is to be admitted and, second, to generate the courage to take another into the confidence.

But, all who have practiced the Steps successfully are quick to say, too, that the tremendous relief which follows richly compensates for whatever mental pain and labor may be experienced in the beginning. Confession, of course, has eased men all through history. Its rewards have not diminished and are within reach of the A.A. who has advanced to this point in his recovery of a useful and happy way of life.

March 1947

'SIWASH' RANCHERS WORK OUT UNIQUE 12th STEP TECHNIQUE

From Denman Island, British Columbia

Remember back when you took the Scout oath and pledged yourself to do your daily good deed? Well, there's an A.A. in Victoria, B.C., who practices this Scout pledge and his idea came to us from a visitor who knew his technique. Each day he performs one unselfish act which, in the ordinary course of events he would not have done. When our visitor mentioned it we agreed casually that it seemed to be sound procedure and it was not until the following day that my wife and I (we're both alcoholics) almost simultaneously realized that here was the answer in simple, easy terms to a problem we had magnified to formidable proportions.

Our place, called locally a "Siwash ranch" or broken-down farm, is on a little island 60 miles from the nearest group and there are no potential contacts here unless the neighbors go suddenly native, which I doubt very much. We, therefore, have often wondered what we could do in our daily living and thinking to take the place of 12th Step work or even compensate for the lack of contact with fellow A.A.'s; we were really quite concerned with our seeming inability to start repaying a very heavy debt to society. Well, here it was; all we must do was to find the opportunity to perform at least one unselfish act each day, something a little bit hard or difficult or even unpleasant. Each act, we felt,

would be one more cut taken at the toughest and thickest root of our alcoholic characters - selfishness.

What to do? Nothing very dramatic, I'm afraid, just simple things like my wife's carrying our spare milk every day - in some bad weather, too - for an elderly couple whose cow had gone dry. She has so far outscored me in her endeavors for I miss quite a few days, but I have discovered that I have more spare time than I thought and have been able to help out various neighbors with tough jobs. Sometimes we discover to our mutual embarrassment that we are helping each other out!

Actually, it works like a charm. It's so much easier than trying to change one's entire character overnight or making a dramatic gesture towards the welfare of the world in general. It's simply the principle of "easy does it," the old 24-hour schedule again.

Anyway, it works for us and we are just as pleased as if our hens were each laying two double-yoke eggs a day or if Baby, the cow, had presented us with twin heifer calves.

It may be that some lone member could use the idea with as much profit as ourselves.- *Ted M.*

March 1947

12 Steps In Reverse

From Chicago, Ill.

Everybody is always talking about the 12 Steps in A.A. Another way of thinking about it are the 12 Mis-Steps of A.A. Here they are:

1. Start missing meetings for any reason, real or imaginary.
2. Become critical of the methods used by other members who may not agree with you in everything.
3. Nurse the idea that someday, somehow you can drink again and become a controlled drinker.
4. Let the other fellow do the 12 th Step work in your group. You are too busy.
5. Become conscious of your A.A. seniority and view every new member with a skeptical, jaundiced eye.
6. Become so pleased with your own views of the program that you consider yourself an "elder statesman."
7. Start a small clique within your own group, composed only of a few members who see eye-to-eye with you.
8. Tell the new member in confidence that you yourself do not take certain of the 12 Steps seriously.
9. Let your mind dwell more and more on how much you are helping others rather than on how much the A.A. program is *helping you*.
10. If an unfortunate member has a slip, *drop him at once*.
11. Cultivate the habit of borrowing money from other members; then stay away from meetings to avoid embarrassment.
12. Look upon the 24 hour plan as vital to new members, but not for yourself. YOU have outgrown the need of that long, long ago. - C.L.

EDITORIAL

On the 6th Step....

"We're entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

After the preceding Steps, this one shouldn't be too tough. Already we have admitted that we were powerless over alcohol; that we would take a moral inventory to do something about it. Generally, an honest self-analysis discloses a number of items on the "wrong side of the ledger." We can do something about many of them. However, we discover a number of defects that we can't do anything about. The 6th Step is considered in the light of this latter type of defect.

The question of personal honesty comes to mind. Many of us became thoroughly dishonest with ourselves after years of alcoholism. Many of us reached the point where honesty was almost impossible. We rationalized. We evaded. We lied. We refused to face the truth of a situation. In the end, we had made a habit of personal dishonesty. Such a habit was not easy to break.

Another common defect among persons, especially sick alcoholics, is selfishness. Many of us reached the point where it was almost impossible to be unselfish. When drinking, most of us were terribly selfish. When sober, many of us found little time to think of the welfare of others. Again, this defect became a habit. In some cases, the habit became an obsession. We became fascinated and intrigued with

ourselves.

Such defects of character cannot be removed without help. Try as we might to "turn over a new leaf," or "mend our ways," we found ourselves slipping back into the old, well established habit patterns that were part of our alcoholic sickness.

But there is an answer to this very common problem. In fact, the answer is so obvious, so simple and so near at hand that many of us did not see it at all. The complete solution to the character defect lies in this 6th Step. Some persons call it surrender. Some call it transference. We call it common sense.

Isn't it common sense to ask for assistance in an emergency? Would you try to lift a 1,000 pound weight without help? If your child is ill, doesn't it make sense to ask for the help of a doctor? Of course it does.

Defects of character will retard your recovery and mine. They will take from us that thing that we hold dearest: our sobriety. And if we lose our sobriety, we die. Does it make sense to seek help from a Higher Power in removing these dangerous defects? The answer is obvious.

Reach into your soul and admit that you cannot remove these defects alone. Humbly ask God's help with these life-destroying problems. We must call on the "fellow upstairs" for life. Get ready to do it. Be determined to see it through. If you do, you can't miss because He can't miss. He's the one who is doing the job.

EDITORIAL

On the 7th Step....

"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings"

Few are so fortunate that the change implied in this Step comes about easily or quickly. For the majority, considerable effort is required to gain the desired outlook

Both intellectual and emotional conditioning is called for here. The intellectual seems the easier, as it is so often applying the other Steps and other A.A. principles and propositions. Getting the intellectual understanding usually comes first; getting "the feel" of the idea is more difficult.

Another way of expressing the difference between the two degrees or departments of understanding is that the idea may be accepted in the conscious mind without penetrating to the subconscious, and it is in the subconscious that the emotional drive is generated. The terms used to define the process differ according to individuals, but apparently a full understanding of the 7th Step needs to be achieved on two levels which some call intellectual and emotional, or conscious and subconscious.

From the experience of many who did not achieve this full understanding easily comes much encouragement. They testify that the mind and the spirit, the conscious and even the subconscious, can be conditioned favorably even as the body. Though the process requires perseverance, many have done it.

First, they point out, the myth of man's

own self-sufficiency needs to be dispelled. This is not too difficult if one begins by listing only a few of the things on which man depends for his survival and which are beyond his own limited power to supply. Even such an elemental thing as oxygen is enough to lay the premise that man depends on some other source or power greater than himself.

The distance from this premise to the idea of a Supreme Power is not as great as when the individual was still entertaining the illusion that he was self-sustaining, that he could do it himself, his way. Once this point of development has been reached, common sense points the rest of the way. Having discovered that there is a greater Power, it's no more than good sense to make use of it in all possible ways, and to ask for the removal of those defects that we could not remove ourselves.

The mystery of the 7th Step is that it works with a fairly simple technique. The secret of some magic formula does not first have to be discovered. Rather, results are obtained merely by reminding oneself of the existence of the Power which he already admits does exist, coupled with a reminder of one's own desire and willingness to rely on it.

Frequently enough reminders develop a new way of thinking, as many who once were skeptics, cynics, agnostics or even atheists, now gladly testify. The new way of thinking is the way to the "personality changes" that are common in A.A.

EDITORIAL

On the 8th Step....

"Made a list of all persons we have harmed and became willing to make amends to them all."

Here the program demonstrates its reality, its understanding of the nature of the alcoholic. How often have we come out of the fog to find the path strewn with persons we have injured or wronged? How often we have stayed awake at night thinking of the wife or mother or sister who suffered far more than we did on our last drunk?

Remember the kindly grocer who cashed our bum checks? Remember the look of anguish on the face of the boss when he had to tell us we were fired? Remember the guys in the company we let down when our part of the work was neglected? Of course we do. But, more importantly, the A.A. program remembers and understands.

The 8th Step was written for us when we remembered these things. "Make a list," it says. "Be willing to make amends to them all." In other words, stop being remorseful and do something about it.

The part about making a list is easy. Depending on our history, we make either a long or a short list. But the part about making amends is tough. That part takes courage and humility. A man we know made a list of 43 former employees he had harmed, wrote a letter to each, and - fearing the consequences - left town for two weeks! When he arrived back in town, there were 43 answers. Every employee took time out to thank the man for his letter and to wish him

luck!

Many A.A.s find it impossible to make full restitution to all persons. That's not essential if you have been *willing* to make amends. Sometimes a trip across town to a person you have harmed is enough. Most people are happier to see you sober than you think. It's human nature to root for the horse that's behind in the race. It makes people feel *good* when you show enough courage to come up to them and tell them you are sorry.

Making a list of things you did wrong is a good idea anyway. Just to look at the foolish and terrible things we do gives us pause to think. If we go further and try - we mean *really* try - to do something about them, we get a far greater satisfaction than we deserve. The 8th Step is close to the 4th Step. Its practical and simple. If you found in the 4th Step that you were selfish, look at your list from the 8th Step and see who you harmed through selfishness. Then *do something about it!*

The 8th Step convinces us that A.A. is a program of action. If you think it was hard to admit you were an alcoholic, see how you feel when you go to the people you have been avoiding to tell them you are sorry. That's real hard.

And yet, we cannot describe the wonderful satisfaction that comes if you go through with it. Even the air seems cleaner. Yes, the 8th Step is a lulu, but it pays off at the welcome rate of about 100 to one.

AN ANALYSIS OF 12th STEP WORK

(How can 12th Step work be made more effective? Can any specific techniques be developed for it? Patterns are becoming apparent in the sponsorship plans evolved by a number of groups. Because of the interest in these and because of the vital importance of 12th Step work and the need to learn how it works best, the A.A. Grapevine will present a series of studies on the subject, beginning with the following account of what kind of 12th Step work helped one A.A.)

From New York City

Sponsorship, as we now refer to 12th Step work, is being given much attention these days and since I have given some thought in the last year to my own vital impressions during my first six months in A.A., I am going to attempt to record them for other members. I am calling these first six months my "threshold period." During that time a number of minor and major upsets nearly plunged me back into my former confusion. I am aware that others have been less fortunate during their threshold period.

It so happened I was fortunate in having a sponsor who was free, and content, to give a great deal of time to me. Moreover, we proved companionable. He insists today he learned more than I did. Be that as it may, in our mutual desire to find the last detail those twists which had undermined our reason for years, we delved about as

deeply into ourselves as our groping intelligences, rather new to this sort of thing, permitted. I lifted the lid of many a long closed incident in my past, wandered down many a dark, dark corridor of my mind, viewed and reviewed the sepulchral nature of this strange individual - the fugitive me. I could not have done this alone, nor did I feel complete trust in my sponsor at first. I gave him sneak glimpses, or should I say I allowed myself fragmentary exposure. I remember preparing the retreat before making the advance, in the early attempts at least. But about the time I was ready to expose the entire truth in any one instance, so was he ready to hear it, and often when I revealed to him the final detail it was only to discover that he had guessed me days before.

Eerie Navigating

As I groped deeper and deeper into my disordered and cluttered mind, and made regular return voyages down gloomy caverns gradually becoming familiar, I became a fairly competent navigator in these eerie recesses. In months of constant probing I ultimately developed objectivity, and slowly escaped from the suffocation of an

imprisoned subjective viewpoint. And, then, as my sponsor and I engaged in 12th Step work I saw myself more clearly than ever, through others! - amazing moment. In doing this exploratory work my sponsor and I were guided by A.A. literature, what we observed at meetings, and matters we discussed at dinner each night and always felt we were simply putting into practice the sound philosophy and preachments of Alcoholics Anonymous.

What was employed, eventually, was a device we referred to a "home-made Freud machine," not entirely unlike the cartoon strip's Dr. Wonmug and his famous "space-disintegrator." In truth, there is no special limitation within the human mind, and the intelligence, liberated from the inhibition of emotional cliché, can soar or delve, can race or walk, can investigate at free will. I tore a clipping from the masthead of an editorial column the other night to reproduce it here: *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* - John, viii, 32.

Working Backwards

As a working formula, an oversimplification perhaps, but handy as a carpenter's rule, my sponsor created the phrase: "A.A. works backwards." This is

not half so paradoxical as it sounds at first and a world of wisdom is buried in this brief summary. Try talking an alcoholic out of an impulse and see where you get and then work it backwards with patience and understanding and wait for him (with gentle guidance) to talk himself out of this same impulse and see where you get! There is little question in my mind about the wisdom buried in "A.A. works backwards." It works backwards, as we interpreted that statement, or it doesn't work at all. The frontal attack is all those ways tried on the alcoholic *before* he comes into A.A.!

I shall never forget the first visitor who came into my hotel room the night of January 8, 1946, in El Paso, Texas. Everything I then knew how to care for in this world was gone - money, social and professional standing, the people I thought were friends, the world as I had chosen to see the world for all my "adult" years, 15 of them. I was sick, I was alone, I was smashed - and mightily disturbed. All I really knew was that something was terribly wrong with the world and me. I suspected that part of the difficulty lay with me, but I wasn't sure how much. I also held a strong suspicion that my drinking had had a heck of a lot to do with it, but I hadn't the

slightest idea how I could "control" or "stop" my drinking. I's tried for years, and in the last five years my efforts had grown increasingly futile and hopeless. I knew nothing about myself, as I really was, and held a fabulous assortment of notions about myself the parting from which has never once occurred to me.

That night of January 8, I was fogbound, bewildered, lost, and very sorry for myself. I had heard of A.A.; I held a deep-seated doubt that A.A. could help me. I was a confirmed "individualist-- and regarded all mass movement or group activities with sharp suspicion. I was a fine, home-made snob, too, and a terrific egotist and my strongest impulses were in the direction of speed, now, at once, immediately. I was impatient, possessed of storming emotional demons all urging instant restoration of the good King Charles. The truth is I secretly hoped that my first A.A. visitor would be a multi-millionaire, or at least a well-heeled citizen in the community who would enter my life with charm and grace and resource, recognize me as a worthy young man I thought I was, and instantly summon my old and prosperous world back for me. Perhaps a few phone calls would do it...and an immediate stake so I could heel myself with that rich, green folding money in which my faith for years had lain with simple, trusting naivety.

Instead, my first visitor was a nervous, hurried gentleman, direct in speech whose wife was waiting for him downstairs and who had a date for dinner and who had just come out of the county jail himself and was now working as a postal clerk. This was quite a come down and my interest in A.A. wilted rapidly. My first visitor made a call to a second A.A., however, and arranged for me to meet this second fellow an hour or so later. After a brisk hand-clasp the first A.A. was gone.

Illusion, One

I went out for a walk and I doubt if my spirit has ever been more sorely tried. I'd taken that fateful plunge of writing a letter, which to my old hypersensitive nature was a shocking confessional of weakness, and this letter had produced - not my dream-wish of a rich and powerful benefactor but a hurried, uninfluential, slim-pursed post office clerk. Little did I realize then the profound contradictions of attitude which were at work with me, tearing me to pieces inside. On the one hand I was an esthetic, sensitive, cultured person and on the other, and with equal if not stronger force, I was a crass, arrogant, conceited ass with low materialistic designs on everyone.

The man who walked those dark streets of El Paso for that hour on that cold January night was a sick man whose great trouble in life was he didn't know how sick he really was, or in exactly what way. The grim necessity of "finding a way out" held me to my resolve to "see this one through." The adhesive of my resolve was the only asset I had in this world that night. I didn't know this, of course, and so, back in my hotel room a little while later when the second A.A. came in with a handful of pamphlets and a curious, somewhat frightened look on his large face, I heard my hopes crash to earth like the large oak in the forest. Pamphlets! Indeed. What had happened to the juices of humanity? My new A.A. acquaintance didn't say much, had a rather owlish appearance, and I frequently caught him staring at me curiously. I later learned he was scared to death of me, being a rather timid soul himself, and I being his first call! We went to dinner, and this helped a lot. Slowly the rudiments of my plight were unfolded to his attractive ears. He was a marvellous listener, and I wonder if listening isn't about the finest attribute any A.A. sponsor can possess. This man became a cushion for my emotional outbursts, my heaving to left and right of center in the weeks and months there-after. He never faltered

from his chosen role of buffer, never obeyed the numerous impulses which must have surged within him to throttle me and my ambitious complaints. I'll never forget how dull and disappointing this man seemed to me that first night, and the night thereafter when he took me to my first A.A. meeting in El Paso.

For This, Chess!

A sickening limp feeling hit me inside - so this was A.A.? No instant remedy, no smooth gay companionship, no surging fellowship of good will and monied generosity. I was still alone. My first meeting dismayed me, I felt an outsider, I couldn't seem to hook into anything real. Of course, I was in a chaos of conflicting passions. As we walked back to my hotel from that first meeting he invited me to join him in a quiet game of chess the following night. Until my sponsor reads this, he will not know how close I came on that El Paso street corner, and in the sickness of my sorrow, to turning down his humble offer of a game of chess. And I would be anything but honest if I said I accepted his offer, for any other reason than that I was still desperate, and had nothing better to do the following night.

I recite this a year later, writing as I am on a Typewriter in an office from which alcoholism hurled me five years ago, fully aware that the delicate balances of psychology involved on that evening of January 8, 1946, were balances on which my future hung by a slender, oh so slender thread. So little could have turned me back that night. A few ill-chosen words would have given that be-fogged and confused character who was I reason enough to toss his own salvation aside. The complex psychology of all of us is our subject and the slight quality of the slender thread which binds us at these profound moments in our lives is our hairline route to recovery. This tender passion, the vagrant heart, the blindfold mind, is to me the sacred concern of all of us in A.A. who wish to do 12th Step work. All that we really know is that a vast unknown world exists, a world into which but a few of the most skilled explorers have so far been able to navigate with any success whatsoever. What makes the heart beat so? What leads the mind of man? Where lies the reason?

Who Said, Easy?

And all this works backwards, gently and without effort, casually and

slowly, and buried within this miracle of navigation there lies all the tender mercy of the human heart, the nobility of understanding and strength of compassion.

During my first six months in Alcoholics Anonymous I managed quite successfully to keep home dry, but all that time I bitterly resented the phrase "Easy does it." I resented "Easy does it" because that simple and profound homily was exactly what I needed to bring into control the surging, infantile passions which had ruled my life for nearly two decades and which were little inclined easily to abdicate their throne. Long after I had stopped drinking, I was still *thinking* alcoholically. Nine months after I had my last drink, I was still able to verge on emotional hysteria, hysteria which would have been strong enough to undo everything accomplished up to that time had it not been for certain devices - bear traps, I called them - for stalemating recurrences.

A few weeks after I had joined A.A., my sponsor and I worked our way through the treachery of false recovery and partial right thinking. I nearly lost my own grip because I was unable to do as much as I felt should be done for an old railroader many months drunk. Throughout all this, my sponsor, who never said very much, paddled along, hoping for the best, picking up a cue now and then, oaring occasionally when the going was rough, but in the main letting me do it all myself, especially when I had to do it the hard way (and he knew how to do it the easy way), but felt it was better for me to learn any old way, so long as I got there *myself*. - Ned A.

June 1947

THINK!

From Chicago

Numerous groups throughout the country have printed booklets, interpreting the 12 Steps of the A.A. program. These booklets have been seen by other groups and adopted by them as a help to newer members.....

The question is whether the use of these booklets is more of a detriment than a help to the members.

If the use of the booklets tends to lessen the disposition of the member to THINK for himself, such use is harmful.

Unless and until the member THINKS independently, he has little chance of properly employing any of the Steps in a way beneficial to his problems.

If there is one thing which is responsible for retarding the progress of members in assimilating and using the Steps it is failure to THINK. If the members have an opportunity to avoid THINKING, by reading the thoughts and interpretations of others, as contained in these booklets, you may be sure that some will do it.

There are members in most groups who have been in their group for extended periods of time without actually absorbing the Steps. They remain mentally disturbed and are likely to have "slips" occasionally. They have read and re-read the Steps, have listened to other members discuss the Steps and have conscientiously done everything possible to profit by the program, except to actually THINK. They mistake good intentions and wishing for actual THINKING. They

mistake lip-service to the program for THINKING. They are sincere people who are trying their best to attain sobriety through the program but they DO NOT THINK. If the use of the booklets by such people is going to postpone the day when they actually THINK out their situations, THINK about the object of each of the Steps, THINK about the application of each Step to their individual problems; if they are going to avoid their own individual THINKING by reading and mouthing the thoughts of others, it would seem that the use of such booklets is a step in the wrong direction.

The writer believes that these booklets of "Interpretations of the Steps" have a place in A.A. meetings, but, if they are going to be taken by any of the members as a means of avoiding thoughts of their own, they are not as helpful as they may have intended to be.

In the same sense that we could read the big book and all other A.A. literature, until we were blue in the face, without getting any real good out of it, so it is with these booklets. Reading only acquaints us with what actions we should put into the program. It does not constitute the necessary action. Any constructive action that we put into A.A. will only be such action as results from our own individual thought.

There seems to be some danger that this essential individual thinking may be replaced by reading the thoughts of others.

J.O.C.

June 1947

Golden Opportunity

Alanews, Dubuque, Iowa - "The question arises if there actually is such a person as a hopeless alcoholic. We don't think so. We don't believe any person is ever placed on this earth and destined to become burdened with an obsession which would be so strangling as to preclude any hope of recovery. It's probably axiomatic to say that despair is the only barrier to hope. If one talks to an alcoholic who is in despair - who believes there is absolutely no hope - if you meet such a man, your answer is tailor made. We believe that every man, no matter how far he may have strayed from the normal way of living or how numerous his transgressions, will some time in his life, at least once, maybe oftener, be presented with an opportunity to return to a decent way of life. The very fact that this despairing alcoholic met you - you, who are living, visible proof of recovery - the very fact he came in contact with A.A., that he had a chance to hear about, the program and see what it actually has accomplished - all this constitutes the opportunity and the means he claimed he'd never get. Whether or not he accepts the opportunity is beside the point, but this person can never again honestly say he did not have the opportunity. It is up to us to help him realize that this is his opportunity."

EDITORIAL

On the 9th Step...

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

This one sounds simple. And, true, it does not involve some of the more complicated mental probing required by several of the other Steps.

Having already made a list, unapplying the 8th Step, *"of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all,"* the path is clearly defined with all stops plainly marked. All we have to do now is start doing.

But the "doing" is not easy. It takes considerable courage to confess a wrong, even in private, and much more courage to confess it to the person against whom the wrong was committed.

The list very likely includes one or two previous employers whom we deceived in one way or another; friends whose friendship we abused; relatives whose sense of blood obligations we exploited; the mate whose trust, patience and persistent hopes we flaunted. To each we owe a debt, large or small, and merely saying "we're sorry" does not discharge the debt.

In fact, we actually do not have the right to the inward ointment that comes from saying we're sorry, unless we also have within us a sincere willingness to repay in full, whatever effort this may cost, and an equally sincere determination not to repeat the wrongs against anyone.

Most of us, by the time we reach A.A.,

have been going around for a great many years saying "we're sorry" after each wrong and lightly thinking that these words made everything all right again. We've been annoyed if someone did not seem to accept our apologies as meaning much. How many can hark back and hear themselves saying, petulantly, "What's the matter with him? I said I was sorry, didn't I?"

The 8th and 9th Steps call for something more substantial, more tangible, more meaningful than words spoken casually. If it is money that is owed, it has to be paid back to the limit of ability to pay. If it's a debt of meanness, it has to be paid off with kindness. If it's neglect, as it is so often of one's family, then it can be balanced only by consideration and thoughtfulness. And let's not forget that debts of this kind - of neglect, thoughtlessness, mistreatment - have been piling up for years. They can't be paid-off in two weeks.

The qualifying phrase, *"except when to do so would injure them or others,"* should prevent anyone from being righteously bullheaded, or stupidly "noble" about this. We are scarcely making amends if we dig something out of the past in which we had a part that will hurt someone else. The privilege of confession does not extend that far.

A helpful guide in the application of the 9th Step is the reminder that by making amends, where we can, we are doing no one else a favor; a favor is done us if those we have wronged accept our offer.

July 1947

An ANALYSIS OF 12th STEP WORK

(Second of a series of articles presenting an intimate and detailed discussion of 12th Step work from the newcomer's viewpoint).

In this discussion of sponsorship last month, I noted a simplification "A.A. works backwards," a formula that calls for further analysis.

That night of January 8 when my sponsor first met me in my hotel room in El Paso he was as scared of me as I was dubious of him. In temperament, in personality, in social conditioning we were pretty much unlike. He was slow, cautious, deliberate, and his professional training was that of an engineer. I was abrupt, impulsive, eager, and my training was that of a superficial newspaperman. I had placed constant emphasis in 15 years of professional life on developing certain personality ornaments which were largely a curious assortment of conceits expressed in obvious mannerisms. I thought fast, made snap judgments, did things rapidly. Because, in my journalistic profession, this technique had proven successful, I held these personality ornaments in high esteem. On the other hand, my sponsor was a man whose work was impersonal, detailed, painstaking - a fractional error on the blueprint could wreck a construction project. I employed sweeping generalities

about as much as he avoided them, and I doted on vast ethical and moral indictments whereas he was mainly concerned with specific causes and effects.

Test of Patience

Here, then, were two opposite temperaments and personalities drawn together by their mutual enemy alcohol - welded by disaster. On the surface (the way I used to grasp things) one could see an extravagant miracle of redemption born of a fellowship out of a touching common cause, a rather perfect Hollywood scenario. But, unfortunately for this romantic concept, my subsequent relations with my sponsor developed along less glamorous lines. In the long haul, which is the one that counts, what made us work as a team was his patience and my persistence; his contentment with a plodding, gradual progress and my insistence on doing it all at once. I had the steam on the upgrade and he had the brakes on the far side of the hills. "We can keep on the track," he used to say, "If I can curb your more violent impulses."

During the first few months, however, it was his horse sense, that durable stuff you find in work horses and never in race horses, which made the combination practical. He didn't attempt to try to cope with my rocketing ego, nor curb it. He has since confessed to several low moments. I think he referred to them as "star-bursts." He didn't express whatever tortured feeling my savage mental gymnastics brewed within him during the early weeks of our initial skirmish. He didn't mark me off as somebody from another professional world than he, and therefore legitimately outside of his realm of understanding and interest. He kept a dreadful silence as we crossed several dangerous shoals, although at times I assailed the most sacred citadels of his personal beliefs and convictions.

Quite a Comedown!

It would be nice to say that I never knew a moment's conflict with my sponsor, that all was perpetual harmony between us. It would be pleasant, but dishonest. The truth is quite different. I was a mass of complex emotional disturbances when I entered A.A. Fear,

ignorance, vanity, conceit ran the show. Mine was no overnight change. My sponsor, by the nature of the problem, came in for his share of curious involvement. There are things he and I never talked about and they lie way out in the deep part of the lake. We kept our fishing in the shallow waters. That is, he did, and for companionship, I stayed inshore with him.

There were many trials. I was passing through a major crisis - the process of discovering what a big fool I had been for many of the best years of my life. That's no small crisis in itself. Doubts assailed me, I passed down all the treacherous corridors of self-pity, regret-beyond-endurance, futility-of-it-all, and so forth.

For some ten years I had known, in New York City, a fine income as a newspaperman and publicity writer. I was a by-line writer for an important newspaper in New York, and wound up near the top of the heap with a \$30,000-a-year Hollywood publicity job just within grasp.

When I woke up in El Paso I was a typist for a railroad earning 89 cents an hour. (And a very good thing it was I had that job!)

A True Sad Sack

I's sold everything I owned in this world, starting in a rather grand way with the entire furnishings of my New York

apartment right down to the last shreds of my personal luggage, a few items of someone else's luggage, and such cheap jewelry as I had left toward the end. My wardrobe, in the final week, was an old summer sport coat with frayed sleeves and elbows, a pair of brown gabardine slacks with two crude patches on the right leg - holes made in drunken falls and clumsily sewed together by me. It was winter and I had no overcoat, but for some reason had a swank pair of light tan chamois gloves which were grime-covered - a sad remnant of former gentility. I had no hat. My box-like hotel room was shorn of everything which could be pawned or sold - even a pair of prized editorial scissors went the last day for 40 cents to buy a few beers for "courage." The week before, New Year's Eve, I had been run down by a motorist in an El Paso street and when I got up I apologized to the driver for being a nuisance. I got a few comforting drinks out of him for my alcoholic diplomacy and was delighted with my skill in handling this situation. For several days I had been hunting cigarette butts in the sand boxes on each floor of my hotel.

Opposites Attract?

That, then, was the human being my sponsor found in that small El Paso hotel room the night of January 8, 1946. My sponsor is an alcoholic, too, and as

he has so often said, his main problem was selfishness. Selfishness, reserve, retreat had all played an enormous role in providing the twists which had sent him spiralling into the self-made oblivion of drink. The remarkable contradiction emerges instantly - a mental and physical wreck leaning on a timid, shy, reserved and retiring individual who had always shunned public exposure of any sort, and who particularly disliked *meeting strange people*. There we were, as fine a brace of opposites as the good Lord in his almighty wisdom ever threw together. And we made a perfect team. Is it any wonder my sponsor rather insistently declared in the months to follow that "A.A. works backwards"?

A.A. works backwards in a good many ways, and a lot of them are far beyond me to pin down in so many words.

Here I was, obviously a fellow pretty much confused and lost in life. I had, surely, a lot to learn if ever I was to regain my self-esteem again.

Did I go to my first few meetings, meek and humble of spirit, bowed by the awareness of my life failure, hungry for the crumbs of wisdom I might share with my stronger brethren who at least had started earlier than I to find a way out of the maze? I did not. By my second meeting I was trying to run the show. I was telling others, some of whom had

been dry three to six months, what was wrong with A.A. I made a handsome collection of enemies right in A.A.

My sponsor saw all this happen. He rarely spoke at meetings. My brazen attitude abashed him. He held a grim and silent spectatorship at the circus in which I was the featured performer. He heard the lions roaring and trembled but never once tried to restrain me.

There was a lot of wild talk, finally, and then the whole thing calmed down and all of us went about the main business, i.e. - keeping sober. We are all friends today.

We could have all sat down and talked things over reasonably and come to a fine reasonable conclusions in the very first place - except! - we were not very reasonable fellows or we wouldn't have been alcoholics and thus would have had no problem to start with.

Anticipated Progress

The wisdom which guided my sponsor, I have since learned, was that it would all work out somehow in the end, which it did, and that the only way it could work out was the way we saw fit to do it. The easy way, the way we rejected, was, of course, a beautiful

simplification but was absolutely no good since it was the *forward* way to do it. We had to do it *backwards* before we liked what we had.

I have wondered since then if what we all went through in El Paso that winter isn't just about the same thing that happens in a good many other A.A. centers around the country.

So that was the picture then - I came into A.A. desperately and hungry for aid. But no sooner in than I hit the trail of my salvation along the lines of my familiar old alcoholic thought. My impatience, my intolerance, my ego bucked around in A.A. in those first few months in the same manner it had bucked around during all the wet years.

What did my sponsor have to guide himself with during those turbulent early months? He used a system of checks. Having an orderly mind, he projected a day or a week ahead and judging by my current notions tried to anticipate the ones I should logically reach if I were making proper progress. He didn't try to reform me, he did not attempt to show me the way. He contented himself with estimating my progress, and waiting patiently for the signpost of recovery to emerge over each new horizon.

Along about the first four months or so of our voyage together, I asked my friend, after some complex issue had been cleared away:

"Why didn't you have the answer to that? You knew it all the time."

I remember being rather angry. I had gone through some embarrassing gymnastics to reach a very simple solution.

"I don't know that I should have," he answered. "I figured if you found the answer yourself you'd appreciate it a lot more than if I told you."

Like Unravelling Yarn

When my friend found me I was entangled in the skein of my own life thread, like a kitten in a ball of twine. The only way out of that tangle was to unwind each strand and knot separately and carefully - snarl and twist - backwards, slowly. One or two sharp or abrupt forward tugs might easily have entangled the mess pretty hopelessly. That danger or snarl was the danger my sponsor most feared, not only for me, but for himself. About the time I joined A.A. he was on the verge of giving it up! - *Ned A.*

EDITORIAL

On the 10th Step....

"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

Notice that the word "*continued*" is a past participle. We take it to mean that this Step is an unvarying and unceasing thing. It is a part of the program that must be repeated day by day. It is also a reminder that the program is a living thing - a way of growing.

Remember how hard it was to accomplish the 4th Step - the first moral inventory? Many of us finally got around to make it. When we finished, we felt a lot better. At least our own slate was wiped clean. But some of us let the matter end there. The 10th Step serves to warn that the inventory process - begun in the 4th Step - is only a beginning.

Now let's look at the rest of the Step. *"When we were wrong, we promptly admitted it,"* is another of those easy-to-say but hard-to-do things. Most of us are fairly egocentric; it is part of the illness. In our personal relations, it's a bit harder for us to admit that we were wrong about anything. Early in our sobriety, especially when we were still in the remorse stage, we went overboard on this matter. It gave some of us a sort of pleasure to admit that we were stinkers; that we were

going to do better. Are you still feeling the same way?

There are several sound reasons for the 10th Step. In the first place, no alcoholic can afford to nurse resentments. If we know that we are wrong about something and do not admit it, we are likely to start building a nest for resentments. In the second place, none of us can afford to be dishonest. We believe that it is dishonest to "think wet and talk dry." We believe it is dishonest to "get by with something" at the expense of someone else. When we are wrong and fail to admit it - even to ourselves - we are back in the old drinking state of mind - dishonest, phony, stubborn and arrogant.

But enough of this preaching. The really important thing is the effect of this 10th Step will have on you. It will make you happier, kinder, more serene. We know a number of A.A.s who practice this Step in their lives. We envy them because they have peace of mind.

Start practicing the 12th Step now. It's a principle of living that can be used everywhere. Begin at home and then carry it to your office. You will be surprised how startled - and pleased your friends will be when you start taking your share of the blame!

EDITORIAL

On the 11th Step....

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

It is easy to believe in a power greater than ourselves - we have only to think of the inexplicable marvels of the universe - but it is hard to believe that we can interest this Power in our own insignificant needs through the medium of prayer and meditation.

Many of us have heard a newcomer say, "I can believe in His existence all right, but I can't swallow the idea that He will bother with a worm like me, or that he should!"

There's nothing wrong with this attitude; it is the beginning of an arrested alcoholic's true humility, and it leads right into the 11th Step, which may be approached experimentally. It may be approached on the "try it and see" basis.

No one is going to jam prayer and meditation down anyone's throat. It is a job that must be undertaken by the individual from his own desire and his own need. Perhaps he will fumble a little at first. Like every other worthwhile activity in this life, it requires a technique. One's own is the best. One shouldn't be confused by the form of address or even the content of the prayers in church. They are designed to encompass the general congregation. One's own prayer will be his individual way of consulting God, of stating his simple desire and hope for a better life. And his thanks.

The clue to the whole thing is contained in the very wise phrasing of the

Step itself - *"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God."* This implies that everyone, to a greater or lesser degree, has, conscious contact with a Higher Power. That is exactly right. It could not be otherwise. All through our lives we have been more or less aware of a part of ourselves which was different from and superior to the obvious phenomena of nature.

Some people call it their better nature; others their will; still others call it that spark of divinity in each one of us which unites us to the whole Divine Principle. Terms are not important so long as we recognize the fact of "our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him." The Step merely suggests that we *improve* that contact.

It is helpful to many to think of prayer and meditation as a consultation with the God within us. This makes it easy to reconcile prayer with the exercise of will power, a force which many A.A.s are reluctant to give up. Nor need they give it up. Will power is the motive force which is fueled by prayer and meditation. The Step expresses this idea clearly - "praying only for the knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out."

We must not be afraid to ask generously - pray fulsomely - for what we need. We shall be answered generously. It is not the amount of our demands on God that matters, but the love and sincerity and good will behind them.

Try it and see.- C.B., Greenwich Village, New York City.

EDITORIAL

On the 12th Step....

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Now comes the last Step in the Program of Recovery. We will consider the two aspect of this Step: (1) *we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Our own peculiar personal histories as alcoholics make us singularly fitted to perform the first part of this Step. Indeed, it is the fact that we are alcoholics in the process of recovery that makes us effective at all. Where medicine and the ministry have failed, A.A. often has been successful because the prospect somehow felt a "bond of understanding."

In carrying this message to other alcoholics we must remember that we are carriers of information, not reformers. If the prospect indicates that he has no desire to stop drinking, we should let him alone. We cannot force a person to stop drinking. We shouldn't try.

However, if the prospect convinces us that he has a real desire to get well, we should be prepared to go to any length to help him. Sometimes the indirect approach is better. Tell your prospect *your own story*. See to it that he has a chance to read the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Take him to a meeting and see that he has an opportunity to talk with other members.

In talking A.A. with the new man use common sense. If you do he has a much better chance of getting well. If he is in a hospital, for example, and very jittery - be kind and sympathetic but use discretion about how long you stay. Remember that A.A.s do not moralize or preach. We simply give information about ourselves.

Above all, don't get discouraged. There's an old saying around A.A. that your prospect never gets well *when you want him to*. This saying isn't always true but there's a lot in it. You might remember that 12th Step work always helps *you* regardless of the success or failure of your prospect.

Think of your own experience. Did you get well because of another person? Of course not. You got well because of A.A.; its 12 Steps; its Program of Recovery. Your sponsor merely brought the message to you.

The second part of this Step is by far the most important part of the program. How many of us practice these principles in all our affairs? You guessed it. Too few of us. Fact is, many entirely overlook the second part of this Step. Recently, a member looked at us queerly when we mentioned part two of the 12th Step. *He had never thought of it.*

To practice A.A. principles in all our affairs requires growth and full-scale adoption

of every phase of the program. Those who accomplish it are A.A.'s happiest and most serene members. They are finding peace of mind. They have humility without humbleness. They have true tolerance and gratitude.

It isn't possible to tell you how to practice A.A.'s principles in your life but we know the payoff is tremendous!

Finally, a word about our conception of 12th Step work. Although it is generally associated with active help for the sick alcoholic, it doesn't have to be. We believe 12th Step work is any work, direct or indirect, that helps other alcoholics to recover. The volunteer workers; the group secretaries; the members who perform the service of providing refreshments at meetings; the man who takes time out from his business to mail 100 post cards for the group - all are doing 12th Step work just as surely as if they were visiting drunks in hospitals, jails, sanatoriums or homes.

October 1947

12th Step Is Obligation

(Editor's note: The writer of this letter is the widow of an alcoholic who has given generously of her time in A.A.)

From Detroit, Mich.

It is important that we be faithful to the 12th Step and "carry the message to others." First, there is the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." We know in our time of suffering what it meant to have the word of healing brought to us, and we should crave the wonder of taking it to others. Down through the ages has come the question that stirs our souls: "Am I my brothers keeper?" Had we pondered and answered that question we would have been spared the untold suffering, death and carnage that we are enduring today. We of A.A. know that hatred and resentment make us do terrible things for which we pay a terrible price - and that means hatred of anyone anywhere, for "God has made of one

blood all nations of the earth."

A just society can be built only on the foundation of human solidarity. The classification of human beings into categories has produced appalling wreckage. Jesus' scale of values was rooted from principle - God the creator and man the son - so we are of the family of God and our attitude should be that of brotherly conduct - "Freely thou hast received, freely give." The high trail cannot be traveled alone. Mutual aid is essential if we are to scale the peaks. Comradeship is imperative. Jesus found it so and spent much time intimacy with the disciples. The fellowship of the twelve as they questioned and listened is the pattern for us. After they had been counselled they were told to "Go ye forth into all the world; preach the gospel and heal the sick." The A.A. Program is our gospel; alcoholics are our sick; carrying the message to them is our supreme task.-
S.K.

October 1947

Daily Inventory Shows Assets

From Chicago, Ill.

If I kept a dairy - and I do not - there might be an entry in it something like this:

April 2, 1942: For the first time, I admit I am powerless over alcohol. I now know I can't safely ever take another drink. I have decided to turn my will and my life over to God, without reservation. I have seen tonight - in one hall - 600 other men and women afflicted as I am. They are leading happy respected lives. If they can find joy in sobriety, so can I. By my voluntary presence at this meeting, I have told them I want to live a life of continued sobriety. The odds are greatly in my favor. Many times before I have tried to quit drinking and each time failed miserably. If there's any intelligence left in me, I'll follow their example, abide by their advice - because they are successful.

That, I believe, is what I might have written when I came into A.A. But how has it worked out during the past five years? Were my admissions and decisions made then enough to keep me sober and happy?

The answer is very definitely "No," because the A.A. Program is not a sign-up-and-forget affair. It isn't a one-time inoculation against all the ills that may come in the future. It isn't a college in which degrees are conferred or one that boasts a single graduate. Rather, it is a continuous daily program of living, and I have observed that the happiest and most successful A.A.s are those who take a perhaps brief but *daily* refresher course.

Every one of the 12 Steps is of course vital, but I believe the Step that has been of greatest help to me is the 10th, which reads: *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.*

For me, that personal inventory must be daily. At the end of each day, I try to review at least the highlights of the day. If anything especially good or especially bad has happened to me I won't have to dig too deeply. It will be right out there in clear view for me to tackle as I will.

As entries on the wrong side of the ledger loom up, I can at least see where I was mistaken and decide what must be done to not only correct the error, but to avoid repetition of it. Bemoaning isn't going to help one bit. Self reproach is silly unless I use it constructively and try to use the mistakes of today to make a better day tomorrow.

In this personal inventory there are bound to be some good and comforting entries. And I think it's a wise thing to dwell on the pleasant things, too. Activities that are good deserve to be enlarged upon and it's all to the good if we build good works into permanent habits.

I like to look upon a personal inventory pretty much as a shopkeeper regards his inventory of merchandise. He has certain items that enjoy a good turnover and are profitable for him to handle. He builds up his stock of these items. Other merchandise he handles may be shoddy or otherwise undesirable. These items not only take up

valuable space on his shelves; they occupy space he should allot to profitable merchandise. The undesirable items grow stale and outmoded - they may even injure his reputation. The wise merchant discards such goods as bring unworthy and replaces them with products he is proud to display.

Now, my personal inventory undoubtedly includes such items as selfishness, impatience, laziness, anger and a dozen other very undesirable things. In taking a daily inventory I can see where they cropped up in the day's business. More than that, I can see *how* they cropped up and if I'm learning anything at all, I'll try my best to avoid the occasions of such mental mishaps.

On the other hand, it's possible that I have tried to do something good during the day - perhaps exercised a little self-control or restraint when the going was tough. Perhaps I've been a little more tolerant today than I was yesterday. Maybe I've benefitted by keeping my big mouth shut when my natural inclination would be to tell somebody off.

All these things belong on the right side of the ledger and as I look at them in my personal inventory, I know I want to keep them on my shelves and to enlarge my stock.

As I say, I generally take my inventory at the end of the day - and follow it up with a little prayer of thanks for the good things that have come to me during the day - and the not-so-good things I've managed to avoid.

It's not in the cards for me to take the first Step just once and say, "O.K., I've admitted I can't drink any more. That's that."

I can't do that. I can't skim over any Step and regard it as being finished, for there is no conclusion to A.A. It would be like an attempt to give up eating entirely after one full meal.

In addition to this daily examination of conscience" or inventory, I find the regular meetings most helpful. As a matter of fact, I believe they're actually *vital* if I am to get the full benefits and flavor of the program. In regular attendance over five years, never once have I come away from a meeting without learning something really worthwhile and helpful.

Personal visits with A.A.s are not only helpful, they're a lot of fun.

During my first year in A.A. another member and I had coffee together practically every day and I found his counsel and example always an inspiration. In the building where I work now there are a number of other members and we meet for a cup of coffee or lunch at least once during the day. These daily contacts are mighty valuable and unquestionably have helped each of us over some tough roads. Even though A.A. itself is not mentioned (which is rare!) The things we discuss are approached from sane viewpoints and with patience. By each others' example we try to see life and its problems through eyes other than our own; and even when we don't see eye to eye, we can disagree without being disagreeable.

Along with the daily inventory, I try to keep always in mind the last phrase of the last Step in the A.A. program." *and practice these principles in all our affairs.*" I firmly believe that A.A. should be a part of my daily program of living and often like to recall Henry Van Dyke's prayer poem:
"Let me find it in my heart to say
When vagrant wishes beckon me astray-
This is my work, my blessing, not my doom.
Of all by whom this work might be done
I can best do it, in the right way."

- L.J.R.

November 1947

The 12th Step

From Wollaston, Mass.

In the August issue, under heading "Mail Call for A.A.'s at Home and Abroad" there was a letter from Long Beach, Calif., signed Gay M.B.

The author points out the possibility of keeping sober by working the 1st and 12th Step and by so doing you are, supposedly, subconsciously and automatically working the other Steps.

So many people get the erroneous idea that the 12th Step merely embraces the carrying of the message to other alcoholics. There are three definite phases to the 12th Step, if we read it carefully. The step reads: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs."

This would mean that before we are ready to carry this message to alcoholics, we should have experienced a spiritual awakening as a result of the other eleven Steps. Does this not indicate that we must or rather should, work on all of the Steps? Then the last part of the 12th Step "and practice all these principles in all our daily affairs." How can you practice these principles referred to

in the other 11 Steps.

Too many of us (alcoholics) take the slogan "Easy does it" too literally. We were always past masters at taking short cuts and procrastination. I can't imagine sobriety without happiness and the only way I can see for an alcoholic to be sober and happy is by a personality change. The only way I can visualize this personality change is by practicing the principles of the 12 Steps in all our daily affairs. You will get out of the program in proportion to what you put into it.

If you only take 11/3 Steps of the program I don't see how you can expect to experience the benefits contained in the 12 Steps. You can also make the program so simple for yourself that it will be elusive. The effort required to attempt to practice all of the principles will not equal the effort put forth to create our alcoholic dilemma. You will notice I said "attempt" to practice all of the principles, and that's all that is required. We strive for progress not perfection.

The peace of mind that we hope for is not the absence of conflict, but our ability to cope with it, and this ability increases as we make progress in the practice of the principles contained in the 12 Steps of the program. - J.A.M.

December 1947

(This is a discussion page. Ideas advanced here are only suggestions, put forward to help furnish group discussion topics, without any intention of reaching fixed conclusions or dogmatic "rights" and "wrongs." All readers are invited to submit group discussion topics.)

How Soon The 12th Step

Topics previously discussed on this page are : "Admitting...you are an alcoholic;" "Anonymity;" and, "A.A. Devices." Another topic which sometimes bothers the new member and on which views differ among older members is this:

The Question: How soon after coming into A.A. should a member undertake to do 12th Step work?

One A.A.'s Thoughts: Three months, say some; six months, say others. But how can any given time be chosen arbitrarily? At three months, or even three weeks, some members are ready to do highly effective 12th Step work. Others who get the "feel" of A.A. more slowly may not be ready at six months.

Two factors are always present in 12th Step work. One is the effect on the prospect and the other is the effect on the 12th Stepper himself. Perhaps it is true that regardless of whether the prospect gets any good out of a 12th

Step visit by a member of A.A., the member himself almost always benefits. He's making the effort to pass along his knowledge and he is bound to derive some good from the desire to give good.

But, the effect on the prospect can scarcely be ignored. If a visit leaves him more confused than ever, or antagonistic to A.A., or fearful for one reason or another of joining, then he has suffered a setback. To this possibility the answer is sometimes heard, "If he really wants A.A. he'll come around." Perhaps that is true, too, but how much better it is when he can be persuaded to come around sooner than later - that is, persuaded by an exchange of experiences and by example, not by high pressure selling.

So, the effect on the prospect would seem to have some bearing on the question of how soon 12th Step work should be tried. Since the time required for absorbing enough A.A. to be able to pass it on varies with each individual, there should be a more logical approach to the question than by an arbitrary selection of three months, or six months, or some other period.

A compromise suggestion is this: Why wouldn't it be a good idea for the new member to get started on 12th Step work by accompanying an older

member? Let him go along and listen; let him see how it's done before he strikes out on his own. This way he will learn from the older member and at the same time he will be sharing in the benefit that unquestionably attends 12th Step work. Furthermore, the recent dry can sometimes help the recent wet. He's nearer the viewpoint of the brand new prospect than the old timer is.

Doesn't the idea of 12th Step work being done by teams - each team composed of a new member and an older member - offer the best way for all concerned to get the most out of it?

February 1948

The Cliche Expert Testifies on Alcoholism (With apologies to Frank Sullivan)

Q. Mr. Heister, you are an expert in the use of the cliché as applied to alcoholism, are you not?

A. Indubitably.

Q. In that case, would you give us your definition of an alcoholic?

A. An alcoholic is a very sick person.

Q. How Sick?

A. Sick as a dog.

Q. Any particular kind of dog?

A. No, just any old dog.

Q. Mr. Heister, what happened to you the last time you had a drink?

A. I had a slip.

Q. What is a slip?

A. A coy word used by members of Alcoholics Anonymous to convey the idea that they almost murdered themselves.

Q. How did this slip make you feel, Mr. Heister?

A. First, I felt high as a kite, then tight as a tick. After that I was loaded but the police said I was soused.

Q. And how did you feel the next day when it was all over?

A. It wasn't the next day; it was the next month.

Q. Very well, but how did you feel?

A. I had a brutal hangover, violent nausea, hot and cold sweats, no appetite and a completely shot nervous system. I was full of guilt and remorse.

Q. What caused you to do all this to yourself - to start drinking again - to slip?

A. I had an argument with my wife while an old Navy chum and my college roommate were in town for a visit. Besides, I had just lost my job and I was thirsty.

Q. Hmmm! Tell me, Mr. Heister, what does Alcoholics Anonymous think of such goings-on?

A. I think they call it "wet thinking."

Q. Would you say, Mr. Heister, that this slip had anything to do with a personal feeling of frustration, resentment, elation or self-pity?

A. Yes.

Q. What was your next course of action?

A. I put a nickel in the slot and had a long talk with a fellow who's got the Program.

Q. What did he recommend?

A. Sobriety.

Q. Anything else?

A. The 12 Steps.

Q. Just what are the 12 Steps, Mr. Heister?

A. Oh, hey are the various Steps which most slippers skip.

Q. Which one did you skip, Mr. Heister?

A. The first one.

Q. Mr. Heister, what are your plans for the future?

A. I Don't worry about the future. I'm on the 24 hour plan - day-to-day living.

Q. Does that help?

A. Yes, I'm on top of the heap.

Q. What heap, Mr. Heister?

A. On top of the world, feeling fine. I've had a tremendous release.

Q. Release

A. Yes, my divorce decree became final yesterday.

Q. Let's stick to alcoholism, Mr. Heister! What are you doing about it?

A. I'm tapering off and reading the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Q. How do you like the book?

A. It doesn't make sense to me. Just a lot of case histories proving that alcoholics have to stop drinking.

Q. Are you an alcoholic, Mr. Heister?

A. I don't know but I am an expert on cliches.

Q. That will be all, Mr. Heister! - *A.P.*

12th Step Obligations

From Indianapolis, Ind.

In the light of our first inventory we all made some unpleasant discoveries.

A great many of us came to A.A. practically without hope, overwhelmed by a feeling of internal inadequacy to meet external strains. We had never been deeply and strongly organized within. We had not the moral or spiritual backlog to provide us with an inner strength against the gradually worsening situation. And we did not know where or how to find that inner strength.

Something like intellectual and moral paralysis had set in. And we found, after the smoke had cleared somewhat, that we had not been building anything, or even thinking of building anything, over the years, but had been steadily tearing down. Consciously or not, we had been destroying instead of constructing.

Those of us who were able to grasp the significance of the trend realized that we needed to be taken apart and put together again, this time on another principle...We needed the resources of inner strength that would make for endurance...Deep, spiritual strength was needed to endure the trying experiences of life, and preserve for us an unembittered equanimity. The vital transforming spark or key to this new inner strength, many of us found, not too willingly, was God - God whom we had been too selfishly preoccupied to consider seriously.

God, or the acceptance of God or a Higher Power, proved to be for us a great and dependable source of daily power.

Let us look at another phase of A.A.

We're all here with a common purpose - the pursuit of a happy, useful life. We have come here to find ourselves. And while we have only begun to distinguish the true from the false, most of us, I believe, have been set upon the right track. We have begun to see and act with clearer vision and to proceed along the new course with reborn assurance.

Meanwhile we are absorbing the benefits of A.A. fellowship. The originators of this movement, recognizing the need for sharing our experiences with other similar gropers, have emphasized the remarkable therapy of this association. Great healing properties are inherent in frank discussions of the common problem. Wounds inflicted upon us by alcohol, which have been allowed to fester and grow malignantly within us, are partially drained by honest, unreserved admissions to those who can understand. And in the process of reciting our individual troubles, we find ourselves listening sympathetically to those of our companions. There is an unburdening of loneliness, without the usual barriers and prejudices.

The subject of admission or mutual confession brings me inevitably to the 12 Steps. For me, as indeed for most of us, the

Steps have designed a new pattern of living. They have given me a new way of looking at life.

A fellow unfortunate may be desperately in need of the same "medicine" that saved you and me. It is quiet possible that you or I may be the "appointed" one - perhaps the only one from whose hand the sufferer will take the medicine. Surly he would be an unfeeling fool who would say, "I will not take the responsibility."

I contend that the members of this illustrious fellowship have an obligation before God - an obligation to use the particular talents He has given us for the salvation of other alcoholics. The fact that we are alcoholics who have been vouchsafed a new life offers us an open-door opportunity to help where a non-alcoholic samaritan finds himself persona non grata. In a very definite sense we are singularly blessed with a gift for helping others. And we would indeed be wasting our time if we failed to propagate the truth (as we have discovered it) that some needy one might grasp it and apply it to his or her own life.

Those of us who have organized our lives according to the A.A. pattern, have found the new ways and modes easier and more habitual with the passing of the years, and our lives ever more strongly integrated. We have been transformed by the renewing of our minds and our spirits. - *H.W.*

May 1948

GROUP MEETING DISCUSSION PAGES

(This is a discussion page. Ideas advanced here are only suggestions, put forward to help finish group discussion topics, without any intention of reaching fixed conclusions or dogmatic "rights" and "wrongs." All readers are invited to submit group discussion topics.)

The following is the conclusion of the questions discussed in the April issue of *The A.A. Grapevine*. These were among the questions canvassed in a series of seminar-forums held in Washington, D.C. The report is made by members of the Washington Newspaper A.A. Group, all seasoned reporters. It reflects no editorial or doctrinaire views except as they may have been expressed by the participants.

Topic: Sponsorship and Twelfth Step Work and First Forum. Bill A., Arlington, chairman; Bill C., Arlington; Katherine L.; Ray H., Chevy Chase.

Bill A. - A.A. does not pretend to cure any alcoholic but if one intelligently and diligently tries he can find the answer. I speak from experience. There are no graduates in A.A. but in getting this program there is peace of mind from here on out; happiness by helping the other fellow. Do we know of anything to

do one's heart more good than rehabilitating a human life? A.A. is our opportunity to give God a chance.

Yes, there are disappointments, and some of these sponsorships pretty near threw Willy. Well, all watermelons don't get ripe on the same day but we can trust to God that they will get ripe before the frost gets them.

Katherine L. - I never believed that one day I would stand before such a tremendous audience and I feel that this right now is 12th Step work because I have received so much from A.A. - my life. Five years ago I worked for A.A., I wanted it, I needed it, I learned by trial and error, and now I try to give to others what helped me in my dire need. When I asked for help not to take a drink something seemed to flow through me, and I think that was a spiritual experience.

Now when I get a call I try to let the prospect talk herself out. I ask her to have faith in what I tell her, to be honest with herself and to stay dry long enough to hear what we others say. It's important that every candidate you bring to a meeting be introduced to as many people

as possible; some other girl may be the answer.

About anonymity. Everybody in Christendom knew it when I was drunk. Its important that the new member understand her illness may be caused by resentments; and it's fine to find, after a time, that we can learn we are rather nice people to live with - our families, too.

Ray H. - I had a sponsor. If there was ever an element X used by psychiatrists when they speak of the spiritual, this must be it. After seven years of living hell, a 'phone call came from a man I hadn't seen in 20 years. I told him to mind his own business and for the dole purpose of hitting that gentleman in the nose, I went to his office. He was out, but there was an oldtimer waiting there, and because I wanted something I listened. As he talked, sincerely and honestly, I began to see something. Three weeks later my original sponsor sent for me. He had had a slip, but three weeks of listening at meetings had given me a story. It has changed my entire life and I will do 12th Step work ahead of anything else - it is the most important thing there is.

I don't know of any better sponsorship in the world than to take a bird who drinks, live with him, listen, and with the help of God, he will come through. Sure, there are a lot of discouragements and for moments we are apt to forget that we, too, are just drunks. But for me A.A. is my life.

Bill C. - We owe our lives to someone's sponsorship and we are dealing with the most sacred responsibility - the life of a man or woman. Nor should we let it throw us if we should try to play God; His idea wasn't to make one call and tap your shoulder when something right happened.

For the A.A. engaging in 12th Step work, the following considerations appear:(1) You must assume responsibility for your candidate. It's a critical time in his life and he looks to you for comfort and guidance; (2) does he know he is an alcoholic? (3) does he want to do something about it? and (4) does he want your help?

Don't be too arbitrary in your judgment. Remember the alky has been in a violent anti-social scene, and he is accustomed to surround himself with a wall to keep the world out. Try to be his friend....Everlastingly put yourself in his shoes.

Bill A. - (Closing) Let's call A.A. crystallized Christianity.

Topic: Sponsorship and Twelfth Step Work (Second Forum). George C., Alexandria, chairman; Margaret S. and Eugene G., Washington.

George C. - We face consideration of the merits and demerits of "babying" as against the "cold turkey" treatment of newcomers. The question of prolonged personal sponsorship, whether workable or valuable, and in what circumstances, should be examined. The feeling is pretty general that the sooner the new person in A.A. comes to depend on the Program and the group, rather than on any individual, the better. And I think it is generally accepted that it may be better to make a 12th Step call even if it does not come from the prospect himself.

Margaret S. - The importance to the newcomer of attending meetings, meetings and still more meetings cannot be overemphasized. He, or she, should be warned not to expect immediate release from the alcoholic problem, but encouraged to have faith that, having taken the 1st Step honestly, daily vigilance and sincere effort to understand and apply the 12 Steps on a 24-hour basis will carry him or her safely over the first difficult weeks.

It is neither necessary nor wise to emphasize unduly the spiritual aspects of the A.A. Program in the first approach to

one who is likely to be rebellious or impatient, as well as mortally sick. In such cases, place emphasis on the effectiveness of the whole A.A. approach to the problem of alcoholism; particularly the value of example. The key to success of the Program is contained in the last part of the 12th Step - "we try to practice these principles in all our affairs."

There is no final word on the value of formal sponsorship. Circumstances and individuals vary. Certainly there should be recognition of a definite responsibility for personal assistance as long as it seems needed and helpful.

Gene S. - Excessive rules and rule-making, tendencies found sometimes in new and growing groups, are not too good. The importance of anonymity should be stressed. The prospect coming into A.A. signs nothing; the only requirement for admission to the fellowship is an honest desire to quit drinking. Early difficulties with the Program are no evidence that the individual may not become a steadfast member if he keeps on trying. Rules, regulations, charters, by-laws and the appointment of bouncers are experiments sometimes regretted later.

To the prospective member the protection, as he then regards it, of anonymity can be of high importance. He is promised it, and individuals in the group should see to it that the promise is made good. Granting there are two schools of thought on the subject of anonymity, still the decision to join one or the other should be left to the person most concerned. Every A.A. shares a great responsibility with all fellow members and to A.A. as a whole. If in his enthusiasm and gratitude a fledgling makes his affiliation known, or if an older member deliberately or inadvertently does the same, then a so-called slip by either can do great harm to his group and to an undetermined number of actual or potential members.

Protect the anonymity, do not take the first little drink, try to practice the 12 Steps in all our affairs - that way we cannot harm A.A., or others, or ourselves, and it is almost certain, we will do some good.

June 1948

Read Further In A.A. Book For 12th Step Aid

From Detroit, Mich.

Anyone who is having trouble applying the second half of the 12th Step, the part that suggests, "...and to practice these principles in all our affairs," might get some help by reading a little further on that page of the A.A. book. It's page 72 in my edition and the part I refer to reads:

"Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."

To me, at first, applying the principle of complete honesty alone seemed too big an order. How could one get along in business is constituted, if he

were completely honest? How could one bargain? He would be taken advantage of if he were completely honest. First of all, how can one really be completely honest? How can one practice all of the A.A. principles of honesty, humility, tolerance, anonymity, etc., in a world rife with greed, competition, trickery, deceit and all the rest?

I didn't think it could be done. But I decided to take the book's suggestion and try anyway. Much to my amazement, I found it can be done. Strangely enough, too, I haven't been exploited half as much as back in the days when I used to try to out-connive the other fellow. I'm doing much better than ever before. To be sure, being honest requires a little more ingenuity, perseverance, patience and even hard work. But the satisfaction is much greater, too. -- *D.O.R.*

June 1948

"Slip Clinic"

The time to give earnest consideration to "slips" is before they happen.

It is little use going back for one's umbrella after the storm breaks. Better to have taken it along.

The direct or overt cause of a "slip" is known only to the person involved. But the real, fundamental cause is easily found.

Somewhere along the line, one or more of the 12 Steps has been overlooked, by-passed, or neglected!

Even one neglected step can cause all the trouble.

One slip on an icy pavement is all that is needed to break one's leg or fracture a skull.

The 12 Steps earnestly followed, prepare one for every contingency.

The 12 Steps need no amendments. They cover everything necessary to our new pattern of life and every safeguard for maintaining complete sobriety!

They are not local, or national only. They have a universal significance and application. They work as effectively

in China or Peru, as they do in New York or Oregon.

There is no imperfection in them. The imperfection is in ourselves.

To score one hundred percent in applying the 12 Steps in all the affairs of our daily life is impossible.

But so far as maintaining sobriety is concerned we can so improve our score that these unhappy "slips" if they do not become impossible, will become far less frequent, less prevalent, and more and more on the way to becoming "unthinkable."

"Controlled *slipping*" leads to an attempt at "controlled" drinking.

The 12 Steps can't be edited, not "blue-pencilled."

We "shot the works" when we were on our bats, binges, and benders.

And now if we want to stay dry, we have to "shoot the works" on The Program. - L.C., Portland, Ore.

June 1948

Any Takers?

From Brooklyn, N.Y.

I have been around A.A. for three and one half years but now, because of my job, I find myself unable to attend as many meetings as I used to. I wonder if there aren't others in the same boat who would like to exchange letters?

During my first years in A.A. I achieved little more than physical sobriety. But all the study, physical effort and lip service I gave did keep me constantly conscious of A.A. The knowledge, if not the spirit of the program became mine.

After a year which included four slips, I suddenly was blessed with the spirit of our ideas. The only thing that kept me going during that second year was the knowledge of the mechanics of the Program.

When that knowledge was added to the spiritual faith I found, I saw that everything given to this cause comes back a hundred-fold. I had no fear of the new way of life that would interrupt my A.A. activities when I accepted this new job. I knew that I could take the A.A. principles right into my new surroundings. I'd like to add 12th Step work by mail to my daily schedule. Any takers? - *B.L.*

June 1948



"JOHNNY ONE-STEP" THINKS IT'S AN ESCALATOR---
---JUST SIT ON THE FIRST STEP AND RIDE UP.

July 1948

I Work the 11th Step

From Montrose, Calif.

"When we are conscious of a thing we naturally live in it." When we have made conscious contact with God, it would seem to me we would naturally live in a God-like manner. For me it seems to be kindly, considerate, tolerant, and sober. This is in a small measure demonstrating the qualities of a God-like manner.

We in A.A. are trying to "Improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him," and in improving our contact it becomes a pleasurable practice.

For me came a feeling of freedom from alcoholism, also a feeling of freedom from insecurity never experienced before. A feeling of glowing content to be at last in touch with the source of all things. By degrees I came to rest in this contact, to depend upon it, knowing the right direction would be shown me if I kept spiritually fit in my thinking and my every deed to the best of my ability.

When at times I stray from this contact, I get back into it by prayer and meditation, doing this earnestly and honestly, seeking to keep my contact renewed, and someday, I hope, constant. - *M.K.*

August 1948

What's the Answer?

In the June issue of *The A.A. Grapevine* I read an item, entitled, "What Is the Answer," written by A.G., Rochester, N.Y.

According to the item, Brother A.G.'s A.A. Group was discussing the case of a hypothetical "slipee" or an unfortunate member who had had a relapse. To make a long story short, the victim had hit bottom, and hard, - no job, no money, no room and no friends. A group takes hold and reclaims him from the dregs of humanity. After three months in A.A., he is sitting on top of the world because of his sobriety, but he has been lax in attending meetings although constantly contacted by the men who brought him back from the "living dead." And then he slips and within 48 hours he has lost everything he had gained in three months of sobriety.

Now, permit me to quote my friend, A.G. "Now comes the \$64 question. Do we start all over again? The man has been given the tools to work with, but did not use hem. Are we supposed to go through all the same things? Siting up nights, getting rooms, getting jobs, for this same man who ignored the members pleas to come to meetings?"

Probably I can offer a small fraction of help by citing a mistake I made. An alcoholic, whom I shall call Ed, came to me under similar circumstances. He had a large family, a sick wife in a sanitorium, and he was broke, disgusted and sick. I took Ed along to our group meeting at Williamsport and he took to A.A. like a duck to water. Within six months time Ed was looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. We, in our groups, had given Ed the tools to work with.

After seven months of sobriety Ed slipped. No, he did not fail us; we failed Ed. His case was parallel with the neophyte who was given the finest set of watch-making tools and then instructed to build precision time pieces. This he was unable to do because of lack of training. We gave Ed the finest set of working tools, the 12 Steps, and told him to become master of himself. Realizing the seriousness of our mistake, we again got Ed back on the Program and taught him the fashion and use of God's Working Tools for alcoholics, the 12 Steps.

Perhaps that will answer your \$64 question. - *Dick K. Watson, Pa.*

“Don’t! You Can’t!— but I Did!”

From New York, N. Y.

THE fundamental method of our education and general upbringing for many generations seems to have been instruction and discipline imparted to us from the cradle by such words as: Don’t! You can’t! You must! You must not!—I’ll spank you if you do! In other words we have been told—we have been told off—and we have been threatened in the process.

Many child psychologists today recommend that instead of telling the child, the teacher or parent should just gently hint or suggest that this or that would be a good thing to do—and point out why. I don’t know what the result will be—let’s hope it will be good.

Anyway, I am a product of the

“I’m telling you” type of upbringing. I came from a very strict and an exceedingly religious family. I couldn’t take it. I rebelled.

After being told from the cradle that whisky was a terrible thing, how could I resist finding out just how terrible it was? My parents had practically talked me into it. I found out that it is a terrible thing for an alcoholic like myself. My parents had been right about the whisky, but they had told me once too often.

You will notice that on every card or paper on which the 12 Steps appear, is printed the “Suggested Steps.” Those two words made an investigation of A.A. possible for me. At the time when it was important that I investigate A.A. I was in a typical alcoholic’s frame of mind.

I had been told two billion times too often that I was drinking too much. Somebody was using the wrong psychology on me and I continued to drink too much and became more and more bored and fed up with anyone who was capable of making such a brilliant observation—regardless of their good intentions.

I finally reached the point where my drinking began to give me some concern about myself. I had heard of this A.A. outfit and I knew that doctors were in existence in various parts of New York City but I couldn’t contact any of them as that would mean that I was giving in to those characters who kept saying that I was drinking too much. If I contacted A.A. those characters would be just nasty enough to say “I told you so!”

They’d be right and I’d be wrong and being wrong would be a very heavy dish for me to take. Besides I figured if I contacted A.A. I might find out what I already suspected about myself—I might be an alcoholic and would have to stop drinking. It might do me some good and that would be no good. Another drink or six was the only solution at that time.

Well the day finally came when I could no longer stand the combination of these nagging characters and my own drinking—so I gave in—I thought. I went to see a doctor. He charged me \$50 for the excellent advice that I should contact Alcoholics Anonymous. This I did because I

had already invested \$50 and I was curious about this A.A. outfit despite the possibility that they might do me some good.

The A.A. outfit said that they would send a member in my neighborhood to see me. The A.A. fellow came. Having had such an open mind through this whole deal, I expected nothing less than an exceedingly small pigmy, tight lipped and beady eyed—a little Napoleon, who would be quite capable of telling me what I must do to get off the stuff that I loved so dearly.

The A.A. fellow turned out to be quite a guy. He was well over six feet, clean cut and not the least sign of a six day growth of beard. He let me do all the talking. When he got a chance to get a word in he’d keep saying, “Of course maybe you’re not an alcoholic—” Those were brilliant words—wonderful to hear. Why this fellow knew what he was talking about. I decided to listen to him for a while.

Of course I wasn’t an alcoholic. He told me all about A.A. and the 12 Suggested Steps. He didn’t say, “You must” once. He didn’t ram any opinions down my throat. He just said I should find out for myself if I was an alcoholic.

I got one of those little cards that have the 12 Steps printed on them. I said to myself, “Well here are the rules, I’ll see how tough they are.” I was really pleased when I discovered that the “rules” were not rules but merely Suggested Steps. I could-

n't believe that the whole A.A. outfit was as liberal as the fellow who had come to talk to me. Why, I could take a suggestion or a hint—but no doggoned rules for me! If these A.A. people were going to be reasonable—I'd be reasonable. I'd read their book over a bottle or so of bourbon.

Don't think for a minute that the certain characters that I have mentioned had let up in the meantime on this "You're drinking too much" stuff. Yes I was, but I had a very convincing angle now. I was intentionally trying to overdo it in order to find out if I was an alcoholic. I laid it on—poured it down and finally concluded that I did have some trouble. The trouble was nagging.

I figured the nagging would stop if I quit drinking. I quit drinking and the nagging did stop. But for some strange reason I remained eternally thirsty. I began taking short shots and covering up with the usual

Sen Sen, peanut butter and garlic. The whole procedure was too much of a workout and no fun. All the time in the back of my mind the words "Suggested Steps" kept echoing. I decided to give the A.A. Program some sober consideration. I actually dried up long enough to read the book in a sober state of mind. Meetings and sobriety followed eventually.

I have wanted to point out here how infantile the mind of one rebel alcoholic can become—how stubborn it can become as a result of the "I'm telling you" school of thought. I still don't like to be told off. Thank God A.A. never told me off. A.A. suggested steps and told me how they worked. It let me do the picking and choosing of what I thought would help me most.

To those who are new to A.A. I suggest that you study the Suggested Steps and use them for yourself. Others will eventually profit from your use of them.—*A.P.*

December 1948

From Chattanooga, Tenn.

AT long last through the Grace of God, I have found A.A. Admitting to the 1st Step took more honesty of heart and mind than I had experienced in ages. Then I began seriously working the whole Program, step by step, into my daily life. That was many months ago and I'm still at it. We never reach perfection and we never graduate from A.A. but we obtain happiness and peace of mind which words can't describe. In my opinion the most important thing we get from the A.A. Program, next to sobriety, is complete and fearless honesty of thought. We learn to face facts as they really are and truth becomes something to be sought rather than to be avoided. I am encouraged now because I feel that through working the A.A. Program, especially the 12th Step, I cannot only be a true friend to myself but also a friend to man.—*E.H.T.*

December 1948

"Twelfth Step Kid"

From Little Neck, L. I.

WITH Charley, it was love at first sight! He became the group's "12th Step Kid"—hospitalizing 'em, riding herd on 'em afterward—Charley loved it. And, around the group, Charley was considered a darn good A.A.

I guess the rest of us are more guilty than Charley for what developed. Most of us are busy and Charley seemed not only to have the inclination, but the time also. So we were glad to let him go to it. Then gradually it came out that things weren't so hot in Charley's home.

Not enough money was coming in. Not nearly enough. His wife waited patiently for Charley to settle down. But Charley continued to ride the pink clouds. New men had come into the group, ready and eager for 12th

Step work. But Charley continued his frantic rushing around—on a "binge" of self aggrandizement. "Playing God"—and mesmerizing himself.

He couldn't be pinned down. Instead he shrugged off his obvious responsibilities, falling back on the excuse that he was a "sick" man—that his 12th Step work was his "medicine". And, besides look at all the people he was helping!

Some of us tried to talk to him. It was plain that Charley was merely substituting one excess for another. He was still "escaping", even though his new escape bore the label of the wonderful 12th Step. Frankly, we didn't know what to do. So we just kept talking—and hoping.

Somewhere along the line Charley snapped out of it. He about faced, got himself a respectable job which he does rather expertly.—A.S.

From Nutley, N. J.

THE article "Twelfth Step Kid" by A. S. in the December issue of *The A.A. Grapevine*, interested me immensely, especially as it made me see something in me that needs correcting.

My first impression on reading was this: "That is exactly like —. He pulls the same stunt, etc.; etc."

Then my thoughts probed a little deeper. I realized that in a sense I was complimenting myself because I didn't do these things and use A.A. as a means of escaping my legitimate responsibilities. But I had forgotten something. "In A.A. we do not criticize, we only try to help." And I began to see myself in a not so favorable light.

SOMETIMES it is not that we do not *intend* to be honest with ourselves, but it is so much easier to look at the other person's faults, than at our own.

As I see it, I had been criticizing where I had no right. So I studied myself more deeply, and what I found I did not like. Therefore I must correct it.

There was more than a trace of complacency in my feelings, as well as unwarranted criticism of a fellow A.A.

As I searched my own heart, I came to understand that I, too, had been using A.A. as an escape, more often than I had thought possible.

There have been times when I

"—what I
found I
did not like—"

should have done work about the house, or family obligations should have been met, but I went to a meeting instead. I now believe that I felt by going to the meeting I would not have to censure myself for avoiding my responsibilities, and I would also derive a certain amount of pleasurable satisfaction if someone said, "She's a good kid. Has her troubles, but sticks close to A.A."

AFTER thinking this through, I see things differently. I believe that when we first come into A.A., we *must* attend a great many meetings to assure our sobriety and a good foundation in A.A. But I also believe that after some time, when we feel more confident of our sobriety, that we are intended to again pick up the threads of normal living. In the book it says that none of us devote our time *exclusively* to 12th Step work.

A.A. is a way of life. In learning and practicing this way of life, we should strive once more for the goal of an average normal existence, accepting and discharging our nor-

mal responsibilities *plus* the privilege of 12th Step work in A.A.

I think many of us have a tendency to swing from one extreme to the other. First, alcohol crowds out normal thinking and living. Then A.A. puts alcohol in its proper place—*outside* of our lives. *Then* I believe we should continue to change, and swing back to a happy medium.

MY thanks to A. S. He has helped me to turn the light of criticism on myself, where it belongs, and honestly to see where *I* am at fault.

Surely the family who has suf-

fered through the drinking period of the alcoholic has a right to some of his attention when he once more becomes an integrated personality.

From now on I shall continue to try to grow in A.A., but will also keep an eye open that I do not again so abuse A.A. as to use it as an escape from my natural obligations.

There are emergencies, of course, when A.A. work will necessarily interfere with our own personal plans, but by letting it *entirely* supersede our families and responsibilities, I believe we are defeating the primary purposes of A.A.—*D.A.*

From Birmingham, Ala.

ROUND and round it goes, discussion of that first 12th Step call. Some A.A.s think it's a great responsibility for, they feel, on their first-call presentation may depend a man's very life.

Questions in recent Birmingham Group discussion were: "Have you a set formula, or do you let circumstances guide?" "Generally speaking, what is your basic plan of presenting?"

Here's a thought on the matter, from one of Birmingham's original group. His years of sobriety and splendid 12th Step work attest the howling success of that long-ago call he received. He says:

"What sold me on A.A. on that first call is not what they said—it's

something they did, and the way they did it."

"It was a Sunday afternoon. I sat on my front porch, disconsolate, shaky, with no prospect of a drink. Oh, Sunday Sahara! The phone rang; A.A. members wanted to visit me. I didn't want A.A., but I made a deal with them—if they brought me a pint, I'd lend an ear.

"When they brought the pint here's what sold me on A.A.: with no fuss about mixers and ice cubes they poured me a drink. 'Oh, men of understanding', I thought, as my shaking hand reached out. When my nerves had quit screaming enough so they could be heard (and not before), they talked briefly about A.A.

Then, had I any doubts left, as to their being gentlemen and scholars, their leave-taking sold me a bill of goods. For, when they had gone, the *bottle was still there*, half-full. Here were men who spoke my language. In the years that followed that Sunday I've made many 12th Step calls. From that call made to me I remember one thing—a masterly presentation of A.A. is a fine thing, but the best thing to take on 12th Step calls is a kind heart.—*Anonymous*

February 1949

A Paradox

From Bennington, Vt.

WHEN I was serving time in our state prison for alcoholism I dreamed of breaking out of the place—anything to get relief from the awful confinement.

Little did I think that the time would ever come when I would want to break back in, or would feel snubbed when not permitted to do so.

That is exactly what did happen to me recently when the governor and other celebrities, as well as many A.A.s attended a ceremony of the formal opening of the A.A. prison group which I had started. The reason for the ruling which applies to all departed guests of the prison is obvious. I accepted it with regret but without resentment.

To make this alcoholic paradox complete, I must also report that even more recently my 12th Step work has brought me into contact with the policeman who on several occasions, previous to my incarceration, had had the distinction of escorting me to the local jail.—*Bob P.*

February 1949

The Stumbling Block

From Altoona, Pa.

THE 3rd Step has always seemed to be a stumbling block for the younger alcoholic. If we do not accept this Step in its entirety we will always grope along from this to that and we will never find a true purpose and peace in life.

We seem to go into that Step with reservations. We're eager enough to be free from alcohol, but we still have plenty of ideas about what we want out of life. Maybe God's will won't coincide with ours. With a little sobriety we forget so quickly where our wills, our big ideas, have landed us. It seems to be an alco-

holic characteristic to set our goal too high for our abilities.

We strain too hard on our own resources and soon wear them out. Then we turn to alcohol until it wears us out. Then believing to be without resources, we're glad to turn to a Higher Power.

We must learn to recognize and discard our selfish desires. We have to sacrifice a lot of impractical dreams and wishful thinking. In return we are given the power to live with reality and to live more abundantly than ever before. Let Him decide the future. He knows our needs and potentialities better than we.—*B.D.*

February 1949

Thoughts for the Newcomer —

From Nashville, Tenn.

LET us analyze some of our alcoholic characteristics. Among them is fear, and fear eats out the heart, warps the mind, and destroys the body. It is a killer, so toward fear it is not a question of "live and let live," it is a question of kill or get killed. Fear is the sign that we have been groveling in the valley of despair, but in A.A. we learn to walk on the high plain of faith. Fortunately fear is on the inside of man, not the outside. That in itself is hopeful, for we know that each of us, with the help of his particular Higher Power, is master of all that is within him. If, therefore, we have sincerely accepted the preceding Steps, then faith has entered the front door of our hearts, and when that happens, fear goes out the back, for certain it is that fear will not dwell in the heart which is filled with faith.—*P.S.H.*

Mail Call for A.A.s at Home and Abroad

From Toronto, Can.

NOT long ago I tried to do 12th Step work with a very sodden alcoholic. He had tried (but I don't think very hard) to work the A.A. Program. Trying not to judge him wrongly or too harshly I remembered what our A.A. *Big Book* says about slips and disappointments and the fact that sometimes we must be prepared to see an alcoholic disintegrate before our very eyes. An A.A. friend (who has since had a slip himself) was very pessimistic. But I still have hope for this poor fellow and here is a little lesson on faith and hope that I took to heart one Sunday in leaving church: I asked a dear little old lady friend in her seventies, how her alcoholic son was doing. He has been in and out of A.A. half a dozen times. Every time everyone feels like betting on him he takes another nosedive. I had learned from his sister what she and her mother had undergone that very week through this lad's absorption of alcohol.

It was grim.

Yet that little old lady's face fairly radiated faith and courage as she told me of her faith in God and how that faith in turn made her certain her son would eventually reform. It did something to me. Yes—it made me ask myself “should we not always have faith in the alcoholic we are working with?” Or, is our own faith sometimes so shallow that we cannot transmit it to our “patients?”—*Hugh.*

From Pasadena, Calif.

WHAT is the most important Step, the beginner often asks. In my opinion, they are all important because they all interlock with the other. To me the 12 Steps are like a cartwheel. The hub is represented by the 1st Step, the spokes are Steps Two through Step Eleven and the rim of the wheel is represented by the 12th Step. Now you wouldn't have much of a wheel if some of the spokes were missing, would you?—*L.A.*

Editorial:

Do We Lay It On Too Thick?

A. A. is not an employment agency. Yet some newcomers often get the mistaken idea that it is. Since the first of the year we've heard of at least four serious slips—one after eleven months—all blamed on the alibi that, "A.A. didn't get me a job!"

The obvious conclusion, and by far the easiest, is that these four were confused about what A.A. is and how it works; that they've had to learn the hard way. True. These men are wrong. Dead wrong! But does that absolve the rest of us? Isn't it possible that we have contributed to these erroneous notions? We wonder.

HOWEVER, before we go any further, let's have it understood that this is not written in defense of such slips nor to condone anyone leaning so heavily, so long, and so mistakenly, on A.A. But, before we "lecture," let's do a bit of self-examination.

In our 12th Step work, particularly on that vital first visit, we may be so anxious to reassure some poor devil who's hit the bottom that we paint a too rosy picture of what A.A. can do. In our own enthusiasm we may be too glib. We

may, in all innocence, be holding out implied "promises" of a good job, reunited families, etc.

We lay it on pretty thick sometimes, and fortify our argument with actual instances. "There's John," we say. "He was *really* down and out. But Charley in our group got him a job in the bank and today John's a Vice President, making umpteen thousand dollars a year and living the good life in his happy, rehabilitated home!"

WHAT we may have neglected to say was that, before Charley offered him that job, John had washed a few thousand dishes or done all sorts of menial chores until he'd demonstrated, first to himself and then to others, that he'd regained his perspective, his self-confidence, his self-respect, and the human dignity that comes of accomplishment. *These* are the important things, not the fact that there are people in A.A. who might be in a position to help a man find a job!

For, once a man has done a job *on himself*, the rest *does* follow in logical sequence when mixed with a generous portion of "Easy Does It!" It is only incidental that John got his start through another A.A.

If he hadn't, he would have gotten where he is through other channels. His talent, ability, and business experience, embodied now *in a whole man*, were bound to find their proper level—and to gain their rightful reward in terms of wordly goods.

So maybe we would be wise to sort of be extra careful about what we promise—even by inference. It

seems reasonable that anyone who sticks around any length of time should be able to figure these things. But alcoholics are suckers for glittering delusions. Remember? So let's not allow our misplaced pity for a fellow sufferer to create and prolong such a delusion—when the simple truth of *rebuilding from within* is so much more wonderful!

Editorial:

We Should Be Careful

A CHECK on correspondence coming into the General Service Headquarters turns up a surprising number of complaints. Of course, the fact that A.A. is not 100% successful and that we, as individuals, are something less than perfect will come as a surprise to practically nobody.

What did surprise us, however, was the nature of many of these complaints. After setting aside the legitimate criticisms and making due allowance for crackpots and sore-heads, there still remained quite a few which would seem to indicate that we have been a bit lax in how we "represent" A.A. to others.

IT seems that many people, too many, have the mistaken idea that A.A. recommends and endorses this, that, or the other thing. Mostly, it's hospitals and rest homes. In other cases, doctors, psychiatrists, and even clergymen. And in one instance, a recent political candidate claims that the local A.A.s "came out" against him.

Each of us knows that A.A. neither recommends nor endorses *anything!* Yet we can easily see how somebody could get the idea that we do. An unfortunate experience in a hospital or the mere fact that somebody's "dear one" failed to straighten up and fly right can be enough to release a stream of mis-directed abuse against A.A.

ONE woman said, "You recommended the hospital and the doctor. You practically *guaranteed* that my husband would sober up and stay sober!" Of course, we didn't make such claims. Yet this woman may be more or less justified in believing we did. Probably the A.A. members who "12th Stepped" her husband were only trying to reassure her and spoke with such conviction that, to her, it sounded like a gilt-edge-double-your-money back guarantee, bearing the official stamp of approval of A.A. Maybe she *wanted* to believe it so much that—she *did!*

So what can we do about it? Just be careful, that's all. We can send

our 12th Step cases to hospitals, to doctors, and to clergymen and still make it lucidly clear that A.A., officially or otherwise has no connection with any institution, medical procedure, or spiritual teaching. It can be done without tempering one iota the enthusiasm of our 12th Step work.

CERTAINLY your personal opinions are your own. You have every right to say anything you think about a hospital, a doctor, a religious creed, about A.A. itself, and about alcoholism. But you and I also have the obligation to A.A. to

make it understood that you speak as an individual.

For, as a whole, A.A. has no right and no qualifications to encroach on the medical profession or the clergy. And most definitely we have no place in politics. If we were to assume such omnipotence and follow it through to its logical conclusions, we'd soon be in "the doctor business" as lay therapists; we'd be setting ourselves up as savers of souls; and we'd begin to fancy ourselves as a pressure group in politics. We can think of no faster or surer way of destroying A.A. completely.



Do You Follow Through?

From Charleston, W. Va.

SINCE it is the end of my seventh year, I have been doing a lot of mental 10th and 11th Step work. Having tried to bring myself up to date, I then began looking around at other people in A.A. to see what sort of 12th Step work they were doing. I found about the same situation with them as with myself—not proper follow-through.

I see a very strong tendency among individuals and in groups to get away from the basic fundamentals of the 12th Step. The old member, not fully following the 12 Steps toward a Higher Power, thinks to lead his baby first to confidence in him as an A.A. member, then to the group. After taking him to a meeting, the sponsor quits personal work with the baby and turns him loose on the group to find whatever he can, in any way he can. As a consequence:

(a) The new man has no one person to talk over his physical, material troubles with and he loses confidence in himself because he can only mix with the crowd and has nothing really to guide him for his first few weeks.

(b) The group, made up of many new people just like this man, begins to have troubles, arguments, doubts and lack of force. It seems to me that all this *lack* goes back to the sponsor, since current sponsoring seems to be simply picking up the new man at the request of a loved one or friend, getting him sober, obtaining his thanks, telling him about the *Big Book*, taking him to one meeting, and then saying to him, "Now, there it is bub, just do that and it'll work."

HAVEN'T you watched that very thing happen many, many times? The poor man is still scared, still nervous over having admitted to other humans he is a no-good drunk, still befuddled in everyday thinking and planning, still has nothing bigger than he is on which to hang.

The sponsor who works in this way is not sure of himself, and certainly cannot pass on to another what he himself does not have.

The 12th Step is a whale of a job, an enormous responsibility. In order to make it work for the new baby, the member must sit time after time

after time with him, giving him inspirational articles, books, pamphlets, and analyzing with him each Step; showing him how to pray—not for power, but for *guidance*, and to *whom*; showing him how to lead his daily life; helping him with *all* his physical and material problems at home and at work; helping and

showing him in these many talks how "to let go and let God." It cannot be worked with several babies at one time—but, in the doing of it solidly, the A.A. member helps so much more to pass on the A.A. help through his babies to others in solid form, and gets himself closer to God and sobriety.—A.K.

Three Stages Toward Serenity

From Bronxville, N. Y.

IT seems that one of the standard A.A. patterns has three stages toward serenity. It has happened to so many others beside myself that I assume somebody will be interested.

Act I (of a play that has so many acts it could run forever) is the delicious haze of pure, child-like acceptance, when everything is wonderful, lovely, and 12th Stepping is done with the zeal of a crusader. That is a good, healthy use of the newcomer's tongue because at least he is talking about something constructive, even if it is a little fuzzy sometimes.

Act II is the smug stage, reached after various periods of sobriety, and then is when temper comes in, because suddenly the physically dry alcoholic discovers that all other members of A.A. do not think, act, and speak exactly as he would have them. That is a terrible period and the member either gets drunk or gets the rough edges of his personality sandpapered painfully, which is a wonderful thing when it is over.

Act III is the beginning of tolerance. That starts a whole new avenue

and is endless, apparently. It is reached, certainly, only a day at a time and successfully practiced on the 24-hour plan.

It has to be worked on, hung on to, and painfully sought before it shows results. One of the best ways to build tolerance (from personal experience) is to sit through closed meetings and listen to a member talk loudly and profoundly about A.A., his loudness and profundity in themselves being a tipoff that he's talking through his hat. What a temptation to straighten out his thinking! Ever try it? Brother, that starts a rat race that ends up with serenity in the ashcan, tranquility blazing into temper, and nothing at all accomplished but multiplying the fellow by two.

There will always be a member like that. I was one and perhaps am one now. But I am trying to listen to them with the idea that (1) the fellow or gal eventually will find out how foolish it is to be profound and loud at the same time, and (2) it does me a lot of good to be tolerant and accept whatever he (or she) says as only an opinion and nothing to get excited about.



Otherwise it's back into the swirl of Act II—those terrible weeks and months when the sober A.A. thinks he knows something about the Program!—P.B.

lives. There are also many who are not, many who are as misguided as I was, without the outlet of alcohol.

When I say I am glad I am an alcoholic, what I really mean is that I am glad I have found this way of life, which, without being alcoholic, I would not have found. And by being alcoholic, we of A.A. have to live this way to stay sober—otherwise, we find ourselves drunk! So I am glad I'm an alcoholic and privileged to live the A.A. way.

My other comment concerns the article, "One Day at a Time." It meant a great deal to me, because I

was dry almost two years before the full significance of living the "24-hour" basis hit me. To me, it is really the 3rd Step. By turning my will and my life over to a Higher Power, I have finally ceased trying to control my life. I now live one day at a time (the one 24 hours) that God has granted me to live. Now I can live it fully, getting the most out of it, for God has the future in His hands. Now I try to make the most out of each 24 hours. I do not have to worry about the future—that is God's. Only today is mine! —Anonymous.

March 1949

From Birmingham, Ala.

SEPTEMBER 6 was a red-letter day for me. I'd had a week of gloom. Monday night I went to an A.A. meeting to escape myself. Knowing I would be unable to sleep, I stayed late talking to an A.A. That conversation gave me new insight into the 3rd Step. My "agony of indecision" is no longer that. I told him of my inner conflict. "Why," I asked, "is it being so very hard for me to turn my will and life over to the care of God as I understand Him? How can I reach a point where I'll be willing to let go of these reservations, these special things. Why am I so afraid to let go?"

He told me: "If you submitted

to an operation by a surgeon in whom you had faith, you'd let him do it all; you wouldn't try to direct him, to do the operation yourself, would you? If you'll trust God as you would that surgeon, *completely*, turning your will and life over to Him without any reservation, your inner conflict will disappear.

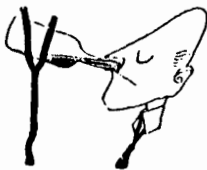
"You believe in God and that he hears your prayers. But effective faith is faith that is *exercised*. Use your faith. Exercise your belief by surrendering your life to Him, including your reservations." Well, it's hard to describe the sense of release when you finally get the peace of making the 3rd Step without "holding back." I may even get over being neurotic, who knows?—L.F.

From Wilmington, Calif.

THE first line in the fifth chapter of *Alcoholics Anonymous* reads as follows:

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."

In taking my inventory I found that I followed a path to destruction which I have condensed into 12 Steps, assuring anyone in doubt that I became a candidate for A.A. by thoroughly following this path. They are as follows:



- (1) I stated that I could hold my liquor and was master of my life.
- (2) Believed I was sane and rational in every respect.
- (3) Decided to run my own life and be successful in all my undertakings.
- (4) Made a thorough and searching inventory of my fellow man and found him lacking.
- (5) Admitted to no one, including God and myself, that there was anything wrong with me.
- (6) Sought through alcohol to remove my responsibilities and to escape from the realities of life.
- (7) Got drunk to remove these shortcomings.

- (8) Made a list of all persons who had harmed me, whether imaginary or real, and swore to get even.
- (9) Got even whenever possible, except when to do so would further injure me.
 - (10) Continued to find fault with the world and the people in it and when I was right, promptly admitted it.
 - (11) Sought through lying, cheating and stealing to improve myself materially at the expense of my fellow man, asking only for the means to get drunk or stay drunk.
- (12) After having had a complete moral, physical, and financial breakdown as the result of this kind of living, I tried to drag those who were dear to me down to my level and practiced these reasonings in all my affairs.

It should be understood that this inventory in its essence, is mine alone. Any resemblance to that of anyone else is purely coincidental.—*J.F.D.*

One Plus Eleven Equals Twelve

From Providence, R. I.

A FEW weeks ago we were at a meeting in a nearby Massachusetts town, and over coffee three of us were discussing the Steps. Tom expressed concern at what he considered his inability to grasp and practice the Steps quickly enough to satisfy his sincere and enthusiastic desire for complete and peaceful sobriety. Our own immediate reaction was to remind him that "*Easy Does It*" and "*Keep It Simple.*" Fortunately, however—for ourselves as well as for Tom—we refrained, and Harry outlined an interpretation that was new to us.

"You heard Joe tonight," he began, "he described so perfectly the value of those two little prayers—the morning one for strength and guidance, the evening one of heartfelt thanks for having received that help during the day. Tell me, Tom—do you pray, as Joe described prayer?"

"Oh yes," said Tom, "and it helps. It's wonderful."

"Then I think you're practicing part of the 11th Step," Harry exclaimed, "you don't realize it, per-

haps, but you're seeking through prayer and meditation to improve your conscious contact with God as you understand Him. And during your evening prayer—don't you think back over the day, what you did or didn't do, what was good or bad, something like that?"

"Why yes," Tom replied slowly, "it seems—well—sort of natural to do that."

"Then it strikes me you're also practicing part of the 10th Step," Harry pointed out, "you're continuing to take personal inventory, every night. I'll bet if you think of something rather poor that you did that day you make up your mind not to do it the next day—don't you?"

"Well, I hope I won't do it," muttered Tom with a grin.

"Then let's stretch a point and say you've partly mastered the 12th Step," Harry laughed, "you're at least trying to practice these principles in some of your affairs."

We turned away then, wiser and, we hope, a little more humble. Which was the better medicine for Tom?—our own feeble suggestion of "*Easy Does It,*" or Harry's little pat on the back? Surely Tom was happier if he now felt he was really mastering the Steps—not in order, no, but he was getting somewhere. Perhaps he now feels that his prayers will bring him understanding of all the Steps, and then by practicing the 11th Step more and more his praying will become more and more sincere and meaningful.—*Anonymous*

July 1949

Let Us Turn the Pages With Care and Honesty

*From Crow's Nest, N.S.W.,
Australia*

Our book of self, hitherto much disregarded in many respects, is now produced, and we should begin turning the pages with meticulous care and honesty. In attempting to carry out the 4th Step, unless we are scrupulously honest with ourselves, it is so easy to skip a few pages of the book. We must remember too, in applying this step, that we are dealing with our own particular problems as they affect us individually.

Our inventories if observed by other members may seem to them to be particularly harsh, or perhaps, on the other hand they may think we are using the "easy does it" policy in the wrong place. But whatever we do in seeking more and more peace of mind is our own affair entirely. If we find that any particular habit tends to become an obsession, or that we are relying on it too much as a means of escape, it is often helpful to deal with it in the same manner we dealt with alcohol. It is

simply added to the list of character defects with the admission that we are powerless over it, and we ask God to remove it.

The aim of A.A. which has proved to be our salvation is "to help the sick alcoholic recover, if he wishes."

As individuals, too, we must make this aim our objective. To keep heading for it, we find we must work tirelessly and ceaselessly in reshaping our lives, thus fitting ourselves to carry on this program of reparations, and construction of a new and brighter world in which any alcoholic may live if he desires.

Back in our drinking days we were not half hearted in our persistent occupation, so there's no reason why we should be niggardly when dealing with the A.A. Program. If we remember, too, the more we strive to better ourselves with A.A. principles in all our affairs, we will find we are better equipped to help the newcomer out of the mire. We need have no fear of failure in the tasks allotted us, if on every page of our book, our scrutiny is really searching and fearless.—*C.R.B.*

I Have Tried to Do My Part First

From San Diego, Calif.

IF I have had a spiritual awakening it is because I have tried to do my part of the job first, before I went to God for help. Yes I believe in prayer! *Last* not first, and yet we teach just the reverse of that today. Yes, I believe that there is a spiritual side to A.A., but I believe that we should let the newcomer find it for himself and not try to cram it down his neck. There are a few people who can create within themselves the necessary emotional upheaval to have a sudden spiritual experience, but, most will get it the hard way. At least we can give them a chance.

Let us not, in our honest sincere attempt to help the newcomer, put him behind the eight ball by forgetting that the Program says, "God as we understand Him." It also says there is no *easier, softer way*, what does that mean? It means working *all* the steps.

I found out that before I could honestly say that I believe in God and that I am now willing to let Him run my life is that I could not ask Him to

do my work for me. He created me and gave me the world for my play thing. If I missed the boat it was my fault not His and therefore it was my problem not His to get me back on it again.

Now I can humbly go to Him and ask for help not in fear or supplication but as a son who has honestly done the best he can with what He gave me to do with. Now when I need help I get it if I have tried first to do the job myself and that is what I think my Creator intends me to do.

Maybe this philosophy of "let George do it" is why our immediate recovery isn't 100 per cent. Maybe George isn't any more willing to keep us sober today than he was yesterday.

But you can bet that there is one old chap left in this world that has been and always will be willing to do his own work, that guy we all know: he is Old John Barley Corn. He never sleeps, he is always right there to offer a drink the minute that we let our guard down.

I say again, let the spiritual side of A.A. take care of its self. If we thoroughly believe in it we don't have

to preach it from the house tops. If we have really found it then we know that it is there and we don't have to be afraid whether the newcomer will find it. He will if we don't get him confused at the start. If he goes to work on all of the Program; and he will if we don't bog him down on the 2nd and 3rd Steps so that he can't get by them until he has had his spiritual experience.

Who are we trying to convince that we have had a spiritual experience; ourselves or the public! If you have it you don't need to convince anyone but if you don't have

it and are bragging about it you'll get drunk sure.

Let's stop trying to sell a bill of goods and go back to the A.A. Program. Let the newcomer find God in his own way. Let's talk about alcoholism, let's talk about the disease, let's really get back to the only new thing that A.A. has to offer the newcomer; the only new thing that he can't find in theology, medicine, psychiatry or philosophy—a society of his own kind of people. Alcoholics who are trying to stay sober and help others do the same thing.
—J.F.H.

August 1949

The Tough Nut— He Won't Give In



From Seattle, Wash.

WHAT about the man who admits that he cannot now and never could handle his alcohol, and who in the same breath states that he still gets a lift out of his drinking?

He could be the fellow who feels he needs some outside influence to make his boss, his wife, or some other disapproving influence think he is now going to do something about the situation, and after making this impression, intends in his secret mind to continue just as he has been in the habit of doing, although probably more cautiously.

He may know in his own mind that he is washed up as a social drinker, but is reluctant to give into the idea.

He may not wish to admit to anyone that he's through, for fear that he might convince himself.

This man should have all the friendship and help we can give him now. But we should not feel defeated if our well-intentioned assistance apparently fails. He may survive a few meetings, appear to have "made" the Program in fine style, when all of a sudden, he fails to

make the meetings, bumps his nose, and lands right back in the gutter.

He was not ready. There was no way we could know that. We can only know what he tells us, and proceed from that. Perhaps he told us the truth as he understood it in his muddled, confused mental state. He may have really wanted the Program, but he was still looking for a bargain; our price was still too high.

As sure as anything, his need for the Program will increase, and the price will seem more reasonable, until he will find the Program cheap at any price.

Nothing is really lost, when we apparently fail in an attempt to help a prospective member.

Twelfth Step work has been called A.A. insurance. It is also education, mental exercise, and experience. If we have followed the rules, we need not feel badly when we fail on an assignment, for if the prospect is an alcoholic, he'll be back, and when this happens, the groundwork has already been laid, and he will probably never run into some of the pitfalls that more quickly successful members have had to meet and to overcome.—A.M.

Build Step By Step



From Laguna Beach, Calif.

TOO many of us spend a lot of time thinking one thing and expecting to become something else. Conditions of being are not attained by thinking of their opposites: Health is not gained by studying and thinking about disease; nor is happiness attained by dwelling on the sorrows and misery rampant in the world. We are not so constituted that we can devote our time and thought to one thing and become something entirely different.

Most of us completed our courses under the tutelage of John Barleycorn—even the extra-curricular activities.

To master our course in sobriety we have to *think and live* sobriety to the exclusion of those things we learned with old J.B.

We are only showing the processes of our own recovery when we spend too much time thinking of our drinking careers; even at its best such contemplation is not good.

EACH of us, in our own way, is attempting to build something better and finer than we've known before. All right then, we should have a blueprint for our sobriety.

If we were going to build a temple, we certainly wouldn't study the plans for a tavern—they are opposites in purpose and design.

In the 12 Steps of A.A. we are given the best tools in the world with which to build our structure of sobriety—but what good are those tools going to do us if we don't study the right plans?

The first and most important thing for us to plan is our foundation—this is going to “have to be good”; it will have to be strong enough to support our edifice against all stress, strain and the buffetings of the winds of Fate.

Here are some of the materials we are going to need in our foundation: First we'll need a large portion of humility—true humility, not the door-mat variety. Another good word for humility (in case you don't care for the word) is teachability—the absence of self-will and egotism.

ANOTHER thing we'll need in a goodly amount is gratitude; gratitude to that Power Greater than ourselves—because only with the help of that Power can we again become sane and useful people. And only as we make the most of ourselves can we truly make amends to others.

Tolerance is another material we must have, great heaps of it, because it makes these other things blend well.

Now we'll mix the foregoing materials well and to them we'll add the strongest cement in the world—love.

These are the elements of a most solid and enduring foundation, on which we are safe in erecting our house of sobriety. OK, so we know what we are going to put into our foundation. The next question is, “how big is it going to be?” That we answer for ourselves by deciding what we need room for in our lives. If we are going to practice the principles set down in A.A. (in all our affairs) we are going to need a lot of room in which to grow.

WE have our foundation, let's see what materials we have at hand for our structure. Let us be very sure that none of our materials are faulty; the bricks with which we build our house must be as perfect as we can make them. If we allow our bricks to become shot thru' with the straws and rubble of self-pity, resentment, fear, narrowmindedness, egotism and reservations of one sort and another we are going to find that our whole structure suffers as the result of the inferior materials.

We are all familiar with the ingredients necessary for bricks of lasting value—such as: faith, courage, determination, kindness, understanding, generosity, sincerity, friendliness, self-respect and true compassion. These are but a few, but we can know that if we use plenty of these, our structure will have endurance and beauty.

Keeping our blueprint in mind, we'll put each brick in its proper place and then almost before we know it, our house of sobriety will become a reality—a reality which will show how closely we've followed our own particular blueprint.—*Jeri*

Book of Proverbs

*"Look Not Thou
Upon the Wine;
It Biteth Like a Serpent"*

From Chicago, Illinois

APPROACHING the completion of my 41st calendar year and with just days remaining to achieve my first year of uninterrupted sobriety I have suddenly become aware of a new impact and a new force in my life. Like many of my kind I have been unable yet to reconcile myself to any formal theology. Dogmatic faith has no appeal. My discovery,

while new to me, is timeless. I try to approach it humbly as a child depending on my conscious contact with God as I understand Him for guidance.

I refer to the *Bible*. It has been just a matter of weeks since I opened the *Book* for the first time and began my faltering studies. The very first day, in the *Book of Proverbs*, I found a description of myself before A.A.—

*"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.
At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.
Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.
Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.
They have stricken me, shall thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."*

THAT was before. I am now on the threshold of new horizons.

My first big problem was how to find my God. Through a welter of misconception I had to find a clear direct path and a workable idea. Constant attendance at meetings produced results. Of the many things I heard, it was inevitable that some ideas pass beyond the stage of listening and mental acknowledgment to the point of spiritual acceptance. Then it happened. No blinding flash, just gradual and quiet awareness and

knowledge of my Truth.

God is Good. Good is God. Therefore the Good in me is the God in me and I had to go no further than my own conscience for guidance. My conception will and must grow. Working the 11th Step will assure spiritual progress.

Again turning to my new discovery, the *Bible*, I find the closing passage of the *Sermon on the Mount* a beacon of hope and a promise of fulfillment. Liken the 12 Steps of A.A. unto the rock—

"He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."—A.J.R.

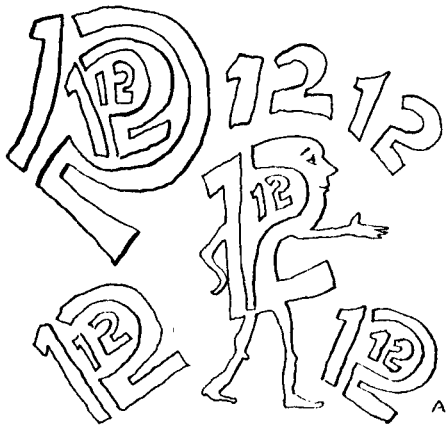


I am thankful to turn my back upon despair, but I am more thankful to turn my face toward hope.

I am thankful to struggle against selfishness, but I am more thankful to strain toward fellowship.

I am thankful to be emancipated from hate, but I am more thankful to be enslaved by love.

Missteps on the Twelfth Step



A LETTER TO the AA Grapevine began, "I've just had a slip, after only three weeks in AA. It was only a one-night stand, but I was scared, scared I couldn't stop. So I called my sponsor to talk it over. He came, all right, but we didn't talk. He lectured! Demanded to know why I hadn't remembered the things he had taught me, why I did this, why I didn't do that, etc. It sounded just like before AA. Why, why, why? Gosh, those were the things I had hoped he could tell me! If another AA hadn't got hold of me that same day, I don't think I would have come back to the group."

He wants to know if that sponsor

is typical. Let's not quibble! This instance is no isolated case of a "spoiled sponsor." The Twelfth Step is a beautiful thing when it is performed with complete humility and compassion by any AA who understands that he has been given another opportunity to help and to serve. It is not so pretty when he sits in judgment. Too many of us, perhaps, are concerned with running up a big "score," forgetting that we are dealing with human lives, not playing some game to see how many people we can "sober up." Surely, we've learned by now that the only people we sober up, or will ever sober up, are ourselves.

None of us is perfect, but on the Twelfth Step some of us really go haywire. The more obvious misusers of the privilege of helping the other fellow fall into certain easy-to-recognize categories. The lecturing sponsor is the "judge and jury" type. He sits above his "baby," who is treated like a prisoner at the bar. He hands down decisions from on high, out of his infinite wisdom.

Another type could be labeled "the doctor." Preoccupied by the disease aspect of alcoholism and probably being a hypochondriac himself, he "treats" his Twelfth Step cases as if they were clinical patients. We've known some who think nothing of handing out pills when their "patients" have trouble sleeping.

Then there are our "thirty-day psychiatrists." They explain to the newcomer just how an alcoholic gets that way, and they do it with an ease that must have Freud spinning in his grave. In many instances, they make AA sound so complicated that the poor drunk, already confused, runs screaming back to the bottle!

Then there are those who "play God." Self-aggrandizement is what they're really seeking, not help for the other guy. Consciously or unconsciously, they get so overcome by their own good works that pretty soon they believe their efforts alone are sobering people up. One man took himself so seriously that he couldn't find time to get a job and support his rather large family. He honestly thought so many people were depending on him for their sobriety that he couldn't be spared for such base, mundane matters as earning a living. Charity still begins at home!

Comes now "the preacher, the saver of souls." Having had his own "spiritual experience," he feels duty-bound to share his knowledge with the world, by force if necessary.

A nice motive, but one that runs roughshod over the fact that most alcoholics, in their first timid approach to AA, are usually God-shy. Maybe they're not atheists or even agnostics, but they're likely to have a deeply ingrained aversion to being preached at.

We have deliberately overdrawn these types so as to create a sharp contrast with the humble spirit of the Twelfth Step—the simple picture of one drunk sitting down with another to bring him the one thing no one else can—understanding!

In its finest form, the Twelfth Step is impersonal. Each new call for help is a fresh opportunity to give of ourselves—a workout to exercise and strengthen our own ability to grow. Naturally, we hope with all our hearts that the poor guy we're talking to will get sober and start living. But if he doesn't . . . well, strictly speaking, that's his business, not ours. It calls for no holier-than-thou lecture. It may call for a more thorough searching of our souls to see what more we can give—a further chance for us to become still bigger persons, and better ones.

If, on the other hand, our man does "get the program," it is for us to be humbly grateful, not smug. Its value to us is lost if we take any part of the credit. Our reward is in seeing, at first hand, the miracle happening all over again—the renewal of our own faith in the miracle of our own sobriety!

Anonymous

September 1949

Who? Me?

TWO of us were answering a 12th Step call. We pushed the bell and the door opened to reveal a sorry looking man peering at us through red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes. He was extremely nervous, but very polite. We said we were from A A and he invited us in but the perspiration was dripping off him even though it was a cool evening. We figured this lad was ready to settle for almost anything.

Imagine our surprise when, as soon as we found chairs in the living room, our hangdog host said, "Of course, you know, I didn't call A A for *myself!* (Heavens, *no!*) "It's about my - er - my - uncle!" Joe and I looked at each other but said, "Of course, of course - *your uncle!*"

So for two hours we sat there talking about "poor Uncle Louie." During that time our host excused himself three times, went to the back of the house, and returned smelling to high heaven of whiskey and coffee grounds. Poor "Uncle Louie"!

As we were leaving, my pal Joey turned to our new friend---said he'd heard a pretty good story that afternoon.

"Seems this guy showed up at a psychiatrist's office," said Joe. "He had two strips of bacon, very crisp, sticking out from under his hat. One on each side, like elaborate sideburns. As he sat down alongside the doctor's desk he removed his hat and there, in the exact center of his head, was a beautiful fried egg. The psychiatrist pretended he didn't notice and asked, "What can I do for *you?*" Whereupon the big egg-and-bacon man said, "Oh no, Doctor, not *me!* I came to talk about my *brother!*"

Then Joe and I said, "Good night!"

THE A.A.
GRAPEVINE

What of the Last Half ?

"... and practice these principles in all our affairs."

FRANK stormed out of his client's office snarling, "That stupid, stubborn so-and-so..." and slammed the door viciously behind him. The jarring impact of the banging door instantly acted as a red signal. Hastily he reopened the door and said to the little man, scowling and scrambling papers on his desk, "Pardon me for slamming the door."

The man glared vacantly, Frank nodded and passed quietly out into the hall and on his way. The dispute that had been raging for three hours had not been settled. An important business relationship teetered in the balance. But Frank got back to his office without a drink.

Nor did he write the scathing letter he had intended to write when he slammed his client's door. He waited until the following day when

his sense of humor had returned, and with it some semblance of serenity, patience and tolerance, honesty and self-valuation, positive thinking and a bit of humility. When he finished dictating the rather lengthy letter, he leaned back in his chair and moved his lips inaudibly, "Thy will be done."

It's not important really whether or not Frank retained that account. But it is important to note that he had accepted the fact that he is an alcoholic, and as such it is necessary to safeguard his precious sobriety by sincerely attempting to "practice these principles in all his daily affairs."

EVIDENCE of this character change might be observed in Frank's attitude toward his landlord who had refused to redecorate,

or in his whistle as the elevator man kept him waiting on the 17th floor, in his comments regarding the editor of his favorite newspaper with whose policies he didn't agree, or in his reaction toward his wife who suggested that he forego his fishing trip this weekend and take the family to visit the inlaws.

FRANK'S fresh attitude in relation to seemingly inconsequential matters or tremendously serious affairs, had on occasions been misinterpreted. "This 'easy does it' stuff and 'first things first' philosophy is all right," growled Frank's boss one day, but don't you think he's carrying it too far?"

Frank didn't believe so, because he was working a desperately serious program—a Program of Recovery. He was trying to regain a position of respect, usefulness, security and happiness in a world from which he had expelled himself. And if his Program indicated a moment or two of medication during a heated conference, or even for a missed bus, he realized that his new attitude toward his fellow man would be reflected in continued sobriety.

But sobriety for Frank is now not enough. He has learned that there is a greater and vastly more important victory to be won, that of living with his fellow man unselfishly, with tolerance and understanding. He knows that discretion in the use of tolerance is neces-

sary if he is to continue practicing these principles in all his affairs. For there are times when he has to make a decision between good and bad, and he has discovered that there was just as much harm in being tolerant of wrong thinking and acting as there was in being intolerant of right action.

"That is what is known as common sense," said Frank, "and is one of the essentials in practicing all of the 12 Steps."

What are these "principles" with which Frank is so concerned in practicing? This is his manner of itemizing them: After acknowledging one's sickness as alcoholism and deciding to do something about it, a study of moral defects of character is made; these are admitted to oneself, God and another human being; then the realization is made that great physical, mental and spiritual injury has been inflicted upon oneself and others; but willingness to make amends is expressed and sanity, happiness and constructive living are achieved through an improved conscious contact with God.

THEN these experiences are shared with others, and one practices these principles in all his affairs, Frank believes this can be identified as a spiritual experience, and is living the AA Program up to the hilt.

To keep these principles in action every day, in every contact he

makes, would rate Frank a seat somewhere between Gabriel and God. But the fact that he continues to reach for this exalted altitude proves he's making progress in his New Way of Life. Because in his

changed attitude toward his fellow man, Frank has enlarged his spiritual concepts to include a sincere willingness to "practice these principles in all his affairs."
--R.G.M., New York, N.Y.

“Don’t! You Can’t!— but I Did!”

From New York, N. Y.

THE fundamental method of our education and general upbringing for many generations seems to have been instruction and discipline imparted to us from the cradle by such words as: Don’t! You can’t! You must! You must not!—I’ll spank you if you do! In other words we have been told—we have been told off—and we have been threatened in the process.

Many child psychologists today recommend that instead of telling the child, the teacher or parent should just gently hint or suggest that this or that would be a good thing to do—and point out why. I don’t know what the result will be—let’s hope it will be good.

Anyway, I am a product of the

“I’m telling you” type of upbringing. I came from a very strict and an exceedingly religious family. I couldn’t take it. I rebelled.

After being told from the cradle that whisky was a terrible thing, how could I resist finding out just how terrible it was? My parents had practically talked me into it. I found out that it is a terrible thing for an alcoholic like myself. My parents had been right about the whisky, but they had told me once too often.

You will notice that on every card or paper on which the 12 Steps appear, is printed the “Suggested Steps.” Those two words made an investigation of A.A. possible for me. At the time when it was important that I investigate A.A. I was in a typical alcoholic’s frame of mind.

I had been told two billion times too often that I was drinking too much. Somebody was using the wrong psychology on me and I continued to drink too much and became more and more bored and fed up with anyone who was capable of making such a brilliant observation—regardless of their good intentions.

I finally reached the point where my drinking began to give me some concern about myself. I had heard of this A.A. outfit and I knew that doctors were in existence in various parts of New York City but I couldn’t contact any of them as that would mean that I was giving in to those characters who kept saying that I was drinking too much. If I contacted A.A. those characters would be just nasty enough to say “I told you so!”

They’d be right and I’d be wrong and being wrong would be a very heavy dish for me to take. Besides I figured if I contacted A.A. I might find out what I already suspected about myself—I might be an alcoholic and would have to stop drinking. It might do me some good and that would be no good. Another drink or six was the only solution at that time.

Well the day finally came when I could no longer stand the combination of these nagging characters and my own drinking—so I gave in—I thought. I went to see a doctor. He charged me \$50 for the excellent advice that I should contact Alcoholics Anonymous. This I did because I

had already invested \$50 and I was curious about this A.A. outfit despite the possibility that they might do me some good.

The A.A. outfit said that they would send a member in my neighborhood to see me. The A.A. fellow came. Having had such an open mind through this whole deal, I expected nothing less than an exceedingly small pigmy, tight lipped and beady eyed—a little Napoleon, who would be quite capable of telling me what I must do to get off the stuff that I loved so dearly.

The A.A. fellow turned out to be quite a guy. He was well over six feet, clean cut and not the least sign of a six day growth of beard. He let me do all the talking. When he got a chance to get a word in he’d keep saying, “Of course maybe you’re not an alcoholic—” Those were brilliant words—wonderful to hear. Why this fellow knew what he was talking about. I decided to listen to him for a while.

Of course I wasn’t an alcoholic. He told me all about A.A. and the 12 Suggested Steps. He didn’t say, “You must” once. He didn’t ram any opinions down my throat. He just said I should find out for myself if I was an alcoholic.

I got one of those little cards that have the 12 Steps printed on them. I said to myself, “Well here are the rules, I’ll see how tough they are.” I was really pleased when I discovered that the “rules” were not rules but merely Suggested Steps. I could-

n't believe that the whole A.A. outfit was as liberal as the fellow who had come to talk to me. Why, I could take a suggestion or a hint—but no doggoned rules for me! If these A.A. people were going to be reasonable—I'd be reasonable. I'd read their book over a bottle or so of bourbon.

Don't think for a minute that the certain characters that I have mentioned had let up in the meantime on this "You're drinking too much" stuff. Yes I was, but I had a very convincing angle now. I was intentionally trying to overdo it in order to find out if I was an alcoholic. I laid it on—poured it down and finally concluded that I did have some trouble. The trouble was nagging.

I figured the nagging would stop if I quit drinking. I quit drinking and the nagging did stop. But for some strange reason I remained eternally thirsty. I began taking short shots and covering up with the usual

Sen Sen, peanut butter and garlic. The whole procedure was too much of a workout and no fun. All the time in the back of my mind the words "Suggested Steps" kept echoing. I decided to give the A.A. Program some sober consideration. I actually dried up long enough to read the book in a sober state of mind. Meetings and sobriety followed eventually.

I have wanted to point out here how infantile the mind of one rebel alcoholic can become—how stubborn it can become as a result of the "I'm telling you" school of thought. I still don't like to be told off. Thank God A.A. never told me off. A.A. suggested steps and told me how they worked. It let me do the picking and choosing of what I thought would help me most.

To those who are new to A.A. I *suggest* that you study the Suggested Steps and use them for yourself. Others will eventually profit from your use of them.—A.P.

November 1949

OH Lord, help me to utilize the chosen Steps making each day my single goal. Help me to exercise their precepts, learning a way that keeps me whole. Let me draw happiness from my day, sharing this feeling with another. Let me store wisdom in AA, bearing its healing to my brother.—*J.A.L., Jackson Heights, L.I., New York*

STEP SEVEN—*Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. What are our shortcomings? Was it just drunkenness? No, that was just one of the many other character defects with which we are burdened. Among them are conceit, arrogance, selfishness, dishonesty intolerance and worst of all the searing and caustic tongue with which we whiplashed ourselves and others, some of whom have tried to help us.*

How can we expect God as we understand Him to remove these shortcomings when we are too small and prideful to admit them? These things must be brought out into the open, must be admitted and then exposed to the cleansing effect of the sunlight of humility and honesty.

A humble person in true humility does this without reservations, he doesn't do it partially, he does it wholly, even though it might hurt. Why? For the same reason that a surgeon excises a cancer totally—he takes out the whole evil mess because then there is no chance of a recurrence. Why shouldn't we do the same? It takes a little more effort and is a lot more painful to our ego. but the cure is more apt to be permanent.

The expression of true humility is the willingness to serve others without expectation of reward, prestige or recognition for our services to them. It should be done in a spirit of cheerfulness and joy.

Mail Call

We must at all times be willing to subordinate ourselves to a Power greater than ourselves. We should neither by thought nor expression be critical of others or their opinions. We must be big enough to give the other fellow the right of expression, give credit where credit is due, be a doer instead of a critical wisher. In short be of AA and not just in it.

This above all: to thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man.

—Ernie, Chicago, Ill.

The Arena

J.O. and H.S.—the last round

THE article by J.O. in the October issue of *The A.A. Grapevine* clearly demonstrates how much of the AA philosophy a person can get by the "hop-skip-and-jump" method.

A thorough study of Steps 2 through 11 will, we believe, eliminate the critical angle, and turn the spotlight where it rightly belongs, upon "ego." Remember that a great quantity of straw must be thrashed to get a bushel of grain.

When you can look at the fellow looking back at you from the mirror and say, brother, I am not perfect, but I am doing my best and with the help of that Greater Power I will eliminate some of my faults and shortcomings; I will attend all meetings when and where possible, and will do so with an open mind, mainly for the purpose of helping myself, and when I don't like the way meetings are conducted, I will examine myself to ascertain, if possible, why I am displeased, and I will further offer my services and help in all meetings where possible.

Then, brother, you will not be "nettled" by a greeting at the door, "Where have you been"?

—C.B., Borger, Texas

THE writer of "A Little Bit Nettled" says: "Anyway, I felt free to try (the running broad jump from Step 1 to 12) because I believe Bill meant what he said in 'Medicine Looks at AA': 'Most strongly we point out that adherence to these principles is not a condition of AA membership. . . based upon our experience the whole Program is a suggestion only.'"

Certainly Bill has emphatically pointed out that adherence to these principles is not a condition of AA membership, because he also said in that talk: "Any alcoholic who admits he has a problem is an AA member regardless of how much he disagrees with the Program."

In that same talk Bill said, "He (the new man) sometimes eliminates 'the spiritual angle' from the '12 Steps to Recovery' and wholly relies upon honesty, tolerance and 'working with others.' But it is curious and interesting to note that faith always comes to those who try this simple approach *with an open mind*—and in the meantime they stay sober. If, however, the spiritual content of the '12 Steps' is actively denied, they can seldom remain dry. That is our AA experience everywhere."

I feel certain Bill's emphasis on the *whole* Program of Recovery—the 12 Steps—will become apparent and lead to the conclusion that it is wise to look before you leap.—W.J.R., East Orange, N.J.

January 1950

TWELVE STEPS

with much license

and some poetic justice

1 Admitted we were powerless over moochers and our finances had become unmanageable.

2 Came to believe that this association could restore us to solvency.

3 Made a searching and fearless inventory of our finances.

4 Told the association the exact nature of our loans.

5 Made a list of all persons who had stung us and became anxious to collect from them all.

6 Made such collection wherever possible by help of the association, lawyers if necessary, knowing full well that money owed benefits neither the receiver or the giver.

7 Realized that cashing checks was the business of banks, Western Union and the Post Office.

8 Continued to take financial inventory and when we were paid, promptly admitted it.

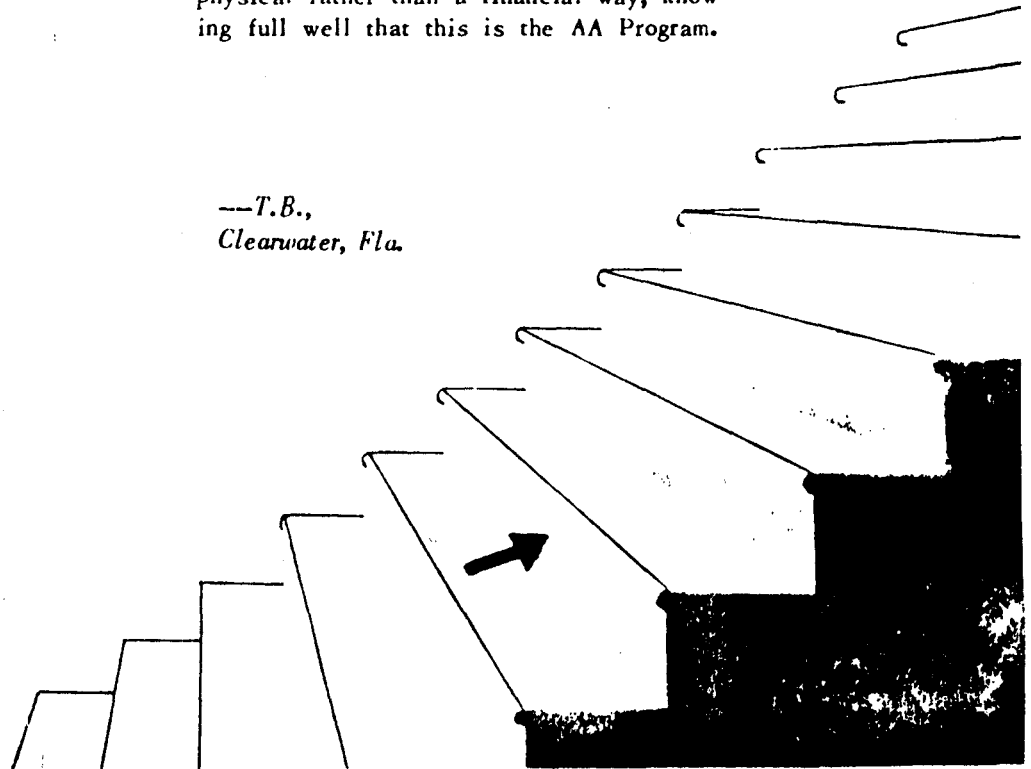
9 Reported defalcations to neighboring groups of AA, purely for the protection of our friends.

10 Recalled that formerly all alcoholics got out of financial messes on their own and our financial help could continue a drunk or prevent recovery.

11 If some case seemed otherwise hopeless, we consulted the whole society. Any help voted would be carried by the society or not at all.

12 Sought to help alcoholics in a spiritual and physical rather than a financial way, knowing full well that this is the AA Program.

—T.B.,
Clearwater, Fla.



February 1950

ONLY THE 1ST STEP?

QUITE recently a friend of mine came out with the remark, "Poor Bill has had another slip." Now it was quite natural on hearing this that I should conclude that Bill had indulged again in a little serious drinking. But why, I have since asked myself, must a slip--if the word has to be used--only suggest a transgression of the 1st Step? Ours is a Program of 12 Steps. It does not begin and end with the cessation of our drinking habit. It is the adoption of a way of life. It is the adherence to a credo as laid down in those 12 Steps. And so I feel--once I

have found the way--if I should relax in my adherence to any of those Steps--if I should so stray in my thinking again--to become intolerant--to lose my temper and be unwilling to beg for pardon--to speak unkindly and yet feel no remorse or seek forgiveness--I shall have slipped just as surely as my unfortunate brother who had imbibed again. And thus I find myself in agreement with the words of Frederick the Great, "Every man must get to Heaven in his own way."--*The Lifeline, Vancouver, B. C., Canada*

Praying Only for Knowledge

SUFFERING is a concomitant of growth. Rehabilitation combines the essence of both as every regenerated alcoholic knows. Du Nouy, in his classic *Human Destiny*, revealed to the discerning eye that the purpose of evolution—the sole purpose—is the creation of a perfect life form, and that man is the evolutive branch destined to become the perfect creature. Every sage, every saint that ever trod the earth, said in one way or another that the sole reason for man's existence is to become one with his Creator; not in some future life, on some other plane of existence, but here and now. Huxley, in his *Perennial Philosophy*, says that man's final end is union with God through the unitive love-knowledge of the Godhead. What, if anything, has this to do with the problem of alcoholism and recovery from drunkenness?

The AA who has made the 12 Steps as vital to his life as eating

and breathing bases his personal daily life upon the 11th Step. Prayer and (right) meditation do improve his contact with God as he understands Him. Praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out is the most powerful spiritual tool in the universe for this is one prayer that must be granted. Seeking through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him opens up avenues of investigation that are closed to others. To such a one the wisdom of all ages gravitates as surely as water flows downhill. It could not be otherwise for this is divine law.

Many of the old-timers are aware of these truths. Some of them suspect that this is so, and will soon know it, for as they grow in spirit they must likewise grow in knowledge of the truth. The restlessness of the old-timer "who no longer fits the niche he has cut

out for himself in AA" is a part of this growth and in a mild sort of way, it is the suffering that is a concomitant of all growth. The recent abortive experimental meetings held on Long Island were evidence also of these growing pains. Their sponsors should not lose heart—the seeds they planted there shall one day take root in more fertile ground and become towering giants.

AA has been rightly called the most vital spiritual movement of the century. History in the making is difficult to see in proper perspective by the participants, yet to some the vision has been granted. To them it is apparent that the "old-timers" are the vanguard of the greatest spiritual force yet to be manifested upon this sad old earth of ours. How many of these men there are in our present membership, comprising some 80,000 people, no one knows. Bill said in the November issue of *The A. A. Grapevine*, "the whole of modern society is on a dangerous and contagious 'dry bender.'" Such being the case—and I doubt that any of us would be apt

to disagree with Bill's analysis—all those who join the ranks of the "old-timers" will have work to do that is beyond our present comprehension of precisely just what is God's will for us. A little wordy, but I think the meaning is clear.

During the past three years I have seen "miracles" and miracles in the making. I have seen sodden dissolute wrecks become upstanding clear-eyed men. I have seen emotional five-year-olds become adolescent before my eyes—men who are now well on the road to emotional maturity. I have seen despair and hopelessness in the eyes of wives and mothers replaced with hope and gratitude, and for the first time in my life, I know the meaning of the word, "joy." And a question kept haunting me. What is the meaning of all this? The whole is comprised of its parts—what is the Whole? Could I, one of its parts, stand off and see it as it is? Are we the Good Samaritans of this age or am I just being the same old self-centered egoist trying to grab off a little second-hand glory? What do you think?—D.S., *Key West, Fla.*

...follow through...

“the picture changes rapidly”

RIGHT in our own 12 Steps is a tremendous One-Two Punch! Maybe it would be more accurate to call it the Four-Ten Punch! For I'm referring to the 4th and 10th Steps. If you start with the 4th and *follow through* with the 10th and do it continuously, some amazing things begin to happen to your self respect, to your general usefulness, and to your life itself!

When that first inventory is taken, it's a pretty gloomy procedure. The minuses usually overpower the plusses. The outlook is not good. If you stop there, it may look like a hopeless task to get the thing in balance. Like the fellow recently said in *The A. A. Grapevine*, “A disgruntled AA is a man who has taken moral inventory of himself and got sore about it.”

But if you *follow through*--if you continue to “take personal inventory”--the picture changes rapidly. The balance swings quick-

er than you have any reason to expect. “Credits” that weren't on the books last month begin showing up. You begin to realize that you--even *you*--have some rather fine qualities you didn't suspect you had. Sure, some of the old character defects are still there. But they no longer dominate. On the other side of the ledger you have some real accomplishments--plus a sense of accomplishment which leads you to believe that, in time, you can lick the defects still on the records.

EVERY individual needs encouragement along the way. And the 4-10 follow-through provides it. It's like keeping score on your own progress, something to refer to in the “down” moments to reassure yourself that you are going forward--not backward.

Also it gives continuity to your working of the Program. Hook it up with the 24-hour plan--do the

best you can each day, no matter how inadequate it may seem at the time. Then, at regular intervals, take your inventory and, by gum, you can *see* the progress then.

After I took my first inventory--and it was like diving into ice water--I wanted no part of moral check-ups after that. Too discouraging. It wasn't until after a couple of years of sobriety and in

the midst of a cycle of depression that I “rediscovered” Step 10. When I compared a new inventory, bad as it was, with that *first one*, I realized that much had happened that I had taken for granted. Now I take the 10th Step regularly, if for no other reason than to see how much *more* I have to be thankful to AA for giving me!

Try it! You'll find you're quite a guy, after all!

A REALM BEYOND CRAVING

The statement is often made in AA that our problem is primarily one of "right thinking"—a problem of the intellect—and that the more thoroughly we can rid ourselves of our emotions, the better. But we also know we can no more stop feeling than we can stop breathing. Any situation in which we find ourselves produces some feeling, some emotional reaction. We must remember that the positive feelings of love, humility, faith, compassion, and charity are also emotions.

Our problem is one of *changing* our emotional reactions to life. How does following the 12 Steps contribute to this shift of emotional orientation? Let's quote from the Big Book: "For alcoholics, we who have been trying to run our lives by self-propulsion, by self-will on an egocentric basis, it is important to note that this acceptance of ourselves as we are involves a giving-up—a surrender."

I suggest that a consideration of the meaning of "surrender" will prove enlightening.

For the most part, alcoholics must "hit bottom" before they are ready for, and can be helped by, AA. Circumstances force us to admit that we are powerless over alcohol and that our lives have become unmanageable. If this admission reflects a true inner surrender; if we have really given up, without clinging to the phony hope of learning to "drink like a gentle-

man"; if it be no mere submission to the practical exigencies of the moment; if we have truly rid ourselves of the feeling lurking deep down inside that "there will come a day" when we can drink with impunity; then—we have taken a big stride on the road to recovery.

All of us know, however, that a state of surrender is not necessarily permanent. Self-will doesn't die easily. That's why, as I see it, the 11 Steps which follow "the 1st Step of submission" are all designed to help us maintain and broaden our surrender until it encompasses all reality.

What are the implications of the word "surrender"? An army surrenders only to a superior force. So do we, surrendering, first, to the force of circumstances. But I don't think any human being goes very far along this new road without beginning to realize the existence of a Power outside himself, a law or a something which is ever present and all powerful. The mere act of surrendering to reality, incomplete and limited in scope as the act may originally be, seems to prepare us for the greater submission—breaks the ice, as it were.

For the first time in our lives, perhaps, we are able to admit there is something which we, by ourselves, cannot lick. The realization that we are not and cannot be sole masters of our fate, Captains of our Souls, brings us to an in-

Surrender and the Twelve Steps of AA



creasing awareness of a Higher Power, We get an inkling that this Power is, has been, and always will be, an important factor in our lives. Thus are we conditioned for the 2nd Step—*coming to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.*

With these glimmerings of faith we are ready for the 3rd Step, even though we approach it timidly: *to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand him.* This Step says "we made a decision" to do so. It does not say we have done it! A complete surrender of our will and our lives is a lifelong task which any one of us will be fortunate to realize to any considerable degree. To the extent, however, that we can do this, and continue in it, we find peace for ourselves—a realm beyond craving—a contented sobriety.

Steps 4 through 10 help us in this spiritual quest to abandon our self-centered attitudes and relinquish the primacy of "me," "my," and "mine," and so clear the way for full acceptance of what the principle of surrender is beginning to mean to us. As a start towards acquiring humility, therefore, we must begin to know ourselves. So, in the 4th Step, *we make a searching and fearless moral inventory.* Then in the 5th, as a further lesson in practical humility, *we admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the*

exact nature of our wrongs.

By logical progression, in the 6th Step, we become *entirely willing to have God remove all these defects of character.* Note the word "willing." In the next Step, the 7th, we *humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings.* Up to here we have done none of these things. We have merely signified a willingness for Him to do them. We are still trying to unbuckle our ego—and turn our will and our lives over to a Higher Power! *As we understand Him!*

There are things we can and must do for ourselves, however. We may turn our wills over to God but we can't expect him to run our errands. So, in the 8th Step, we *make a list of all persons we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.* In the 9th, we *make direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.* We have made a start in turning over our wills and our lives. We have, in a manner of speaking, cleared the decks and brought ourselves to a state of momentary surrender. But only momentary.

Now we come to another practical consideration. We have the rest of our lives before us. We must know how to sustain this fleeting sense of security and strength, found so surprisingly in "surrender." To insure our continued growth in AA and a deepening of our sense of

surrender, we move into the 10th Step—*continuing to take personal inventory and when we are wrong, promptly admit it. Keeping the decks clear.* Then, in the 11th, we *seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.*

The 12th Step has two parts, both designed to further our spiritual growth. The first is to *carry this message to alcoholics.* It is perhaps enough to say here that "faith without works is dead." The opening words of the Step, *Having had a spiritual awakening,* do not mean, as I see it, that only old-timers in AA are qualified to do 12th Step work. Surrender may be, and often is, a very sudden thing. The danger is in a person who may have once surrendered but emerged from it. Such a person doing 12th Step work will not be sufficiently conscious of his position as merely an agent of a Higher Power working through AA. On the contrary, he will ascribe both his failures and his successes to his own abilities. Such a person may find his failures frustrating, and his successes ego-building, conducive to pride rather than to humility.

In the second part of the 12th Step we try to *practice these principles in all our affairs*—seven words which tie up all the preced-

ing Steps into one package.

I have tried to relate the 12 Steps of AA to the psychological fact of surrender. A continuing and patient effort to maintain a conscious relationship with a Higher Power helps to maintain a state of surrender and of sobriety. Note the word "patient." *Frantic* efforts to hurry the progress in this direction are self-defeating.

Relatively few persons are so fortunate as to lead their lives, or any considerable portion of their lives, in a state of calm surrender with its accompanying lack of tension and peace of mind. Those who are so fortunate often reach such a state through extreme suffering or through some emotional cataclysm. Religious writers refer to such people as "twice born men." Such are we in AA. It has been written, "Happy are those persons who, at the crisis of their lives, suddenly break through some mysterious wall and find a storehouse of energy. The release of energy often comes as a result of a great surrender, for not seldom the surrender seems to melt away a middle wall of partition within—which was dividing the life asunder—and lets the whole of our energy go out in a single direction."

Perhaps we alcoholics are not so unfortunate after all.—N.H., Washington, D. C.

The Need for Prayer Is Great

THERE are times, it seems to me, when the urge to pray is imperious in a man's heart. The instincts and real needs of humanity destroy the rationalizing and the justifications of the skeptic. Even the skeptic and so-called "atheist" belies his own logic and unbeliefs when he is plunged into a deep personal calamity--is faced with a serious crisis--or finds himself in the grip of an evil thing which threatens to destroy him. These are the times when this "atheist" and skeptic finds himself in anguished prayer to a God in whom he had refused to believe.

This need for prayer and also this instinctive belief in a "Power" outside of and immeasurably beyond the scope of intellect seems to me to be a mystic part of the "inner man"--soul, perhaps. I do not profess to be able to understand it. But I do know from my own experience that this

"psychic" or spiritual side of life is true reality. It has become vital that I recognize it, cultivate it, and develop it. In only one way is this possible. *By prayer.* The alternative for me is spiritual bankruptcy, perhaps physical death or insanity. I must pray . . .

I sometimes wonder how long we alcoholics have to read Step Eleven before it makes a pronounced impact upon us--an impact that will forbid any procrastination.

ALL of the Twelve Steps are deeply personal, but to me, Step Eleven is particularly so. Let me repeat it:

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.

For me this Step is an ultimatum. I must learn a great deal

more about prayer and how to pray.

Prayer gives a great sense of dignity. It awakens hope. It brings release, then peace, exaltation, power.

To pray I do not think I must conform to "time," "place," or "posture." Eloquence seems to be out of place and may savor of insincerity. My need should rather be my eloquence. My shortcomings my recommendation. Simplicity the keynote. Ceremony does not attract me. I seek to pray for forgiveness for my daily faults, both of omission and commission. I pray for daily strength and power to do the right thing, for guidance, for strong faith that brings serenity. In this way, and only in this way, will I progress and allow the spirit of AA to possess me, rather than I merely possess it.

I have found the diversions away from prayer and the perversions of prayer many and insidious.

I found myself with "doubts of the usefulness of prayer." "Too proud to pray." "Too far down the road to pray." "No time just now." "A sense of vagueness."

But--

Praying beats alcohol and evil--or alcohol and evil beats praying. There can be no compromise. I think that the most sincere prayer is short and of the "must" kind. It seems that the great prayers that have remained through the centuries are the short but effectual types of prayers.

Selfish and purely material prayers would be an insult to the Divine Power. But I believe I can make material requests, so long as I can truly say, "Thy will be done," or "Only if it be good for me." I cannot truly pray if I have in my heart resentments, hate, envy, dishonesties, lusts. If I am not willing to renounce them all--my prayer would be a mockery. How forceably Shakespeare's Hamlet illustrates this very point. The murderous, adulterous king, in his remorse kneels to pray. . .

O, what form of prayer can serve my turn?

*'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be since I am still possessed*

Of those effects for which I did the murder,

*My crown, mine own ambition,
and my queen.*

May one be pardoned and retain the offence?

The king discovers--as we alcoholics do too--that remorse and misery are not repentance.

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

But--and this is Divine Love--not even this evil king would have been denied, or have been "too bad to pray." If he had made his decision to "leave the far country" with its husks and its swine--and its wine.--O. S., Burwood, N. S. W., Australia



WE DO HAVE A "MUST"

TENACITY is more than endurance, it is endurance combined with the absolute certainty that what we are looking for, (sobriety) is going to transpire. Tenacity is more than just attending many meetings to overcome the fear of losing sobriety. Tenacity is not only the supreme effort for sobriety, but tenacity has that firmness of belief and conviction that will never let go. If you have or can develop the quality of tenacity, you cannot fail, but remember it must be a tenacity covering all the steps of our program. Not just Step One, Four, Nine, Ten and forgetting the other steps. You cannot mold this program to suit your own desires and purposes if you are to succeed, if you are to achieve the true purpose as implied in these twelve steps. You my friends must mold yourself to fit this program and its principles.

Too much has been said by many individuals against the word, must, and as always they have been fail-

ures. The alcoholic mind refuses to accept the word must for its own obvious reasons. Its a great stumbling block to his old way of thinking and desire. Must is an obligation or necessity, physically and morally.

Must in the spiritual world is one of the swords of truth. You must always be honest, sincere and truthful. You must always throw out wrong thought and never try to kid or fool yourself and others. Cease to try and find excuses and live up to the letter of the law in the spiritual world.

Must in our spiritual work means the removing of dishonesty, untruthfulness, our own selfish desires and the recognition and acceptance of all true facts as implied in our whole program, not just a part of it. Must is a vital word for a man of truth, yes must is a vital word in living honestly and sincerely.

—H.K., Berwyn, Illinois

August 1950

Wallet cards, with the *Twelve Steps* printed on one side and the *Twelve Traditions* on the other, are now available at \$3.50 a hundred. These cards are laminated so they'll wear well.

SOMETIMES,

THE ANSWER IS... NO!

IN AA we have the spiritual phase, which is important. There are six of the *Twelve Steps* which refer to a spiritual way of life. The living of a spiritual way is merely the daily attempt to honestly adjust our wills to the Will of God.

Remember the words, "*in all our affairs*" whether it be prayer, sickness, business, finance, home life, social life, sleeping, or eating. Why can't God help us meet a financial obligation, help solve our group problems? Why can't He guide our thinking, our conversation, our journey, our working, our playing, our business, our decisions, our family welfare, our clubs, our everything? Didn't we come to believe in a Power Greater than Ourselves, greater than any human strength. Why can't we become God-Conscious at all times?

Let us get out of the driver's seat and let God drive. Not just move over and let God squeeze in for the curves. In that case there may be a great deal of swerving, and skidding and slipping.

Some persons get discouraged in

their prayers because seemingly their prayers are not answered. All prayers are always answered; they have forgotten to qualify that prayer with humble acknowledgment; if it be Thy Will.

The mother who really loves her child, will never give the child anything that will hurt it, no matter how long or loud the child cries for it. Often, God seemingly does not answer our prayers because the result of them would be harmful. But, in reality He does answer them, but sometimes the answer is *no*.

To me the *Twelve Steps* are a way of life. They point the way to a perfect life, because with them we can adjust our will to The Will of God. And I am certain The Will of God is perfection. Throughout the entire Program runs that perfect theme. Thy Will be done. In the Third Step "*to turn our lives over to the care of God?*" In the Eleventh Step "*only for knowledge of God's Will for us and the power to carry that out.*"

—Ed O'N., Cumberland, Md.

THE last two paragraphs of the "Big Book" have supplied me with all the answer I need for the man or woman who says, "I can't do it. I can't possibly get the spiritual 'angle' of AA."

To me the important words in those paragraphs are "honestly," "does not close his mind," "intolerance or belligerent denial," the complete sentence "Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery." And that masterpiece of redundancy, "*But these are essential.*"

Whoever wrote the closing paragraphs of the *Appendix* of the *Big Book* had what I believe to be the most thorough understanding of the entire AA Program which is, as we all know, one great big spiritual circle.

The requisites for a complete recovery are listed—and they are listed in order. We know we must learn to face our problems; but we fail immediately if we don't face them honestly.

After we have jumped that hurdle—and I expect others, like I did, have had trouble getting that honest approach—we have started down the obstacle course to the spiritual circle that is AA.

Next comes that suggestion to keep an open mind; to get rid of intolerance and belligerent denial. That suggestion means this to me: the bars of intolerance and belligerent denial must be removed from the door to the newcomer's mind.

"honestly"...
an
important word

That door must be left open. That's all!

There is no suggestion that we substitute belligerent affirmation for a foot-stamping denial of everything spiritual. There is no suggestion that, after we remove intolerance, we must sidewalk-solicit and drag spiritual tolerance through the open door. As I see it, even at this point, all we need is that open door to our minds.

If I needed further proof—as I did at one time—it is all boiled down for me again in the last two italicized sentences. Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are essential. And they are *the* essentials. And they are *indispensable*.

Willingness—Steps Three, Six, Seven, Eleven and Twelve.

Honesty—Steps One, Four, Five, Eight, Nine and Ten.

Open Mindedness—Step Two.

And that covers all *Twelve Steps*. Nowhere in any of them can I find a suggestion that, after we remove the bar of belligerent denial of everything spiritual, we substitute any other word for *denial*.

Doesn't it all add up to mean that there is no room in AA for belligerence—period? —B.M., Crewe, Va.

A suggestion
for a
closed meeting...

The Chairman Takes Inventory

"Do you know, I caught myself taking another guy's inventory this morning," laughed the Chairman as he opened the regular weekly closed meeting. "And that of course is not the purpose of the Fourth Step... We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Period! Not the other guy." He paused to light a cigarette. "Perhaps we'd better take an inventory of this Step tonight and see what factors enter into the making of an honest inventory."

"I never thought taking an inventory was too important," said Johnny, "until last week while on my vacation I went to a meeting and heard a speaker give out with this thought: 'A man can accept the First Step, believe the Second

Step and acknowledge the Third, and build a pretty good foundation for sobriety. But without the Fourth Step his success on the Program is doubtful. He can't lie to himself about this one. That kind of made me think, and after two years I took time out to line up a list of my character defects. And brother, I still got a hell of a lot left."

"That's a swell start, Johnny," said the Chairman, "But the fact that it's taken you two years to get around to facing yourself, honestly might account for some of the dry drunks you've had to suffer." Very few AAs are ready to surrender all of their character defects. But this method of taking the inventory results in only partial rehabilitation. The Step as explained in the Big

Book suggests a *complete inventory*, honest, sincere and thorough. Let's start around the room and check into a few of the most common inventory items."

"Speaking of the Big Book," said Charlie, "it says that *resentment* is the number one offender. More alcoholics are affected by this defect, than any other, I believe. When we first set our resentments down on paper, we believed that in the majority of cases we had suffered loss of jobs, self-respect, family and other relationships, through no fault of ours! That of course, is alcoholic thinking, and can lead only to unhappiness. For my money, resentment is a luxury alcoholics can not afford to indulge in. It's dynamite."

"Thanks, Johnny, Some night we'll expand on this major inventory item... Ruth, have you got an item for our inventory list?"

"Yes; I feel that many persons who do not recover through the help offered by the AA Program have not been absolutely honest with themselves. *Dishonesty* has no place on our Program, because being honest with your God, yourself and your fellow man is the main link between alcoholism and happy sobriety. The AA Program to me, would be a very boring affair if I permitted dishonesty to become one of my character defects again."

"OK, Ruth. Joe, what you got on your mind?"

"Fear! Mister Chairman, knocked

me for a loop when I was drinking. And when I took the First Step — with reservations, I admit, it was fear of living without a drink that made me take it that way. After I learned that the AA Program was not founded on fear, but rather on a spiritual way of life in which we learned through faith that a Power Greater than Ourselves would help us overcome our fears, then I began thinking positively and my fears disappeared. In other words, I replaced my fears with faith."

"That's a swell thought, Joe, on a vital inventory item. Fear actually has an important part in the lives of human beings. It prompts us to take precautionary measures necessary to every day living. But in the case of us alcoholics, we've always utilized fear as a negative quality, always apprehensive of the worst, and forever fearing tomorrow.

"Tommy, have you a contribution to our inventory list?"

"I think most alcoholics have indulged in *self-pity* as a form of rebellion against circumstances. I can recall that it hit me the hardest when I was in the throes of a hangover. However, I think it is very closely allied to resentment, and until we realize that it's a false attitude toward life, it can hinder our rehabilitation, and stunt our growth in AA. When I feel self-pity sneaking up on me I find that the best remedy, is to look around for someone else to help

whose troubles are greater than mine. Invariably my own difficulties disappear as I gain strength in helping the other guy solve his problem."

"Patsie, I don't imagine a mild mannered gal like you had too much trouble with the inventory... or did you?"

"Haven't you ever heard me tell how I nearly killed my husband by bashing him on the head with an electric toaster?... Well, my contribution to your list is *Anger*. And I experienced the entire gamut from indignation to blind rage. But the AA philosophy showed me that there is no room for this emotion if I am to make any progress or

growth. I think you will find a line in the Big Book that says "If we were to live we had to be free from anger... its a dubious luxury for normal men, but for alcoholics anger is poison!"

"Wonderful, Patsie. I'd like to continue, but time is short. Many, many more items can be included in our Fourth Step Inventory. You might continue thinking about them, and remember that Step Ten suggests continual taking of our inventory, because a perpetual inventory is daily insurance against the instability of our natures... But please remember - take your own - not the other guy's!"

NO CRUSADE MENTIONED

Step Twelve—Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.

NOTICE it says "to carry this message." It does not say to start on a "crusade." Nor does it infer that we should feel that everyone we know who, in our opinion, "drinks too much" is an alcoholic and that they should therefore do as we have done, namely stop drinking.

Speaking for myself alone, I am of the opinion that many of us in AA jump from the first step to the twelfth, ignoring the 10 vital ones in between these two.

To "carry the message," is to tell or inform someone who does not know what the "message of AA really is." Therefore I confine most of my Twelfth Step work to beginners, — to try to tell those who do not know just how the Program works and how they can be helped if they really *want* help. My experience has been that when someone asks for help, he is in more of a receptive or open state of mind.

It is a regrettable observation that many consistent and may I say

persistent slippees, "know all about AA." What "message" can we carry them, if they "know all about it?" I am again referring to the unfortunate who wants "coddling." There is too much of this wet nursing and holding of hands, cleaning up dirty living quarters and tossing out stacks of "empties" for those who, to me, use a Twelfth Step worker for a "sucker." Again I am speaking of the "consistent."

Personally I would rather devote such work, no matter how hard and disagreeable to a "new baby." We have just so much time, and if it is spread to really carry the message in the fullest sense, new "prospects" offer a more fertile field. This does not mean that we refuse to help a *sincere* old member if he is in trouble.

Another observation is that

Twelfth Step calls should be made by at least two members. I have heard and seen too much of claims made by drunks that the lone caller did this or did that, or did not do this or do that, hence a witnessoft times stops erroneous statements of blame sometimes attached to good AAs.

The real caution should be; study the exact words and meaning of just what is meant by, Step Twelve. Check yourself carefully. Have you had a "spiritual awakening," or have you "just stopped drinking" suddenly. Are you just too enthusiastic over having come into AA and, being sober for the first time in many years, are you going out to do some reforming? Careful now — "Easy does it."

—Henry, San Francisco

October 1950

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

We continually hear the phrase, "A New Philosophy of Life," but we doubt if many of us have given much sincere thought to the profound depth and real need of this philosophy as a part of our lives in our search for "satisfied sobriety." We believe that sobriety alone is not enough to offer the alcoholic. He much be given something solid, something inspiration-

al, something which can keep him mentally and spiritually alert until he dies.

It is our belief that the general summary of this philosophy is contained in the Twelve Steps and the AA Prayer. We also believe that each individual should search out his own interpretation of these and adopt a philosophy applicable to his own emotions and personality. We think it rather futile to blindly try to accept any dogmatic interpretation or arbitrary philosophy.

We believe that there is dignity in honestly facing the truth; that there is grace in being humble; that there is achievement in being tolerant; that there is courage and honor in determination. --*L.M.*

CARLSBAD, CALIFORNIA

Since I have been restored to a normal, happy life, it has been my privilege to do some 12th Step work. I find that the average alcoholic has strayed so far from the "spiritual angle" that he is gunshy of the word *God*. So I have taken to skipping Steps Two and Three and stressing the importance of Step Four.

If we cull out our defects of character, live those Steps to the best of our ability, see only the good in our fellow-man, forget his faults and try to lend a helping hand whenever possible, that will develop a spirit of love. To my discredit, I am not a student of the *Bible* but I have heard it said that "God is Love and God is Good," so we, by that practice automatically acquire the spiritual end of the Program and we learn that "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" --*Junior*

December 1950



FALSE SECURITY

FALSE security is a sneaky thing, like a snake slipping in under the blankets of a desert sleeper. It slides, undetected, under the outer skin of the alcoholic, sudden to sting his inner moral fibre.

"Mary has a part-time job at least. The kids'll eat - and, good old Mary - she'll be there-.

Or, "Bob makes good money. Oh, he'll worry if I should - -.

And so you, or I, whether man or woman, use false security as our excuse to get drunk. Remember, we're only talking about the compulsive drinker now, the alco-

folks like you and me. And some day we'll find this kind of security really is false. That is, if we keep it up. Someday Mary and Bob *won't* keep the home fires burning for us. They simply won't be there.

No, we never mean to shift the responsibility to them. Basically we're not that kind of people ourselves. But our alcohol-fogged brains don't allow us to think like the kind of people we basically are.

The solution? Learn to stand on our own two feet. Just AA, that's all - but *all* of AA - Steps One through 12, inclusive!

—H.B., *Del Paso Heights, Calif.*

February 1951

ALIBI ALBUM NO. 2



I'M TOO BUSY FOR 12TH STEP WORK



Twelfth Step ... with stripes ...

the AA helping hand reaches through iron bars in ...

NEW YORK CITY PRISON PROGRAM

THE Assistant to the Commissioner of Correction of the City of New York felt that he had been very fair to the visitor, the man who called himself "an AA volunteer." Even the Assistant's Assistant sensed that the crux of this meeting was at hand.

And then the Commissioner him-

self pushed the typed reports aside and spoke directly to the visitor: "Well, Mr. AA, suppose we did let you talk to say 1500 of our inmates within a year. How many of 1500 would your AA business save?"

The volunteer pondered. Percentages and statistics, that's what officialdom understands, and the

wheels seemed to be whirring out some neat number.

"If we can explain AA to 1500 men in one year, sir..."

"Yes," the Commissioner waited. "One man, sir."

The Assistant jumped when the chief's voice boomed out: "Sold! You make sense, Mr. AA. Your program gets its trial!"

In four and one-half years that pre-date and post-date that interview in Manhattan's Tombs Prison office, twice 1500 men behind bars have heard the AA message from many volunteer AA visitors. And 400 times the one promised man has found sobriety and a new way of life on arriving "outside."

The AA activities within the city's houses of detention, jails, workhouses and penitentiaries are no longer on trial. As recently as New Year's week, 1951, a four-page mimeographed outline of AA procedures for prisons and institutions has been distributed via official department channels to 50 City Magistrates, 20 Probation Officers, and other guardians of the law. By direction of, and with the blessings of Commissioner Albert Williams who has been a friendly tower of strength to the new AA Centre Street Committee.

Page one of the historic charter states "Type of Work," and lists these five approved activities:

1. Conduct AA meetings at City institutions.
2. Visit inmates when requests

for such visits are received from the authorities or when the need for such special visits are indicated.

3. Interview and introduce AA to people who are interested in AA and who come from such institutions and departments.
4. Write to interested inmates of all city institutions.
5. Offer general co-operation to the Courts and Departments in rehabilitation work with alcoholics.

Legal sanction for the New York Program came after one more "disorganized AA organization" proved that the Twelve Steps can work inside stone walls as well as outside them. It was one more milestone for one more facet of AA that, like Topsy, just plain grew.

Back in 1945, one more unfortunate, weary of breath, slipped after a brief AA endeavor. The slip led to trouble and a term in Manhattan City Prison. A letter from the cell-bound slippee reached his sponsor... a busy salesman who knew nothing of jails, prison regulations or institutional red tape. Perseverance by the sponsor finally resulted in visits to the rashly importunate member in temporarily bad standing. The renewed AA contact acted as a quick tonic, and at exercise time the prisoner talked his revived AA to a cellmate who blamed alcohol for his new residence. On his release, the returned brother joined his spon-

sor in getting the AA word into other prisoners. Soon a dozen, some ex-cons themselves were wangling visiting permissions to carry the word inside the grim, gray walls.

In April of 1949, the faithful handful of volunteers made an appeal through the New York Inter-group Bulletin for more helpers. An even 100 responded.

Keepers of the faith are now 150 members pledged and banded together in Centre Street Committee. A recognized AA group, it holds one closed meeting a month to program the field work. Although 95% of the work is with men inmates, women have been added to the group. They will not only carry out the visiting service in the Women's House of Detention (ladies' jail in the heart of Greenwich Village) but will also visit families of male inmates, to secure co-operation in the family unit for the released or paroled man of the house. A special sub-committee, the Welfare unit, is headed by a long-dry Sing Sing graduate and will try out a job-finding service for released men who have shown a sincere desire to become good AA's.

Special meetings are held for prisoners out on probation until they gravitate to neighborhood groups. Most of them have had many meetings "in stir" as their training period. Attendance at Riker's Island (main city prison) is limited only by meeting room size, 270 often squeezing into a space comfortable for only 250.

Old timers of the volunteer AA prison workers hail the newly sanctioned set-up, but can tell off-the-record stories of "unofficial" sanctions through the early years from friendly court employees, some say even sympathetic judges, and from AA cops whom they refer to as "the finest of the famous finest."

And old timers say solemnly that the new program of carrying hope and help through barred windows comes from an old AA recipe for successful accomplishment — man hours of persistence. And they say that each meeting with our incarcerated fellow men reminds them of an old familiar motto.

You must have seen it in some meeting room. It reads....

"But for the Grace of God!...

"ROUND THE TOWN" *Broadway and 76th Street*



PASS IT ALONG

HAVE you ever told a story to someone and then, after passing through several mouths, have it return to you almost unrecognizable? I have, and it started me thinking.

It's human nature to either consciously or unconsciously edit what we are told or what we read so that it conforms with our opinions. Too many times we do this without giving the matter adequate, unbiased thought, and thus begins the distortion. There's nothing wrong with our weighing the sub-

stance and deciding whether or not it applies to or affects us, either favorably or adversely — that's a healthy sign that we're doing our own thinking. But in every case, in my opinion, there lies a firm foundation of facts and truths upon which the matter, whatever it may be, relies for stability. The smaller tangents which branch out from these are the factors which we can alter to fit our individual thinking but the meat, the core, should remain constant.

We know in Alcoholics Anony-

mous that no two of us are alike, no two of us take and apply the many facets of the Program exactly the same. It's one of the most attractive factors to the newcomer, it appears, because most of us have had a long history of deciding for ourselves and of resentment born of being told what is or is not good for us. Therefore, our founders were guided along the path of freedom of application, encouraging the newcomer to decide for himself whether or not the shoe fits.

So, in our Twelfth Step work it's almost a certainty that we're going to approach our first patient a bit differently from the way, in thought and procedure, in which our sponsors presented AA to us. The thoughts which were injected by the sponsors and those prompted by meetings shape for us the way of life by which we are going to survive and, if we are fortunate, help others to survive. These thoughts should be carefully considered before we give them away. Have we merely changed the facets of AA to conform to our case or have we, unknowingly, gone deeper and altered the foundation of this glorious way of life, the Traditions and Steps to recovery.

In my opinion, the way to insure immortality for Alcoholics Anonymous is to ask ourselves, daily if necessary, whether or not we are guiding our everyday life according to the Traditions and Steps, the in-

spirations of the program which Bill W., Doctor Bob, and others were granted when they first appealed to a Power greater than themselves for salvation. We all feel, I'm sure, that God was present when AA was born.

If we *live* each day according to the Twelve Steps we cannot help but pass this way of life to someone else as he is meant to see it. By our example we are insuring AA. And by being ever mindful of the Twelve Traditions, just as important to the survival of Alcoholics Anonymous as are the Twelve Steps to ours, but too often neglected, we are stabilizing the very foundation of AA. Without it we're lost because it worked when nothing else did. Therefore, it would appear that it is our last chance, our last hope for a decent life. Shouldn't we, then, guard it with every ounce of thought and effort that our sobriety requires?

If we feel this way about it, and I do, let's be certain that, in giving it away, we do so as it came into the world — the Traditions to insure Alcoholics Anonymous and the Steps to insure our sobriety so that we will be ready and able always to help another.

Keeping these things in mind will eliminate any possibility of our unconsciously thinking and living at odds with AA and we will then, when we are called, pass this along without distortion.

— M. E. M., Ridgewood, New Jersey

Low Bottom or High Bottom . . .

TWELFTH STEP WORKSHOPS

Two experiments that do raise bottoms up!



AN act of Providence *plus* an act of improvisation equals a beginning on the Twelve Steps *plus* a pair of shoes to take steps in. In such an equation of alcoholic mathematics perhaps 4,000 New Yorkers have found the beginning of The Road Back through two unique recovery "clinics."

Alanon House and Twelfth Step House are both co-operative ventures of AA individuals from metropolitan groups; as different from one another as everything in AA is different, and yet akin to one another in their assembly line techniques of providing outer props of food, clothing and shelter along with inner props of hope and spiritual help. Geographically, both houses are in Manhattan, and both lie just this side of Paradox as "official" AA reckoning goes. Neither is a Group nor a Club; neither is inside the AA structure, but both have been constructed by AA's.

A postcard from Korea with the simple address "Alanon House, New York" got prompt delivery to the old brownstone front on 46th Street. The house (only the basement and first floor are Alanon space) stands equidistant from Tenth Avenue's Hell's Kitchen and Broadway's Great White Way. And inside from twelve noon to twelve midnight there's a mingling of folks from all the vastness of New York's byways. Alanon is an outgrowth of the first New York AA Clubhouse, and in its present form

dates from late in the year of 1948.

Since then 5,000 12th Step calls a year have gone out from here, by visiting "flying squadrons." Maintained by voluntary sponsors, Alanon dedicates itself "to serve all Groups in the Greater New York area as a central facility for individual 12th Step work by their members . . . it is an informal meeting-place for active AA's who believe in the necessity of an AA Open House." Voluntary sponsors man the desk and perform myriad duties.

Any AA can find sober company here, and out-of-towners are invited to use lounge, writing room, the little rooms marked "Adam" and "Eve," arrange with the Desk Custodian for mailing privileges, the acceptance of phone calls and telegrams, and the recording of messages. A restaurant provides soft lights for a coke, a meal, or a place to bring a date. A bulletin board announces two open meetings a week conducted by metropolitan groups, and a variety of personal notices ranging from "Gladys: I have your gray gloves" to "Joe D. called and has a job for Harold B."

But the Alanon accent is really on the Newcomer, and come they do. For the referral or the happenstance wanderer, there is sympathetic listening from Voluntary Sponsors. For the sincere, there is more than refuge; there is often dramatic action. Shoes, arrangements for nearby lodgings, small loans, an overcoat, or a pencilled



*The first step toward the
First Step -- a shave -- a
suit of hand-me-downs...
Clothes may not make
the man, but.....*

note to a neighborhood doctor. Charity?...no, it is more "I am my brother's lender" than "keeper." Monthly, an average of 150 money pledges are gratefully sent back to the brownstone house that was a haven from the brimstone for guys and gals who had walked their next to the last mile when they found Alanon.

Far downtown and the width of Manhattan Island away is another house of refuge...Twelfth Step House, barely a block from the border of the Bowery. "That?", and the cop on the corner will point, "That's 61 Fourth Avenue, and four flights up if you can make it."

A "prep school" for AA, some of the individual sponsors call it, and point out that nearly every entering "student" has the degree of L.L.B. -- Lowest Low Bottom. For this is the edge of Limbo where names and years and the very purpose of living disappear in dim doorways amid timeless cauldrons of Sneaky Pete and Smoke and other panhandled ambrosias. Across the street from 61 Fourth stands John Wanamaker's store, but around the corner is the long Street of Nobodies. Across the square from 61 is Cooper Union, where Abraham Lincoln talked of slaves. Ninety years before the slaves of the dark





given each new applicant, "a place where...prospects can be given the working tools of AA indoctrination..." and then channeled to the AA Group most convenient for them."

A "happy" case history would run something like this on the Twelfth Step House record cards:

Monday -- "Joe D. Age about 38. Does not know family's address. Last worked as a porter about five years ago. Had his last drink yesterday afternoon. Has mild shakes, but wants to 'get squared off' like Bill H. who came here last November. Needs flop tonight."

Tuesday -- "Helped clean prem-

ises. Was here from opening at noon until after tonight's meeting. Shaved self. Has week's ticket for Municipal Lodging House."

Wednesday -- "Here twelve hours today. Talked with new men this afternoon and joined in question period at meeting. Remembers address of married sister. Contact will be made with her."

Thursday -- "Joe says feeling great now. Brought in 60¢ earned at odd jobs in neighborhood and asked if he could repay cost of first night's flophouse charge."

Friday -- "Have job for Joe starting tomorrow at X-hospital as live-in porter. Outfitted him with

Uptown at Alanon... coffee haven in the Roaring Forties...

January 1... turkey... leftover from AA New Years Eve parties

Bowery found the half-hidden door that leads to Twelfth Step House.

It isn't a house. The street hallway leads to steep, long stairs... four tortuous flights to a great bare room. And at 12 noon, 40 figures in rags and cast-offs wait for the plain door to open. Inside there are chairs, and there is warmth, and a bare desk. And someone to talk to... someone sober to talk to.

The interviews are simple and to the point. Do you want to stop drinking? If you do, what's your name...or, sometimes, what do you use for a name now? When did you have your last drink? Where are you going to sleep tonight?

And one more question...if you stay sober five days what kind of job could you work at?

For the emphasis at Twelfth Step House is on work, say the AA individuals who have spent two years developing this therapy plan. The newly arrived may find himself assigned to floor sweeping or some light chore within his first hour. There is neither time nor space here for the man who will not, within his physical capabilities of the moment, make an honest attempt at work even if it is only the labor of his will to avoid that first drink. "A Twelfth Step Work Shop," says the typed slip



suit, shirt, tie and shoes. Loaned \$3 carfare to get him to new job."

Joe's story could happen to almost any of the day's crop. The recuperative power of the Bowery boys is often phenomenal.

Any alcoholic is welcomed at Twelfth Step House so long as his behavior does not interfere with the welfare and progress of his fellow victims. Trouble makers, "goof ball" addicts and some special "problem fellows" may be sent away on "suspensions" up to 30 days, say the by-laws, but no alcoholic who really wants to attain sobriety can ever be permanently barred.

Statistics are roughly arrived at, but about 2,000 persons had at least one or more days of sobriety through "the course" in 1950. One-thousand were given clothes in the same 12 months. Twenty-eight flophouse accommodations for one night is the standing record. About 780 were placed in jobs. Of these probably 400 will make full recoveries.

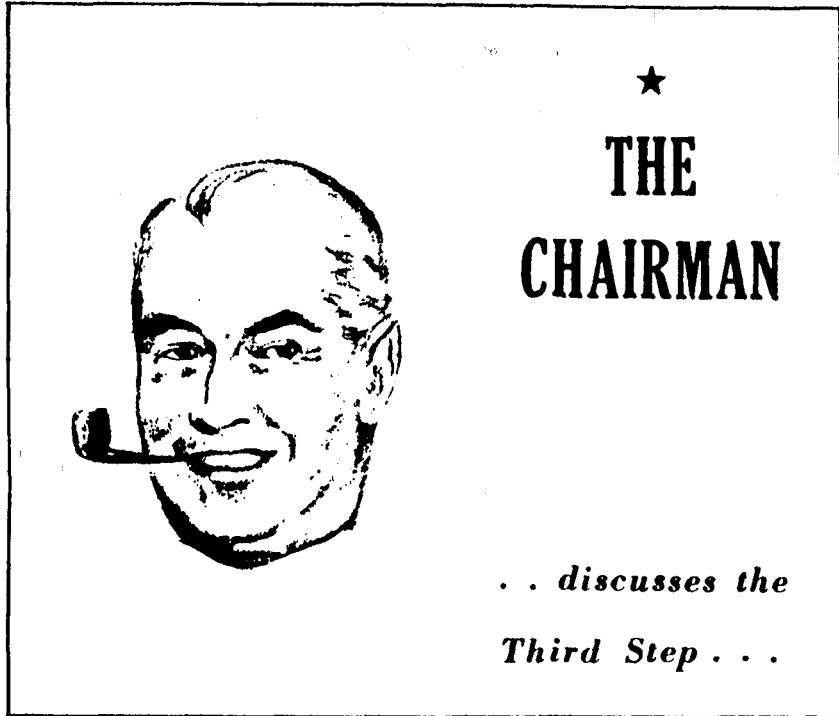
Like Alanon House, Twelfth Step House not only accepts contributions of services, cash, clothes and food but must sometimes actively "hustle" for the maintenance of its brood of unwashed 'untouchables.' Mention of Twelfth Step House in a national magazine article on Skid Rows brought manna from strange places. An anonymous Texas contributor has sent \$10

every month since he read of the work at 61 Fourth Avenue. Collection baskets at the four meetings a week often contain folding money from visiting "high bottom" AA's as well as beer caps palmed-in by shaking "first day" hands. Christmas Day, 1950, the log book tersely says: "Attendance 75. Collection \$1.62."

On the bulletin board is a large chart headed "Information that may be of help in making a new start." Three types of information are listed... "Lodging houses, rooms, flops"... "Places to get jobs"... "Where to get deloused."

Volunteer workers state the case of Twelfth Step House something like this: There has to be a bottom rung someplace; this is it. This isn't "grass roots"... it's mostly dirt roots, but they too can grow. Maybe it operates outside the AA structure, but it does get AA *inside* these guys. If it has open hands for outside financial support, it also passes help on with open arms. And the workers add: "Excuse us from not having more time to tell you about our workshop, but there are more feet coming up those stairs. Hear them?"

Yes, there *are* new feet shambling up those long and hard four flights of stairs. Feet in rags, and feet that pause long to rest. But their shuffling draws nearer... they are feet that want to CLIMB....



MADE a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood him.

The Chairman of the Mid-Week closed Group laid his pipe down and continued: "This Third Step is one of the basic Steps of the whole AA Program. Yet many, many newcomers — and Old-Timers, too, have trouble with it. I've known men to give up the Program in de-

spair because they couldn't get it. And I've seen others who had no end of trouble because they tried to ignore it... Pete, as an ex-agnostic, how did you get around this phase of the AA Program?"

Pete stretched his six feet three inches from a lounging position to a sitting posture: "I'll tell you, Doc, what got me was that phrase, 'God as we understood him.' For

my book that leaves the thing wide open, providing that the newcomer keeps an open mind. You know I had to make a hell of a spiritual adjustment when I came into AA, but from my observations I'd suggest keeping an open mind on the Third Step, while we work our way through the rest of the Steps. In fact, many of our personality faults will come to light if we honestly practice the rest of the Program. In getting over these hurdles we will soon discover that we are now ready to accept Step Three. And as I said, the phrase — 'God as we understood him' was the thought that made it possible for me to latch onto the spiritual phase of the Program."

"Well, Pete, at least you eventually became willing to admit that there *was* a Power greater than yourself that helped keep you sober," added the Chairman. "You see the first three steps in our Program actually point up the three-

fold disease known as alcoholism. The First Step points out the ravages of liquor upon our physical being, the Second Step what occurred to our mental capacities and the Third Step shows how our spiritual happiness had been affected. Our recovery is dependent upon realizing the extent of the injury we have suffered because of our compulsion for alcohol. It is important that we understand the treatment of our physical and mental illness, but in my opinion com-

plete and happy recovery is never attained until our spiritual sickness is cleared up... Yes, Mary, what's on your mind?"

"My experience with the Spiritual side of the Program proved to be one in which I developed slowly, over a long period of time. In fact many of my friends noticed a change in me long before I was aware that I had ever had a spiritual awakening. But when I realized the change, I knew that I could never, never have done it alone. Then I realized that I had tapped some other source, which I now identify as my Power greater than myself. Had I not been able to keep an open mind, as Pete suggested, I am certain that I would still be struggling futilely with my own stubborn will."

"I remember your approach to the Third Step, Mary. You really practiced 'Easy does it.'... on the other hand Snuffy over there," said the Chairman pointing to a bright-eyed little chap, "became hooked up almost immediately. How do you account for that, Snuffy?"

"I guess I'm what you guys call a miracle. An' I guess I really had a spiritual awakening that punched it right home to me. It was this way, if you don't mind my telling it again" — the little fellow paused.

"Go right ahead, Snuffy. Some of us haven't heard it, and it won't hurt those of us who have to hear it again." said the Chairman.

"For over three years I'd been

on the Bowery. On one of my many trips to Bellevue hospital, the Docs discovered that one half of my brain had been paralyzed from a fall I got when I was a youngster. The other half of my brain was affected by alcohol.

"I'd never learned to read or write. Had been an elevator operator most of my life. One night I even bummed a cop for four bits — some of 'em are pretty good that way — an' after I'd spent it for some kind of booze, something told me to go to Twelfth Step House an' get a flop. I'd heard about AA an' that the guys over there would help a guy who really wanted to quit drinkin'.

"Well, to make my story short, I stopped drinkin' that night. I worked around Twelfth Step House, doin' odd jobs. Then one night a couple of nicely dressed guys picked me up an' said we was goin' to Staten Island to talk to a group. I was scared stiff. Me talk? 'Bout what? I hadn't done anything for no one. But on the way over on the Staten Island Ferry we talked about things. Kind of exchanged experiences. They'd had some pretty tough times too. It was cloudy and dark goin' over, but when we came back the moon was out and I never seen so many stars in the sky. As we passed the Statue of Liberty, I shouted — 'Lookit! Ain't that beautiful?' The two gents laughed. 'Haven't you ever seen Her before?'

"I shook my head. Nope. Lived here most of my life — anyway I never thought She was so beautiful. Looks like I imagined an angel might look.' Then do you know what one of my friends said?

" 'Snuffy, you gave your first AA talk tonight. It lasted about two and a half minutes. But you said a mouthful. Especially when you wound up saying, 'If I can do it, you can... When you sat down you were a different man from the scared little guy who stood up to talk. I don't know if you ever pray, but out there in the harbor, shining for all She's worth, is a symbol of your Greater Power. Think of Her, pray to Her. Believe that she can help you stay sober. It's your one chance for happiness.'"

"When he finished I wiped my eyes an' told them how much they had helped me. An' I said I sure wish I could help them some day.. You know what they said? They both patted me on the back and said, 'Snuffy, you'll never know what you've given us tonight'... It took me some time to figure that out. But now, I guess I know. Anyway, folks my Greater Power is out in the middle of the New York harbor. And She shines every night for ole Snuffy, an' his sobriety."

The Chairman put his pipe on the table. "See what we mean by 'God as *we* understand him' and how it simplifies our acceptance of the all-important Third Step?

LONELINESS

AA HAS THE ANSWER

ONE of the great problems of the alcoholic is loneliness. Alcoholics Anonymous has an answer to this basic problem for each and every alcoholic.

As a new man in AA I was desperately lonely. I had loneliness of that heart-achy type that wears a man down and down. Loneliness and friendlessness go hand in hand with chronic alcoholism. The friendliness of an AA meeting constitutes the first break in this horrible condition. For once the alcoholic meets people on a common ground, the ground of people like himself, afflicted with the same set of troubles, almost note by note.

At first I looked forward in desperation to the "next meeting." I was unable to see that I now had the means of carrying the meeting right with me into the work a day world. But that is what successful

members all accomplish. It is like this, the meeting is over but the facts of life go on. The truths of the AA Program go on. The parts of this Program that adhere to us, miraculously keep us sober from day to day. At each meeting something new is added; it cannot be seen, counted, weighed or assessed. These particles seek each other out, join with other particles and the sobriety again miraculously continues.

There comes a day when these particles have joined to form a pattern in our make-up. Something is now in us and of us that did not exist before. We begin to see beauty in surprising things... it can be a cloud, a flower, a child, a building, a sunset. A myriad of things change their relationship to us and us to them. We are in the company of all these new found

things for the first time. None of these things can coexist with fear, so fear diminishes and finally leaves for parts unknown..

A man cannot read and re-read the Second Step without soon feeling its stabilizing effect. A man can't "turn his life and will over to the care of God as he understands him" time on end without feeling a sense of close companionship. At first it gives a feeling of distinct relief to turn his life and will over to some power that is so much better qualified to carry the load. The feeling of companionship in *all things* grows. It never diminishes once it starts. The alcoholic begins to live with himself, not just hate himself. Automatically he begins to live with other people.

How can loneliness endure in the presence of the 11th Step? This is where we tune in on the universe. This is where we start to roll with it. Here we join forces with unseen power operating over us, around us, through us, and under us. How can loneliness remain when we begin to know that we are an important part of the scheme of things with a job to do. What job?

"Having had a spiritual experience, as a *result* of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics"—and this is the grand *pay off* in all AA. I never knew an AA who had time to be lonely, once he turned his mind and heart to some form of 12th Step

work. And praise be, it can consist of so many things. Twelfth Step work has no boundaries, from simply making coffee clear down to sitting on the chest of a DT patient while the straps are being applied.

To you in AA who have a problem of loneliness and the number is large, for we all have it in one form or another — may I tell you of one of the most thorough remedies that ever came my way. It was from a man in AA, comparatively new to the Program. He said that he used his watch to help him operate the 24 Hour Program. If it was two o'clock when he looked at his watch he said to himself, "*Came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity.*" Whatever tendency to be "screwy" at the moment leveled off. It it was ten o'clock, he "continued to take inventory" for an instant, and this served as a check point for whatever activity he was engaged in. Should the hour hand point near "Eleven," what better time could there be to tune in with the power who made him in the first place. Particularly so if the time was evening.

Practice Step Eleven at bed time boys and soon you will know again what they mean when they say "slept like a baby." In my case it turned out to be for the first time in over 30 years.

— Anonymous, Muskegon, Michigan

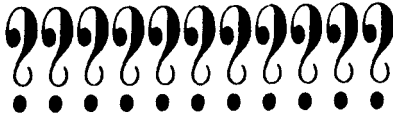
August 1951

Sanctuary of the Twelve Steps

IN ALMOST three years continuous sobriety, thanks to AA, I have listened to many talks in the intimacy of closed meetings. I try to weigh them with sympathetic understanding. Some do not accept even Tradition Three; some seem to rest on Tradition Three alone; and those who accept Tradition Two and Three appear to believe, as I do, in the entire AA

Program. On that delicate subject of belief, I find the "12 Steps" to be all-inclusive, and I never fail to pay a silent salute to its authors. The area within the periphery of that all-inclusiveness is a sanctuary for all manner of beliefs, where harmony will be found, provided disparagement of any particular belief be prayerfully avoided.

— T.P., Tulsa, Oklahoma



What Price Slips



TOO many slips and poor group loyalty as well as dilatory attendance at meetings must have reasons. Could the following be the explanation?

What has happened to the old fashioned discussion groups circa 1946? The lack of them is getting more evident as is indicated by the appalling amount of slippers and the failure of the various groups to hold people after they have come on the Program.

Group after group is following the easy indifferent way, i.e. getting speaker after speaker to entertain with a recital of their sordid drunken past, rather than to educate with open and free discussion of the 12 Steps, problems, character defects and habits which are peculiar to alcoholics.

Individual sponsors do no better, they make a 12th Step call, tell the subject to come to a meet-

ing at a certain time and place and let it go at that. The poor bewildered drunk is on his own from then on in. God help him, no one else will. If he makes it the sponsor takes all the credit, if he does not make it then the hell with him. The old saws then come to light. Such as "he isn't ready" and "I can't work it for him" and the rest of the chesnuts.

You can't long expect anyone to have and keep an interest in something he or she knows nothing about. We must be able to give them enough food for thought at each meeting to make them want to come back for more.

Of such stuff is sobriety made, common interest in a common problem the right and privilege of free discussion and expression. The right to accept what we hear and learn and apply it only as it affects our particular needs.

Any recital of our past is only a repetition of the other fellows case history, so what worthwhile purpose does it serve for us to make comparisons? We both got drunk.

Please let's again talk and think about our 12 Steps of recovery and tradition and put AA back upon a real solid foundation, we owe this not so much to ourselves as to those who are yet to come in and partake of this glorious new way of life.

Let's give it a try, shall we?
— E.L., Chicago, Illinois

12 STEPS CAFETERIA STYLE

THE two words "these principles" did not make much of an impression on me in my early days in AA. In fact, I was often told that the Twelve Steps were merely suggestions — that I was to take them "cafeteria style" — take what I wanted and disregard the rest.

I followed the course taken by many who start with reservations about the First Step; yet trying to "carry this message to alcoholics" even without "having had" any sort of chance of spirit or "spiritual awakening *as the result of these steps.*"

Recently I have heard a number of so called old timers who seem proud to proclaim "I don't know the Twelve Steps — oh sure, I have read them — but I don't know one from the other."

It was not until nearly six years after my entry that I realized that such a statement is a hollow boast. And, as one who had to learn the hard way, I would like to suggest that (if there are any others who are as I found myself to be) maybe a repeated inventory of "these principles" might be in order.

Am I, of myself alone, powerless over alcohol? If so, would it not

be wise for me to remember the need for continued help from a power other than my own ego? — and keep to my decision to turn my way over to that something beyond my own ego? And hadn't I better continue to do some honest work on uncovering my own character defects — admit them — become willing to have them removed — and humbly ask? And, as a result of these Steps, won't I be able to do a more sincere job of making amends to all who should be in an honest list of those I harmed? And won't I be in a more sound position to continue a daily inventory? And won't I have a real basis for meditation and prayer to open the door for a conscious contact with God, a knowledge of his will for me, and the power to carry that out?

I feel that as I *try* to improve my understanding of the Twelve Steps (and to me, they are in logical sequence) I will find that I am enjoying a spiritual awakening as the result of *these* steps, and feel better able to carry *this* message to alcoholics and practice *these principles* in all my affairs.

— F.O., Vermont

Twelfth Step

by Rabbi Herbert I. Bloom Ph.D.

Kingston, N.Y.

I should turn over my life to God, and teach others the way;
Yet I must do it alone, and I cannot.
I have no Aaron's rod which will bud at my saying;
I cannot command God nor even entreat Him
That He may help my fellow-sufferers in the way.
I hear the whir of a motor and the cheery goodnight,
And the voice of one of the group;
You will go 'way across the fields and valleys
And past the lighted windows where there is happiness and sorrow,
And you will stop,
And there upon a bed, perhaps, there will be one in trouble,
Whose wife or whose brother's anxious face
Tells you a tale of pain, bewilderment and desperation.



You will speak comforting words,
And say a prayer of wisdom and strength and serenity;
And out of the aching, retching, black and purple depths,
Will come an echo of response and some coherence
In the hunger to be helped.
You will bring tidiness of dress and spirit to his will,
Or perhaps take him, at his brother's urging
And your friend's of the fraternity,
To some informal conclave that I know so well;
And half aware, he'll hear of the power of men,
Through God, to help their fellows.
He will come home, much talked to and much comforted
Somewhat confused, but still much comforted
Clutching a bar of hope;
Though insubstantial, hope withal.
You will return elated,
Matching your prayerful wish to someone else's prayerful wish;
As you whirl through the night,
The sound of rubber of the asphalt grinds out fulfillment,
The lights are less, the stars impersonal
Indifferent, it seems, to that bright caravan
Whose luminous eyes pierce the dark curtain of the lowering night.
Within are hope and rapture and quiet confidence,
And mutual congratulations for your work, and you to them
For having let you serve the Lord and His unhappy child.
Those men of mystery know of magnanimity,
Are still of flesh and blood.

"WE GET STRENGTH FROM THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS"

IN GROWTH

AS we grow in AA, the need for carrying the message to suffering alcoholics burns in our hearts as we scan the horizon of the misery we know so well. Ours being a loosely knit organization quite naturally calls upon some members more than others to the huge task, with the help of a Power Greater than ourselves, to minister these human needs. It cannot be met with dollars or anything that dollars alone can buy.

It seems and rightly should be

important that those who feel the call to do 12th Step Work should make some preparation for success along that line and for those who are not aware of the fact, our Public Libraries have literature on how to help people which personally the writer has found to be extremely valuable. The lessons there found, guide us in our personal preparation for consideration of other human problems as well as those of the alcoholic methods of talking to troubled individuals, making adjustments for a new way

of life and in general the art of human relationship.

The Great Healer of all time was our greatest individual 12th Step worker and we know of His measure of success which we can only hope to emulate in a small way.

The needs of an alcoholic which we know so much about from our personal experience can only be met by an individual who has the love of understanding and he should pass along the feeling that somebody knows, somebody understands and somebody cares. Our experience has been that such a revelation can be the beacon to help a sick alcoholic out of his or her despair and life of self shame and frustration.

Experience many times has taught 12th Step workers to be able to psychologically make a fair guess as to where to direct the spare time which they sometimes can ill afford to waste.

Many times we realize that an over-sentimental or over-sympathetic attitude not tempered with too much common sense has resulted in failure. Sometimes advice has been given when we have not taken the time to learn enough about the facts of a given situation. On the other hand, caution should be taken that consideration should be given to any individual lest we deny our knowledge to one who is ready if given a fair start.

Our experience in our new way of life, our knowledge and experi-

ence of what a power greater than ourselves can do to restore us to sanity and entune our lives in harmony with our environment and in giving us a life of happiness and contentment makes us all feel that the bounty of good living is too precious to keep to ourselves. The loneliness, sorrow and suffering of the old life and the enlightenment following makes it difficult for many of us to deny postponement or neglect a call for service.

At one time as I started out to make one of my first calls, I asked another AA to correct me if I did anything or said anything wrong and if there was anything in particular that I should or should not say and I was told to speak to a confused alcoholic exactly the way I felt . . . in complete honesty and from the bottom of my heart. By so doing I would make no mistake. This seems advice well worth giving. Sympathy and understanding, frank in quality, given in all humility and honesty should lessen unfortunate experiences and make the desired impression in this type of work. There is no blanket procedure for 12th Step workers. We believe there is general acceptance of the fact that we need not soft-pedal the spiritual angle of the Program. Circumstances are such at times that I do temper my remarks because an alcoholic is extremely cynical about religion and things spiritual.

Many of our cases, of course, are

such as need advice concerning medical or hospital care which takes precedent over the details of our Program. Your attention to a prospect while in a hospital, or to say the least *immediately* following release, is very important.

For a person who has apparently recovered from the acute illness following a "binge", presenting the Program, as we understand it, before him in a "take it or leave it" attitude sometimes is effective but in other cases more than one call may be necessary to reshape the warped thinking or alcoholic thinking as you will, into a frame of mind entirely receptive to the 12 steps of AA.

To the skeptic, a break with the past and promise of a new way of life can and sometimes does cause some serious doubt. We need to fortify ourselves with the thought that God has asked us to make this call and that we are giving away to others what God has given to us. Decisions concerning this work can and have been made on bended knees. We handed our lives over to God for him to do as he would and having heard God's call we must do this job as he would have us do without shirking and without compromise.

We are dealing with resentful and dishonest individuals who probably have never experienced anything resembling the happiness which we have found in AA — a person far away from any spiritual

reality, entirely unprepared for a promise of happiness for himself, his family and his friends. Actually as we know, he is freeing himself from slavery. Our assurance to him or her of our great experience and promise can be imprinted more indelibly with our soft-voiced sincerity and the usual glowing warmth of friendship.

Making friends with a view to helping an individual necessitates that we become good listeners. Too much enthusiasm tends to influence us to over talk — this should be guarded against. We have a condition where our prospect may think we really do not understand him. Emphasis on poise and humbleness can be as convincing to a frustrated personality as eloquence in language. It might be considered that first capturing a person's imagination could be more important than winning over their minds. One can readily understand that to completely captivate one's mind might set up a condition where the prospect might be in the mood to create an argument. Or in other words, we must let them see living evidence of changed personalities by attendance at meetings and thereby create in their imagination a picture of what they themselves might find in the development of this Program for them. This imaginative sequence would probably make them begin to think how wonderful it would be if a spiritual experience were to overtake them.

This would seem to be a soft, effective approach to the need of a spiritual change.

Having experienced something of the spiritual angle of this Program, most of us know that living along with us, honestly and realistically, one would expect to produce results approaching the miraculous. We want them to know and wish them to see in us something far above anything they have ever imagined which will prompt the best in themselves and make the desire more certain that the Program is for them. We must believe and follow the theory that many questions and answers will be necessary to straighten out the confused thinking of an alcoholic but we have conclusive evidence that our AA Book which approaches perfection has all the answers and can be thoroughly relied upon to clear up any of the complexities which tend to confuse our prospect.

It should be stressed more and more that following this road and stopping in the middle defeats any attempt to get the happiness, contentment and serenity which the Program promises. We know too, that 12th Step work followed to a successful conclusion can make friends and much nicer friends than we ever knew in the rat-race of old. Assurances that we can accept and hold confidences should be a must in this kind of work. Likewise in relating experiences before a group or another member

we should not hash details confidentially entrusted to us.

It has been pointed out to me that we do not make friends with people whom we want to help spiritually by pointing out how good we have been but by showing them we are conscious of our own needs — ready to share them and making it clear that nothing they can say to us will amaze us or remove our interest from them. St. Francis de Sales said "*Gentle with some — severe with others — a child with children — a hero with heroes — a weakling with weaklings*" — in short an infinite discretion is required if one is to be fit to meet the needs of all.

Finally, if you have the feeling you have been talking into the wind and possibly losing ground, always consider turning the prospect over to a fellow AA whose different approach may make the impression you started out to make. This cannot mean in any sense that you are a failure in 12th Step work.

One of my friends says, 'We get strength from the suffering of others,' While we dislike to see this suffering it strengthens us in our desire to stay sober.

Please do not stand by and watch the other fellow do all the 12th Step work. He won't complain but he also knows if you are not doing your share and accepting your responsibility.

— C.H.T., West Springfield, Mass.

the secret of SERENITY

IN attending meetings in various groups in our region, I am continually surprised at the number of members who are resentful because they have not acquired "serenity." They can't get peace of mind "no matter how they try."

It is my opinion and it has certainly been my experience that we don't "get" serenity by fighting for it or even by looking for it. In fact, we may even lose it by wanting it!

Why? Again, in my opinion, serenity or peace of mind is not a goal in itself. It is the result of a revolution in our thinking; a revolution, in our case, brought about by our efforts to apply the Twelve Steps of the AA program to our daily life.

I heard a real old timer the other night say that the Twelve Steps are really one step, divided into twelve pieces. Of course the First Step is essential to sobriety and without it the whole program col-

lapses. But the core of the program is the Third Step. And the heart of the difficulty we have in applying it is our increasing desire to run the show in our own way.

We lose our serenity in the hardship and anguish we suffer every day from the burden of our own selfishness and clumsiness and incompetence and pride. Discouraged by our own failures, we are hungry to be led and advised and directed by someone else. Who? The Third Step answers the question. *"Made a decision to turn our lives and will to the care of God, as we understand him."*

Our own will has become the source of so much misery and darkness, that we renounce our own will, our own ego and pride and desire and seek God's will for us. When we do this we find peace and serenity even in the midst of labor and conflict and trial.

Serenity is impossible for the man who is dominated by all the

confused and changing desires of his own will. And even if those desires reach out for the good things of life, for peace and recollection, or the pleasures of prayer, if they are no more than natural desires, they will make serenity difficult or even impossible.

It is unlikely then that we will have perfect serenity or peace of mind unless we are detached from even the desire for serenity. We may never be able to pray perfectly unless we detach ourselves from the desire for the pleasures of prayer.

The secret of serenity then is detachment from our own will. That is worth repeating: The secret of serenity is detachment from our own will. If we attach importance to our own desires, we run the risk of losing what is essential to serenity — the acceptance of God's will, no matter what our feelings happen to be.

Detachment. If we think that the most important thing in life is serenity, we become all the more disturbed when we notice we do not have it. And because we cannot directly produce serenity in ourselves when we want it, our disturbance increases with the failure of our efforts. Finally, losing patience by refusing to accept this situation which we cannot control, we climb into the driver's seat and lose the one important reality — union with God's will, without which serenity is nearly

impossible.

It is important then to revolutionize our thinking about the importance of the human will — our own human will in particular. I heard it expressed once as the laying down of our will alongside God's will so that the two become as one.

Just how we accomplish this is what makes the individual aspect of the AA program. For each of us comes into AA with a different temperament, a different background and various reactions to our past experiences.

One thing I think is important in setting goals for yourself. Do not become too disturbed at failure. We all have a lot of the old Nick in us and we are all far from perfect. If we expect to achieve perfection we shall certainly be disappointed. But peace of mind and serenity do come to us in proportion as we turn our lives and wills over to the care of God, as we understand him. But don't look for it and crave it. If you think serenity is a great and wonderful thing and that it makes you superior to other men, then you cannot desire it as it ought to be desired. It is necessary to be abased, not to be exalted. It is not helpful to be great in your own eyes but to be little.

For it is in humility that you find the answer to all the great problems of life and the soul.

— Anonymous

Spirituality

ATHEISTIC, arrogant, egotistical and intolerant as I was, and further, armed with a few years certain knowledge of the fact that I am an alcoholic, made my surrender, after a practical - drunken - raging - drunken - cunning - drunken - methodical - drunken - hopeless battle with alcohol, all the more totally abject.

Totally and abjectly surrendering to the fact that I was powerless over alcohol and that the persistent and stubborn belief that I - I - I did have, had brought my life to a state of unmanageable chaos, I came to believe, thru the testimony of those happy and contented people who told me of "the way," that there existed a power that could relieve me of this senseless urge to destruction. The fact that, to me, this power was ethereal in that I could neither feel, taste, hear, smell nor see it, meant nothing, in the light of the mass of concrete and irrefutable evidence, but further proof of inadequacy in me. Therefore, humbly, if regretfully, accepting the truth of this inadequacy, I decided to find, by conscientious adherence to the directives of those who were living proof of the benevolent potency of

this power, a means of knowing His nebular quality, I would follow His dictates with the hope of eventual understanding of and communion with Him.

Impasse! To this point, humbly accepting facts, I had come with dawning hope and eagerness. Now after a keyed-up, fervent and conscientious execution of the directives, I was, in all honesty, not a bit nearer to a conception of this power's will for me. Desperate queries brought only calm admonishment to "take it easy" and "it will come."

Very well, a calm and thoughtful recapitulation of the directives was in order. Point by point I checked them until I came to one that I had missed its full significance. "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps . . ." If I was to continue my reasoning on the premise that these folks were right, and the proof was still as evident as ever that they were, then the key was in these Twelve Steps.

Reason - I was told by some that reasoning could be of no use in the search. This called for an analysis of the righteousness of this power. First, last, and eter-

nally, this power would be just. Having endowed man, above all living things, with the power to reason, any debate as to its efficacy would be pointless. Justice - it became self-evident that any human being born into this world with the power to reason, regardless of mental range and capacity, would have equal and inherent faculties for the recognition of the will and desires of this power. Therefore this faculty had to be of a simplicity that would be part of everyday life regardless of locality, race or color. I realized that my unconcious assumption that I was looking for something alien to my life could have caused me to look too high and too far away.

A new start was made on the directives, this one to be exhaustively thorough. "A searching and fearless moral inventory." Exhaustively thorough - the thought struck me, "I have been wrong in so many things maybe I don't know right from wrong." Surprise! I found that the instinctive supposition that we are taught what is right and wrong is erroneous. We are taught, if we are lucky, the advantages of doing right, or the disadvantages of doing wrong. A component part of every human being is an inherent and abiding sense of right and wrong. This sense was the root and cause of law which in its intricate ramifications today is no more than a means to force all to do unto others as you would

like them to do unto you. To those that triumphantly cry "the Ten Commandments" - Justice - countless humans neither read nor write and thru no fault of their own, live and die with no slightest knowledge of the Bible. Further - strict adherence to this one rule makes nine of the commandments superfluous and non-essential.

What pulled the trigger on a deed and branded it right or wrong? An analysis of the deeds on the wrong side of the ledger in our inventory revealed that only the flouting of this basic law caused that feeling called *hurt conscience*. Simple and logical - if a harm to a fellow man causes a disagreeable reaction, it certainly implies negation, so inversely a good to a fellow man causes an agreeable reaction hence positive. Here was a law of cause and effect common to all. Finally I had a definite "yes" and "no." Now to bring this conscience out of depths from where it had been shoved every time that it had raised its head. This is, to me, the sounding board of the power. I realized that all consultations with my conscience would be an open book to His omniscient eye - that the cunning contrivances of my mind would gain only what they merited - that the sincerity and honesty with which I interpreted His will and carried it out would be the measure of the benefits that I would receive.

Many months had elapsed in ar-

living at these simple conclusions. One day I caught myself feeling pity for a man whom I had, in the past, despised with virulent hatred despite all efforts to the contrary. Gradually, with quiet and thankful wonder I realized that I had been experiencing a spiritual awakening for many months, in fact from the time that I had called for help that dark and dismal night.

It was then that I realized fully that the Twelve Steps are not steps to take progressively in order to at-

rive at a conclusion, but a code for living – the constitution of a way of life.

Three years have passed. Three years of growth – growth in the capacity for growth. The calm certainty that if I live today by these precepts I need have no fear for tomorrow.

Peace – Freedom from fear – Freedom from want – Contentment.
Gosh! Ain't Life Wonderful!!!

— O.B., Alva, Oklahoma



January 1952

We Express Our Own Opinion

WHAT I or any of my speakers say here, is our own opinion and does not represent the opinion of this group, or of AA as a whole." When I first heard this preamble stated by leaders at AA meetings, I thought it was an advance apology for what might be coming. But nothing startling ever did. I have since learned to understand that the speakers are privileged to express their own opinions at AA meetings.

AA has 12 suggested steps that are a roadmap to continued sobriety. As members of AA, we value these 12 Steps and try to understand them in all that they imply. When we express opinions on AA, they don't differ with any of the 12 Suggested Steps. It is rather a matter of where the individual

member places his emphasis. But the emphasis is always his own, because AA is an undogmatic and an all-inclusive program. We gain a more secure sobriety when we develop our own understanding of AA within the framework of the 12 Suggested Steps of the AA program.

We had individual patterns of drinking, and individual sets of emotional problems that contributed to our drinking. And so, most of us need an individual approach to AA to help solve our drinking problem.

Thus, we are not only privileged, we are encouraged to express our opinions in AA, in the hope that the opinion may reach some member, particularly the new member, and help him in his sobriety efforts.
— J.S., *New York City, New York*



The CHAIRMAN

SUGGESTS A QUIZ ON THE FIRST STEP

OUR Chairman was called out of town on business this week, so he won't be able to sit in with us on the first meeting of the new year," explained the Secretary of the Mid-Week Group, as he opened the regular closed meeting.

"But in keeping with his responsibility for giving us a subject to discuss each week, he's written us a letter which includes his suggestion for tonight's meeting." The Secretary unfolded several pages of hotel stationery and began reading:

"Hi, members of Mid-Week AA... a very happy and sober New Year to all of you. Sorry I can't be with you at the first meeting of this new year; but AA meetings are conducted in a great variety of patterns, and inasmuch as hundreds of individuals have found AA through the mail, I don't see why we can't conduct a meeting that way... So let's give it a try...

"As this is the first meeting of the year, I'd suggest we do some work on the First Step. For those of us who have been around AA for a while, as well as the guy or gal who is here for the first time tonight, we can never lose sight of the fact that unless we take this step honestly and without reservations, we'll never get very far with the recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Past New Years are reminiscent of resolutions to quit drinking ranging in length of time from a month to life, depending upon the size of our hangover or the degree of trouble we happened to be in at the moment... Perhaps there is someone in our meeting tonight who is turning over in his or her mind the idea that they can find here some miraculous trick that will keep them sober until they recover, and then they'll be able to resume their drinking on a controlled basis... I'm sorry to disillusion anyone who may have such a thought, 'cause now I'm going

to give you a few questions to toss around that I hope will prove how once a person has accepted the fact that they are alcoholic, according to AA beliefs, there's no turning back..."

The Secretary paused in his reading: "Now our Chairman lists a few questions, all pertinent to the First Step, and suggests that I read them off and then wants us to discuss them..." He picked up the letter and continued with the Chairman's message:

"The First Step in the 12 Suggested Steps of recovery from alcoholism in the AA program says - 'We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable'..."

"Who is an alcoholic?" This is a question that only the individual can answer. We can help him decide through the use of the John Hopkins questionnaire if he'll answer honestly.

"Why does an alcoholic drink differently than so-called normal drinkers?"... Does he actually, or is it the way alcohol affects him?

"Can Alcoholics Anonymous cure excessive drinking?"... You've heard tell of AA spoiling a man's drinking. How about using AA to control it?

"What does it mean when a person accepts the fact that he's powerless over alcohol?"...

"Will his resolve to do something about his problem include a desire to sober up for anyone else

besides himself?

"How does the fact that alcoholism is regarded as an incurable disease affect your practicing the AA program only 24 hours at a time?"

"Do you honestly believe that one drink — the first — is too much, and 100 is not enough?"

"Why is it considered important to attend at least one regular AA meeting every week?"

"Can a man or woman's life become manageable as soon as they have accepted the fact that alcohol is their problem, and they take the first step in AA? . . . Remember the pink cloud?"

"Does it help to realize that when we start out each day, we are potential drunkards?"

"How do the words honesty, humility, helpfulness and humor fit into your introduction to the AA program?"

"Does it matter whether we call a member for help before or after we take the first drink . . . so long as we do call?"

"Why did the founders of AA stress anonymity? . . . after all, it is half of the title of the *Big Book*."

"Have you read the 'Big Book'? Did it make sense? . . . I'd like to suggest to new members that they read this book, as it is the sole authority for the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous . . . And as a New Year resolution, it might be beneficial for us older members to take a gander at it, again."

"For the benefit of everyone present one of the older boys or gals might explain the meaning of — *Easy Does It, First Things first, Live and Let Live, and, But for the Grace of God . . .*"

"Can a person maintain sobriety by practicing only the First Step?"

"Remember this is a 12-Step program, but if we take the First with reservations, or kick it around, we'll never have a chance to learn anything about the other 11. And as you've so often heard me say, my opinion is that AA is a means to an end, but is not the end . . . In other words, a working knowledge of the 12 Steps not only gives me sobriety, but provides me with the opportunity for a fuller life . . ."

"One more factor I'd like to hear discussed for the benefit of old and new members is *Faith*. All we have to do is look around at any gathering of AAs and we can recharge our faith that the program will work . . . so long as we give it a chance."

The Secretary stopped to light a cigarette. "Well, sounds as though we've got something to discuss. I'll start it off by admitting that I am an alcoholic, and I'm one of that breed of AAs who has a rough time getting the First Step. So I'm always happy to take part in a discussion of this particular step . . . It's a sort of personal security that I find I need . . . But now to generalize — as the Chairman asked: 'Who is an alcoholic?'"

AM I AN ALCOHOLIC?

HOW often do we AAs sit at a meeting and listen to a man "qualify" himself as an alcoholic and relate a terrible and gruesome tale of years of drinking escapades which took him to the very depths of degradation and despair. How often do we say to ourselves, "I was never that bad at my very worst. I didn't do all of those terrible things. I wonder if I am really an alcoholic. Perhaps I can try again and maybe I can drink normally and learn to be a social drinker."

Brother or sister, perish the thought - you are headed for a nose dive. When we came into AA, we admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable. We must have hit our bottom level at that time or we would have kept on living our miserable lives. There is no certain bottom or degree of misery for everyone alike. Each of us had reached the point where we must turn one way or the other and thank the good Lord that we turned in the right direction when we did - to AA. It was not necessarily how drunk we got - whether the things we did to ourselves and to our loved ones were quite as bad as others whose stories we hear, but what alcohol did to us - the character of our drinking and how it affected our own personality and lives. Yes, our lives had become

unmanageable due to alcohol, that was enough.

We admitted many other things and our alcoholic problem has become arrested. Are we now after several years of sobriety becoming complacent, are we forgetting the reasons that originally prompted us to take the first step into AA, without which we might not now be alive? Count the blessings and the better way of life we are now enjoying as against our former way of pre-AA life. Would we risk losing these things for an experiment or to try and prove a point, which even if successful, would prove to be a loss? Why? Because we would set an example for other doubtful alcoholics to make this test and would lose our own sobriety and peace of mind, which we should cherish beyond all else.

Let us always remember that we have asked God to grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change . . . let us live by this prayer, as we are now living proof that it has been answered for us. - *H.S.R., Pittsburgh, Penna.*

Nobody But Nobody

WAS IN STEP BUT ME!



WE have all heard the expression — "Everybody out of step but our Jock." That was the way I was running my life before I came to AA — nobody was in step but me! My business life, my family life and my so-called social life — all haywire, but not me!

I became a past-master at being able to justify myself — to myself. I even developed a technique of blaming everyone else first — jumping them before they could jump me. All the usual merry-go-round of what I now know as an alcoholic personality — loneliness, self-pity, resentments, bitterness, all drowned in liquor — only to wake up in a fog and find them worse than ever.

Finally, the last bitter dregs of despair and I came to AA because it was the last resort — I had to try the only thing left. I did not come to AA because I wanted to stop drinking — but because I found it impossible to control my drinking. I had tried everything.

The word "sobriety" might have been a word from the Greek language, because I did not know the meaning of the word, nor, to be honest, was I any too sure that I wanted sobriety — but I decided to give it a try. I had nothing to lose by trying it and I couldn't go on running my life the way I had been for the past many — too many, years.

I am absolutely convinced that anyone who will give our program of recovery an honest try, — and I mean honest — will find such a new

and wonderful life opening up for them, that they will sincerely want it more than anything else that the world could offer them. I had to sell myself on the AA way of life, even though I was none too willing — but I did try to be honest in my attempts to find out what made it "tick."

I can't give any cut and dried explanation as to how or why it works, it just does work, if you give it an honest try. I haven't found any short cuts and now I don't want any short cuts. I just want it each and every day. I do think that the only way to stop drinking is to stop drinking and hang on. We cannot appreciate sobriety until we have tried it, and given it a fair test. I know now that I want to keep my sobriety more than I want anything else. I came to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity — I came to want sobriety more than anything else.

With sobriety, I am receiving so many other benefits; good health, good friends, good family relationships, self-respect being regained — in fact, happiness. AA is teaching me to get in step with the rest of the world and to keep in step — and like it. It is not an over-night process, it is a gradual changing in one's thinking and living pattern — I no longer have to try to run my own life and in the turning over of that burden, I have received a wonderful release.

Each day is a brand-new, unsullied day. I ask for guidance each morning and each night give thanks to the Navigator who has safely steered me through the difficulties of that day. I depend on that Power greater than myself, each day, because I have learned that He will never let me down if I "play ball."

I now know that, as an alcoholic, I can never be a controlled drinker again — that I will have that disease for the rest of my life, but, through the AA way of life, I have had a miraculous recovery and I want to hang on to it.

No one should think that it is all pink clouds — it is not; there are times of discouragement and of being frazzelled, but the game is worth it — the game of life — the AA way of life. I cannot afford to let myself get confused or angry or disappointed — my sobriety would be the price — I would have to pay if I let any of the destructive emotions overwhelm me. When my thinking gets out of step, I can recognize it and do something about it.

Yes, thanks to AA, my life is back in step again.

I figure I have work for the rest of my life, taking it one day at a time, in trying to "practice these principles in all my affairs" — to pull my weight, but not to throw my weight around — to try to lend a helping hand — to show others that it does work.

— J.W., British Columbia, Canada



Discussion of the "FORGOTTEN STEPS"

The Chairman

"I'd like to make a small wager that out of this group of 21 persons, not more than four of you can tell us what the Eighth and Ninth Steps in the AA program are . . ." The Chairman of the Mid-Week Group looked around the room, smiled at the blank expres-

sions on the members faces and continued: "I think we'll all concede that we don't gain recovery from our alcoholic state by simply agreeing with the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. We recover only if we put into practice the philosophy of our new way of life;

through adherence to the 12 Steps we try to correct past mistakes. Many of these included the insults, harm and injuries we inflicted upon loved ones, friends, business associates and even enemies . . ."

"Doesn't the Fourth Step cover these acts?" interrupted Slim . . . "Where we took our own inventory?"

"Not entirely," replied the Chairman. "It's necessary in my opinion that we take this moral inventory, but the Eighth and Ninth Steps are directly slanted toward a restitution to those we've hurt, or if you prefer . . . a cleansing of our grudge list . . . Now turn the 12 Step board around, Charlie, and read the Steps in question," said the Chairman.

Charlie twisted the framed panel hanging on the wall, on which were lettered the 12 AA Steps of Recovery, so that they were now visible to the Group.

"The Eighth Step is to make a list of all the people we had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all," droned Charlie.

"Okay," said the Chairman.

"Now don't you remember what a tough assignment this was? And for some of us it took a long time to hurdle . . . In my own case my sponsor suggested that it might make my going a bit easier if I wrote letters to some of my family, telling them of the move I'd made in joining AA, and that while I made no promises of future conduct, I could admit that I had learned what was wrong with me and that I had

found a way to correct my past actions. I still carry in my pocketbook two answers I received, special delivery, from my doctor-brother-in-law and a former boss. They certainly helped materially in rebuilding my confidence . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a point right here," said Steve. "In the Eighth Step it is suggested that we make a list . . . and become willing to make amends. Actually, there is a vast vacuum between this and the Ninth Step. Right? The Ninth Step says, we made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

"That's a good point, Steve. The difference, of course, is in the fact that in the Eighth Step we are *willing* to do certain things, while in practicing the Ninth Step we actually do them. Obviously these two Steps work in conjunction . . . Pete, you've been around quite a time, and must have had some experience with these Steps. Give us your opinion."

"These two Steps were the toughest for me to latch onto, and it wasn't until I'd been in AA for quite a few months that I was able to bring myself to a state of mind that accepted the fact that I might have caused injury to others, and therefore increased my mental confusion. There's no trick in making a list of folks we feel are entitled to restitution . . . or apologies. But it takes spiritual guts to sit down

and write a letter, or as I did in a couple instances pay them a personal visit, look them in the eye and make reparation. Bro-o-t-ther, this is rough! But it did something for me that accelerated my progress in accepting the AA program as a new way of life . . . We used to hear about the 'forgotten man,' but I've often felt that the Eighth and Ninth Steps fall into the category of the 'forgotten Steps.'

"Pete's got a good point there. Francis, would you elaborate on the possible obstacles encountered in following these Steps?"

"My chief obstacle was procrastination, a character defect that seems to be exaggerated in alcoholics. The longer I put off making my amends, the less I believed in the philosophy of the two Steps. However, one warning I'd like to offer to the newcomer is that of rushing headlong into the reparation program! It's going to take a long, long time to complete the Ninth Step, so I'd advise against becoming emotionally alerted to the need for righting your past wrongs."

"Thanks, Francis, for your sound suggestions. Tommy, you look as though you've got a couple ideas waiting to be released on the subject . . ."

"What threw me temporarily was not having a plan of some sort to follow. I got confused, possibly through my misinterpretation of the Steps. But anyway, one case I re-

member, where I called on a guy prepared to make amends, and the guy would have none of me. Said I was a drunk and for his dough, would never be anything else. That of course injured my pride, and I wound up with a bottle in my hand again. I do feel that pride can be a terrific barrier to practicing the Ninth Step."

"I'd like to offer my answer to that," interrupted Pat. "I haven't heard much mention about the spiritual factor in relation to these two Steps. I believe that in order to determine who rates an amend and to gain the much-needed humility so vital to making successful reparation, that we should ask for direction from the Power greater than ourselves. I found that meditation and a thoughtful prayer for guidance helped me in making my list of names, to separate the ones I could do nothing about, and how to proceed. It was actually a spiritual awakening for me when the first person I talked to had tears in his eyes when we finished talking. That was a tangible dividend."

"Quite true, Pat. A good deal of spirituality enters into these two Steps. And for those of you who aren't aware of it, the *Big Book* treats this subject on pages 88 to 96 . . . I'd suggest taking a gander at it . . . We can't possibly cover this topic in the allotted time, but I would like to hear some suggestions as to the categories or types of persons to whom amends could

be made . . . How about it, Jane?"

"I'd say our families, including wives and husbands of alcoholics, parents and children if any. This list should also include relatives, in-laws, for instance, as mentioned by the Chairman. It may take some time for reconciliation, but don't press. Take it easy! When the family is educated to the problem of alcoholism, through your newly acquired knowledge or by reading the *Big Book*, your amend-making will be simplified."

"George," called the Chairman as he nodded to one of the elder statesman, "carry on, please."

"I had a lot of amends to make business-wise and with very close friends. What a beating I gave several of my bosses. And how I gyped several swell friends. In my approach to these people, however, I attempted to be just as sincere as was humanly possible, for me. I had to be completely convincing and assure them that my intentions were absolutely honest. That there was no hook concealed in this demonstration of AA at work. I explained my illness, told them briefly about Alcoholics Anonymous, what it had done for others and hoped it would for me . . . if I gave it a chance. I was never gunshy in my apologies. The past was past. Today I was starting anew. I prayed before each visit, that whatever the reception, I would maintain my sobriety. And I can honestly report that on not one in-

stance did I leave in a resentful mood. In other words, everyone I called on accepted me as I was, today."

"George just touched lightly-over-once on indebtedness. Tony, have you got some information on this touchy subject . . . creditors!"

Tony laughed. "Yeah, don't dodge 'em! They can still catch up with you even though you're dry . . . If you can't pay 'em, tell 'em. Make a deal, but for God's sake keep it. Here is one AA department where fear really puts the double whammy on sobriety. You gotta have some kind of an understanding with the people you owe dough to. Some idea as to how and when you expect to pay it back. Most of them will go along with you. But get the honesty part of the program on this score, or it'll be gin an' mostly bitters for you."

"You're so right, Tony, and we could elaborate on this if time permitted. Another group are those who have gone to another world. It's futile to wax remorseful over harms we inflicted on those to whom we can't make amends. Living your new found philosophy in the AA way will partly compensate for wrongs done to those who have died . . . And try not to get involved in making amends for wrongs long since forgotten. I had enough fairly current ones to worry about without going back into the dark ages . . . What's your question, Frank?"

"In the Ninth Step, what does the phrase mean . . . *except when to do so would injure them or others?* I think after this meeting tonight I'm about ready to make some amends. But this thought has me stopped."

"Good question, Frank. There are some amends that require extreme discretion, and in fact, are better left unmade. As we all know sex problems have, and do complicate an alcoholic's life . . ." the Chairman smiled. "And as far as I know, the non-alcoholic's life also! . . . But that's not our consid-

eration. Here again honesty is a most important factor. And I mean honesty in our *own* thinking and actions. Jealousy would certainly retard our progress in AA. And cheating would surely toss us for a loop."

The Chairman lighted a cigarette. "Pretty important Steps, the Eighth and Ninth, aren't they? But I guess when all is added up and you're ready to start making amends . . . or reparations . . . let your conscience be your guide. And if you have the honesty part of the program, you won't have too much trouble."



God as I understand him

Ornithologically Speaking

AS a member of AA now in my 11th year of membership I am somewhat of an oldtimer. I have seen AA have many growing pains and I have had my own personal ones along with it. One of the difficult humps for me to surmount from the very beginning has been that of. . . *God as I understand him*. Like most alcoholics I had no very deep religious tendencies during my drinking days. I have never been able to understand God very clearly. But there is a God: an omnipotent and omniscient Power;

of that I have not the slightest doubt. The understanding of Him or It is for each of us to figure out in a way which will prove the most helpful. Perhaps the following true story of an experience of mine may help some who are floundering in their efforts to understand God. It has helped me. I pass it along in the hope that it may also help others.

I once had the good fortune to accompany a group sent for ornithological research to the Outer Hebrides Islands. The Outer Hebrides

lie off the northwest coast of Scotland. Sea-birds of many varieties seek these islands every spring as their breeding grounds. The Hebrides are riddled with innumerable lakes or "lochs." In these lochs, some of them very large, are many islands. To these islands flock hundreds of thousands of gulls each year, there to lay their eggs and raise their young.

We visited these islands at the nesting season. Perhaps "nesting" is not a true descriptive expression. There is little if any nest. The bird forms a hollow in the sand to conform to its body and in this hollow the eggs are laid. This is the nest.

The remarkable part of it is that these nests are so close together that a man cannot set foot upon an island without treading on eggs. When the gulls are sitting upon and brooding these eggs, no soil can be seen from above. The entire island takes on a mother-of-pearl hue from the plumage of the birds.

When disturbed by a loud shout or the firing of a gun, every bird is aloft simultaneously; thousands of them. When all fly upward at once, the sky is literally darkened by the countless number of them.

The island is left completely covered with unprotected eggs; many hundreds of thousands of them. When the alarm has passed the birds, as quickly as they feel it safe to do so, descend to their eggs.

Now mark this: To the human eye, every group of eggs, or nest, is identical in appearance to every other. Perhaps there are 50,000 such groups of eggs on the particular island which I am describing. There is the greatest confusion in the air as the parent birds fly up, all together, in alarm. But as they settle down again, tranquility restored, each bird, without hesitation, goes to its own particular eggs without any indications of uncertainty. Each mother bird is attracted by the strength of mother-love and her desire to protect her own and she goes in a straight bee-line to her own eggs. *This is the work of God as I understand him.*

The confusion gets greater when the eggs hatch. All have been laid at approximately the same time. All hatch within a period of 24 hours or so.

Now our island becomes a living thing, crawling with countless young gulls. These young birds cannot fly for quite a time after hatching. But almost immediately they become very active on their legs. The eggs, at least, were static. They stayed put. But this myriad of young birds starts to move around under its recently endowed power. A young gull can easily go from one end of the island to the other. The greatest confusion of movement now exists upon our island.

The mother birds now must feed their young. This necessitates foraging expeditions far afield. Upon

the mothers' return, the mouth of every young gull, of the 50,000 or so, is opened expectantly and held heavenward. Does our mother gull feed its neighbor's child? It does not. It knows its own offspring wherever on the island it may be and to its own young it carries the food; this despite the fact that human observation can tell not the slightest difference in the young birds. All look alike as peas in a pod. But kill a mother gull, and its offspring, and its offspring only, will die of starvation.

The facts I am telling you were carefully checked by our expedition; by banding the birds; by photographic check-ups and by scientific means generally. You must accept them as true. *They represent the handiwork of God as I understand him.*

One more surprising bit of information. Gulls nest in colonies on the flat ground as I have been telling you. Other types of sea birds nest in similar colonies but lay their eggs on bare, narrow ledges

of lofty cliffs and crags. A gull's egg is oval; approximately the shape of the familiar hen's egg. If disturbed by the wings or feet of the mother bird when taking off for flight or alighting, it will roll moderately. No harm is done. But the eggs lain by birds on high narrow rocky ledges come to a sharp point at one end. If disturbed, they can roll only about their own axis. They cannot roll off high ledges and crash into the sea hundreds of feet below. *This is the work of God as I understand him.*

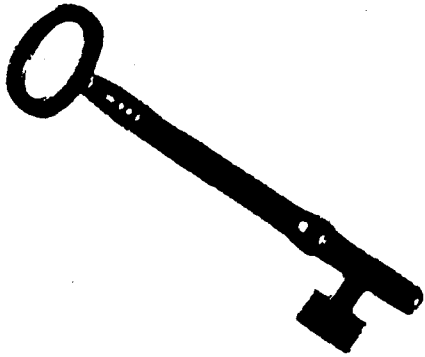
Does it not say in the Bible somewhere something like this?

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?

But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12.6-7)

Many scoff at such statements in the Bible. Perhaps we should not scoff without careful study.

— C.C.A., Cincinnati, Ohio



An Open Mind Unlocks the Door

IN the past years of association with AA I have heard much about the virtues we must acquire and the defects we must eliminate. However, little is said about the "key" which unlocks the door . . . open mindedness. Occasionally it is mentioned in passing with relation to spiritual things and God, but do we not need to apply all that we learn to our every day living? The 12th Step says "*practice these principles in all our affairs.*" It has been my sad experience to find very little real open mindedness among my fellow travelers. Many of my associates will be indignant and perhaps even have some resentments but I see what I see, and hear what I hear, and have been guilty of the same fault.

Open minded is defined as "ready to hear," "Open to suggestion." I have heard an AA say: "we must keep an open mind," and no longer than 30 minutes later I have heard that same AA insisting his opinion was right and being very definite about it. Also, we sometimes insist our associates are not doing things as we believe they must be done. This is lack of open mindedness.

I don't believe we can cheat. We are using a spiritual Truth when we attempt to utilize the 12 Steps to straighten out our life, and I believe we will pay a heavy price if we do not heed the laws laid down by Truth. Therefore, let us place this virtue where it belongs among the important things we need to practice in our daily

contacts. Let us always remember that in every man there is good and that we may learn something good from the worst. Let us always remember that each person is an individual and for him, his opinions may be right. Each one of us must find God as we understand him, each one of us must straighten out his life as we see it in accordance with God's plan, not mine or yours.

I have found it absolutely impossible to disagree with everything a speaker says. I have always found at least one thought which I could add to my storehouse of knowledge as I listened to another ex-drunk, even if it is only the knowledge of what not to do.

Let us keep an open mind when one of our brothers has trouble, for we would have to know everything he thinks, all the external forces which enter his life to judge him. Even then it would be a risk. Let us learn to listen with an open mind to every one we come in contact with and thus take away a new thought to meditate upon and perhaps add to our own storehouse. Somewhere along the line in life we will need to draw heavily upon this storehouse, when the chips are down, if we would remain sober.

No person completes a lifetime without one day having to prove beyond all shadow of doubt what he professes. The Divine Plan so arranges it. If you come into AA and refuse to keep an open mind

you will miss an education in philosophy. Perhaps you do not refuse but are just unaware . . . you must become aware if you would stay sober.

Let us keep an open mind when we talk with the neophyte, so that we will be able to do the greatest good. Let us remember that we are all individuals, we did not all drink for the same reason, we do not all have the same character defects or problems, so we must set aside, at times, our own fixed opinions and listen if we are to help. We can all state what we would do if we were in another's place, but would we? I have found that many times in the past year I was unable to do the very things I preached to others. There are times when we must, of course, advise and guide: as adults we should be able to know when to listen and when to talk.

To me, contact with other members is a sounding board for new ideas, an exchange of opinions and I must listen, as well as talk, if I am to continue to learn and progress. If I do not, I shall find myself thinking in circles, having fixed opinions and, Brother, then it won't be long unless I wake up and get busy. I must free my mind, be receptive to opinions and ideas from other AAs as well as from God. This, I think, is closely linked with self-centeredness, perhaps the end result of lack of open mindedness. It is no doubt the first step down the ladder we have so labori-

ously climbed. Add to your inventory at night, "Have I been open minded today" and if you haven't, look back over the day and see just how much you might have learned . . . if you have I'll bet you find you have several new thoughts or ideas to add to your storehouse.

In Cleveland, during the Convention, I heard much about the four absolutes. Honesty, sincerity, love and humility. I fail to see how we can ever acquire any one of them without first opening our minds

and being receptive. This is what you did when you admitted your powerlessness and asked for help. You opened your mind so that "A Power greater than yourself" could come in; this is what you do in the 11th Step when you meditate.

Let us apply this "open mindedness to our every day life as well as to God. If we do we will find ourselves far richer in thought as the years go by.

— *J.W., Jacksonville, Florida*

IN Appendix II, PP 4, Line 3 of the Big Book we read:

"Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the "educational variety" because they develop slowly over a period of time."

That's "I'm."

A little more than three years were required to get down to cases on Steps Four, Five, Eight and Nine. Let's have a look:

Step Four. The list of character defects reads like a thesaurus with every part of speech except adjectives bearing a connotation of opprobrium omitted.

Step Five. The first two parts have been relatively easy but when

it comes to the third, these questions always pop up: "Whoinhell wants to listen to all my shortcomings? Do I have to relate about all the watermelons I stole as a kid? How about some other forbidden fruits that were filched along the way?" Frankly, it is going to take a little time to reach a decision as how best to go about selecting someone on whom to inflict my confession and just what shall be confessed.

Step Eight. A list has been made with space left open for additions.

Step Nine. One of the amends-making experiences had a humorous side. After several starts and backings-away, enough courage finally was mustered to walk into the boss's office. The following ensued:

"Got a couple of minutes, chief?"

"Sure, sit down." (*Business of handing him a folder with the 12 Steps printed thereon.*)

"Read numbers Eight and Nine on there and I'll tell you why I'm here." He read them and looked at

me with a "Whatthehelldoesthis-screwballhaveonhismindnow" expression on his face.

"Well, I'm here to offer verbal apologies for all past depreddations, and . . ." He cut in short:

"That's all water over the wheel . . . there's been a helluva change in you . . . you've done a swell job and we all recognize it . . ." I cut in short.

"I didn't have a damn thing to do with it, it was . . ."

"Well, let's say it has been done."

"Okeh, and I'm mighty grateful for all your patience and kindness." He roared:

"You're grateful? Hell, I'm the guy to be grateful. Thank God we can live with you around here again."

As anyone can gather, the job wasn't nearly as tough as anticipated. Undoubtedly when I finally get around to the third part of Step Five, it will prove just as simple. Until that time comes, however, I

plan to continue to heed the admonition, "Easy does it" and not to crowd things. Lord knows, I didn't get into the shape I was in when I came to AA in five minutes and it is going to take a whale of a lot of five-minute periods to rid my stubborn self of the armor of resentment, selfishness, self-pity, fear, et al, et us, ad infinitum.

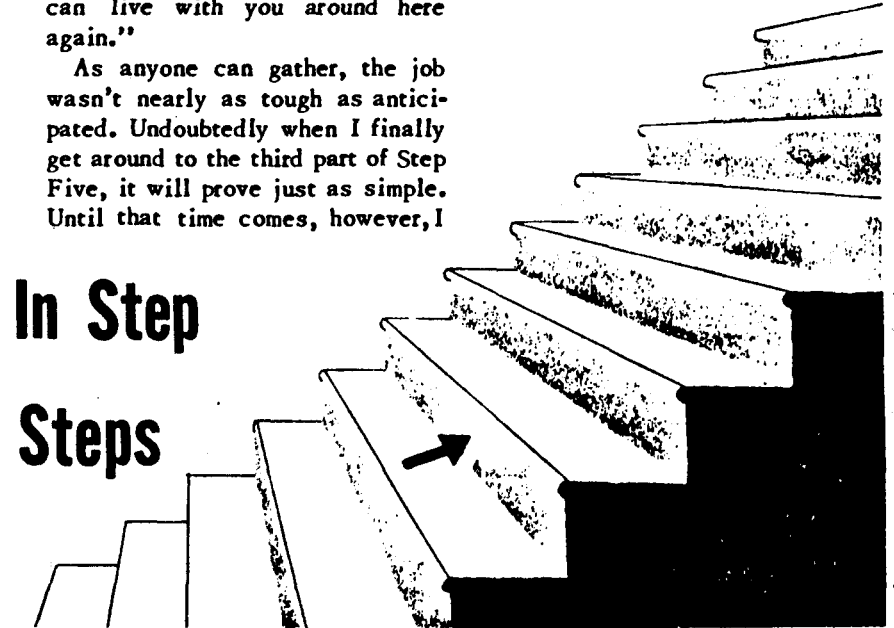
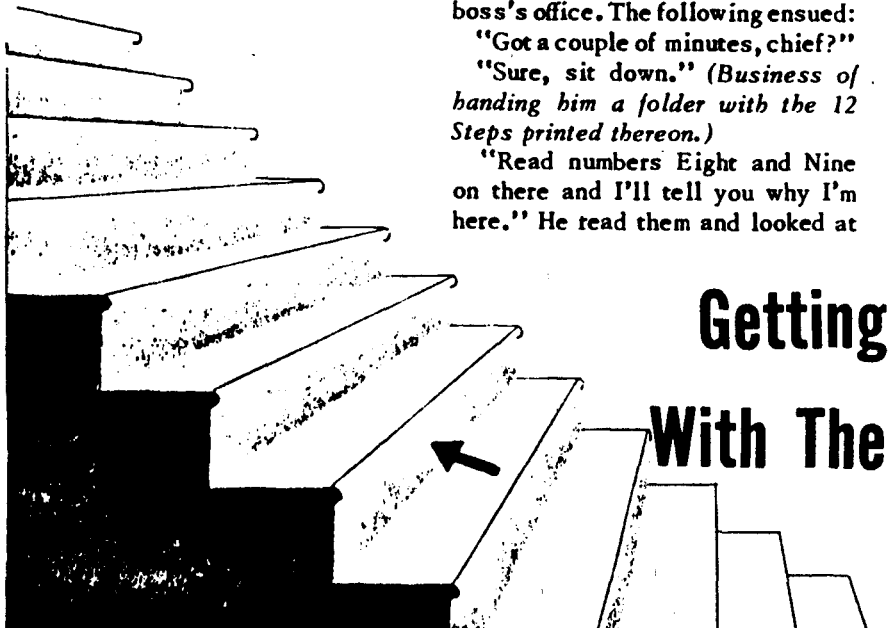
There comes to mind the lines:

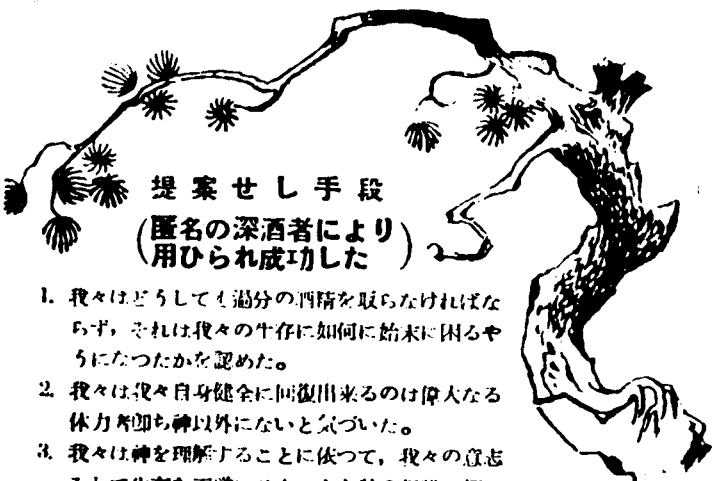
"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small . . ." To which my wife adds:

"And considering the stuff they have to grind, it's a wonder they grind at all."

Again, that's "I'm."

— D.K., San Francisco, Calif.





提案せし手段
(匿名の深酒者により
用ひられ成功した)

1. 我々はどうしても過分の酒精を取らなければならず、それは我々の生存に如何に始末に困るやうになつたかを認めた。
2. 我々は我々自身健全に回復出来るのは偉大なる体力者即ち神以外にないと気づいた。
3. 我々は神を理解することに依つて、我々の意志そして生存を正常にせんことを神の保護に頼らうと決心した。
4. 我々は我々自身のその説いをして人間的道德的目標を作つた。
5. 我々自身そして他の人々及び神がすべて我々の間違つた生活状態を認めた。
6. 我々は全くそれらすべての性格上の欠陥を取除くべき覚悟を神に誓つた。
7. すべてその欠陥を取除くことをへり下つて神にお告げした。
8. 我々は我々の害をこうむつたもの全員の表を作り、そしてそれ等全員に償い得る様にした。
9. 我々は何處でもその様な人々には償い得べきやうにひきしめた、しかしそうすることに依つてなほ一そう害になるやうなときはやめた。
10. 我々は引續き個人的日録を以て、我々の間違つた時はそれを敏速に自己により認めた。
11. 我々は祈りと黙想を通じて我々の意識せる神との接近を以て、改悔しやうとした、同時に神を理解せるやうに、神は我々に如何にお考へなされ、その知識とその遂行せる力とをあたへたまへと断つた。
12. 我々は此れ等の手段の結果始めて精神的体験を持つた、そして此の伝言を通じて、深酒者に此れらすべての我々のとつた主なる事柄を実行されるやう、我々を試みたのである。

ANOTHER
H A S
B E E N
S E E D
P L A N T E D



Since the early beginnings of AA it has seemed, at times, nothing short of miraculous that as needs arise the answer has been presented. Such is the story of the growth of AA in Japan. At present there is a small but thriving group in Tokyo, made up of Americans. So far there are no Japanese among its members . . . but there have been queries, many of them.

Because of the language differences it is difficult to "carry the message" in any country where English is not spoken.

A loner, a member of the Armed Forces, stationed at Sendia, has had The Twelve Suggested Steps translated into Japanese. On these pages is the Japanese translation as it will be distributed, upon request, by the Tokyo group and the literal re-translation back into English.



- Step One* — We could not help taking overmuch alcohol and we acknowledged how it has become a trouble for our existence.
- Step Two* — We became aware that it was no one else but a great man, a God, that would be able to restore ourselves.
- Step Three* — We made up our mind to rely it upon protection of God that we would make our will and our existence normal, according to understand God.
- Step Four* — We made keen and daring object of our own.
- Step Five* — We, ourselves, others and God, all admitted our wrong livings.
- Step Six* — We swore our resolution to God to remove all those defects on our characters.
- Step Seven* — We courteously informed God to remove those defects.
- Step Eight* — We made the list involving all who sustained our damage, so that all of them can compensate.
- Step Nine* — Whenever we found such a people, we braced them up so that they can compensate. However, we did not brace them up in case it causes more damage to them when doing so.
- Step Ten* — We continuously made our own personal list, thereby we admitted by ourselves as soon as we made any fault.
- Step Eleven* — We endeavored to improve ourselves with approaching to God which we had recognized through prayer and contemplation. Simultaneously we prayed to make us understand God much more; contemplated before God how he was thinking of us, and prayed may he give us his knowledge and power to execute.
- Step Twelve* — As the result of those methods, we had a spiritual experience for the first time and, through this message, we tried to have heavy drinkers execute every one of those main items which we had taken.

I Had Lost The War!

It didn't take me five minutes to admit that I am an alcoholic. It's true that I had always rationalized that I had lost a battle, when in reality I had lost the whole war. Yes, at long last I surrendered unconditionally.

A while ago a speaker said that it was no use admitting that one was an alcoholic unless the admittance was accompanied by a realization of what being an alcoholic really meant. The next time I heard the speaker he persuaded me that I wasn't finished with the *First Step* yet. He said there was no use my making the admission even in the full realization of what it meant, unless I accepted the fact that I was an alcoholic without resentment. That took a little longer; but finally, after having the resentment removed I thought I could honestly say I had fulfilled the three conditions he laid down. Admission, realization, acceptance. From now on, all I had to do was to take this step each day, and then devote my thoughts to the other 11. Ah sweet naivete! To think that a mind soaked with alcohol would so easily change its habits of thinking and rationalization. John Barleycorn dropped the direct attacks like an experienced campaigner, and started a flanking attack coupled with some smooth fifth-column work.

I began to read some other works on alcoholism as well as the *Big Book*. A natural interest, you might say, for an alcoholic. In all sincerity some of these books as well as seeking a "cure" were also hoping to learn something about "prevention." I began to ask myself -- How and when did I become an alcoholic? Did I become an uncontrolled drinker five years ago? Or was it ten? Could I have been born with alcoholic tendencies? These and many more questions surged through my mind.

The same speaker now told me that there was no use in my wondering why or when I became an alcoholic for the very simple reason that it wouldn't change my condition; even if I did find the answer, I would still be an alcoholic.

The clergy, the scientists, the medical profession, the social workers, all have good and legitimate reasons for seeking the answer to "how and when," but do I? The Twelve Steps told me "to try to carry the message." They didn't mention my becoming an expert on alcoholism, its prevention and cure. Actually do I really care about the future generations? Perhaps I should, but truthfully, my charity hasn't developed to that extent yet.

Why then, was I concerned with how or when I became an alcoholic? I know

now. Subconsciously or otherwise, I was making a last desperate attempt to get out from under. Somebody else, or something else was going to accept the responsibility for my plight. My fault? Perish the thought. Wasn't it enough that I admitted my condition, realized what it meant, and accepted the fact without resentment? Did I have to accept the blame too?

Apparently I had. Funny thing -- it doesn't seem to matter much to me now, "how or when." My interest in future generations is confined to wishing well to those who legitimately seek the answers. I still have too many "selfish" things to look after before I can become "unselfish" enough for that. *Anonymous, Toronto, Ont., Canada.*

THAT FOURTH STEP

How many of us realize the importance of that Fourth Step and have made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves? A brief thought, yet containing a lot of meaning for those whose lives have become all tangled up with the ways and works of this hurly-burly world. For information we should consult the highest authority on the subject. It's too bad, but most of us are not the "highest authority" when it comes to analyzing our own motives and emotions. We rationalize too much; we are too easy with ourselves. It takes guts to look deep inside to see what makes us behave the way we do. But, if we are going to take a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves we've got to be resolute.

Isn't it true that most of us live our whole lives without ever becoming really acquainted with ourselves? To get a steady and well-balanced perspective we should withdraw from the world occasionally; we should retire to a place of our own, to ruminate, and

find ourselves in "the majesty of silence."

We cannot learn from others what our consciousness alone can tell us. Inner peace and serenity can never be achieved without a periodic withdrawal from this noisy world into the silent places of the spirit. Man is not an animal. We are gifted with qualities of mind and soul which are too long neglected. Let us then bring these submerged qualities to the surface by practising the Fourth Step of Alcoholics Anonymous.

However, we must be careful that our meditating doesn't deteriorate into wishful day-dreaming, or self-reflection alone. The man with a "mirror mind" who can see only himself no matter which way he turns is too wrapped up in himself to get any real value out of a period of self-searching. Meditation should be a means of getting out of ourselves, to refocus our attention to those aspects of life which are immutable and enduring. Only then can we learn to know ourselves. *L.A.S., Edwardsville, Pa.*

MY DAILY MORAL INVENTORY

Month _____ Year _____
Check Results DAILY in Proper Column

LIABILITIES Watch for —	ASSETS Strike for —																															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Self Pity																																
Self Justification																																
Self Importance																																
Self Condemnation																																
Dishonesty																																
Impatience																																
Hate																																
Resentment																																
False Pride																																
Jealousy																																
Envy																																
Laziness																																
Procrastination																																
Inincerity																																
Negative Thinking																																
Vulgar, Immoral, Frashy Thinking																																
Criticizing																																

Eliminate the Negative Accentuate the Positive

CHECK THE SCORE EVERY NIGHT — TRY TO GET THE SLATE CLEAN

(Reprinted from the June, 1946 issue of *The A.A. Grapevine*.
By Mark W., Jackson, Miss.)

My Twelfth Stepper



DIRECTLY across the street from my second floor office, (an office that would not exist if it were not for AA) there is a back door entrance to a main street saloon. Whether it is Providence or what I know not, almost every morning as I get ready for the day's activities, I have a compulsion to look out; rarely do I fail to see a poor soul, whom I have dubbed "My Twelfth Stepper" (because of his constant reminder to me of days gone by), shuffle up to this door. Most mornings he has to hang onto the rails which have so thoughtfully been placed there; it is a long journey he has to make . . . I have made it . . . ; five worn steps down, then about ten steps through the men's wash room and finally fifty agonizing steps back up to the main street level. How much easier it would be just to step in the front door on Main Street; but no . . . coming in this way, it isn't necessary to run the gauntlet of the early morning "social drinkers"; also, the light on the back bar is so much easier on the eyes.

As I look out and see all this, I go

back to February, 1945 and a little group of AAs meeting at the local Y.M.C.A. My leader that evening was also my Twelfth Stepper and I recall his groping for words but he none-the-less eloquently told the story of how two AAs had rescued him from a snow bank just three months before, and of how they had followed his progress through . . . from the hospitalization for frost bite to the usual five days rest home treatment. Finally, I remember the end of his talk with his sincere gratitude to AA

and to the wonderful AA way of life.

I think of myself . . . a first nighter . . . in that meeting, who today attributes his seven years of unbroken sobriety to that leader, and to whom a large group in a nearby city owes its existence. . . .

Then, as the grimy hands leave the rails, and the back hunched by too much shoveling of coal disappears, I close my eyes; again, I know not how or why, I see a sign actually appear over that door, "But for the grace of God" . . . R.M.G., Bellevue, Ohio.

December 1952

DO WE REALLY KNOW THE
TWELVE STEPS?

IT is this writer's observation that the ones who *do* get much out of their sobriety are the ones who know and follow the Twelve Steps.

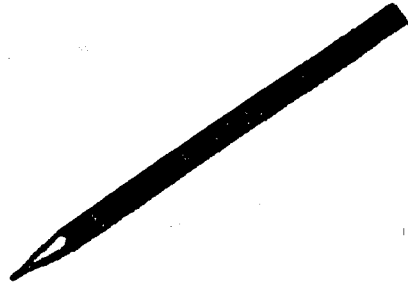
But how many times do we hear the expression, "I can't understand the spiritual part of the program." Is it because such folks can't understand plain English? Or is it because we are just lazy and do not want to make the effort?

So often people do not make use of all the talents and abilities that are theirs. Man has so many powers, resources and ideas that he does not know he possesses until he "tunes in" with God and works hand in hand with his Creator. If this "Power greater than ourselves" can stop one from being a drunk, did you ever stop

to think what other wonderful accomplishments can be realized through the use of such power? Many have found this out, and through the AA program have not only become "new creatures" but are attaining heights and goals that would have been impossible, even before their drinking days.

Then last but not least, the AA program is a give-away program. As the founders soon discovered, they had to get out and help others, or they were not on safe ground. This writer sees many things which cause him to wonder what keeps many of us sober. It certainly isn't anything that the individual deserves complete credit for. Must be "that Power greater than ourselves."—*Anonymous, Pa.*

. . . . we mean
to write one story . . .



IT has been said that the life of everyone is a diary in which they mean to write one story, but proceed to write another.

Their humblest hour is when they compare the book as it is, with what they had hoped to make it. The comparison, of course, will bring about a feeling of inadequacy, incompetence, frustration, and despair. None of these is a good feeling and will only lead either to self-pity or self-condemnation if cause and remedy are not found.

In the self-evaluation brought forth

by the Fourth Step, to be taken completely and honestly, stressing specifically the last word of this Step (*ourselves*) we find many things wrong with ourselves. To name a few, there are deception, dishonesty, impatience, intolerance, hatred, resentment, lack of faith, ingratitude, and a host of others. However, there is one thing more all of us, whether alcoholic or not must recognize, and that is our *limitations*.

Let's talk about some of our limitations and what they mean.

(1) Moral: how flexible is our

conscience? How far can we stray from the Golden Rule? What are our concepts of conduct in our relations with our fellowman? To what degree can we deviate from what is right and proper without endangering our precious sobriety?

(2) Spiritual: how deep is our faith and belief? Have we completely surrendered ourselves to the will of a Power greater than ourselves? Are we ready to get out of the driver's seat? Do we recognize that to be agnostic and faithless is to endanger our hard-earned sobriety?

(3) Mental: different people have, of course, different and varied ability to reason, to absorb, and mentally digest what they hear and read. Educational backgrounds differ, various philosophies exist. Therefore it behooves us to take and keep only that which we can use and understand and not jeopardize our sobriety by taxing our mental capacities too greatly.

(4) Emotional: how much can we love or hate—persons, places, jobs, conditions? Intense emotional binges are a prelude to a dry drunk which is only a step away from the real thing. So again we must watch very carefully that so delicate emotional balance, so as not to lose sobriety.

(5) Physical: how hard and how long can we work? How heavy a load can we carry, are we aware of physical as well as mental exhaustion? How about our general health? Do we take as good care of ourselves as of our possessions? We must be careful not to let ourselves become exhausted to

the point where maybe for surcease we might in desperation turn to the bottle as we once did.

(6) Material: how much of our earthly possessions, such as goods, chattels, and money can we give away, dissipate, or lose without endangering our sobriety? Does the seeming slowness of acquiring material things tend to make us impatient? Do we in sobriety still have to be the Goodtime Charlie, the would-be big-shot of our drinking days? Do we recognize the signs of depletion of our assets before it's too late to do anything?

Whether our limitations be any one of those listed above or others which we may have missed, we must recognize and accept the fact that we are but one individual, that we have but one mind, one pair of hands, one body, and but twenty-four hours in one day to work with.

Knowing this we must realize that only so much can be accomplished, and never become dissatisfied with the results for that day. Should we drive ourselves beyond our capabilities, whether in a mental, physical, moral, spiritual, or economic sense, we are very apt to do ourselves more harm than good. We couldn't even be able to make amends to those we would like to for the harm we did.

So in recapitulation of all these things it stands to reason that we cannot in a few short months or years expect to undo and make amends for the breach of ethics, transgressions, moral turpitude, and wrong living and thinking that covers many years.

If however we have failed to recognize our limitations, and thereby failed in the performance of tasks we set out for ourselves to accomplish, we dare not sit too severely in judgment on ourselves. Rather, we should profit by it, and know better the next time.

It should be sufficient that we do the best we can with what we have, each day, for that day alone. Be con-

tent that we have, to the best of our limited capabilities, done that which we can consider rightly proper. No more than that can be asked.

Let us seek through God and our AA program a life of contented sobriety and having found it pray to God that we keep it forever.

E.L., Chicago, Ill.

It happened a year ago...and the ending
is still a happy one

The Human Story

SOMETIMES a little shove just in the right direction will save an alcoholic, sometimes a shove in the wrong direction may lose him.

In March, 1950 the City Treasurer of Richmond, Va., was making a trip to San Francisco with a police sergeant to bring back a boy thirty-two years of age who had skipped out with about \$13,000 belonging to his employer. After spending the cash, he decided in San Francisco he wanted to give himself up. He phoned the police and waited three hours in the lobby of a hotel for them.

The City Treasurer, knowing that I had lived in San Francisco forty years ago, asked me if I would like to make the trip with them.

Reaching San Francisco after five days' driving, we got in touch with the police department and when we visited them I was told by a police inspector that the boy we came for was not a criminal but had simply gotten drunk and made one terrible mistake. This gave me an opening, so

I told him I belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous and would have an opportunity to talk to the boy on the way back to Richmond.

He turned out to be a wonderful chap and the police sergeant who went with us to bring him back was the most considerate person I have ever seen. Of course it was necessary to put the prisoner in jail each night, but he always permitted him to have dinner with us at our hotel and the next morning he always went for him about six o'clock, giving him an opportunity to bathe and shave and be ready to have breakfast with us. Outside of the time he spent in jail each night, no one could have told which of us was the prisoner.

When we got back to Richmond the boy was put in jail and was out in two days under bond.

Finally his case came up in court, and the judge sentenced him to five years in the penitentiary, but being a great believer in the parole system and thoroughly familiar with the good

work AA was trying to do, he suspended sentence with these remarks: "Your probation report is the best one I have ever had before me since being on the bench and I notice it included the fact that you have joined Alcoholics Anonymous. I know you are headed in the right direction. However it is important that you build your weeks around at least one AA meeting. This you cannot do if you are confined, so your sentence is being suspended."

This is being written two years and nine months since that sentence was suspended. Two weeks ago this man was in Domestic Relations Court interceding for another alcoholic. The Judge of Domestic Relations Court paroled the man to the boy who was under a five-year suspended sentence. Immediately he told the judge that probably he did not know it, but that he was a parolee himself. This did not change the attitude of the judge. This confidence in the parolee created a thought that perhaps the lifting of his own parole would be a nice Christmas present.

I called on the judge who had sentenced him back in March, 1950 and thanked him for placing this boy on

parole. I gave him a wonderful report of his activities in AA and his economic success, as he had been reinstated at his automobile agency and was number one or number two salesman each week on their list. While I was talking to the judge, who should walk by but the police sergeant who went to San Francisco to bring him back and, a few minutes later, the probation officer followed! With the good report both of them had to make to the judge, he readily agreed that lifting of the parole would be in order. Now this boy with three children, has probably received the most valuable Christmas present he has ever had.

Some people may think that what started out to be a pleasure trip to San Francisco just happened to turn out to be the longest Twelfth Step call I ever made and some perhaps may think that it was just a coincidence that the police sergeant who brought this boy back and the probation officer just *happened* to pass while I was talking to the judge . . . but for me it could not have happened without the touch of the Master's Hand being involved.

Jack W., Richmond, Va.

January 1953

TO at least one gibbering idiot in the usual third-rate hotel room, a call to Alcoholics Anonymous for help meant the first good night's sleep in upwards of three years. No sweats. No shakes. No hallucinations. The little people, regular visitors at 3:30 a.m. for too many years, went about their various businesses. Heavenly first aid administered by a high school science teacher (strictly an intellectual job, was my first drunken reaction) and an Irish railroad worker, whose firm handclasp and sparkling eyes require no embellishment on my part. These were God's messengers.

A Twelfth Step call, with a fresh, smelly drunk can be, and usually is, rather a hectic affair. However, there's nothing new about this ex-

ponent of the white zombie school of drink to be holed up in a bottle lined flea-bag, doing "Julius Caesar" and playing all the parts. Simply a routine matter of being physically ambulant and, to put it mildly, mentally far afield. Novelty entered the picture with a knock on the door. The knock of two men, coming to help a fellow-man, or a degenerated facsimile thereof.

To be fully and humbly aware of one's small beginnings does not imply great accomplishments; great endings. However, small beginnings do leave ample room for that spiritual growth to which an alcoholic, in truth, has no decent or livable alternative.

— Anonymous, Worcester, Mass.

Anonymous Means Victorious!

WE all recognize the practical reasons for anonymity. The new member, filled with all the fears of the alcoholic, may take heart that his veil of anonymity will be respected.

But there is too, the spiritual significance of this tradition, the placing of principles above personalities. We are all anonymous individuals having as our ultimate authority a loving God as each of us understands him. There is really little difference between us when we consider that we are all alcoholics, dependent upon the same power for our recovery. A member's economic or social background is not important in AA as he becomes a fellow-member and a friend.

We find in the Fifth Step that it is suggested that we admit to God, ourselves and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs. Therefore we may expect in AA to share in the confidences of many. A respect of these confidences is obviously a respect of their anonymity. Should a member tell us of a slip that he or she may have had, it may be that they are seeking our assistance and advice. It certainly isn't because they want us to 'carry the message' of their slip to every member within reaching distance. The gossip that we hear in AA is strangely inconsistent with our

principles; it could be checked by a more sincere application of our Twelfth Tradition to our affairs.

Still another aspect of this tradition is what I like to call "Anonymity of Service," as an important AA function.

The benefit and satisfaction that we derive from our Twelfth Step work . . . the practice of AA principles in our daily affairs . . . is enriched when this practice becomes a habit. Service, as a habit, expects no recognition . . . demands no praise. It would take an enormous conceit indeed, to believe that we and we alone had the power to go to, speak with, and bring to a meeting, an alcoholic destined never to drink again. We neither accomplish nor are we able to accomplish these things alone but there *is* a Power at work both within and around us that each may understand and name as he understands it.

We are known as Alcoholics Anonymous. For the newcomer, our tradition of anonymity may be a shield against embarrassment, but to the older member it is a lesson in humility. It is a glorious anonymity coupled with a Divine Identity and the vehicle by which we may make sacrifices without expecting credit, by which we may work without seeking gain, and give, without counting cost.

And what is our reward for this? Surely there must be some recompense. There is, because our reward is the very thing we were seeking when first we came here. Sobriety.

*Anon., St. Rose de Laval,
Que., Can.*

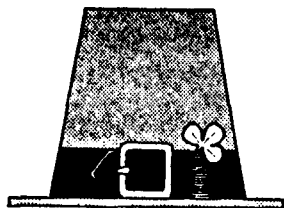
...FROM A DUBLIN DIARY



AA Helped Him

Drive Out His

Own Snakes!!



I AM an alcoholic. I was a drinking alcoholic for the most part of thirty years. I have been a dry alcoholic since I joined AA six years ago. Whatever anyone else may think of it, I *know* that AA is a success, because it has succeeded for me. Six years is a good test, by any reckoning.

I don't know how or why I became an alcoholic. I wasn't dropped on the floor as a baby; I had quite a happy school life; there is no record of drinking in my family (not, at least, before I made good the deficiency); I entered a profession I liked and got on in. Yet almost from the first drink I took, drinking had on me a compelling power to take more and more. I don't say I drank compulsively from the start; for a time I could control when I drank. But once a party started, I was there to the end. Gradually and imperceptibly I became an alcoholic, and trouble gathered over my head, slowly at first, but ever quickening.

For many years, good friends covered me up or overlooked what I did; but eventually I was retired from my profession. Not because I had done anything openly scandalous or was no longer any good at work; but because those in charge could not any longer ignore the fact that they could not rely on me being sober enough at any given moment to be fit for duty. I left with a mixture of real disgust at myself and of deep resentment, and proceeded on the worst bout I had had up to then. I drank myself into a home, came out after a month and got drunk that night. Then I returned to Ireland to live at home. For the next six years things only went from worse to worse. I went to more doctors and specialists and gradually lost all hope that I could live like a normal human being. Finally I took benzedrine to wake me up in the morning, drank all day and into the night and went to bed on a nightcap of paraldehyde laced with gin or whisky.

That wasn't a very successful way of living, and on April 28th, 1947, my parents came and told me to quit. They no longer wanted me either in the house or in the family. Somehow I managed to strike a bargain. I would go down to the AA meeting held that night and if it could do me any good, I could live on at home on probation. If it was no use for me, I would quit next day. Well, I went down, and I am in AA ever since . . . dry as a bone, in an alcoholic sense.

AA may be strange, cranky, comic, whatever people like to call it. But if it can help a drunk like me to recover, it's good. It has worked for me; it has worked for tens of thousands of "me's" all over the world.

I'm not going to write of my own recovery directly, though perhaps I am writing about it indirectly. Most of us know of the aids AA gives to the new men to stop drinking. I only want to add something about the program. When we look at that program for the first few times, we might well say "What on earth has all this got to do with stopping drinking?"

TO HELP US STOP WANTING TO

Well, actually, apart from the First Step (our admission ticket into AA) it hasn't got anything at all to do with just *stopping* drinking. Its purpose is to help us stop *wanting* to drink. Because there is no lasting recovery in merely physically ceasing to drink. That state won't last unless we convince ourselves that we want to stay dry and that we can live contentedly without drinking. So this program is designed, by fellow-alcoholics, to take the complications out of our living. It is designed to teach ourselves to live simply and happily, with as few emotional ups-and-downs as may be possible. It is designed to take the worry out of our lives. As a personal view, the Twelve Steps are the two age-old commandments. Steps two to eleven mean to me "Honor your God and trust in him." Step Twelve is "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We don't preach in AA, and I write nothing more directly on the first commandment. But the second is vital, too. I have been learning more and more about it in the last few weeks. I have learnt, in trouble, how very kind most people want to be if I can only let them be. I have learnt that, no matter how much money I might have had, I could still have been the loneliest man on earth had it not been for the love and kindness shown me by AA members all over the world. I have learnt a finer knowledge of the truth that when Christ came on earth to teach us charity, he was not preaching a gospel of idealism; he was giving us the secret of living. For love is the warmth of life. And the love or service of our groups is the AA antidote to loneliness. Most of us can remember our desperate loneliness when drinking, when our own lack of charity cut us away from the rest of the world. Now that we have stopped drinking in AA, we have regained friendship and have learnt to value it. If we grow careless and relapse, we relapse back into loneliness again. And to be lonely again, as the drinking alcoholic can be lonely . . . that would be a terribly high price to pay for the fleeting pleasure of the first few drinks.

Doctor Bob, almost with his dying words, urged us to keep AA as simple as we can. It seems to me that the four qualities I must keep on trying to cultivate are the simple-sounding qualities of humility, patience, toler-

ance, and charity. Humility towards my world and my fellowman, and in my approach to God as I understand him. Patience in realizing that I can only do so much each day; that if I do my best I am not accountable for the results. Success or failure, joy or sorrow . . . these results are but the practical expressions of the will of God. I have neither to explain away failure nor be unduly elated at success. Tolerance in conceding to my neighbor what I would expect him to concede to me. Charity in trying to help my neighbor; charity in being grateful for the help my neighbor has given me.

Two quotations seem to me to sum up the purpose of our AA aim of living . . . those two commandments. In "The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena" is our Twelfth Step clearly exposed, where God is made to say to her:

"I have placed you in the midst of your fellows that you may do to them what you cannot do to me, that is to say that you may love your neighbor of free Grace without expecting any return from him; *and what you do to him, I count as done to me.*"

The other Steps are surely in this:

"And I said to the men who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the Unknown.' And he replied 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God; and that shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'"

S., Dublin, Ireland

TWELFTH STEPPER

*"We Don't Reach DOWN
... We Just Reach OUT!"*

THE phone rings. It's a drunk! He's in the "Green Lantern," crying in his beer.

You know him, and you know everyone has tried to help him . . . but to no avail. You think: "It would be a waste of time; it's late and I'm just going to bed; why the hell did he have to call me direct? There are younger members in the group who ought to have the experience."

Well, anyway, you go. Are you eager or reluctant or pleased or displeased or grateful for the opportunity, or just plain sore because you're it?

As you are driving in to make the call, how do you think? Do you say

to yourself "Well, I guess I shouldn't be provoked. Joe probably knows I can help him. I have helped many others and, yes, it's nice to have reached the point of being needed by others because I have grown so strong. I guess someone has to play God for the weak ones and I really shouldn't mind. I feel I'll be able to reach down and pull this poor devil up to my level."

Of course we don't reach *down* to anyone; we just *reach out!* I have been guilty of some of these erroneous thoughts, and maybe you have too. But we have to learn by making some mistakes and by experiencing the failures

and successes that bring us to a beginning of the practice of sound philosophy.

I believe that my happiness and personal security began to develop only as I began to understand and establish my relationship to God and to my fellowman. Where else can this relationship be more clearly brought to light than on the Twelfth Step call? Now, in making such a call I am ever aware that I have nothing to give that was not given to me. I start by being grateful for my sober position in the case (it could be the other way around). I speak with my God, who is always with me, and as we travel along I sincerely ask that he grant me the privilege of being the instrument through which his message may be carried to my suffering fellowman. I

thank Him for letting me do the footwork and anticipate His assistance even in selecting the words I may use in presenting the AA message . . . His message.

What does this make me? God's gift to the sick alcoholic? Absolutely not. It makes me very small; it puts me in my proper place; it makes me a witness to a miracle!

As I arrive at my destination and prepare to enter the door, I hesitate, and I recall words of Kahlil Gibran:

"See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver; and an instrument of giving. For in truth it is Life that gives unto Life—while you, who deem yourself a giver are but a witness."

R.R.T., Harlingen, Texas

March 1953

AFTER ACCEPTANCE . . . ACTION!

MANY times I have heard speakers at AA meetings say "I have accepted the Twelve Steps" . . . in fact, I've said it myself more than once. However, on further thought, it's a pretty light and almost frivolous statement. Couldn't I just as easily say "I've accepted the Ten Commandments"?

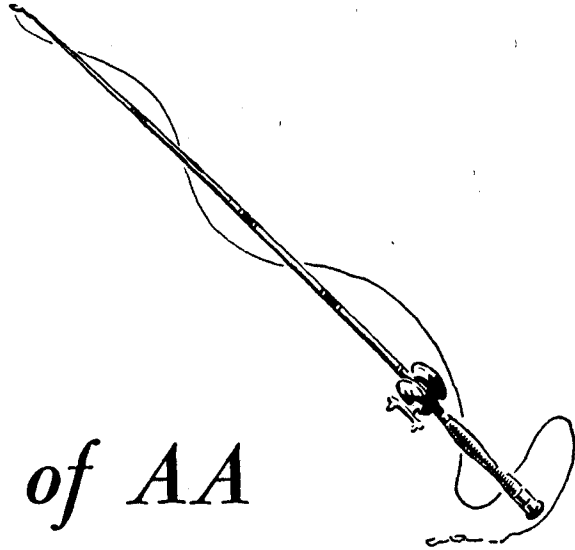
The longer I'm privileged to enjoy the help and fellowship of AA the more I realize that the Twelve Steps require daily effort, prayerful thought, and humble action.

We enjoy the savory smell of a roast of beef cooking. Would we say "I have accepted roast beef as a good food" and expect to derive any benefit? Of course not . . . we must chew it, digest it, and assimilate it, before it can provide us with nourishment, but it's surely worth the effort!

Just so, we must not only "accept" the Steps . . . we must put some real effort into thinking about them . . . applying them in a practical and personal way, to our daily lives. They can be incorporated into many of our daily conversations, our daily thoughts and activities. Then, we can truly say "We have accepted the Twelve Steps" and truly mean what we are saying.

F.C., Humber Summit, Ontario

The Fishers of AA



THE true fisherman goes forth at ungodly hours to the most unheard of spots to throw out his line. No matter who scoffs, sneers or laughs he goes out in an unconcerned manner . . . to fish.

Sometimes he is trying to land a special type . . . other times he will take what comes along. Wherever he goes, whether he catches a fish or not he enjoys the church-like experience of being close to nature and God. Being very human, the fisherman also enjoys the experience of landing fish to bring home.

Occasionally, a fellow man suggests a trip to land a fighter. All the sportsmanship within the man surges up and he prepares his tackle, bait and all known equipment that may help land a big one.

In high enthusiasm he sets out,

going for any length of distance that will get him to the waters or spots where the "big ones" hang out.

The weather can be zero . . . the rain can be pouring down . . . it can be so doggone hot the man boils, but anything is worth suffering if there is the slightest possibility of getting a bite!

Perhaps the day has passed with not even a nibble. To all sensible thinking the fish are twenty other places . . . or not hungry. Still he'll sit enjoying the possibility of success with another cast.

Yikes! A bite! Easy now . . . take it easy. It's a big one. He's no dope and you will need all your wisdom to try and pull him in. No . . . he doesn't want to come . . . did you?

Slowly the fisherman starts to reel in. The "fish" works with him for

awhile, then in a sudden dash for freedom he changes his mind. Easy, fisher, let him tire himself out. Steady! Patience! Try to remember all the knowledge you have within yourself. This fellow is worth the struggle.

Whether the line snaps or the fish gets away or perhaps gets caught, our fishermen rarely give up fishing to rest on their laurels of having made a day's catch. Like gluttons they keep going fishing for more! They try catching all types enjoying each trip more!

What game is there in life more ex-

citing than the game of Fishing for Men in the stagnant waters of life?

In all kinds of weather, to all spots on earth, to all types, the fishermen persist in their search for weakies, mackerals, flounders, drumfish, seals, porpoises, whities, catties, balloonfish, etc. Sometimes it's crabs they seek, clams, oysters, shrimps or minnows but the greatest joy comes when unexpectedly a small fish turns out to be a big one!

God bless his fishers of AA.

M.M., Philadelphia, Pa.

April 1953

"WHOLESALE" 12TH STEP WORK

In some cases we have received S.O.S. calls from groups that were falling off in attendance . . . groups that were in difficulties. These calls always came first with us. It enabled us to do what we like to call "wholesale" Twelfth Step Work.

To save expenses, the group meets in the home of one of its members. We have our own little eight-to-twelve-page paper. We have our own group telephone to take Twelfth Step calls. All new "babies" are urged to call our number day or night if they feel the need of talking to some one.

We hope eventually to visit every group in Northern California. We may never do it. But we are going to try, one group at a time and twenty-four hours at a time. We like our idea. We are very happy. And we are meeting wonderful people and are having a wonderful time.

J.B., San Francisco, Calif.

Twelfth Step Work Is AA

"If we live AA, we are doing Twelfth Step work . . . how infinitely more powerful is our message, if the suffering alcoholic recognizes that AA has produced in us a patient, humble, and loving friend of God and man."

OBVIOUSLY there would be no such thing as this life-saving fellowship called Alcoholics Anonymous, were it not for the regenerating two basic elements which seem to me to make up the vital Twelfth Step. They are, of course, a mission to carry the message, and a high calling to practice daily the AA principles in all our affairs as best we can.

If we look first at the mission territory into which we are to carry our message, we will better understand the absolute necessity of putting into practice the principles we advocate. It should not be difficult for us to familiarize ourselves with the mission fields into which we are venturing, inasmuch as we have all, more or less, recently dwelt in that outer darkness ourselves. That darkness, wherein we were, and where they are now groping, is a hell on earth. On the fringes of despair, our prospective members are

utterly alone in their losing battle, with no one to understand their problems, much less anyone to give them any permanent help in their tragic and desperate plight.

The world, in its fantastic progress, has left them behind as hopeless and helpless. Their closest of family ties have been severed, and where there was love, there is pity; where there was loyalty, there is contempt. Their faith in all things human as well as divine has been totally shattered. They are literally alone, abandoned, and doomed. They must blot out of their minds the joys of the past and they dare not face the inevitable sorrows of the future. Their souls cry out, as did their Divine Master's, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Our mission, our carrying of the message, is the lone response to their plea, it is the only ray of light to pierce the Stygian darkness that en-

compasses them. Will they hear us? Will they respond to our beacon of hope? Can they again put their trust in men? The answers to these questions lie in the second basic element of our Twelfth Step.

It seems to me that we will almost always be able to answer these two questions in the affirmative, if and when we really practice the principles of AA in all our affairs. The virtues of patience, humility, and charity must be ours, not at our meetings alone, but in every hour of our twenty-four hour program. Were it not for the charity of our sponsors we would not be here tonight. If they had not been possessed of patience, how many of us would still be here? Had they not the virtue of humility, of what concern would our sad situations have been to them? Our sponsors were sober, they knew the life-saving program. It is true that someone else had given it to them, but it does not necessarily follow that they were obliged in justice to hand it on to you and me. Thank God they were not only hearers of the word, but they were doers of it also. They were living the AA program, they were putting into daily practice the principles of AA in all of their affairs.

I said to begin with that this Twelfth Step is the step of regeneration. If there were no Twelfth Step, there would not be any AA. I firmly believe that even Bill and Doc, our founders, could not have kept themselves sober for long, had they not come up with this crowning admoni-

tion of the new way of life they developed. Because, the Twelfth Step simply means living the other eleven steps. It follows as does the day the night, that when we have recognized our dependence upon God (as we understand him) and we have turned our lives entirely over to his guidance and care, we will observe the command to love one another as he has loved us. In other words, we will always be doing Twelfth Step work, as long as we are adhering to the other eleven steps.

Many of us find Twelfth Step work very difficult, others of us seem to find very little opportunity for it. Much of our concern over these apparent difficulties lies in the fact that we try so hard to define Twelfth Step work. It cannot be defined in terms of the number of contacts made or even in the number of men and women we have introduced to the program. Twelfth Step work is AA. If we live AA, we are doing Twelfth Step work. Our every thought, word, and deed either builds up or tears down the program. We must practice what we preach; our own sobriety is by no means secure because we may have lost the florid complexion and now have an extra buck in our jeans. The change, if it is to endure, must originate in the very depths of our souls. When our hearts have been turned over to the care of God, our lives have in all truth been changed.

This new life will communicate itself to all with whom we come in contact. The message of AA will be

carried far and wide to alcoholics and non-alcoholics alike. Who could possibly estimate the number of AAs who have come into this new life as a result of the good example of one of our members. How many non-alcoholics have been witness to the change in an alcoholic acquaintance and as a result, the non-alcoholic carries the message to another in need of help with his problem.

How many of our former bar buddies, who are still at the bar, are watching us? How many of them are already on their way into AA, because they see the light shining through us?

Not for a minute would I belittle the glorious and meritorious work of those who spend themselves in what we commonly refer to as Twelfth Step work. It is the work that we all must do whenever the opportunity presents itself to go to the aid of an alcoholic in distress. What I am trying to say is that Twelfth Step work is much broader and all-embracing

than what we sometimes realize. We all know that in carrying the message to another alcoholic we find our best approach, in fact generally our only approach, lies in pointing out what we had to do to sober up; in telling, not what he must do, but what we have found worked for us. How infinitely more powerful is our message, when he already knows or at least immediately recognizes that AA has produced in us a patient, humble, and loving friend of God and man.

Therefore I think that we must go out on Twelfth Step calls ever mindful that we are very likely only the immediate instrument in this particular case, and as we go to and return from that call, our journey may well be fraught with occasions to sow the seeds for many, many calls yet unheard. Yes, I think that the as yet unarticulated calls must be given voice by our daily practice of AA principles in all of our comings and goings.

R.J.M., Jamestown, N. Y.

How Many Spokes in A Good Wheel?

YOU'VE probably heard, maybe too often, of the fellow or girl who says "Oh, I only need the First and Twelfth Steps." They get along swell for a while with only two good spokes in their wheel. Maybe.

But, suppose you heard someone say "Oh, I need only the Third Step." You'd sit up and listen . . . if the speaker could explain that a bit.

I heard that recently, and here's how I think he works it.

Naturally, anyone who can work the Third Step has admitted his weakness and the need for help, so let's say he has One and Two and doesn't realize it.

In order to work his Third Step he finds that, to "turn his life and will over" he has to take stock to find out what kind of a life and will he has to turn over. He has to be ready and willing, and if you turn something over to someone else, you have to more or less ask the other fellow to take it, as you give it. Our friend can't turn over a messy piece of merchandise, so he has to go over it, clean up any

liens and mortgages he has on it. So, it looks to me as though the fellow has followed all the Steps following number Three, and when you do that, the chances are that Eleven and Twelve are as well taken care of as One and Two.

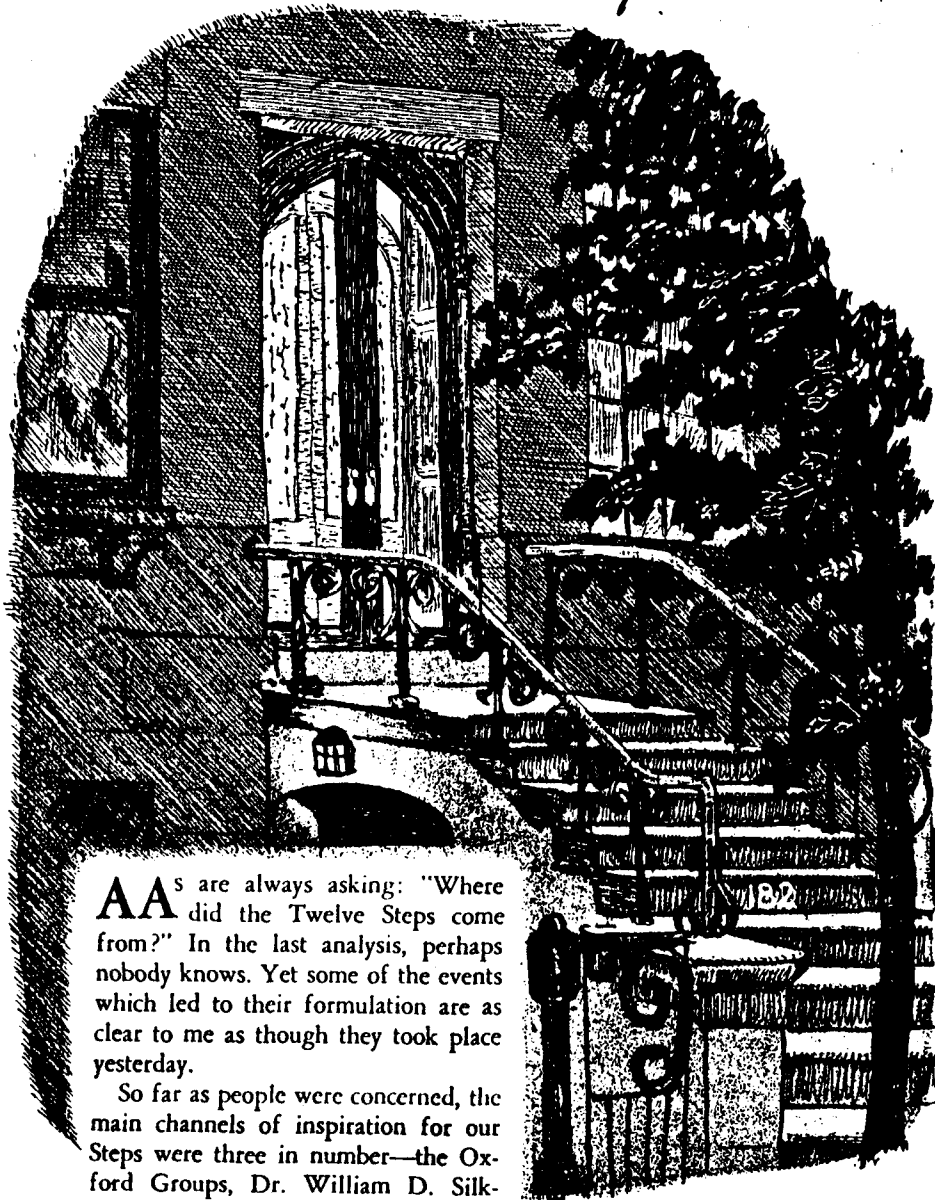
One fellow I told about this made the remark, "I've often wondered how to turn my life and my will over . . . I think this fellow tells us how."

And, consider the fellow who has only one person on his list, in the Eighth Step. If he takes the necessary steps to really make amends to that fellow, he'll have all the others happy and satisfied.

Like the story of the little girl who put the jigsaw puzzle together so easily . . . her father saw a map of the world on one side . . . but the child saw the picture of a man on the other side . . . and worked toward the picture from that angle. As she said, "when I got the man right, Daddy, the world was all right, too."

*F. T., Remora Lodge,
Lyndonville, Vermont*

*A Fragment of History
by Bill*



AAs are always asking: "Where did the Twelve Steps come from?" In the last analysis, perhaps nobody knows. Yet some of the events which led to their formulation are as clear to me as though they took place yesterday.

So far as people were concerned, the main channels of inspiration for our Steps were three in number—the Oxford Groups, Dr. William D. Silk-

worth of Towns Hospital and the famed psychologist, William James, called by some the father of modern psychology. The story of how these streams of influence were brought together and how they led to the writing of our Twelve Steps is exciting and in spots downright incredible.

Many of us will remember the Oxford Groups as a modern evangelical movement which flourished in the 1920's and early 30's, led by a one-time Lutheran minister, Dr. Frank Buchman. The Oxford Groups of that day threw heavy emphasis on personal work, one member with another. AA's Twelfth Step had its origin in that vital practice. The moral backbone of the "O.G." was absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love. They also practiced a type of confession, which they called "sharing"; the making of amends for harms done they called "restitution." They believed deeply in their "quiet time," a meditation practiced by groups and individuals alike, in which the guidance of God was sought for every detail of living, great or small.

These basic ideas were not new; they could have been found elsewhere. But the saving thing for us first alcoholics who contacted the Oxford Groupers was that they laid great stress on these particular principles. And fortunate for us was the fact that the Groupers took special pains not to interfere with one's personal religious views. Their society, like ours later on, saw the need to be strictly non-denominational.

In the late summer of 1934, my well-loved alcoholic friend and school-mate "Ebbie" had fallen in with these good folks and had promptly sobered up. Being an alcoholic, and rather on the obstinate side, he hadn't been able to "buy" all the Oxford Group ideas and attitudes. Nevertheless, he was moved by their deep sincerity and felt mighty grateful for the fact that their ministrations had, for the time being, lifted his obsession to drink.

When he arrived in New York in the late fall of 1934, Ebbie thought at once of me. On a bleak November day he rang up. Soon he was looking at me across our kitchen table at 182 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York. As I remember that conversation, he constantly used phrases like these: "I found I couldn't run my own life;" "I had to get honest with myself and somebody else;" "I had to make restitution for the damage I had done;" "I had to pray to God for guidance and strength, even though I wasn't sure there was any God;" "And after I'd tried hard to do these things I found that my craving for alcohol left." Then over and over Ebbie would say something like this: "Bill, it isn't a bit like being on the water-wagon. You don't fight the desire to drink—you get released from it. I never had such a feeling before."

Such was the sum of what Ebbie had extracted from his Oxford Group friends and had transmitted to me that day. While these simple ideas were not new, they certainly hit me like tons of brick. Today we understand just

why that was . . . one alcoholic was talking to another as no one else can.

Two or three weeks later, December 11th to be exact, I staggered into the Charles B. Towns Hospital, that famous drying-out emporium on Central Park West, New York City. I'd been there before, so I knew and already loved the doctor in charge—Dr. Silkworth. It was he who was soon to contribute a very great idea without which AA could never have succeeded. For years he had been proclaiming alcoholism an illness, an obsession of the mind coupled with an allergy of the body. By now I knew this meant me. I also understood what a fatal combination these twin ogres could be. Of course, I'd once hoped to be among the small percentage of victims who now and then escape their vengeance. But this outside hope was now gone. I was about to hit bottom. That verdict of science—the obsession that condemned me to drink and the allergy that condemned me to die—was about to do the trick. That's where medical science, personified by this benign little doctor, began to fit in. Held in the hands of one alcoholic talking to the next, this double-edged truth was a sledgehammer which could shatter the tough alcoholic's ego at depth and lay him wide open to the grace of God.

In my case it was of course Dr. Silkworth who swung the sledge while my friend Ebbie carried to me the spiritual principles and the grace which brought on my sudden spiritual awakening at the hospital three days later. I immediately knew that I was

a free man. And with this astonishing experience came a feeling of wonderful certainty that great numbers of alcoholics might one day enjoy the priceless gift which had been bestowed upon me.

THIRD INFLUENCE

At this point a third stream of influence entered my life through the pages of William James' book, "Varieties of Religious Experience." Somebody had brought it to my hospital room. Following my sudden experience, Dr. Silkworth had taken great pains to convince me that I was not hallucinated. But William James did even more. Not only, he said, could spiritual experiences make people saner, they could transform men and women so that they could do, feel and believe what had hitherto been impossible to them. It mattered little whether these awakenings were sudden or gradual, their variety could be almost infinite. But the biggest payoff of that noted book was this: *in most of the cases described, those who had been transformed were hopeless people. In some controlling area of their lives they had met absolute defeat.* Well, that was me all right. In complete defeat, with no hope or faith whatever, I had made an appeal to a higher Power. I had taken Step One of today's AA program—"admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." I'd also taken Step Three—"made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God as we understood him." Thus was I set free.

It was just as simple, yet just as mysterious, as that.

These realizations were so exciting that I instantly joined up with the Oxford Groups. But to their consternation I insisted on devoting myself exclusively to drunks. This was disturbing to the O.G.'s on two counts. Firstly, they wanted to help save the whole world. Secondly, their luck with drunks had been poor. Just as I joined they had been working over a batch of alcoholics who had proved disappointing indeed. One of them, it was rumored, had flippantly cast his shoe through a valuable stained glass window of an Episcopal church across the alley from O.G. headquarters. Neither did they take kindly to my repeated declaration that it shouldn't take long to sober up all the drunks in the world. They rightly declared that my conceit was still immense.

SOMETHING MISSING

After some six months of violent exertion with scores of alcoholics which I found at a nearby mission and Towns Hospital, it began to look like the Groupers were right. I hadn't sobered up anybody. In Brooklyn we always had a houseful of drinkers living with us, sometimes as many as five. My valiant wife, Lois, once arrived home from work to find three of them fairly tight. The remaining two were worse. They were whaling each other with two-by-fours. Though events like these slowed me down somewhat, the persistent conviction that a way to sobriety could be found never seemed

to leave me. There was, though, one bright spot. My sponsor, Ebbie, still clung precariously to his new-found sobriety.

What was the reason for all these fiascos? If Ebbie and I could achieve sobriety, why couldn't all the rest find it too? Some of those we'd worked on certainly wanted to get well. We speculated day and night why nothing much had happened to them. Maybe they couldn't stand the spiritual pace of the Oxford Group's four absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. In fact some of the alcoholics declared that this was the trouble. The aggressive pressure upon them to get good overnight would make them fly high as geese for a few weeks and then flop dismally. They complained, too, about another form of coercion—something the Oxford Groupers called "guidance for others." A "team" composed of non-alcoholic Groupers would sit down with an alcoholic and after a "quiet time" would come up with precise instructions as to how the alcoholic should run his own life. As grateful as we were to our O.G. friends, this was sometimes tough to take. It obviously had something to do with the wholesale skidding that went on.

But this wasn't the entire reason for failure. After months I saw the trouble was mainly in me. I had become very aggressive, very cocksure. I talked a lot about my sudden spiritual experience, as though it was something very special. I had been playing the double role of teacher and preacher.

In my exhortations I'd forgotten all about the medical side of our malady, and that need for deflation at depth so emphasized by William James had been neglected. We weren't using that medical sledgehammer that Dr. Silkworth had so providentially given us.

Finally, one day, Dr. Silkworth took me back down to my right size. Said he, "Bill, why don't you quit talking so much about that bright light experience of yours, it sounds too crazy. Though I'm convinced that nothing but better morals will make alcoholics really well, I do think you have got the cart before the horse. The point is that alcoholics won't buy all this moral exhortation until they convince themselves that they must. If I were you I'd go after them on the medical basis first. While it has never done any good for me to tell them how fatal their malady is, it might be a very different story if you, a formerly hopeless alcoholic, gave them the bad news. Because of the identification you naturally have with alcoholics, you might be able to penetrate where I can't. Give them the medical business first, and give it to them hard. This might soften them up so they will accept the principles that will really get them well."

THEN CAME AKRON

Shortly after this history-making conversation, I found myself in Akron, Ohio, on a business venture which promptly collapsed. Alone in the town, I was scared to death of getting drunk. I was no longer a teacher or a

preacher, I was an alcoholic who knew that he needed another alcoholic as much as that one could possibly need me. Driven by that urge, I was soon face to face with Dr. Bob. It was at once evident that Dr. Bob knew more of spiritual things than I did. He also had been in touch with the Oxford Groupers at Akron. But somehow he simply couldn't get sober. Following Dr. Silkworth's advice, I used the medical sledgehammer. I told him what alcoholism was and just how fatal it could be. Apparently this did something to Dr. Bob. On June 10, 1935, he sobered up, never to drink again. When, in 1939, Dr. Bob's story first appeared in the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, he put one paragraph of it in italics. Speaking of me, he said: "*Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience.*"

THE MISSING LINK

Dr. Silkworth had indeed supplied us the missing link without which the chain of principles now forged into our Twelve Steps could never have been complete. Then and there, the spark that was to become *Alcoholics Anonymous* had been struck.

During the next three years after Dr. Bob's recovery our growing groups at Akron, New York and Cleveland evolved the so-called word-of-mouth program of our pioneering time. As we commenced to form a society separate from the Oxford Group, we began

to state our principles something like this:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol
2. We got honest with ourselves
3. We got honest with another person, in confidence
4. We made amends for harms done others
5. We worked with other alcoholics without demand for prestige or money
6. We prayed to God to help us to do these things as best we could

Though these principles were advocated according to the whim or liking of each of us, and though in Akron and Cleveland they still stuck by the O.G. absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, this was the gist of our message to incoming alcoholics up to 1939, when our present Twelve Steps were put to paper.

I well remember the evening on which the Twelve Steps were written. I was lying in bed quite dejected and suffering from one of my imaginary ulcer attacks. Four chapters of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, had been roughed out and read in meetings at Akron and New York. We quickly found that everybody wanted to be an author. The hassles as to what should go into our new book were terrific. For example, some wanted a purely psychological book which would draw in alcoholics without scaring them. We could tell them about the "God business" afterwards. A few, led by our wonderful southern friend, Fitz M., wanted a fairly religious book infused with some of the dogma we had picked up from the churches and missions which had tried to help us.

The louder these arguments, the more I felt in the middle. It appeared that I wasn't going to be the author at all. I was only going to be an umpire who would decide the contents of the book. This didn't mean, though, that there wasn't terrific enthusiasm for the undertaking. Every one of us was wildly excited at the possibility of getting our message before all those countless alcoholics who still didn't know.

Having arrived at Chapter Five, it seemed high time to state what our program really was. I remember running over in my mind the word-of-mouth phrases then in current use. Jotting these down, they added up to the six named above. Then came the idea that our program ought to be more accurately and clearly stated. Distant readers would have to have a precise set of principles. Knowing the alcoholic's ability to rationalize, something airtight would have to be written. We couldn't let the reader wiggle out anywhere. Besides, a more complete statement would help in the chapters to come where we would need to show exactly how the recovery program ought to be worked.

12 STEPS IN 30 MINUTES

At length I began to write on a cheap yellow tablet. I split the word-of-mouth program up into smaller pieces, meanwhile enlarging its scope considerably. Uninspired as I felt, I was surprised that in a short time, perhaps half an hour, I had set down certain principles which, on being

counted, turned out to be twelve in number. And for some unaccountable reason, I had moved the idea of God into the Second Step, right up front. Besides, I had named God very liberally throughout the other steps. In one of the steps I had even suggested that the newcomer get down on his knees.

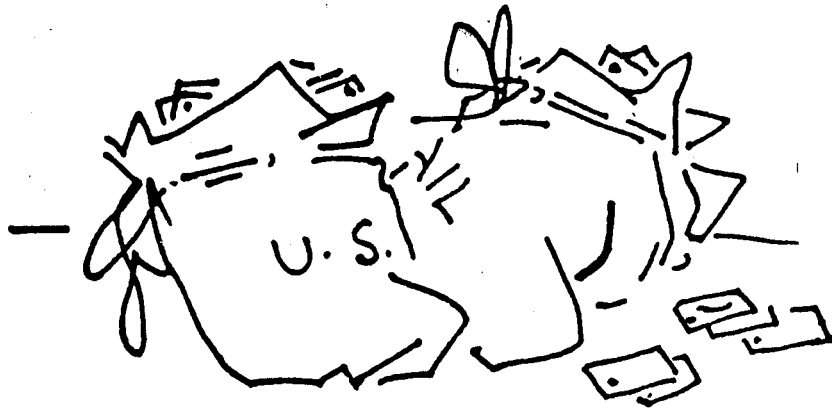
When this document was shown to our New York meeting the protests were many and loud. Our agnostic friends didn't go at all for the idea of kneeling. Others said we were talking altogether too much about God. And anyhow, why should there be twelve steps when we had done fine on six? Let's keep it simple, they said.

This sort of heated discussion went on for days and nights. But out of it all there came a ten-strike for Alcoholics Anonymous. Our agnostic contingent, spearheaded by Hank P. and Jim B., finally convinced us that we must make it easier for people like

themselves by using such terms as "a Higher Power" or "God as we understand Him!" Those expressions, as we so well know today, have proved life-savers for many an alcoholic. They have enabled thousands of us to make a beginning where none could have been made had we left the steps just as I originally wrote them. Happily for us there were no other changes in the original draft and the number of steps still stood at twelve. Little did we then guess that our Twelve Steps would soon be widely approved by clergymen of all denominations and even by our latter-day friends, the psychiatrists.

This little fragment of history ought to convince the most skeptical that nobody invented Alcoholics Anonymous.

It just grew . . . by the grace of God.



From the Grass Roots

THE THIRD STEP

WHEN I first came into AA, eager-beaver style I galloped through the Twelve Steps (or thought I was taking them) with great enthusiasm. As for admitting my shortcomings to God, myself, and another human being, I button-holed all my friends and poured out my sins into any ears I could find until I must have become the village bore. I also dashed around trying to "convert" other alcoholics, or at least hard-drinkers, to my new way of life, so that it is a wonder anyone tolerated me at all.

With all this missionary work, and self-immolation of confessing my sins, apologizing for past wrongs, and converting the multitude, I was side-

stepping a certain step myself—the Third.

I was *afraid* of it! There is the bald statement and I blush. I am as ashamed of this, and it is as difficult for me to confess it, as it is for some of our members to stand up and tell how "low" they fell before AA. Because the reason is so childish . . . that is why I blush. I feared if I turned my will and all my affairs and my life over to God he would "fix me." Justly, of course. I didn't blame Him . . . I had it coming to me. Once I put all in His hands He would "even the score."

Perhaps I did not consciously think this, but such a fear was in my mind.

But after three months, came the day when I knew I had to take the Step. How to go about it? I supposed the way would be to tell Him so. I prayed in a sort of way and turned it all over to Him—with a reservation. If He began "punishing" me as I felt it only just He should, then I'd take my own will back again. Having taken the Step I waited for results.

We both know all this is childish, but I often think most of us have some childish fears. Of course the Universal Heart of Good "fixed" me, or "got even" with me with compassion and forgiveness and a better life. I discovered there was not a Book-keeping God I had to deal with, but a generous and loving Father who understood my poor little miserable soul and who loved me none the less.

I speak of this because I have, from time to time, heard people say they didn't know so much about "that Third Step business." One man said, "But I am given a will to use!" Yes, that is true! But I have found that my will may serve me better if I bend it to One far wiser and more generous, a Will which guides me into my own good with good to spare for those around me and my contacts.

Anonymous, Gulf Coast, Florida

Family Circle

*As non-alcoholic mates and families
see the AA program . . .*

How One AA Wife Lives the 12 Steps

Lois W., AA's "first lady" as the non-alcoholic wife of Bill, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, tells the story of her own adventure in growth applying AA principles to her own life.

WE have often heard it said that the Twelve Steps of AA are a way of life for anyone, if you substitute for the word "alcohol" any particular problem of life. For a close relative of an AA, a wife or husband, even the word alcohol does not need to be changed in the First Step; simply leave out "alcoholic" in the last, thus: "carry the message to others, etc."

We wives and husbands of AA in our Family Group try to live by the Twelve Steps, and the following is how one wife applies the Twelve Steps to herself:

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable.

I was just as powerless over my husband's alcoholism as he. I tried in every way I knew to control his drinking. My own life was indeed unmanageable. I was forced into doing and being that which I did not want to do or be. And I tried to manage Bill's life as well as my own. I wanted to get inside his brain and turn the screws in what I thought was the right direction. But I finally saw how mistaken I was. I, too, was powerless over alcohol.

Step 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

My thinking was distorted, my nerves over-wrought. I held fears and attitudes that certainly were not sane. I finally realized that I had to be restored to sanity also and that only by having faith in God, in AA, in my husband and myself, could this come about.

Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.

Self-sufficiency and the habit of acting as mother, nurse, caretaker, and breadwinner, added to the fact of always being considered on the credit side of the ledger with my husband on the debit side, caused me to have a smug feeling of rightness. At the same time, illogically, I felt a failure at my life's job. All this made me blind for a long time to the fact that I needed to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. Smugness is the very worst sin of all, I do believe. No shaft of light can pierce the armour of self-righteousness.

Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Here is where, when I tried to be really honest, I received a tremendous shock. Many of the things that I thought I did unselfishly were, when I tracked them down, pure rationalizations—rationalizations to get my own way about something. This disclosure doubled my need to live by the 12 Steps as completely as I could.

Step 5. Admitted to God, to our-

selfes, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

I found this was just as necessary for me to do as it was for an alcoholic, even more so perhaps, because of my former "mother-and-bad-boy" attitude toward Bill. Admitting my wrongs helped so much to balance our relationship, to bring it closer to the ideal of partnership in marriage.

Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

I came to realize there were selfish thoughts, feelings and actions that I had felt justified in keeping because of what Bill or someone else had done to me. I had to try very hard to want God to remove these. There was, for instance, my self-pity at losing Bill's companionship, now that the house was full of drunks, and we saw each other alone so seldom. At that time I didn't realize the importance of his working with other alcoholics. In order to banish his alcoholic obsession he needed to be equally obsessed by AA.

In the early days there was also my deep and unconscious resentment because someone else had done in a few minutes what I had tried my whole married life to do. Now I realize that a wife can rarely if ever do this job. The sick alcoholic feels his wife's account has been written on the credit page of life's ledger. But he knows his own has been on the debit side; therefore she cannot possibly understand. Another alcoholic, with similar debit entry, immediately identifies him-

self as a non-alcoholic really cannot.

This important fact took me a long time to recognize. I could find no peace of mind until I did so.

Step 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

"Humbly" was a word I never fully understood. Today it means "in proportion," an honest relationship between myself and my fellow man, and myself and God. While striving for humility myself, it was encouraging to see my husband's growth in humility. While he was drinking he was the most inferiority-ridden person in the world. After AA, from a doormat he bounced way up to superiority over everyone else, including me. This was pretty hard to take "after all the good I done him." Of course few wives at first can see how natural it is for the alcoholic to feel that the most wonderful people in the world are AAs living the only true principles. Since I, too, was trying to live the AA program, this was the very point where I had to look to my own humility, regardless of my husband's progress or lack of it.

Step 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

At first I couldn't think of anyone I had harmed. But when I broke through my own smugness even a little, I saw many relatives and friends whom I had resented; I had given short, irritated answers and had even imperiled long standing friendships. In fact, I remember one friend that I threw a book at when, after a nerve-

racking day, he annoyed me. (Throwing seems to have been my pet temper outlet.) I try to keep this list up to date. And I also try to shorten it.

Step 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

This is just as important for me as for the alcoholic. To have serenity and joy in living and doing, to be able to withstand the hard knocks that come along, and to help others do the same, I found I had to make specific amends for each harm done. I couldn't help others while emotionally sick myself.

Step 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

It is astounding how each time I take an inventory I find some new rationalization, some new way I have been fooling myself that I hadn't recognized before. It is so easy to fool oneself about motives. And admitting it is so hard, but so beneficial.

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.

I am just beginning to understand how to pray. Bargaining with God is not real prayer and asking him for what I want, even good things, I've had to learn is not the highest form of prayer. I used to think I knew what was good for me and I, the captain, would give my instructions to my Lieutenant, God, to carry out. That

is very different from praying only for the knowledge of God's will and the power for me to carry it out.

Time for meditation is hard to find, I imagine, for most of us. Today's living is so involved. But I've set aside a few minutes night and morning. I am filled with gratitude to God these days. It is one of my principal subjects for meditation; gratitude for all the love and beauty and friends around me; gratitude even for the hard days of long ago that taught me so much. At least I've made a start and have improved to some small degree my conscious contact with God.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to

others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

I am like many AAs who do not realize when their spiritual awakening occurred. Mine was a slow developing experience. Even following a sudden spiritual awakening, no one can stand still. One either moves forward, or slips backward. In retrospect I can see a change for the better between my old and new self, and I hope that tomorrow, next month, next year I shall continue to see a better new self.

And nothing has done more to move me forward than carrying the AA message to those non-alcoholics who do not yet comprehend and are still in need of the understanding and help of those who have gone before.

He Wasn't Such A Bad Guy

ONCE upon a time, there was a guy, really not a bad Joe, who was almost a charter member of O.B.A.I.C., which means, "Oh Boy Am I Confused."

Well, this guy was confused about a lot of things, but he was more confused about his liquor problem than anything else. And, if the truth were known, his confusion over his liquor problem was really the cause of his confusion about his other problems.

As I mentioned above, he really wasn't such a bad guy, in that he never really set out to get drunk; it just happened that after he had gotten one shot under his belt, he never knew when to quit. He never had any real trouble getting a job, it was always trouble to keep a job after he got it. So often his work interfered with his drinking, but he had to work so he could tie one on once in a while. But it wasn't too long before those "once in a while" got too close for comfort.

Well—about five years ago, after having hired himself out to a grand outfit, making more money than he was worth, and certainly more than he

had ever made before, his prosperity went to his head, and he really had himself a "ball." Didn't intend to let it get out of hand, but it did. He managed to stay on a bender for almost two weeks until, at last, his wife finally found out where he was. Even then, she didn't know what to do, but she knew about Alcoholics Anonymous, so she gave 'em a ring. They told her about a real guy by the name of Jack, who had been real successful in AA, not only successful himself, but he had helped put a lot of other guys on the right track.

Jack knew what to do, allright. He had had many other cases like this one, so he called another good Joe in Lynchburg, and the two of them got their heads together on a plan of action. The upshot of the whole thing was that they managed to get this drunk back home, and Jack suggested that the best thing to do would be to put him in a hospital to dry him out, and then maybe somebody would be able to talk some sense into the guy. So they did, they were able to talk to him; and for a wonder they talked his

language so well, that the guy was able to understand what they were talking about, and it all made sense to him, so much so that for once in his life, he realized that he had met somebody that knew more about something than he did.

Jack went to see him in the hospital, gave him encouragement, kept in touch with him, and finally introduced him into Alcoholics Anonymous. Well, you know how AA works, and this guy, this ex-drunk really drank up that good old AA philosophy, so much so that to this day, five years since he took his last drink, he is still on the ball. Staying sober, trying to think and do right, and almost succeeding. Of course, nobody is perfect, and this ex-drunk is no exception. But the main thing is, he is really trying, and for the first time in his misspent life, he is giving some thought to others, and not just thinking about himself.

Jack may not know it, but he really saved the guy's life. Not only that, he saved his home and family, for

goodness only knows what would have become of him or his family if Jack had not come to his rescue, or if Jack had been too busy thinking about himself to bother with this drunk. But, once upon a time, somebody had helped Jack out of a similar spot, and he never forgot it. Figured that AA wasn't much good unless he could give some of it away; in fact, Jack knew that the more AA he gave away, the more he would have.

To make a long story short, this ex-drunk keeps in touch with Jack. Every time he is in the neighborhood, he drops in for a few minutes to chew the fat, and tries mighty hard, without getting sloppy about it, to let Jack know just how grateful he is for the help, confidence and encouragement he had given him. Of course, the English language is full of words that convey the same meaning, but after all, is there anything more eloquent than a simple word that comes from a heart full of gratitude, when that word is "Thanks, Jack."

C.B., Richmond, Virginia

The Twelfth-Stepper's Handy Guide (for feminine cases only)

READ THE LABEL!

WHILE there is no rule that can automatically be applied in approaching any alcoholic, it is my female contention that a certain formula can be employed during your first visit with the well-dressed woman alcoholic who has called for help. Generally it will indicate the most expedient course to follow in leading her into the AA program. This is my "Coat Label Approach."

On entering the home, and with as much tact as possible, head straight for her clothes closet. Once there, browse quickly and determine the predominance of a particular store or specialty shop label inside her garments (you'll find the bottle jutting out impudently from the pocket of some coat or another). Now let's run through a few typical situations and their possible meanings.

For example, spotting the "X & Co." label stitched to her tweeds, you conclude that your pigeon is normally (note I say normally) a capable, practical woman. Her clothes were selected to withstand a busy, wholesome life and many prolonged drinking bouts. Deal with her in a forthright manner.

Upon seeing the "Y & Co." signature inside a matronally unfashionable garment of excellent cloth, don't give up. True, when faced with this rather formidable name one is inclined to stand stiffly at attention for a moment, knowing our usual lighthearted informality may be far more disturbing than reassuring in this instance. Discuss your own alcoholic affliction as much as you like, but it will be quite some time before you will be able to suggest that drinking is or has been any problem in madam's life; that she has at anytime inbibed with any indiscretion whatsoever; or that her present ill health has been induced by anything other than nerves or neuritis. Then, when she has returned from the sanitarium, you'll find it wise to confine her attendance to meetings exclusively of women's discussion groups . . . closed, of course, closed tight.

Sometimes it is not even necessary to hunt in the closet in order to gain insight. "Z & Co.", for instance. Seeing "Z's" inscribed on a small paper bag lying around, you can be fairly certain that it contains a spool of thread—which, as a result of great de-

liberation and a very involved consultation with a favored salesclerk, is precisely the correct tension, and exactly the right shade. And you know that the purchaser upon arriving home, will scuttle of to the attic where, after scrounging and burrowing happily for many hours, she will arise from the clutter flushed but triumphant with some remarkable old hat . . . *just* the color of the thread. This type is rarely an alcoholic. She attends meetings, however, all too regularly, with her husband, "dear Horace" who hasn't shown a sign of "indigestion" since finding "such diversion" in AA.

But back to our "label" types. Probably the woman from whom we derive the most pleasure and satisfaction in our twelfth-stepping will in most instances have "A, B, C. & Co." labels predominating. She is delightfully responsive and youthfully exuberant, regardless of her age. And she will progress rapidly in the program, once in AA, to become one of our most willing, eager, dependable and active members—between slips!

Then there is the enigma type. In her closet, no two garments bear the same label. She stumps me too, but I've found her more often to be the searching, analytical type, and therefore critical. She devours all the literature we proffer, interested in and acquiring an alarming amount of knowledge on all phases of alcoholism; medical, spiritual, mental. Her most annoying trait is that she is highly opinionated. Early in the drying-out period, for instance, she makes it clear

that she highly disapproves of the Yale Clinic's attempt to make drunks out of all the poor little mice they test. Besides which, if they were determined to prove something, they certainly failed to reproduce representative conditions under which to carry out the tests.

First, they should have put the rodents through a series of their most complicated, frustrating mazes; set loose a crashing clatter of noise over them; and placed nagging relatives and friends at the windows. After a considerable time of this, they would then turn off the noise, send the relatives and friends out for coffee, remove the confused, panicky, enraged rats, set before them sugar-and-water or booze-filled saucers and . . . *then* just see which they choose.

After this divergence from my topic, you may well doubt the validity or even sanity of my theory and question my qualifications. Well, I haven't any, other than the fact that I fall into the last category described. But added to this trait that most annoys others, is one that most annoys *me*, about me. I'm an "impulse buyer," unable at present to fully recuperate from my last attack. Its onslaught occurred while I was engrossed in a fashion magazine. Thumbing through its pages, suddenly from a page up popped a "creamy, dreamy, soft cloud of a pale pink coat." This was too much. Up popped I to the phone and called a store saleswoman who I instructed to rush the coat out that very moment without an instant's delay. Early the next morning,

the large box arrived from which there arose my creamy dreamy pink cloud of a coat. And I have been utterly miserable ever since!

If so much as one pale gray cloud passes overhead, I must hop into the nearest taxi for fear of rain. I cannot wear it to church because of genuflecting. In meetings I must sit and freeze rather than toss it about my shoulders and have it brush the floor. Subways are out of the question. And com-

muting on the New York bus I am compelled to stand all the way rather than sit beside a many-footed child. Altogether, my life in that pink coat is without my rightful joy and freedom. And should some *drunk* spill a drop of liquor on it—well! I have to borrow at least 100,000 nickels and dimes for immediate therapy.

But it's got a pretty, pretty label inside!

K.D., Bloomfield, N. J.

"An Open Letter to AA" (July Grapevine) asked: "Can anyone explain the difference between Twelfth Step work, working with others, and guys and gals who know the solution but continue to drink and use AA connections?" Two answers appear below.

Too Many Saints and Experts

I BELIEVE J.F.M.'s "Open Letter" contains an expression of sentiments shared by a number of alcoholics who have been successful in maintaining their sobriety over a period of years. I feel that it may be timely for this group of "the righteous" to re-examine not only their own motives and attitudes towards their less fortunate fellow-members, but also the fundamental principles and purposes of AA.

The Open Letter begins: "I am . . . starting my seventh year of continuous sobriety. I have many times read the Big Book (but) nowhere between the covers am I able to find . . . any information about how to carry the message to constant slippers."

I do not know how many slips are necessary for one to become a "con-

stant slipper," but I do know that I have slipped a sufficient number of times. I have been in AA since October 1940, and on one occasion went four years without a drink. At present, I have not had a drink for nine months. More accurately, as a friend who has had fifteen years of continuous sobriety just wrote me, "I haven't had a drink to-day."

In my capacity of "constant slipper," during the past thirteen years I have been made most acutely conscious of the growing army of saints and experts (I forbear to estimate its numbers) which has sprung up in the ranks of AA. I have never ceased to look with awe and amazement at these patterns of behavior, and to wonder by what mysterious process of reason or self-hypnosis they had

achieved omniscience and beatitude. Could they have once, in their less happier days, beaten and despairing, crawled out of the same gutter from which I came, and to which so often I returned? It hardly seemed possible, for there are often lessons to be learned in the gutter, and they had obviously forgotten them.

J.F.M. is disturbed because he cannot find an appropriate answer to his problem in the Big Book. May I refer him to a still Bigger Book (Mat. 18, 21-22) wherein he may learn, by the application of simple arithmetic, that only on the occasion of his fellow-member's 491st slip is he entitled to withhold his forgiveness. If this 2,000-year-old hint is not sufficient to solve his precious attitudes toward his fellow-alcoholics whose behavior is displeasing to him, let him re-read Number Five of the AA's Twelve Traditions: "Each group has but one primary purpose . . . to carry its message to *the alcoholic who still suffers.*"

And if this reference still fails to carry conviction, let us go back to the basic principle of AA from its first beginnings: "Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety." This, then, should enable J.F.M. to resolve his dilemma. Applying the above statements to the case of the erring member he has cited, Member X either is an alcoholic who still suffers, or he is not. If he belongs to the first category, as seems evident, he is clearly a member of that class from whom

AA was founded, and for whom it continues to exist. The statements I have quoted make no distinction between "good" alcoholics and "bad" alcoholics, con-men alcoholics and haloed alcoholics; they refer to the practicing alcoholic who still suffers.

Our function is to help, not to judge. Certainly, no human being (AA or not) can be of much help to another towards whom he feels a total lack of sympathy. But here again, no problem exists. We are not called on to like our fellow-members, but to love them, and this merely means to have for them a feeling of active good-will. If we find this small requirement too difficult, we can at least hold our peace.

Aside from the obvious lack of charity revealed by the letter, its most deplorable feature is the unconscious picture which the writer gives of himself. Here, in unmistakable accents, echoes the prayer of the Pharisee: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other AAs are, petty blackmailers, con-men, clippers, or even as this constant slipper. I am starting my seventh year of continuous sobriety, I have many times read the Big Book, I still work with my old drinking pals, and help them weather many a rough Monday morning and have compassion and concern for any drunk who wants help and I can help." Am I being unfair? Turn to the original: Luke 18.

Reduced to its essentials, the AA program is: Honesty, Humility, and Helpfulness. Let us examine the let-

ter in the light of these requirements.

Honesty: It pretends to be a request for information; in reality, it serves to a) air a grievance, and b) testify to the writer's personal righteousness.

Humility: Consider the opening sentence: "I am starting my seventh year of continuous sobriety." Are we now staying sober for a year at a time? Intrigued by this manner of stating the situation, I examined every statement in the July issue relating to length of sobriety and found that in every instance, save the one just quoted, the individual referred to the duration of his sobriety in the past tense. "*I refuse to accept* the constant slipper . . . with the same solicitude . . . I object to his continued using of AA contacts." Is this the tone of the humble, or of the cocksure and the arrogant?

Helpfulness: It would be interesting to know what alcoholic has been helped to stay sober and to carry the message to other alcoholics as the result of the Open Letter. Assuming that it helped the writer, which I doubt, what probable effect would it have on the poor unfortunate against whom it was directed?

It is too bad that J.F.M. could not have read the same issue of *The Grapevine* in which his letter appeared. If he had looked at the bottom of page 48 (When We Are Older, H.P.Y., Tuscaloosa, Ala.), he

would have found a perfect answer to his question: "It seems to me that we older members could give a bit more encouragement now and then to the other older members who might be discouraged. *Just a kind word now and then might make all the difference.*"

C.Q.G., Paris, France

* * *

Pat's Story

IN the year 1945 a woman read an article about Alcoholics Anonymous . . . she wrote to the General Service Headquarters address in New York. . . a telegram from there went to the four-months-old AA group in Nacogdoches (the only one anywhere in East Texas at that time) . . . Nacogdoches phoned their only Palestine member, who made his first Twelfth Step call on Pat, desperately sick in the hospital there.

Pat was fifty-six years old; he never took another drink of alcohol after that AA call on November 14. When he learned that he had a disease, that others suffered from it just as he did, that many had found recovery and happy sobriety through the AA therapy, he wanted that happiness too. It wasn't easy, but Pat truly wanted it.

His sister in Centerville, Texas, who had written General Service Headquarters, made room for Pat in her home . . . he had long since lost his own family.

Every Thursday at noon Pat boarded

a bus to Palestine, ate supper there, then went to Doc's office and rode with him to Nacogdoches for the AA meeting. They got back to Doc's home about midnight, Pat slept there, had early breakfast and then caught the eight o'clock bus back to Centerville where he arrived about noon Friday. The round trip with layovers at Buffalo both ways was about 270 miles and took twenty-four hours, but Pat thought it was worthwhile . . . he didn't miss a meeting for over a year. By then Palestine held their own group on Monday nights and Pat's trip was shortened to 140 miles.

Pat's health improved, he set up his own residence, worked in his brother-in-law's general mercantile store, gradually took more responsibility, became manager and finally half owner. He returned to active church membership, became a good influence over the young people, who loved him and his ideas of clean fun, moral living, and proper dress (he was an immaculate, modern

dresser). He loved football, fishing, and hunting. He was made president of the Centerville Chamber of Commerce. He became a happy, useful, Christian citizen.

In September, 1953 Centerville High School installed a new public address system, and chose Pat to announce their first football game over it. He was pleased and so glad to do it. During that pleasant event, Pat suffered a heart attack and slumped over dead.

He didn't die drunk, or miserable, or confused, or of a wet brain or in convulsions; he died happy, having known eight years of self-respect with the respect and love of all who knew him. He had carried that message of AA recovery to other drunks along the way. His children had re-discovered their father; he had spent wonderful vacations with them in Georgia and Florida at their home.

What made this story? Only an address: a lighthouse beacon shining across our great land from AA General Service Headquarters in New York City. To operate that service, the central office needs about two dollars a member from AA groups . . . from just the recovered alcoholics, who own Alcoholics Anonymous.

There are many thousands of alcoholics and their loved ones who still don't know about AA . . . there are hundreds of "loners" whose only AA contact is Service Headquarters. Would you like to help write such a true story in the lives of other men and women? If we appreciate AA as it is, if we want this kind of Twelfth Step work continued, let's keep that beacon shining, that address accessible, and that happiness spreading, by supporting our General Service Headquarters.

Doc B., Palestine, Texas

Step Twelve Means Meetings

Step Twelve says we "tried to carry this message to alcoholics . . ." What alcoholics? Just the counterparts of our former selves? Or all alcoholics, including other members of AA? The new man who is still groping confusedly, and the older member who is having trouble with the program?

The Step says simply "alcoholics." There are no designations, exceptions, classifications, or distinctions . . . so it means ALL alcoholics.

As I see it, attendance at meetings is just as important a phase of Twelfth-Stepping as answering a call from the hospital or police station, or whatever. If I have been working on the program I may have come up with a thought that would help a newcomer, or an old-timer in difficulty. So it is part of the

job of carrying the message to be present at meetings, regularly, to pass on that thought that comes to all of us once in a while and which we feel to be important and good. And whether I have the privilege of assisting a fellow-member or not, I am sure to get something out of every meeting that will amply repay me for attending.

Another thing, I feel I owe it to my sponsor to appear at meetings. Didn't he go to a lot of trouble, many times, on my behalf? And if I am still sober, and wish to stay sober, the least I can do is present myself in gratitude to him, if nothing else.

Maybe I in turn have become a sponsor. Won't my "baby" look for me at meetings? Of course he will,

just as I looked for my sponsor on entering meetings. And if he gets off the beam will it be because I didn't find it convenient to put in a regular appearance?

If I make a practice of attending meetings only when it is convenient to do so, or when I feel the need of it, I can't quibble if the other members do likewise, which means that there may or may not be a meeting on the scheduled night.

The obvious inference to be gathered from intermittent attendance of a group membership is that the members either do not value their sobriety very greatly, or do not feel concerned about the welfare of their fellows. I cannot expect the group to guarantee a meet-

ing on the night I happen to feel like attending unless I accept the same responsibility they are expected to shoulder.

And, of course, the inevitable result of irregular and irresponsible attendance will in time be—*no group*.

So, can an AA really be on the program if he (or she) absents himself from meetings when attendance is possible? I mean "possible" . . . not merely convenient. In my opinion he is not. He is not observing the Twelfth Step, which is a vital part of the program. He is being fair neither to himself nor to his fellows, and I firmly believe he is flirting with the danger of slipping sooner or later.

H.E.H., Chemainus, B.C.

"This I believe..."

I AM an alcoholic—this I believe with all my heart and mind. As long as I continue believing this and trying to live the AA program, I shall have peace.

While a great many alcoholics do not feel this way, I reserve the right to believe that I was born an alcoholic, at least with the characteristics and emotional make-up of an alcoholic . . . else why, even in adolescence and during my teen age, was I envious, resentful, self-centered and full of fear?

I was reared in a normal and average American home. I am married to a wonderful person and have healthy, good children. But as my alcoholism progressed, these things were not enough to stop the growth of the character defects so deeply rooted in my life.

Then, when life reached a low ebb, when everything I should have valued was lost and there was nothing but despair, I found AA. When I discovered that I had a disease and that something could be done about it, I began to hope and began to believe that something might be made of this person who was so utterly and surely lost. Slowly, I began to think and to reason, with a great deal of confused thinking, and more stumbling, that life might be worth living. I began to see

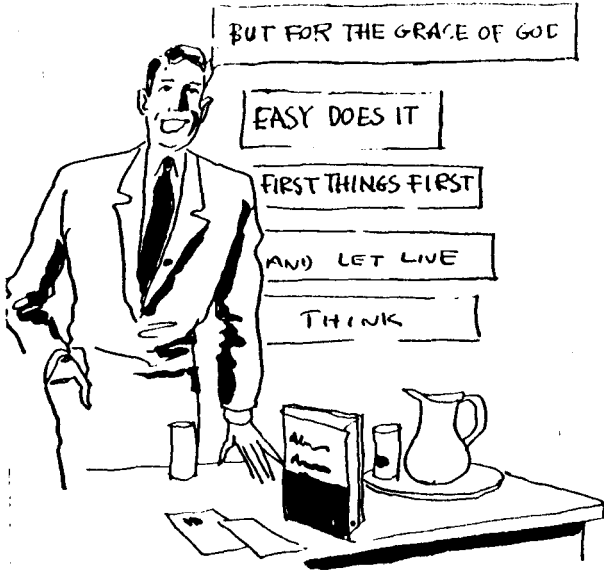
that if there was a power that could change the seasons, let the grass and flowers grow, and make the stars shine—a power I choose to call God—then this power could and would gladly give me an opportunity to rebuild my life. This I have tried to do. All I had to do was follow the Twelve Suggested Steps of the AA program.

So, over a span of time I have come to believe in God—or this Higher Power—as a friend, one to whom I can turn over my problems, and one that will be with me at all times, as long as I express my need and gratitude for his love.

I no longer can imagine a God of wrath and revenge, as I did in my active alcoholic years. I'm sure that we were snatched from that life of indescribable misery for a reason; to fulfill our destiny, we must work this program to the best of our ability.

I believe in this wonderful fellowship of AA. I believe there is no end to the possibilities that will come from this program. I believe in its survival, because nothing evil can come from a way of life that is good. I believe in the essential goodness of men and especially alcoholics. Is it any wonder that I can say, "I believe?"

M. L., Cape Girardeau, Missouri



Must we
always talk
like drunks?



A LITTLE over five years ago I attended my first AA meeting. Since that day I have attended 1000 or more meetings.

I have heard hundreds speak, never paying much attention to the language that they use.

Recently a middle aged lady who is employed in the office of the company I work for spoke to me about her young brother who is having a lot of trouble with booze and asked my advice.

I told her of a meeting that was held weekly in a church hall near her home. This pleased her very much because the church happened to be of her faith; she asked if she could attend.

The following night she grabbed Junior and carted him off to the meeting. I was curious to find out what

she thought of the meeting and went to her office to find out. She said, "I was amazed."

There were four speakers. They took the Lord's name in vain twenty times or more, used such expressions as son of a b. and b----- several times.

It made me feel somewhat ashamed for I have been guilty of the same kind of talk that amazed her.

If we must use God's name why not tell the people that are listening that they will find His name mentioned once in the third, fifth, sixth and seventh steps; twice in the eleventh step. That He is referred to once in the second and twelfth steps and that we are sober and happy because one day God saw fit to shed his grace upon us.

A.J.W., Somerville, Mass.

Step Ten reads

*“Continued to take
personal inventory...”*

THERE is a guy in our group, a little older than I am, who'd been a regular in AA for about three years when I first started going to meetings a year and a half ago. I'd been to a few meetings in neighboring towns before I met him, and at my very first meeting with him he made me good and mad by saying that he didn't think anybody could get anywhere in AA who had ever been to a psychiatrist. That's what I thought he said. He claimed he'd only said that psychiatry makes it more difficult.

He and I have made Twelfth Step calls together and visited each other's homes. We get along pretty well. People in our group ride him some about his argumentative manner in meetings, but everybody enjoys him. He irritates me by getting a meeting off the track and bogged down into an argument over the meaning of a word. I think of him as the eternal collegian, because that's the way college kids acted when I was in college.

A few weeks ago, I shocked myself by telling him right out in meeting that what he said was the stupidest thing I'd ever heard and when he answered, I ended my contribution with, "Aw nuts!" In connection with a discussion of the twenty-four hour plan, there had been a lot of talk about planning and whether it was all right to plan so long as it was constructive planning, not just worry. Everybody seemed agreed that it was all right and I was already tired of this discussion when my friend said, "There's no such thing as planning anyway. All anybody ever did was just to schedule things." It was then that I let go my blast.

The discussion passed to other things and nobody seemed any the worse for my outburst . . . nobody but me.

I was really upset by my own behavior. That's why I'm writing this. This same man has accused me of taking other people's moral inventory

for them and I'm beginning to see that he's right.

Take the fellow who gets me so all-fired mad because he talks as if he invented AA. He preaches, pontificates and acts as though he thinks he's God Almighty, but then, this is just my opinion and my reaction and what he says may be very helpful to others.

Then there are those two guys who have had a number of slips since I came into AA and who like to talk about their slips in meeting and what they've learned from their slips. They irritate me and my excuse is that this talk is no good for newcomers and

that they should be quiet and maybe learn how not to slip by listening to some other people. I don't know what the effect of their stories is on newcomers. I'm just bored with it myself. I think what I'd better do is figure out some way of being a little humble and tolerant. Maybe my own contributions will be a cut or two above what they have been if I can keep from getting mad at what other people say. And if I can listen with an open mind, perhaps I'll learn something.

Thanks for the opportunity to take a short moral inventory.

M.W., New Canaan, Conn.

Wisdom for Twelfth-Steppers

*A reminder that our attention to others
needs to be pursued
in deep humility*

ANYONE who seriously tries to follow the AA program for even a short time finds himself inevitably involved in helping others. This is part of the program. But let's remember *what* part of the program. It is the Twelfth Step, the last Step. It follows such searching and life-revolutionizing Steps as turning our life and will over to God as we understand Him; the cleanup Steps calling for inventory, admission, and restitution; and the great Eleventh Step, in which we seek God and His will for us.

Everybody knows this. So what?

So this: Helping others is a two-edged sword. One edge is its benefit, yea, its indispensability, for us. The other edge consists of a number of real dangers which are involved, more or less, in all "doing good." What some of these dangers are and how they may be avoided are the

subjects of a good-humored and keenly incisive piece by Marten ten Hoor in *American Scholar*. Ten Hoor is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama. In writing his essay, called "Education for Privacy," he could not, of course, have had AA or the Twelfth Step even remotely in mind. There is no mention of AA or the Steps in his article, and maybe he hasn't even heard of us. But "Education for Privacy" nevertheless does make very good reading for anyone who has bumped his head on some of the difficulties of twelfth-stepping.

Ten Hoor begins by noting the fact that helping others is a burgeoning modern phenomenon. "Never in the history of the world," he writes, "have there been so many people occupied with the improvement of so few. . . . It does seem to me that these days there are too many lead-

ers and too few followers; too many preachers and too few sinners — self-conscious sinners, that is. . . . Nobody has time to improve himself, so busy is he with attempts to improve his neighbor."

It was at this point in reading the article that the shoe began to fit me as an AA and a twelfth-stepper trying to help others. I have — many times — got so involved in Twelfth Step work and the active part of AA that I have failed to work on those parts of the program that are mainly self-cleansing and self-improving. I have — many times — got so mixed up in other people's interests that I have neglected the state of my own soul. The result has always been a deterioration of the *quality* of my Twelfth Step work, because I was neglecting to cultivate in myself the attitudes and practices I was urging upon others. There is a need for balance between attention to oneself and attention to others, and one does well to find his own point of equilibrium and to stick to it. We may note in passing that self-attention is not always and not necessarily egotism. Indeed, certain forms of self-attention — such as AA's Fourth, Fifth, and Tenth Steps — can erode egotism.

Ten Hoor points out that the eager beaver who is intoxicated with an overdose of helping others is likely to lose his humility in the process. This certainly is a good reminder for us AAs, because, while all of us must help others, none of us can live for long without humility. "To begin with," says ten Hoor, "it is easy to assume that your neighbor is much worse off than yourself. . . . the assumption produces a feeling of comfort. If there is some slight suspicion that all is not well within, it is compensating to concentrate on the plight of one's neighbor. Since attention to him is distracting, it keeps the individual from worrying about himself. To do something about a neighbor's ignorance also makes one feel virtuous. . . . I doubt if the reformer always has the wisdom necessary to direct the lives of so many people — but this is certainly assumed. How many people are there who have demonstrated the capacity to prescribe for others? If an individual makes a mistake in trying to improve himself, that is not so serious; but consider the consequences if he has induced all his neighbors to do the same thing."

Of course, AAs *do* prescribe for others, if they ask for it. By God's

mercy, we have demonstrated the capacity to do so with good results in many cases. But ten Hoor's probing on the subject stimulates some questions in my own mind. Do I always prescribe the Twelve Steps, the proven principles of recovery, to a newcomer? Or do I sometimes slip in some purely personal notions of my own? Do I offer the Steps as *suggested* lines of action, or do I introduce a note of coercion, a hint that he'd better take the suggestions — or else? Do I let him deal with God as he understands Him (even if he doesn't believe in Him)? Or do I start trying to sell him God as I understand Him? Do I point out the prescription that has worked for me and others, and let him freely take it or freely leave it? Or do I put out a version that is highly colored by my recent reading and speculating, and try to force that down his throat? If he bucks or draws away, do I get mad? Ten Hoor has something to say about these pitfalls, too:

"Further reason for doubt is to be found in the characteristic reactions of the hypersocial-minded. They become so indignant when people resist their ministrations. They are so determinedly selfish in their unselfishness. Ideas, particularly ideas designed for the improvement of others, so quickly become inflated. . . . Note the bitterness between rival reform groups. . . . Let us not forget that human beings have killed one another in the mass even on the authority of their religions. In the

absence of sophistication and modesty, reform notions grow into delusions; their advocates become more and more autocratic; leadership becomes pathological; the desire to help one's fellowmen is transformed into fanaticism and tyranny — societies become authoritarian."

Do such dangers as these concern us, individually, and as a whole, in AA? I think we must admit that they do. If, by God's grace, we do not have to plead guilty to some of these things, we must recognize their potentiality and frankly face their threat. It is helpful to know where the crown of all our activities, helping others, can lead when it is not pursued in deep humility and the constant remembrance of Him who gave us the power to act helpfully in the first place.

What is the antidote for the ills to which overzealousness in outgoing activity may lead? Ten Hoor calls the cure "education for privacy." Many of AA's Steps would come under this heading as he develops it. Before anyone can presume to help anyone else, according to ten Hoor, he must learn to possess his own soul. "To possess one's soul in an intellectual sense means to have found some answer, or partial answer, to the questions: What is the nature of this world in which I find myself, what is my place in it, and what must be my attitude toward it? The problem is one of intellectual and spiritual orientation.

"The benefits of such intellectual

and spiritual adaptation have been extolled by the wise men of all ages and all countries. A 'view of life' prepares us for what life brings, for what happens to us . . . and most important of all, for what people turn out to be and for what they do. To be spiritually and intellectually lost in the world, on the contrary, is to be unarmed and helpless. A disorganized mind is unprepared for reality and easily frustrated. The fate that awaits the individual so afflicted is to be always a stranger and a wanderer in the world. The 'lost soul' of literature, the ultimate in tragic creation, suffers from this great spiritual illness."

Does that strike close to home, or doesn't it? I find it wonderfully interesting that so many people like ten Hoor, working far afield from AA, so often write and say things that pertain directly and vividly to our problem and its solution. In conclusion, here is another bit from

"Education for Privacy" which further bears out this point:

"In the last analysis, only through the alchemy of private reflection do philosophical ideas become private resources. Only then will they be available in time of crisis. When the normal course of existence is interrupted by conflict and frustration, it is a bit late to begin developing fundamental guiding ideas; that is the time to apply them. . . .

"Resources of the spirit are like savings; they must be accumulated before they are needed. When they are needed, there is no substitute for them. Sooner or later, the individual faces the world alone, and that moment may overwhelm him if he has no resources within himself. Distraction helps but little and betrays us when we least expect it. We can escape our physical environment and our neighbors, but we cannot escape ourselves."

T. P., Chappaqua, N.Y.

From the June 1954 Grapevine

THE LOST COMMANDMENTS, THE DICTIONARY, AND AA

An excerpt from his opening address to AA's
Fourth General Service Conference

by Bernard B. Smith

I had occasion recently to refer to the current dictionary's definition of "happiness" in an address I made on the subject of Alcoholics Anonymous, in which I remarked that, on the whole, no group in modern society had attained so high a degree of relative happiness as those who lived by the twelve tenets of AA. Because I prefer, if at all possible, to know what I am talking about, I looked up the definition of "happiness" in my Merriam-Webster New Unabridged Dictionary published in 1943.

To my surprise, the first definition there listed is "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." This materialistic definition is manifestly the antithesis of the kind of happiness that we in AA possess. The second definition listed in Merriam-Webster, however, I found directly applicable to the kind

of happiness we in AA believe we can maintain through living by the philosophy of AA's Twelve Steps, which brought us our sobriety.

This definition reads: "A state of well-being characterized by relative permanence, by dominantly agreeable emotion, ranging in value from mere content to positive felicity, and by a natural desire for its continuation." Measuring in terms of this definition, I stated that those who live by the principles of AA achieve a higher measure of happiness than any class or group of people to which I, as an individual, have ever been exposed.

After I made this address, I thought a good deal about this definition. I knew that the definitions contained in a dictionary follow current socially accepted usage, and I was disturbed by the fact that the first

definition of happiness today should be "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." So I examined a number of dictionaries published in the 1890s, and I found that the word "prosperity" appeared in none of these dictionaries under the definition of "happiness." I then happened on a Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary, published in 1927. By this time, the definition "good luck, good fortune, prosperity" not only appeared, but had reached second place in the dictionary; by 1943, it had reached first place, supplanting that definition of "happiness" by which we in AA prefer to be counted.

A totally materialistic conception of happiness now held undisputed sway over modern society. So sensitive human beings seeking to achieve this new, socially accepted, materialistic definition of happiness, then finding this kind of happiness unattainable, or attaining it and finding it empty, fought against it unconsciously, draining it off in alcohol. The bottle became the symbol, not of a disordered mind, but of disordered social ideals; and when finally, through AA, we discarded the bottle, we discarded with it the first definition of "happiness" as contained in our current dictionaries, and adopted the second.

Our Twelve Steps, therefore, when judged by the socially accepted standards of happiness of this age, are steps backward — back into the universal heart of man, back into the spirit of man. I will believe that the

world has moved forward when our dictionaries are revised backward.

Now, rumor has it that I am a non-alcoholic. Perhaps the best proof that I am a nonalcoholic is my utter failure in Twelfth Step work. The best I have ever been able to do is to lead my alcoholic friends into the arms of one

*"The AA comes to a
suffering brother gently;
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All he asks is that the
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of sobriety"*

of my AA friends. The nonalcoholic cannot help the alcoholic, because an alcoholic, like any other human being, does not want people running in to his home to do him good. The alcoholic who has ceased to drink, however, does not come to do good as a superior human being but comes, rather, to his brother to share the gift of sobriety, to help him to help himself.

He comes not to reform, but to share — to share that which once someone shared with him. When the AA shares, he has no sense of giving up anything. He believes in service, not sacrifice. He will falter as he takes the Twelfth Step if he feels that his service is a sacrifice. For when the joy goes out of sharing, we lose the power to share. It is not sacrifice but service to others that provides us with the key to unlock our hearts.

So the AA comes to a suffering brother gently; he asks for little; he does not demand that the alcoholic take all Twelve Steps at one time. All he asks is that the alcoholic take the first step toward the light of sobriety. He does not ask a man to go dry; he asks him only to get his feet wet by standing at the spiritual wellspring of AA.

Recently, I was flying over the deserts of our great Southwest. Here and there, almost out of nowhere, were tiny patches of lush, green growth, surrounded by great expanses of brown, lifeless desert. I thought of the great springs of water lying under this desert expanse, which, if tapped, would cause the entire desert to flower; and I thought, "God provides the water, but we have got to dig the wells." These green, lush patches I likened to our groups, where, with the faith derived from our Twelve Steps, we dug the wells that caused a patch in the desert of life to flower. And I thought how we learned that we alone could not transform the desert in which we lived; we

could not dig that well alone.

In AA, the whole is truly greater than the sum of all of its parts. The infusing power of the group, of our Fellowship, draws something more out of each of us than any of us by himself can supply; and each of us, in turn, draws out of the spiritual reservoir of our Fellowship the added courage and will that make each of us the stronger, and our Fellowship the greater. So as each draws at the well of AA, the level of that well does not fall, but rises; and as, each year, more and more draw at the spiritual well of AA, our well brimmeth over.

I thought then of our General Service Conference, which provides channels between the wells of each group, so none can go dry; of our general services that shore up the channels, keep them in repair, extend them as new AA oases are formed in the desert of life, and bring the tools, when needed, to dig new wells. There can be no dry holes in AA. For while one AA's well is full, no other AA's need be dry.

For, in truth, we had lived blinded, and saw nothing about us but a world that was to us a dry, choking desert, until the flame of faith opened our eyes. And then we saw — and the words are not mine but those of St. Augustine — "the universal gracefulness of the heavens, the earth, and the sea, the brightness of the light in the sun, moon, and stars, the shades of the woods, the colors and smell of flowers, the numbers of birds and their varied hues and songs."

June 1954

USE THE INGREDIENTS

A CANDIDATE for AA membership said to his sponsor, "Look here, old chap, I've read the Twelve Steps from cover to cover. I guess I understand it thoroughly but I don't see yet how it's going to keep me perpetually sober." "Well," answered the sponsor, "just pick up that book on my desk and open it to any page and read to me whatever is written there." The man opened the book and said, "But this page is just a recipe for a chocolate cake." "Read it aloud." The fellow did. "Now read it again," demanded the sponsor. When the chap had done so he asked him to read it yet once again aloud. When the reading of this recipe had been completed for the third time the sponsor said, "Right—you have studied and read this recipe for a chocolate cake three times. But you haven't got a chocolate cake, have you? You have read the Twelve Steps from cover to cover, but you haven't got sobriety either—both need practical application. You certainly won't get the cake unless you obtain and use the ingredients and make the cake and you won't obtain sobriety unless you do the same."

Chit-Chat, Robesonia, Pa.



July 1954

to sink... or swim?

AFTER finishing reading this month's *Grapevine*—consuming it avidly as I always do—the thought came to me, "What if all these people whose thoughts you've been allowed to share had evaded even trying to write them? All the pages would have been blank! How horrible! Like going to a meeting and finding no one there!"

So, now I shall try to do my bit of sharing.

When I first came to AA I immediately realized that the members had

(continued on next page)

found something that was far superior to the miserable restlessness and agony of being "on the wagon." I wanted what they had for I knew that for me to maintain *continued* sobriety I must find a *contented* sobriety. I also decided if they could do it I could too.

Although the program was simple it seemed illusive until I decided to relate it to something with which I was familiar. I'd been a swimming instructor, so I simplified the program for myself and made it understandable and usable by relating it to swimming.

I had been told the Twelve Steps and our many sayings such as "easy does it," "live and let live" and our twenty-four hour program are merely suggestions, that there are no musts. This I could understand for there are no musts in swimming. It's rather impossible to compel a person to swim or breathe properly. Yet, if he wishes to advance his abilities and his own safety he can do so only by following the suggestions offered.

There are many swimmers who never learn to breathe properly. Their endurance is short and their safety questionable. Knowing this I decided to follow our Steps and all other suggestions to the best of my ability in order to give myself the greatest possible opportunity for relief from this compulsion I had so long suffered.

The slogan "easy does it" fits perfectly: how many times had I told my swimmers "relax—take it easy?" and the mental picture of a swimmer tensely flailing at the water is enough

to remind me quickly "easy does it."

With beginners the first job as an instructor is to gain their confidence. So, too, confidence in the sponsor is of prime importance and by the sponsor's story the "pigeon" learns he knows whereof he talks. The beginner has to see others in swimming, relaxed and enjoying it, to know it can be done and to desire to learn how. Isn't that pretty much how we, by being at meetings contentedly sober, carry the message to the newcomer? Don't we try to show him it can be done and help him to want to exchange his old life for our new one?

Many have tried tossing people into the water to get them to swim. Seldom does it work except in reverse. The desire must be instilled in the person before he can successfully handle himself in this new environment. So too it is with our program. A willing pupil is an apt pupil.

In all Red Cross swimming they use what is called the "buddy system." Each swimmer, including the advanced ones, at all times has a buddy close at hand. We in AA do likewise. First and foremost is our reliance on a Power greater than ourselves, then our sponsor, our telephone therapy and our meetings where we learn we are no longer alone, we who felt so alone before. These meetings provide an opportunity not only to enjoy the deep feeling of fellowship, but to learn how others work the program. This is similar to the times we used to sit on the shore or a raft watching the other swimmers and learning by their ex-

ample as well as by their mistakes how to improve our own abilities. This is one way to work our Tenth Step.

To swim in comfort and safety we dress, or undress, accordingly and leave behind the many trappings of our old environment.

To live this new life AA offers—a life of sobriety—we also find that for contentment and safety's sake we must discard many of our old hindrances: the negative things with which we approached AA, our fears, dishonesties, and self-pity. So we work the Sixth Step, exchanging our old ways of reacting for new positive ways. We find we seldom can do this immediately, but we are told that a sincere willingness to do so is sufficient to head us in the right direction. As we discarded our old attire one garment at a time so too we'll gradually find ourselves discarding our old burdensome thoughts, replacing them with the simple principles of AA's Twelve Steps.

We are told to turn our lives and our wills over to a Higher Power. Again to be willing to do so is sufficient to begin. How simple that became for me to understand when I compared it to relying on the buoyancy of the water, a power that is always there, ever available to us merely by our acceptance of it, by our relaxing into it, not striving for it, not searching for it, just being willing to accept it; a power that is always sufficient for our needs, never changing no matter what depth we find ourselves in nor whether there be storm or calm. All

we have to do is to be willing to trust it *and thereby* learn to use it, or vice versa. The use of this power develops our faith in it and through constant use our faith increases.

We learn to swim confidently through the water, not fighting it, relaxed and easy, one stroke at a time. But there comes a time when our strength falters and we tire; do we not stop now and then to roll over on our backs and float? This is our time of prayer and meditation, our Eleventh Step. We relax into this Power greater than ourselves and thereby gain renewed strength and understanding.

We cannot swim nor float well if we are tense and fearful. The more we relax and accept the more buoyant we become. We learn that fear is lack of faith and by using the Third Step we learn to let go, of everything we do want and of everything we don't want, to "let go and let God," and our faith increases as we learn to pray.

After a day of teaching I used to leave the shore with never a thought of applying these principles to my everyday life. Now through AA I'm learning to try to live as the Twelfth Step suggests, applying these principles to every moment of my life to the best of my ability, living one-day at a time. The rewards in contentment, peace of mind, health and happiness have been beyond my wildest expectations.

And I'm sober today, which is all that matters and for which I'm deeply grateful.

J.J., Hill Billy Group,
Buffalo, New York

The Twelve Steps and the Older Member

Step One

First in a series of articles to be published from time to time on the meaning of the Twelve Steps to one member after several years' sobriety.

As I enter my seventh year of consecutive twenty-four-hour periods of sobriety in AA I am meeting more and more members who feel that the program—which to me is the Twelve Steps—comes, in time, to mean something a little different than it did during those first critical and uniquely exciting months.

By this I certainly don't mean that we who have become a little older in AA can afford to relax. When we grow slack we invite disaster. But the necessary vigilance can become such a habit that it maintains itself with little creative effort. We no longer have to think with the desperate intensity that was needed to hold our early sobriety. When we don't have to think very hard we may tend to stop growing and start fossilizing.

To me, and to a number of my AA friends, the Twelve Steps have remained a challenge and a goad to hard and systematic thought. Let me give you an example of what I mean:

Just as an experiment, put this tract aside right now. Get a pencil and paper and write down all of the Twelve Steps you can remember. If you have forgotten a step or a phrase of one, leave it blank and go on, finishing all twelve before looking in the book. If you're anything like me, you've had an astonishing experience. I must have memorized the Twelve Steps a dozen times, had them letter-perfect. But if at any moment somebody unexpectedly pointed a finger at me and said, "Write them down!" I'd slip up somewhere.

Why? Because there's always some step or some phrase of some step, that I want to forget—it raises intellectual or moral challenges I don't want to face, issues I haven't thought through, necessary but thankless jobs I've left undone. I don't expect the time ever to come when I'll have clear answers to all the questions raised by the Twelve Suggested Steps. No scientist or philosopher even claims to

have put answers, and that's one of the things that makes the universe exciting.

How did you make out? Like myself you may have encountered phrases you once knew but now "can't remember," at least without great effort. Or you'll put them all down letter-perfect . . . then hastily lay this piece aside and do something else; they've become a mere chant to you. Or, if you have one of those orderly minds, rare but not unknown among alcoholics, you may put them down in good order and then begin to ponder, with a kind of awe, the unexplored caverns of meaning in each one.

Take the First: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable." This step now has two meanings to me. One is, its emerging truth as I write now, its significance to an AA in his seventh year of sobriety. The other is the meaning it had for me when I first came into AA.

It is essential, I believe, that this early meaning of Step One always be kept foremost in our meetings and in our talks with those unfamiliar with AA. We are, in a sense, emergency volunteers comparable to the volunteer fire department and the internes who ride the ambulance. We have available techniques for healing people who may be sick almost to death and inaccessible by other means. We have to keep our tools sharp and bright and sterile. Our definitions must be simple and convincing and generally agreed upon. In the maintenance of our community emergency function, we cannot

afford the luxury of individual philosophical dalliance.

In the early days Step One was simply the step of identification and acceptance. It was the "Me, too" step, the one in which we said at last, "Okay, I give in." For a long time our wills had held out stubbornly on whether we could handle liquor, whether we properly could be classed with those who openly admitted defeat in this enterprise. With Step One we conceded. We called off the battle, in some cases reluctantly, in others with relief, in all cases definitely. We admitted to ourselves and to anybody else who showed an interest that we could not handle the stuff.

It was far more than parroting words, more, even, than the intellectual acceptance of a fact. We admitted also "that our lives had become unmanageable." When a person looks over his life and affairs and all the things he has tried to do and relations that have become important to him, and pronounces them unmanageable, he has touched the deepest wells of his capacity for feeling. This is no mere socially expedient concession. It is intellectual acceptance, and, in the profoundest sense, emotional acceptance too.

That, at least, was what Step One was to me. It meant a completely altered notion of my own relationship to society. I was no longer a member of the smart set, if being smart involved the consumption of alcohol. I belonged either with those who "weren't having any today" or with

those who'd insist on having it today, and every day, and would die of it. I couldn't even say which of these two categories would claim me, for my life "had become unmanageable." I hurried on to the other steps, hoping to discover my fate.

So far as my Twelfth Step work is concerned it has never been necessary for me to say more about Step One than that. Indeed I would not say more; my newcomer is confused enough, I don't want to addle him further.

Among my older AA friends, however, I can discuss freely, without danger of hurting anybody, some of the other things Step One has come to mean to me.

Anybody who wants to get into really deep water can stop right at that word "powerless" and its base, "power." What do you mean by power? Power of what kind? Power to do what? For that matter, just what *is* power? You can search all the scientific and philosophical literature mankind has accumulated and not find an answer to that one. Nobody can tell you what power is. The best anyone can do is to define something we have all experienced and ask us to accept "power" as a word for it. There are many experiences and definitions, hence many things we mean, by "power." As to its real source and nature we know nothing for certain.

Some will protest that this is "tinkering with the program," "getting too complicated," and failing to "keep it simple." It is indeed. Before we fin-

ish it becomes more complicated still, and I hold that this is a good thing. I hope I have already established my solidarity with those who insist on keeping it simple in the beginning. God knows if it hadn't been kept that way for me I'd still be drunk.

But it's foolhardy, in my opinion, to cut ourselves short at the growth level we achieved in the first three weeks of AA and stubbornly refuse to go any further for fear it might get complicated. Whether we like it or not the Twelve Steps of AA plunge us head first into questions that have engaged the finest minds of all the ages. We prove nothing by leaving the batter's box the first time we're tossed a curve. But if we'll stand up there and swing we might learn something. We might even grow.

I hasten to add that this avenue for growth has nothing to do with education, intellectual attainments, exceptional stored knowledge or unusually high intelligence quotients. It has to do with the heart and the spirit and a God-given knack for seeing what is true. Of this I am certain, since I, who have had some education, have more than once been instructed by the soul-plumbing remark of a man or woman who's had very little.

I'd like to speak of some of the things Step One has come to mean to me, things which have deeply affected my life, but which I do not ordinarily mention to newcomers and which I don't think are necessary to AA's prime purpose, staying sober.

"This living, this living, this liv-

ing," wrote a poet once fashionable for her brittle melancholy, "was never a project of mine." It expresses almost to perfection the frustrated disappointment which inevitably catches up with the person who imagines he has to run things all by himself. I was such a person. The Big Book uses the theater analogy, describing a person who has to be producer and stage manager and all the actors and write the script too. That was me. I tried to run everything my way, and when I failed I rejected the whole package as something that was never my project.

It was always very hard for me to admit that I had failed, and I never did so until the evidence was overwhelming. Circumstances brought me to a point where I was obliged to admit that I could not manage alcohol. I took the First Step. Once taken, I found that I had not finished with the issues it raised. Was I powerless over alcohol? I was also, I discovered, powerless over a number of other things which, like liquor, I had once imagined I had to bring under my control.

So I had to take the First Step over again continually, as applied to these other things. My wife, my children, my business associates, my friends, my finances, the course of my work—all these things, I found, were under my control only to a very limited degree. To a very large extent I was powerless over them all. As usual, I delayed admitting my failure until the proof had piled up into a mountain that could not be ignored. Then, grudgingly, I'd "First Step" the thing and find relief.

This process, after a few years, led me to a new concept of Step One. Not only am I powerless over alcohol, but I am practically powerless, period. Let us see how much "power" I have of my own. The whole of the physical universe, including my own physical and mental equipment, was created and set going by Somebody Else. The language and numbers I use were invented by other people; other hands than mine built the house I live in, raised the food I eat, wove and sewed the clothes I wear, set up the educational, judicial and police systems which protect me, minted the coins in my pocket. The firm I work for was begun and is largely operated by others. Even if I have what I please to call "my own firm" I find it wholly dependent on the needs, desires and good will of my neighbors. As I take a more careful look at those whom I would bend to my will I find them made by the same Creator and endowed with facilities equal to or surpassing my own, as valuable to Him as I am. What power have I? For sure, I'm as near powerless as you can get and still be human. In truth, this living was never a project of mine.

It is, however, a project of Somebody Else, and with this awareness some wonderful possibilities began to open up. Though I can't be producer, playwright and the whole cast, I can be one of the actors with a walk-on and a couple of speaking lines. Though I can't order people around, I can help, to a very small extent, a few who may be willing to accept my help.

Here I am never frustrated, for the willingness of people to accept my help always far outruns my willingness and ability to give it, so long as I don't insist on choosing whom I shall help, or in what way.

As I begin to realize that this universe is not my project, my eyes begin to open to what a miraculous thing it is. I look around me, not frustrated, but awed. How fortunate I am to have been permitted a look-in on this tremendous enterprise! True, I can't run it, but I begin to see it's not necessary that I do. There is already a competent Stage Manager, another is not required. He will see to the props and timing of my part as he sees to the needs of the other actors. I have taken the First Step in a fuller mean-

ing. I no longer have to run things. What a relief!

Time after time I have had to test out Step One in the laboratory of life, as applied to other matters than alcohol. Just as in the alcoholic problem I have found that, as soon as I am ready to step aside, the real Stage Manager takes over and the performance goes on surprisingly well, with even a little part in it for me! I have to keep doing it, of course, because my mania to take things over is a recurrent compulsion. Step One has always proved an adequate answer to it.

The first of the Twelve Steps has come to mean this much to me so far. Doubtless other and deeper meanings will be revealed as I grow in AA.

J. E., Bronxville, N. Y.

Closed Meeting



"**W**E never get beyond the First Step at our closed meetings. There is always a new face present so somebody decides that we ought to do the first step for the newcomer. I'm getting fed up with the First Step."

So saith one of the semi-oldtimers and he raised a good point. Apparently the group in question believes in starting always at the beginning. But life is not so logical and who ever accused a newly arrived prospect of being logical?

Millions of people think nothing of dropping into a movie with little regard for beginning, middle, or end. They pick up the missed part next time around. One of the ancients, in fact, recommended starting *in medias res*, right in the middle of things. It's often

more interesting that way as is the case in a "who dunnit."

The benefit a newcomer derives from a first meeting is dependent on impressions rather than upon intellectual appeal, upon the manner in which he is received rather than upon what is said to him, upon what he sees rather than upon what he hears. If he is greeted with a smart "Are you a drunk?" or with some similar manifestation of gracious hospitality he probably won't believe anything that is said to him anyway. Manners here are probably more important than methods or speeches.

Hence it would seem that newcomers can be introduced to closed meetings—or to open meetings for that matter—at any time, at any stage of program discussion.

Discussion Subjects For Closed Meetings

1. *Preliminary Coaching.* While, as pointed out above, the newcomer can be brought into the meeting while any subject is being discussed, are

there some things right at the beginning that should be stressed for his benefit either at the meeting or during the informal "therapy" later? The 24

hour plan? When should the spiritual be introduced? What about: "We stay sober by avoiding the first drink, one day at a time, with the help of God and AA."

2. *Anonymity.* Why is anonymity important? It is sometimes argued that much good could result if Joe X would tell his story in the papers and on the air. Perhaps, but after Joe X gets very famous what damage is done if he subsequently makes the first page for drunken driving? Where does humility fit in with the exploiting of sobriety? There are thousands in AA who can write. What if all of them decided to make a full confession at \$3.00 a copy?

Anonymity is usually not broken by the newspapers. It is broken on the personal level by numerous small but careless actions. How about the fellow who waves to you on the street and inquires in a loud voice, "Why weren't you at the meeting last night?" Can you cite three or four examples of how anonymity might be endangered by such specific acts of carelessness?

What obligation do we have to preserve the other fellow's anonymity? Didn't we promise it to him when he came in? It's 50% of our name!

3. *Easy Does It.* The typical alcoholic runs in several directions at once and worries about tomorrow's problems while neglecting today's obligations. He needs to slow down. How can this slogan be applied to *impatience*, while waiting for a slow bus, a slow waiter, a slow wife?

What has all this to do with sobriety? Impatience, particularly if it is very intense, is a sign that the individual is burning up inside. Such consuming emotions are dangerous to the alcoholic.

4. *Step Eleven.* How do we "establish conscious contact with God?"

"Through prayer and meditation," the step says. When? In church on Sunday? Only in the morning and at night? Or whenever we have a moment free; during those waiting moments described in #3 immediately above? What about gratitude after each little favor? Safe arrival home by car? Isn't that something to be thankful for today? Conscious contact is better developed through gratitude than through supplication. Happiness consists in being thankful for what we have instead of striving for something that may be beyond our reach.

Growing with AA

I CAME to Alcoholics Anonymous to get sober. For me it was a long and difficult task . . . chiefly because I chose to make it so. In AA we have twelve suggested steps which lead to a new way of life. This new way of life does not include alcohol.

For a solid year I attended meetings and stayed sober. It was just as tough an assignment as it had been in previous times to go on the wagon. Then of course I got drunk, but was fortunate enough to have been given a second chance. This time admitting without reservation that I was beaten, I rather reluctantly attempted to do what I know now to be the only thing that will give us a measure of success in AA. I gave some thought to the Twelve Steps and attempted to work at them as best I could.

I wonder how many came to AA as I did . . . thinking, "There's nothing wrong with me that a couple of thousand dollars won't fix." This program and these Twelve Steps, just a lot of nonsense. Maybe these other people

need that stuff, but not me. I came here to get sober. And being sober took on a "so what" attitude when my wife would dare to question my lack of interest in the program.

To a new member in AA I would say never underestimate the importance of the Twelve Steps. Remove them and you remove Alcoholics Anonymous. Without them you may get sober, as I did, but I venture to say you cannot stay sober.

And so it is that during our first few months or couple of years in AA we are fully occupied with the all-important task of moulding these Twelve Steps into our everyday living; until staying sober, of itself, becomes reasonably simple; simple only because of a child-like faith we have acquired in our God as we understand Him. And here, of course, is nothing more or less than the pleasant experience of the growth of AA within us.

Having grown to this point, where do we go from here? How many times have we heard that there is "no stand-

ing still in AA." The price of sobriety is eternal vigilance plus a deep-seated feeling of gratitude.

How better then can we express our gratitude than by continuing to grow in this fellowship?

How better can we grow than to carry the message to those who still suffer?

How better can we carry the message than to interest ourselves in our Traditions and our General Services?

How many of us in AA, the writer included, leave the numerous and arduous tasks of keeping our AA ship on an even keel to a handful of members who never say no . . . and then continually criticize them for their efforts? I feel certain that there are a sufficient number of alcoholics still suffering that there is a lot of work for all of us. In attending meetings in my own area very rarely do I see those members who were so active when I first came to AA. These people were at that time responsible for bringing me back to another and yet another meeting, responsible merely because of their presence there. How invaluable is the power of example!

As I write this piece, our representatives to the General Service Conference are meeting in New York.* I pray they are guided in their decisions, by the words of our own AA Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Here we can continue to grow in AA by playing our own small part in the practice of our Traditions, and in the expansion of our General Services.

Our General Services can only be as successful as our smallest groups and our smallest groups can only be as successful as their individual members. So we grow in AA by simply being a good and active member of the group to which we belong, being careful of course not to graduate to the stage of a "one-grouper," if possible.

I see the necessity of well-experienced AA members being chosen as our trusted leaders. And in choosing these leaders great care should be exercised lest a personality be confused with a principle. No member should be chosen or elected to office simply

because "the job will do him good." AA as a whole is much more important than any individual member.

Those of us who are enjoying our sobriety today are doing so only because of the efforts of those who came to AA yesterday. Those who are to enjoy their sobriety tomorrow will do so only by the efforts of those who are here today; and those who are here today are—you and I.

Let me ask myself these questions. Have I a smug attitude toward my own sobriety? Am I so self-satisfied that I have completely forgotten how fortunate I was to have been directed

to AA in the first place? Have I forgotten that I can retain this new way of life only by sharing it with others?

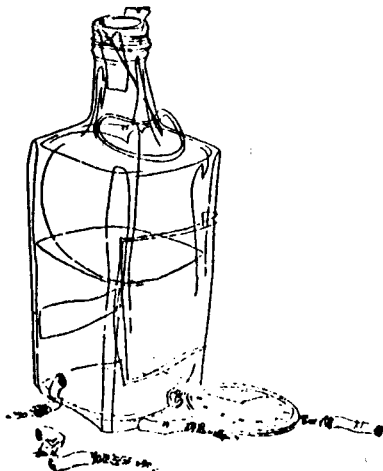
These and many more such questions will stimulate the growth of AA within us, and so far as I am personally concerned, there is not one suggestion in all the AA literature I have read that I can afford to overlook.

Work at this AA program; think about this AA program—and I believe we will grow even unknown to ourselves.

*Bill K., Oakwood Group,
Toronto, Ontario*

Taking Inventory

LET'S take a look at this "inventory" as suggested in the Fourth Step of our AA program. An inventory in order to be of any value should be an honest and fact-finding process, otherwise it produces confusing and useless results. Perhaps we AAs pay too little attention to this vitally important step because it apparently looks backwards instead of ahead. This is the only time AA looks back, but for a very good reason.



A start is made when we discover our mistakes. If we admit them as errors we proceed. When we start correcting them we progress. That is not only sound business policy but a *must* for those who would be successful in AA. Basically, we cast off the old existence and take on a new and normal life.

There is little use of us going back to the *reason why* our lives had become unmanageable unless psychiatry is indicated. If this be the case let the qualified psychiatrist delve into that jungle of frustrations. What we are concerned with is the fact that we were wrong in our thoughts, words and actions, not only to ourselves but to others.

Generally speaking, the more troubles we faced the harder we drank and the harder we drank the more troubles we acquired. Our only apparent relief from our misery was with the deceitful connivance of alcohol. Our physical, mental and nervous system paid a fearful price and the injuries to those who trusted and believed in us formed an almost insurmountable barrier.

Many of us stood on this threshold when we first came to AA. Some looked for instantaneous miracles. Others were frankly and openly skeptical. The remaining ones knew that they had no other place to hide and they accepted the simple truths of AA on the faith of what AA has accomplished and continues to accomplish.

So, in our inventory let us pause for a moment to look at AA past and present. To begin with it was founded by alcoholics who had tried and failed with every known manner of treatment. They were given up as hopeless and were about to give up themselves. That their eventual means of recovery has been successful is well known throughout the world. AA makes no demands of anyone. Those who enter are free to leave and those who leave are free to re-enter. Those who remain, remain sober.

Now, let's take an inventory, in a general way of you and me. At just what point in our drinking careers we became alcoholics is each individual's own story. When it became manifest in us we were confused, bitter and rebellious. The casual drink became several and the several became pints, then fifths and quarts. Our attitude toward others changed and our sense of responsibility became dulled and meaningless. We lived in what we thought was a hostile world peopled with those who threatened and those who wept for us. We never felt normal unless bucked up with alcohol.

As alcoholics we became sullen, arrogant and deceitful. Nothing mattered

but our own selfish quest for forgetfulness. Our innermost desire was to blot out the threats of employers and doctors and our goal was silence from the pleadings of loved ones. We found no peace unless stupefied and saw no good anywhere. Whom did we hurt the most? There can be but one answer, ourselves. But, we spared no one in our headlong flight to the bottom.

In painful moments of near sobriety our remorse and resolves were a small indication of our true selves; not all was lost. But, something bigger and more powerful than we had us in an ever tightening grip. Each time we came back to reality our mental and physical sufferings became greater.

Finally, we came to a point where we realized we could go no further and we groped and grasped at any straw to keep from going under. Tapering off, specialized but boozy mixtures, and attempted changes in drinking habits proved nothing. Medicine could put us on our feet but seldom kept us there for long. We prayed and cried, moaned and groaned. We cursed an unkind fate and blamed everyone and everything but ourselves. Yet, that unkind fate which we vehemently damned, led us by devious means to AA.

How we came into AA or who brought us to our first meeting is best known to the individual. The fact that we are now united in purpose proves that we have made a decision to do something about our future. Our determination we will find to be proportionate to our desire for release from

our self-made and torturous hell.

Once affiliated with AA we dedicate ourselves to sobriety. Not controlled drinking. Not temporary respite. Not for a predetermined period of time and assuredly not as a self-sacrifice. Let those who can drink without loss of control have their inning. You and I cannot play in that league. We *must* accept that fact or expect continued trouble.

Let us not expect miracles of AA, rather, keep an open mind during our first few weeks. It took months and years to become a drunkard. To regain normalcy will take time also. But we have help in AA, the best kind of help, the kind that you and I can understand. We should not become too confident after a few weeks or months of sobriety, always remembering that our alcohol problem is dormant only while we're sober. It will be wise for us not to become too eager and overly enthused. AA is not a mob hysteria movement of high peaks and low valleys. Let us progress easily and gradually into our life of freedom. Also, let us not flaunt our new-found way of living before those who might not understand us. Our actions will speak louder than our words. And, finally, let us not become martyrs; we have

not made any sacrifice, after all!

The Twelve Steps of AA have been time-tested and proven adequate for our success. Our individual interpretation and adherence to them should be our daily guide, for we cannot turn AA on and off without experiencing trouble.

Let us not forget that each one of us has a serious responsibility to one another. The newcomer is just as important to us as we are to them. Those who have enjoyed the sweet success of sobriety through AA are just a drink or so away from the newest member, consequently have nothing to be puffed up about.

If some experience a bit of trouble along the AA way we cannot always place the blame on them solely. Perhaps the failure is ours too. If we are to find fault let us first inventory ourselves and see if we failed properly to sow the AA seeds of honesty, sincerity and faith. If our slate is clean let us be compassionate and helpful, not reminding them of their lapse, but showing our happiness for their return. Let us be convinced in our hearts that AA passes no judgment on anyone, but blesses a thousandfold those who faithfully seek its simple truths.

Jack E., Canal Zone

AL-ANONS FOR "NONS"

I and the other members of our group receive the *Grapevine* through our fellowship group and enjoy it very much.

In my reading of it, however, I see many references to the Al-Anon Groups as being in existence to help and understand our husbands and only for that reason.

I don't know if this is true elsewhere but in our group our program is for ourselves, primarily, and we hope, of course, that through helping ourselves we can help our husbands *and* wives.

First of all we try to rid ourselves of our past resentments, and try to learn to live "Just for Today" and by our own Twelve Steps.

Yes, through living our Twelve Steps and "Just for Today" we gain understanding of our mates' problem, but more important, we learn to live with ourselves.

Our Twelve Steps are as essential to

my happiness and life as breathing and eating.

1) First we admit we are powerless over an alcoholic and that our lives had become unmanageable. We had tried everything from threats and hate to pleas and love to try to bring sobriety to our mates and we failed.

2) Came to believe a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (What else could a life made up of fear, suspicion, dishonesty, distrust be if not insanity?)

3) Made a searching and moral inventory of myself. After living with an alcoholic over a period of years and the accompanying worry, strain, distress and unhappiness which is a natural result of such a life, I had built up a pattern which was no credit to me or to my character.

4) Made a decision to turn my life over to God whether I understood him or not. Why should I try to understand God?

5) Admit to God, myself and other human beings the nature of my mistakes. I had become apprehensive of the future, had mistrusted my husband (and showed it), had been nervous and irritable, had condemned, had devel-

oped self-pity and hurt pride.

6) & 7) I am entirely ready for God to remove all those defects of character, and humbly ask him to remove my shortcomings.

8) I am willing to make amends for the mistakes of the past, to constantly be on the alert for any destructive habits, such as nagging and criticizing.

9) When wrong, I will promptly admit it.

10) I will continue to take personal inventory.

11) I will seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God.

12) Having had this spiritual experience through the help and fellowship warmed and my soul fed by friendliness of AA and having had my heart and love as exhibited in this organization, it is my earnest desire to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all of my affairs.

So you see we do earnestly try to help, to understand ourselves and other people who have an alcoholic in the family.

Thank you so much for bearing with me.

Mrs. D. M. M.. Alameda, Calif.

Second in a series of articles to be published from time to time on the meaning of the Twelve Steps, as one member sees them after a few years of sobriety.

The Twelve Steps and the Older AA

Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

WHEN I first heard the second step of AA's program seven years ago it was like lightning striking. They tell us that physical lightning strikes with two almost simultaneous flashes, occurring so quickly they appear to be one. For me, the

spiritual lightning of Step Two hit with two great truth-currents practically in the same instant.

First, the phraseology of the step—"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity"—suddenly opened my eyes to the fact that my alcoholic behavior had not been sane. Such euphemisms as "problem drinking" and "bad night" and a thousand glib excuses had tended to obscure this fact. When I drank I was insane; continued drinking had brought continued insanity, to a point where there was a grave doubt whether consistently sane behavior could ever be restored.

As this truth-flash was stabbing through the cloud of self-delusion, another was flickering back. Though I was nuts, I could be restored. This had been demonstrated by others who had been insane in just this way and had recovered, they said, through the activity of a higher Power. Suddenly I "came to believe" it. Doubt vanished. Belief took its place. It was one of the most important of my early spiritual experiences in AA.

But that was nearly seven years ago. It has been years since insanity of the

specifically alcoholic variety has been any more to me than a kind of sociological laboratory term. This is not to be cocky; I know the same madness can strike with tornado suddenness if I don't keep up my AA exercises. But I do keep them up, and have been doing so for so long that I am not surprised any more that they yield me daily sobriety.

What does Step Two mean to me today? When the awed, wondering surprise of the first illumination is gone, what's left? Anything? Do the AA steps dribble off into a kind of pointless automatism once the daily fear of a slip is removed? Is spontaneity replaced by hardening of the brain cells, spiritual discovery by mechanistic formula? These are some of the questions that rise to assail some of us who have been around long enough so that the miracle of simple sobriety no longer dazzles us as it once did, who have earned the dubious distinction of being referred to as "older" AAs.

The sad truth is that a variety of things can happen in later AA life, not all of them good. I am inclined to think that relapse to the bottle is not the worst of the spiritual calamities that can occur on the hairpin turns of the higher road. This is usually recognized as a first-class disaster and tends to shock the victim back into the state of wondering humility which so often illuminates our early days in AA and which, I stoutly contend, ought to be the normal condition of mind for everybody.

I have even known slips to be good things, in so far as they returned my fellow-sufferer to our ranks with a deeper understanding, a profounder humility, a greater patience and a more solid sobriety. I have also known slips to cost permanent loss of sobriety and even loss of life, so let's not be too frolicsome about this "good thing" approach.

The more subtle hazard of the later years is hard to name. It might be called spiritual dry rot, going dead, turning sour. It is sometimes designated as elder statesmanship, or getting way up in AA, or beating the rule book or putting the fear of God. It is a basically hostile attitude to life and toward people, and is quickly recognized as such by new prospects, who stay away in droves. The smile is forced, the handshake too aggressive. The voice develops a tendency to rasp and conversations are unknown, having been taken over by lectures. There is a formula for everything and everything has to fit the formula.

If you're thinking of somebody who's just like that, beware. That's taking somebody else's inventory, and we're only supposed to take our own. This is a subtle poison we're dealing with; its effects are on you before you know it. Anyhow, they were on me. People knew I'd been in a while and began to ask me things. I'd tell them—after all, we're supposed to pass the message—and they'd ask me more, and the first thing you know. . . .

Whatever my crimes of pomposity



may have been, or continue to be, at least I am able to define what I *wish* to be. As sobriety was the goal of my AA childhood, this new goal may be called the aim of my AA adolescence. It is to remain in awe.

In this aspiration Step Two is an enormous assist. Step Two was in the beginning, for me, the astringent step. It was the cold shower. In Twelfth Step work today I never try to make it much more than that. People can absorb only what they're ready for, and Old Number Two can come as quite a dose. When you ask a person to question his own sanity you are tinkering with his fundamental belief in himself. The hookup with the restorative higher Power softens the blow, but Step Two directly questions sanity, and this can be a considerable jolt.

And yet it's inescapable that for an alcoholic to drink is insane. For the non-alcoholic a case can be made out, but not for the alcoholic. In my own case, I'd said so a thousand times during my active drinking days: regardless of what others may do, I'd say, and mean it, for *me* to drink is madness.

This admission was already well established before I encountered Step Two. But whatever part of me was doing the admitting was not the part that was in control. The obsession to drink was in the driver's seat, and my resources of common sense were never sufficient to dislodge it. The ability to do that arrived with those tremendous words, "Came to believe."

The power of simple belief was great enough to expel the obsession, and keep it expelled.

The power of simple belief . . . how often have I mulled that phrase since it first delivered me from a progressive, irreversible, fatal disease! I think we have only begun to discover and to put this power to work in our own behalf. I spoke a moment ago of wanting to remain in awe. Thinking about what simple belief could do in the world always awes me, and keeps me awed.

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

In the beginning, this belief was expedited by the visible evidence of what a Power greater than myself had already done. There were the people of the group: neat, well-dressed, smiling, sure. When with your own eyes you see a man lift a hundred pounds, you're not inclined to argue whether he could lift twenty. When I saw what "coming to believe" had done for these people I no longer questioned whether it could do as much for me. We are talking now, of course, about alcohol. In those perilous days we talked, it seems to me, about little else.

I don't recall just when it dawned on me that Step Two makes no mention of alcohol. What it's bringing up is simply restoration to sanity. It must have been about two years before I began to feel that I was probably about as sane as the average non-alcoholic citizen. I then began,

somewhat tentatively, to look around at the kind of world these same average non-alcoholic citizens had produced. Could it by any stretch of the imagination be called entirely sane?

A power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity! As the years have passed, by God's grace in consecutive twenty-four-hour periods of sobriety, this has come to mean more to me than my own rescue from alcoholic insanity. Now that I have begun to feel a little bit secure I can afford the luxury of thinking about other people once in a while, and I'm beginning to be aware of the world's appalling need for sanity, and for the Power that restores it. And not just people who have run afoul of intoxicants, either, but everybody, and in all departments of life.

In my own life, I have found many means of departing from sanity other than by taking a drink. I grow stuffy, pompous, bossy, impatient, callous, indifferent, lazy, arrogant, conceited or angry. All of these are departures from known facts about the way things ought to be, and therefore insane. That superb case book of the human soul, the AA Big Book, warns that an insane obsession to drink may be replaced by an insane obsession with work. That has happened to me, and I've needed to have sanity restored. My tendency to madness has taken the form of jealousy, avarice, lust, pride,

fear and stinginess. Whenever I have been able to "Step Two" these phantasms I have never found the Power greater than myself lacking the ability to deal with them.

It has not been necessary for me to employ earthly stratagems about group opinion and experience, or about the malignant superior power of alcohol, to define to my own satisfaction Who and what this greater Power is. He is the eternal, invisible spirit that created and sustains this wholly purposeful universe. He is the spirit of creation, known in some way to each of the two billion five hundred million persons now resident on this planet, and to their forbears for a million years, active in an orderly manner to the outermost reaches beyond the Great Nebula of Andromeda, whose light registers on our naked eye after having traveled a hundred and eighty six thousand miles a second for a million and a half years. He is God.

Which God? The God, as Bill puts it in the Big Book, of the preachers—and, one might add, of AAs old and new. He is always sufficient, when I can find the wits to turn to Him, to keep me in awe. He is as awesome and as new, as spontaneous and as undiscovered, as friendly and as potent today as when I felt His hand turn a difficult trick for me seven years ago.

J. E., *Bronxville, N. Y.*

Doing versus Debating

ON a recent Twelfth Step call, I found myself arguing with a man who wanted sobriety, he said, but seemed driven to debate about various principles of AA which I tried to explain. It disturbed me for a moment, but only for a moment, and I felt impelled to say:

"Just a minute, now. I don't mean to offend you, or make any cruel comparisons, but there is no point in all our argument and analysis of theoretical things. You have told me you want to stay sober, but can't do it. Once I was in the same boat. I'm only trying to tell you how I changed all that and managed to go without a drink for a little more than three years. You say I'm all wrong, and the program can't work. Okay. I'm wrong; 150,000 other drunks who were once exactly like you, or worse, are also wrong. You win. I might as well be going

now. AA doesn't work. It can't work. You are sure of it.

"But if you don't mind, I'll just go on in my foolish notion that it *does* work. Goodbye and . . ."

"Hey, wait," he said, "come back here . . ."

I don't mean to brag of course, but it makes a long story short to say he's been doing pretty well for the past three weeks—the longest time he's been sober in more than ten years.

It's an old idea in AA, but I was struck by the thought that we do waste a good deal of time analyzing the program and ourselves, perhaps. Emphasize *perhaps*, and don't think I'm putting a knock on moral inventories, either.

But I know my tendency is to seek the cause of things, the whys and wherefores. It's all right, as long as I remember it isn't necessary and don't

get frustrated about it. Regardless of anything, the big *fact* is: AA functions. In the fellowship we have something to DO. If we do it, we're pretty sure to be all right.

Still not bragging, one thing I consciously tried to do when I came into AA was *not* jump to conclusions. I owe it to my sponsor, who said I should go to twenty meetings before I made up my mind about anything, either for or against AA. I'll always be grateful to him, because nothing he said appealed to me quite as much as that. I wanted sobriety, sure. But I

didn't want to be sold a bill of goods, either.

Naturally, after twenty meetings and a couple of weeks of day-by-day sobriety, there was some essential stability got into me. It seemed to come from outside and to have got inside of me, somehow. Whatever put that stability there and has since made it seem to grow, I call the Higher Power. Now, I find the things I did at first because I was told they'd work are the things I *want* to do.

*Anonymous, from the Golden Gate
San Francisco, California*



One of Those Days

I HAD trouble finding a parking space, and then, when I did find one, I had trouble getting into it. I got out of the car cursing the driver of the car ahead for taking up so much room.

All day I had looked forward to the weekly card game at our local AA clubhouse. It had been one of those days—a series of small frustrations and minor annoyances had gradually worn out my patience. And now this—I was late, the game would have started without me. I was no longer

(continued on next page)

merely annoyed. I was angry without quite knowing why. As I walked the two blocks to the club, it suddenly occurred to me that lately I had been angry a number of times.

The lobby of the club was empty. But as I passed the small side room on my way to the stairs, I saw a man, a stranger, sitting alone.

It was obvious that he had just come off a bender. Not that he was shaking, or unshaven; there were none of the outward signs about him. But somehow you can always tell. I have come to recognize the posture of despair, the bottomless weariness just below the surface effort to look like everyone else. This guy, I told myself, has had it.

He looked up as I passed, and our glances met for a moment, just long enough for me to see the look in his eyes. Illogically, because I knew it was not so, I had a feeling that I knew him. I half nodded, and continued toward the stairs.

I told myself that somebody who would be glad to talk to him would be along any minute. I told myself I did a lot of Twelfth Step work, more than most, and that lately the results weren't worth the effort. I told myself I was going to play cards.

And then I remembered why this stranger had seemed familiar.

It was the look in his eyes. I had seen it many times, but now I was remembering the first time I saw it in the eyes of a man whose face I had long forgotten, and whose name I never learned.

This was ten years ago, when not many people knew about us. Our zeal was high, and our prospects low. I remember going up to this man on the street, and asking him if he would like a drink. I could see he needed one, and obviously he was broke. I bought him a few drinks, tried to tell him about AA, and we parted. I never saw him again. I don't know if this naive method brought results; I rather doubt it. But it helped me.

I knew then that I had to go back. I turned, just in time to see the stranger come out of the room and start for the door.

"Hey, hey Mac!"

He looked back, saw me walking toward him, and stopped. As I walked I put on a wide smile, and tried to think of something right to say. Before I could say anything, he spoke, his voice high and hard with anger.

"Look, Jack," he said, "don't yell at me, and don't call me Mac. I got a name."

I fought down my answering anger, managed to hold the smile.

"Sorry, didn't mean to yell. And I don't know your name. Mine is Joe." I held out my hand. He looked at it for a moment, then held out his own.

"My name is Smith," he said.

"Well, whaddaya know. My last name is Jones. We have something in common—very common names. What's your first name?"

"Smith is good enough." The hardness was back in his voice. Then, sur-

prisingly, he grinned. "My first name is Oswald. See why I don't like to use it?"

"Yeah, I see." I grinned back. When he smiled, his whole face changed, and for the first time I saw him as a man, instead of a drunk. "What the hell, I'll just call you Smitty. Listen, Smitty, how about joining me in a cup of coffee?" As I said it I realized that I meant it; I really wanted him to come. The card game no longer seemed important.

Smitty said he thought he could stand a cup of coffee, and we set out for the automat. On the way, he told me that he had just been released from the psychiatric ward of the city hospital. He had spent ten days there, the first three strapped to a bed—out of his mind, an orderly told him. He had learned about AA and our club house from another patient.

The automat was nearly empty at this hour. I saw that the table near the window was unoccupied, and I pointed it out to Smitty.

"That's the AA table," I told him. "At least, we always use it when we can. Sit down, why don't you? I'll play waiter. What would you like to eat?"

He hesitated. "I'll just have coffee. I guess."

"Meaning you're broke. I know that. This is my party. I recommend the cream chicken. Or maybe you'd like something else?"

"No. Chicken would be fine." I turned away from the gratitude in his eyes, remembering with sudden shame

how close I had come to passing him by.

At the counter I ordered the chicken and some vegetables. While I waited, I began to plan. He would need a place to stay for a few days. That I could manage. But he would also need a job—the sooner the better. I must find out what he can do, I thought, maybe I will know somebody in his line. Then I thought, my God, I'm thinking about somebody else.

And I was. For the first time in weeks, I was outside the deadly circle of myself. I was able, once again, to be concerned about the needs of another human being. Again I recalled how near I had been to putting a few hours' pleasure above the priceless chance to serve another and save—myself. I considered the magic of the change in me, and I almost laughed aloud at the wonder of it. After ten years of sobriety, I had been taught a lesson I hoped I would never again forget—by a man who had been sober just ten days. Without this stranger whom I had resented and all but rejected, I would now be playing cards, and hoping for so trivial a miracle as a full house.

The girl put the plate of chicken and vegetables on the tray, and I paid her. I picked up a salad, dessert and two coffees, and walked across the room to the table. Smitty sat quietly, waiting.

"I thought you might like a salad," I said. "Is pie OK for dessert?"

"Sure."

I put the dishes on the table, disposed of the tray, and sat down. Still Smitty sat with his hands in his lap. Was he waiting for permission to eat? I looked at him closely. He saw me looking, and he flushed and dropped his eyes. He picked up the fork, fiddled with it, regarded it as if it were extremely interesting—something to be studied but not used.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked.

"No. Only I don't know when I can pay you back. I will, of course. But it may be some time, and. . ."

"And in the meantime your dinner is getting cold. Look, Smitty, this one

is on me, and it's my pleasure. Anything else I do, we'll consider a loan which you will repay when you can. But don't worry about it. Sooner than you think *you* will be helping somebody. Now will you eat?"

"Well anyway, thanks. Thanks very much."

"Eat!"

He smiled and started eating. I watched him for a moment with quiet satisfaction. Then I lit a cigarette and began telling him how AA changed my life.

L.J.P., Philadelphia., Penna.

A True Christmas Story



I HAD been wondering what happened to Mary. I hadn't seen her since we made a Twelfth Step call together over six months before. She had been considerably disturbed at the time and I never had learned just how it all turned out.

The details of that night were still fresh in my mind . . . a drunken father sprawled out on the bed; two children uncovered and dirty, huddled asleep on an improvised cot; their mother, her bloated face peering at us as she downed a bottle of wine and

tossed it defiantly into a corner; dirty clothing, paper bags and empty bottles all over the place. It was a sordid scene which stamped itself indelibly on my memory.

This was the first time in Mary's four short months in AA that she had witnessed such abject misery; and the sharp rebuke which sent us away must have been like a stab in the heart to her. The woman had virtually put us out. She claimed not to know of any phone call to AA. "And what did we want anyway?" Then she said: "It

must have been that dirty lousy landlord." She reeled to the door, flinging it wide open, and continued: "We don't need you here so get out and let us alone!"

On the way home I ventured to tell Mary that AA didn't work that way. That if the sick alcoholic who needed help did not personally make the phone call, complications like this usually arose, and sometimes much worse.

"I don't care!" Mary snapped back at me. "I'm going back there tomorrow and take those kids some food and clothing even if she **THROWS** me out."

I never found out if Mary did go back. She never talked about her Twelfth Step calls; felt as if they were something precious-like and to talk about them was to lose their goodness. Mary was that kind. So I had been wondering where Mary was keeping herself.

It was Christmas day when the phone rang.

"Hello, you old goat!" It was Mary's voice.

"Well, if it isn't little Mrs. Do-Good," I said facetiously. "Are you still on that honeymoon or have you got down to earth where you belong?"

There was a pause; then, ignoring my remarks completely, she said, "How would you like to take a ride across the river and meet a friend of mine?"

"Fine," I said, because I really wanted to talk with Mary and find out how she was doing. But she evaded any mention of that last call we had

together; women are always so clever in keeping conversation riveted on what they would have it to be that it makes us even forget what we had in mind.

I soon found myself in an adjacent town following Mary into a well-furnished, nicely kept home. I couldn't help thinking, as the room opened up before me, that here was a composite picture of Christmas day in the average American home . . . the mother smiling right through me, her face gleaming with something indefinable; the father on the floor with the children among the toys; the tree sparkling with light and color; half-opened packages and dolls and trains scattered all over the place. This was Christmas.

Hasty introductions over, we were barely seated with coffee when our hostess, Elsie, turned to her husband and said, "Jim," motioning toward Mary, "this is the lady I met at our meeting last week who became so interested in our story."

Jim ventured the remark, "I didn't know we had a story."

"W-e-l-l," Elsie drawled the word, then continued a bit nervously, "When they asked me to talk I just told them of the way we found AA. That we were in such bad shape I couldn't tell them what the lady looked like who made the first call. And the strangest part of it was I didn't even remember a word she said.

"She had left some things with the children, I remember, but when she left there seemed like something had

happened to me. I made up my mind I would call up the place she came from . . . it was the strangest thing, I couldn't shake it off. There was—"

Here a child's voice broke in breathlessly, "Mother, I know, I know!"

A girl of about ten had come over to where Mary sat and was staring down and pointing to Mary's bracelet.

"Mother, I know," she continued, spacing her words for the great moment. "This is the lady who brought me the pretty dresses when we lived in

the 'dirty house'— remember?"

Then turning to Mary she said, "You let me look at your bracelet that day, this one here, didn't you? I prayed you'd come back, you did, didn't you?" the child coaxed.

Mary hesitated, shifted nervously, and said almost in a whisper, "Yes, dear, I did." Then she added, looking over at me, "It was while I was on a sort of honeymoon."

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The Twelve Steps and the Older AA*

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

ONE night during my fifth year of sobriety my sixteen-year-old son was critically hurt in a railroad right-of-way accident and in a few hours he died. My daughter asked me, "Didn't you pray?" I told her I had. She said, "Then why did he die?"

I'm glad I had had several years' experience in trying to work the third of AA's suggested Twelve Steps: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him," before I was called upon to answer that one.

My daughter's question, I think, throws out a fundamental challenge to all of us who would like to live the life proposed by the Twelve Steps and to grow in it year by year.

What she had really asked was: "Since you are such good friends with God, and since He is almighty, why doesn't He perform this simple, for Him, act of healing when you ask Him to?" For several years I had let her know I was trying to give God a greater share in my life, and that He



had taken over and solved many of my most pressing problems. She had concluded that the old man had made connections Up There and could pull wires when there was a real pinch.

There is more to this, I contend, than a child's over-confidence in a parent. She has tossed us one of the fundamental questions for beginners in the spiritual life, which might be phrased somewhat as follows: "Does conscious contact with the Higher Power improve with time?"

The external evidence seems to be inconclusive. When I think of a certain officially consecrated man of the cloth whose home people will change their route to avoid passing, and of a certain veteran of sobriety I dare not trust with a confidence, I say, "no." When I think of another clergyman whose presence always means peace, and of a certain old-timer whose mere handshake is a tonic, I say, "yes." Clearly, the mere passage of time since first acknowledgment of a greater Power is not the governing factor. What we really ask, I suppose, is whether contact improves for those who sincerely want it to.

Here we enter the world of the subjective, the deeply personal. Am I sincere? Only I can say. To my friends I may appear as phony as a Brooklyn gondolier, but if I know in my heart that I'm doing my level best, however poor that may look to outsiders, they're wrong. Or my group associates may consider me very much on the beam, but if inwardly I know they're misled by my unctuous delivery

of pat formulae, they're wrong again. Only I (and the Higher Power) can know when I'm really in earnest. So we recast the query into this form: "Does conscious contact with God improve with time for those who in their deepest hearts sincerely want it to?"

For many of us who have "been in" for a time, this is an important question. Anyway, it's an important question for me, (now aboard nearly seven years), and for some of my friends of comparable seniority. Sometimes we suspect, perhaps a little moodily, that we're not getting anywhere. Well, let's face it—are we getting anywhere? We need a freshener, a perker-upper, a checkup, a spiritual eye-opener, perhaps a goose. How shall we get it?

One good way, I have found, is to go back to Step Three, and review it carefully, and ask ourselves what it once meant to us, and what our accumulated experience with it has been, and what it means to us right now, in this instant: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

What does this mean to you?

This is what it means to me:

During my first few weeks in AA I stayed sober on excitement, preoccupation with a novelty, and the *business* of reading, going to meetings and absorbing the mechanics of daily sobriety. From my first reading of the Twelve Steps I recognized the Third to be pivotal, and kept a sharp ear cocked for tips on how it might be managed. "I just let go and let

God," I heard people say. Or, "I saw I could do nothing so I just turned it over," or, "I can't handle it, God; You take over."

They "just" handed things over! *Just!* If only it could be so simple for me! I longed to be rid of my burdens, and sought everywhere for the Higher Power upon whom I could dump them. Where was He to be found? On what terms did the transaction take place? When you wanted to surrender, who accepted your ceremonial sword, and in what setting? For months these questions hammered through my thinking, and nobody seemed to have any but the vaguest answers.

It was a critical time for me, I now realize. My sobriety was at stake. This program had encouraged me to look forward to a glorious relationship with the Creator of the Universe Himself, an eternal friendly collaboration that would leap all obstacles and transcend all defeats. I was to walk hand in hand with God, they had said. All right, I responded, here am I. Where is God? For weeks and weeks I waited. He had accepted the surrender of many others. Could it be that He would not accept mine?

One day it happened. I was really at the end of my rope, or to mix a figure, they had me properly hemmed in. My (then) family had just been broken past mending. I was broke. My business connections no longer existed. My only hope had been work in progress; this depended on good morale and a clear head, and these as-

sets had taken flight. Everywhere I looked, futility stared back at me. This was frustration beyond the kind that gets people drunk; I had learned that getting drunk wouldn't fix it. It was despair, all the worse because it was sober despair. Then, all at once, the actual phraseology of Step Three came bright and clear to my mind. Particularly, as if neon-lighted, the first words stood out:

"Made a decision."

It occurred to me that all these weeks I'd been trying to surrender, when the step asked nothing of the kind. It only suggested I *make a decision* to do so. I surveyed my situation and asked myself if I really wanted to take such a step. When I decided I really did, I issued a kind of proclamation. I don't remember verbalizing it, but if I had, it would have been something like this: "Surrendering will and life means giving up the right to make decisions concerning them. I therefore proclaim that from this moment until better advised I will make no decision concerning my own actions, that I will follow only unpremeditated whims. These I declare arbitrarily to be the will of God for me; except when obviously harmful I will obey them without question."

As I read this over I find myself praying that no one will take my seemingly preposterous course as reasonable for another. In retelling it I am not claiming what was good for me is good for others—only that *whatever* is specifically good for a person will come to him if he will

endure, with the best faith he can muster, to what seems the very extremity. For me, my odd renunciation of decision led to my first really vivid spiritual experience.

How do I know whether I'm having a spiritual experience or just kidding myself? For many months after my adventure, this question bothered me. Whenever someone spoke of having a spiritual experience I questioned him closely on its nature; in my reading I searched for clues. In my own case there were no visions or alterations of natural surroundings.

Then how do I know it was really spiritual? Two ways: I felt a mighty reassurance come upon me from a source outside myself. My conviction that man has access to the loving, caring Creator of the Universe was permanently deepened.

These two qualities seem common to all the spiritual experiences I've ever heard or read about, regardless of what else may have happened. A little farther on in this series I hope to tell my adventure, but right here the actual events don't matter. What matters is the feeling, during or immediately after the experience itself, that says: "This must be the touch of the Higher Power I've been hearing about!" These feelings can arrive through the most unlikely channels at the most improbable times, or they can descend precisely according to ecclesiastical formula. They can come through the touch of a friend or the look of a total stranger; they can leap from a printed page or emerge

from a blank wall; they can be intense or mild. After comparing notes I've concluded tentatively that the only common denominator is a feeling of reassurance.

Once a person has become convinced that he has established contact, if only momentarily, with the Higher Power, how does he maintain and reinforce that contact? This, to me, is the toughest aspect of Step Three.

For years I have sought to make an assured part of my daily experience the wonderful sense of harmony I knew in the interval of my first spiritual experience. I have failed. Having failed, I am forced to one of two conclusions. One is that God does not want me to have that sense of harmony with Him as a permanent possession. This alternative I do not accept. I am therefore forced to the other: He is trying to teach me some lesson that must be learned before the desired relationship can become permanent.

What could this lesson be? Sometimes, in some moods, I have an inkling. He is trying to show me He is God, and I am only I.

Why should this simple lesson be so hard? I have no answer to that one; I only report that it is. I'm always trying to get God to run errands for me and do chores it would be convenient for me to have done. He always stands on His prerogative. He is God, and He does as He pleases. Being God, He runs no man's errands, does no man's chores, save when He pleases.

He may please not to be chore-boy—and this, to the temperament of which many alcoholics and many, many others are made, is unforgivable. God is supposed to carry out our orders; when He declines to do so, we get mad at Him. I am convinced that much of the attitude of man that passes as disbelief in God is in reality only rage against Him for not behaving as individuals want Him to. My daughter said, "Then why did he die? Didn't my Dad *tell* God what was expected of Him? Then why didn't He do it?" What does He mean, always insisting on doing things His own way? Who does He think He is—God?

That, of course, is exactly who He thinks He is. Whenever I have found the means to let Him go ahead and *be* the God of my universe I have never regretted it. When His ways of doing things seem too unendurably contrary to my own, He often takes the trouble to explain to me, through some new and always unexpected enlightenment, the advantages of His way. Thus have I been able to survive frequent denials of my will and still maintain at least an intention of allegiance to Him. Thus, incidentally, has my young and non-alcoholic daughter also been guided to continue her trust in Him.

Here I have to say a word about getting sore at God. On the very morning of the day on which I write these words of allegiance, I was angry at God. When my son died I was angry at God for a time because I

thought He had been unfair to me. When I'm broke, or unjustly accused, or when I work long and faithfully without reward, I often accuse God of having deserted me and I get sore.

For a long time I was afraid to admit anger at God. When I was a boy, angrily to question my father's judgment was to invite a beating; my experience with employers has led me to conclude that bringing the bosses' decision to ill-tempered account invites devastating retaliation. Suppose God, with His inestimable power, should get mad at me! Instead, He seems more often to teach me, when I'm willing to be taught. I frequently have it out with Him, saying, "God, this seems to me an outrageous deal, I'm surprised and disappointed and mad that You'd allow it!"

Sometimes He seems to admit it's outrageous, and suggests I put up with it anyhow, for the sake of some objective He sees to be in the long run worthwhile. Other times He convinces me that it wasn't so outrageous as I had supposed. That He'll condescend to explain to the likes of me is what C. S. Lewis once called "the intolerable compliment of loving us." That He does love us is now to me beyond question. This makes it much easier for me, as an older member, to turn my will and my life over to Him as often as seems necessary—that is to say, daily. For I am an alcoholic, and I can't afford to let my speculations wander too far beyond the immediate considerations of this day.

J.E., Bronxville, N. Y.

TWELVE STEPS

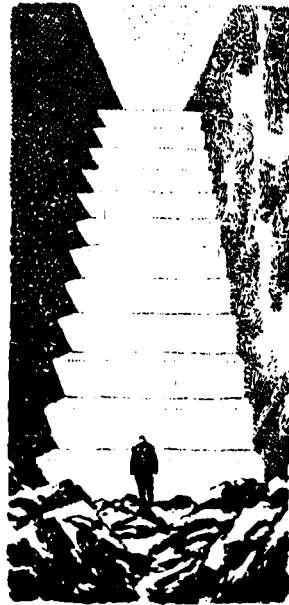
and The Older Member

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

STEP FOUR is the only one of the twelve which is repeated. That the founders thought it vital to the newcomer is attested by its position: it is one of the first four principles to be grasped by those who would follow the AA way of life. That it is equally important to the old-timer is rammed home with unmistakable emphasis. We are to *continue*, Step Ten tells us, and I would take "continue" to mean as long as we live.

Why this continuous self-examination? Why all the fuss about moral (let's not overlook the intimacy of the word) inventory?

In its discussion of Step Four, the Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* explains why; and while we're on the subject I'd like to say a word about the use of that remarkable handbook. In seven years of AA I've seen a lot of sobriety, and I respect those who can "make it on the Steps, the slogans and the meetings." For myself, I need all these things *plus* continued reference to the Baedeker of sobriety. Time after time I have been rescued from a morass of abject abstinence by an insight the founders put in the book, and which could be found nowhere else.



In the exposition of Step Four, for example, meanings are revealed that could not easily be deduced from the wording of the Step. Why should we take inventory? Because it usually reveals that resentment is our "number one offender." Why is it "number one" among our problems? Because "a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness." For an alcoholic it is downright "fatal." "When harboring

such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns." Or, one might add, the almost equal insanity of the chronic grouch. In this same great passage appears a concise definition of an AA member's daily goal: "The maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience." What are we all trying to do, whether we've "been in" ten minutes or ten years, but maintain a spiritual experience and grow in it?

But the inventory, our guide continues, at first only intensifies our dilemma. "We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol. How could we escape?" Up to now we have been spiritually in retreat. We were society's drunks, its erratics, its helpless irresponsibles, those for whom no excuse could be made nor defense erected except to say that we were sick. When we take inventory we discover that in addition to all this we are also resentful. "We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick." This had the effect for me on first reading, and on re-reading, of reversing the whole direction of my thinking.

We are not the only sick people in the world! There are others, and they need our help! At once we end our spiritual retreat and begin our advance. "We asked God to help us show (those who offend us) the same tolerance, pity and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend." We have been changed from people pri-

marily seeking understanding to people whose main concern is giving it. We have gained the spiritual initiative; now we must keep it.

I had a hard time with resentments. "For the first year," my old AA friends tell me, "the expression on your face was mad!" There is a phenomenon sometimes called "alcoholic luck" which suddenly and inexplicably "runs out." I know the reality well, but prefer to think of it in other terms than "luck." So long as a fair number of people can see some point to playing along with us, for good reasons or bad, things go well; we are "lucky." But when people get on to us it seems to happen everywhere at once; our "luck" runs out and "everybody is against us." Sometimes this turn takes place after we've stopped drinking. Those who had been afraid of us may have noticed a new gentleness, and seized the opportunity to get even for old hurts.

There's nothing for us to do, that I can see, but ride out the storm. My first-year typhoon was a marital one; it struck after I'd been sober several months. Much had accumulated over my years of drinking to give my (then) wife grounds to hate me. Somehow I understood that she had a low-pressure area and rode fairly steady while it blew, confident that when all the resentment had been howled away we'd find reconciliation. I did not understand how deep can be the hatreds our drinking can generate, or comprehend a spite that would not rest until the family as a unit had

been permanently smashed. It took me a year to understand it and another year to accept it. I can now write about those years with real forgiveness and even admiration. The woman was sick, and the major responsibility for her sickness rests upon my own illness. During all those years before resentment ran amok she ran a brave show. Could I, given half the provocation, have performed half so well?

Dealing with resentments is like wiping a frosted window. I clear the pane and it fogs up again, and the price of freedom from resentment seems to be tireless wiping. In the main, my resentments appear at two levels. There is resentment of immediate circumstance; at one point it was a vengeful wife; a few years later it was an arrogant business associate; right now I resent being so near to broke. But the hardest to deal with are resentments arising from somewhere deep in memory, vague, half-conscious, slow-burning, persistent.

These dragons of resentment have breathed fire on my neck through all the years, and at long last, through the application of Step Four, I think I have identified them. Not slain them, mind you, but come close enough to call them by name. And the name I would give them is unrealistic expectations.

In my own case these expectations are not only unrealistic but also immature, and far below the spiritual standard set by my AA mentors. They originated in the less mature moods of my parents, took root in childhood,

were nourished in adolescent imagination, grew strong in the soil of selfishness and reached full bloom in alcoholic indulgence. They grew into thought habits of great power; when confronted with actuality and hence thwarted, they turn into troublesome resentments.

For example: the confident expectation of my youth was that at my present age I would be rich, famous, and universally respected. My affairs would be so adroitly disposed as to produce a large income with little effort, leaving time for travel, sport or cultural pursuits as whim might dictate. No one would speak to me except in terms of deference; my moods would be world-renowned, my displeasure universally feared.

Two things have happened concerning this absurd but deeply entrenched fantasy. The realization of even a faint carbon copy became impossible. I own nothing, feel fortunate when I can keep paid up bare necessities, am as likely to be made king of Spain as to go on a luxury cruise, am practically unknown, and am so little respected that even on home grounds I'm usually addressed as "hey!"

Even if my youthful dream could come true, I wouldn't really want it any more. The life I once dreamed as an ideal now appears to me frivolous and pointless. In AA I have come to a partial awareness of the suffering of mankind, and to a first awakening of a desire to do something to relieve it. So there goes the rosy dream of my youth—no longer even partly attain-

able, no longer really wanted, living on only in an outgrown habit of hopping.

Another thing it's been hard for me to outgrow is fear of the word "moral," which in Step Four is attached inseparably to the stock-taking process. A good part of my childhood was lived in fear of harsh "moral" judgments; my adult life has been such that I still cannot be completely comfortable with the word. To overcome my unease I utilize the word "fearless," which is also firmly attached. "Don't be afraid, take the plunge fearlessly," the founders seem to be advising me, "it's the one way you can regain the spiritual initiative."

"Maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience."

These words, I think, have something special to say to those of us who've been in a few years. Have we maintained our spiritual experience, and is it growing?

It's seven years for me now, and I have to face it, the younger fellows are more effective twelfth-steppers than I; they're closer to the experience of

being a hopeless, helpless drunk. They tell me I still give a pretty good talk and they can use me that way from time to time. I'm nearing the end of the usual sequence of service offices awarded to older members in our group and area. So far as AA is concerned I'm headed irrevocably for elder statesmanship and finally the shelf, there to sour or to mellow as I myself shall choose.

Can we keep the spiritual initiative Step Four (as expounded in the Big Book) gives us, maintaining a spiritual experience and growing in it?

I believe we can.

The means of this maintenance and growth are to be found, I think, in Step Twelve: "practice these principles in all our affairs." I find such a variety of opportunities for applying spiritual principles in my affairs that I'll be an eternity catching up. But characteristically, I'm several steps ahead of myself. We're still on Four: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Not of the other chap. Of ourselves.

J. E., Bronxville, N. Y.

January 1955

Working Step Eleven

THERE are different ways to improve "our conscious contact with God as we understand Him." Some of us take a religious way by going to church, reading the Bible and other religious literature, along with the Big Book and other AA literature. Some of us take the spiritual way, confining ourselves to the literature of AA alone. Either way is as good as the other, depending on the effort we put into it. I find the spiritual way works best for me.



When I go to bed each night, I ask myself if during the day I have been resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Have I tried to help people instead of hurting them? Have I discussed problems that arose, with other people as I should, or have I kept them to myself? Have I been able to control my temper? After making my day's re-

view, I ask God's forgiveness for the things I did wrong, and ask His help that they do not occur again. Then I thank Him for keeping me and other alcoholics sober for the past twenty-four hours.

When I get up each morning, I thank God for a restful night, and ask for guidance throughout the day. And that He will help keep me, and other alcoholics, from taking that first drink. I ask that He keep my thinking on the correct course, away from self-pity, dishonesty or self-seeking motives.

If sometimes during the day, I lose control of my temper or proper thinking, I get away from everyone as soon as possible. I sit somewhere alone, smoke a cigaret and relax. I ask God to help me overcome whatever the trouble may be.

When I have a few spare minutes, I spend them meditating, and asking for guidance, not only for myself, but for all alcoholics.

I carry our "Just for Today" and the "Daily Moral Inventory" pamphlets with me at all times, and refer to them often during the day.

This is the way that I work Step Eleven.

"The Golden Gater," San Francisco

TWELVE STEPS

and The Older Member

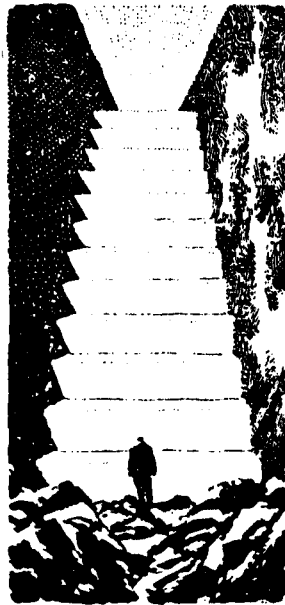
Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

THERE are passages on the road to maturity that are accompanied by very great danger. The most dangerous passages of all, in the opinion of one who has spent seven years seeking maturity the Twelve-Step way, are those where we must run the gamut of the very inner dragons from which, in various aspects of our immaturity, we had sought escape in headlong flight.

No Step is so stern in making us confront these demons as is Step Five. But risky or not, we have to muddle through. The road to further growth is solidly blocked until we have met and mastered these very opponents.

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." What's all the fuss? It's a simple admission of error . . . what's "dangerous" about it?

The type of danger involved is personal and inward, and exists at a level so deep that perhaps no one can speak of it with any accuracy except as it exists within his own self. And so I will tell about my experience with this menace, and give my reasons for thinking that almost everybody, at least almost all alcoholics, must deal with similar demons.



The besetting torture of my life has been a sense of being in the wrong and liable to excoriation and punishment for it. Man and boy, I have tried many ways of dealing with this mental plague. I have tried bluster, proclaiming that I was not in the wrong at all, and wishful thinking, pretending the haunting feeling wasn't really there. I've tried stern repression, resolving not to let my mind dwell morbidly upon it, firmly turning my thoughts to

more pleasant things. I've tried hard work, the pursuit of amusement and diversion, and God knows I've tried getting drunk. And regardless of my evasive maneuvers, there—when the chase was ended—it was, ready to pounce.

It is hard for me to describe the terror that goes with this sense of having been in error. I am almost physically allergic to the word "wrong" as applied to myself. I tense up and shorten my breath and feel scared at the mere mention of it. I go on the defensive at all points, fairly bristling, like a mental porcupine, yet with an underlying deeply panicked sense that my defense is not going to be successful. The word "wrong," directed personally to me, has all kinds of connotations, all of them unpleasant and some of them frightening. It means shouting, berating, scolding voices. It means threats of beatings and incarceration and ostracism and disgrace, an eternity of unfriendliness. It means ultimatums impossible to meet, standards that cannot be attained. My natural reaction is one of hate and fear and hostile defensiveness. That I was ever able to overcome this response and even make an earnest try at taking Step Five is one of the miracles of the Higher Power working through AA understanding and friendliness.

This is how it came about:

After I'd been in AA about three months I began to feel that this bridge to sobriety, a bridge constructed very largely of friendliness, might be strong enough to support me. Tenta-

tively, I had put a foot upon it, and even walked a step or two. It held up; the friendships did not let me down. I was terribly lonely. Though I was making new friends all the time, they were *new* friends, not seasoned; I couldn't really be sure. I wanted to deepen the sense of fellowship and belonging, and I figured the best way to do it was simply to follow the directions in the Big Book.

Now the Big Book said that the Higher Power many call God was *kind*.

This concept ran head-on into my deep fear of being found wrong. In those distorted depths, the Being in all the universe most frightening to be caught in the wrong by was a great Power called God.

I was trapped. To go back to "escape" (as if there were such a thing!) meant the ever-deepening fear which was alcoholism. To go forward meant admitting to God, to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs—a fearsome thing for one of my emotional getup to do.

One night after a meeting, at an hour when all good AAs are sound asleep in their own beds, I called up a member I scarcely knew and told him I had my list ready, as directed by the Big Book, and wanted to take the Fifth Step, could I please come over? I don't know how I can ever quite express my gratitude for the kindness and understanding that man and his good wife showed me that night. Obviously one thoroughly mixed-up pigeon, tense and nervous,

I descended upon them, and began my painful recitation of wrongs. They gave me coffee and cake, they were patient and understanding and good, and they heard me out.

And when it was all over I had learned something of profound importance. I had learned that not only was the Higher Power called God a *kind* Power, a power before Whom one who had done wrong need not stand in fear, but also that there were *kind human beings*, to whom one could admit error without fear of attack and denunciation.

This was the real beginning of the deep personality change we all hope and pray for. The kindness of God and man had made it possible for me to *admit* wrong. When I could admit it I was spared the exhausting effort of trying to maintain the facade of phony bluster and pretense intended to *conceal* wrong. I became less tense, more relaxed, less afraid of people, more willing to help them.

What makes me think that what applies to me applies also to other people? Well, I've been around a number of years now, and I've seen a number of them come and go. I've talked with a lot of them and shared what goes on in those deeper places of the heart. I know because a lot of them have told me. Also, I know because I've seen what has happened to those who have *not* found the resources to admit to God, themselves and another person that they had been wrong.

The most obvious thing that hap-

pens is that they get drunk again, but there is, with some, another thing that happens. The old alcoholic phoniness begins to reconstruct itself back of a new front of unctuous and respectable sobriety. In their talks they are less inclined to "go into all that," and more inclined to pontificate. It becomes harder and harder for friends to get through the shell and reach a real person.

I have to take Step Five over and over again, in various ways, to keep my sense of contact with a real and growing spiritual fellowship. The old reluctance to admit wrong is stubborn, and always wants to re-assert itself and take over and I have to admit all over again, to God, to myself and to man.

What reward have I? Well, I grant it's slow in coming and arrives in small installments. But the reward I can see as an eventuality, the prize for which I strive, and which seems ever more real, and not imaginary, is the possibility of some day living fully and actively before God and man completely without fear. As I continue to admit my wrongs as I see them, and as instead of the fearful retaliations my morbid imagination had constructed there appear the kindness of God and my AA friends, the old phobia tends to break up and finally, I hope, to vanish.

But each time I "admit the exact nature" of my wrongs I go over a dangerous stretch of road. The old lashing, punishing mental bogey still lurks, and can show a surprising

power. By God's grace he has not so far been able to get me drunk. But he has been able to spin me into some rather fancy mental depressions before the saving fellowship of AA has turned to and fished me out again.

And so to all those contemplating this Step I would say: Follow carefully the directions of the Big Book, and don't be scared to be scared. Don't press on too rashly; if the going gets too rough, retreat to Step Two—the Higher Power is kind, and can restore us to sanity—until a more pro-

pitious time. But don't procrastinate too long. We cannot continue in the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience until we can live with God, ourselves and man without the slightest fear of being found, from time to time, to be somewhat in the wrong, along with the rest of day-to-day humanity. The fear vanishes when we become ready to admit we're wrong, then go right ahead and admit it. It isn't really so bad and one is, I find, in good company.

J. E. Bronxville, New York

DO-GOODER OR STAND-PATTER?

FROM "doing bad" to ourselves and others, because of compulsive drinking, we have been given the rare opportunity in AA to reverse the procedure and "do good" for ourselves and others.

Therein lies one of the greatest privileges in the entire history of human relationships and it should be accepted accordingly with proper perspective and gratitude.

We may dislike the word "Do-Gooder" — because of the modern world's misuse of it—but what other is more humbly descriptive of the Twelfth Step work we do in AA, or has more real humanitarian values in it?

It describes a member who, unselfishly and without regard for his comfort and convenience, "tries to carry the message to alcoholics" in hospitals or jails, at meetings or by personal calls, or wherever anyone, new or old, needs help or guidance of some kind.

The dictionary defines *good* as: "Having qualities adapted to produce some kind of satisfaction, whether physical, mental or moral."

Don't we, with acquired modesty and an awareness of our limitations, try to do just that—attain and practice such qualities in all our affairs in accordance with the AA program?

It is understandable that no member intentionally desires to be considered a Do-Gooder in the cynical, worldly, professional or modern sense—either in his own evaluation or that of others. But if we really have an honest and sincere desire to help another human being, isn't that "doing good" in the best humanitarian definition of the word?

Sometimes I think we overdo a "Shucks it was nothing" attitude in Twelfth Step work. We minimize the good we have done (from which we have received something as well as given something) to the point of false modesty. Isn't there a glow, a

fine sense of accomplishment, a rather wonderful feeling of being an instrument of God and AA when we give away to another alcoholic that which was given us?

It *is* nice to get a pat on the back once in a while, even though we're not looking for it and our sobriety is its own reward. Few human beings can possibly be so humble that they are completely unaware of the performance of a kind action. That would imply sainthood and there isn't a saint in a carload amongst us!

So, let us accept the unsolicited but expressed gratitude of one whom we have helped, in the spirit in which it is given—realizing that false modesty or forced humility on our part is another kind of trap for the unwary sober alcoholic.

Personally, I think *how we do good*

is much more important than how it is identified by ourselves or others. There is only one thing to remember—we are merely the sowers of seed through the Grace of God and AA.

As for myself, I'd rather risk being called a "Do-Gooder" than a "Stand-Patter." The latter is one who is satisfied with his (or her) sobriety . . . who has become careless about attending meetings . . . who believes he has done his share of Twelfth Step work . . . who is more interested in group chit-chat than in the new member . . . who, because he stands pat on what he's got, gets closer to that first drink every day.

Do-Gooder or Stand-Patter? Are we still passing along the good we found in AA, or are we unintentionally keeping it to ourselves?

J.F., Elmhurst, Long Island

A Spiritual Awakening in Prison

RECENTLY I was asked the question, "What do you get, or expect to get, out of the AA group or from attending its meetings?" At the time I gave the answer, "Sobriety"; but later reflection on this question proved that I had actually realized a great deal more from AA than this very vital need, especially through the group therapy at the closed meetings where experiences, effects and results were shown in the discussion. These closed sessions gave me a desire to:

1. Admit to myself that I was powerless over alcohol and that it made my life unmanageable to the extent that I landed here in prison. I am now ready to admit that this was in all probability a real break for me because it gave me the chance to find myself again through AA. Next came the desire to find someone or something to lean upon, and my past experience had taught me that this would have to be greater than an ordinary mortal. This thinking led to the feeling that:
2. A power greater than myself or any one person would be necessary to restore my sanity and aid me in my desire to work out a new and better pattern for future living. I found I had

to disregard all of my more recent thoughts of divine power and had to turn my thoughts back to childhood days in order to find the One who could and would supply that need. This brought about a decision to:

3. Turn my will and my life over to the God of my earlier life. I knew from those bygone days that this God of mine would accept this burden and care only if I would:

4. Make a searching and fearlessly honest moral inventory of myself and:

5. Admit to Him, myself and at least one other human being the extent and exact nature of my wrongs. Having made this admission, I then felt ready to ask Him to:

6. Remove all of these defects of character from me and to:

7. Remove all of my other shortcomings by answering my prayers in which I asked that He grant me the serenity to accept the things which I could not change; that He give to me the courage to change the things I could; and the wisdom to know the difference. I soon realized that in my prayer I asked a great deal and this made me very willing to:

8. List and make amends to all that I had harmed or to whom I was in any way indebted. I knew, too, that these amends could only be rightly made:

9. Directly to the persons involved wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. The thought of a possible recurrence made me resolve that my best salvation lay in **making a:**

10. Daily inventory of myself, my

actions, and my thoughts, and upon finding anything of a wrong nature, to admit and correct it promptly. This I carry out at the end of each day. I find then that I am ready to seek:

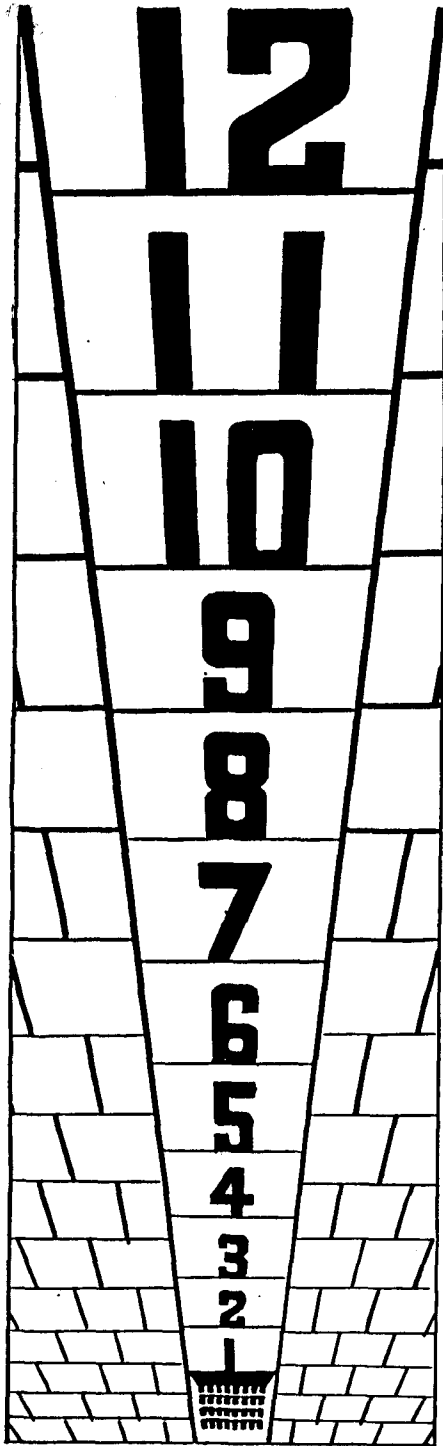
11. Through daily prayer and earnest meditation to improve my conscious and living contact with my God. I ask that in me, only His will be done, praying also that He make His will known to me and that He bestow in me the power to carry out His will fully and without reservation. A great gift such as that I have asked of Him, who alone is great enough to overcome my obstacles, faults and burdens, brought about in me:

12. A spiritual awakening, so great, that I now want to carry this message to all alcoholics who are desirous of trying to travel with me along this highway, which leads to a life of fullness, peace and contentment.

To stay on this road, and merit its rewards (for they are many), I must throughout each day not only preach, but must also practice fully all of these principles in each and every one of my daily contacts. Keeping to this set of personal requirements will gain for me sobriety, honesty and a new code of ethics, that will bring to me as final gifts, the blessings of friendship through respect; a sense of charity through the desire to help others to share in the finding of a better way of life; and above all, a new set of values to guide me along higher planes.

Anon., Sing Sing Group, N. Y.

Ed. note: see page 15 for a suggestion on long-distance Twelfth Step work.



Taking Inventory

WHEN I first began to hear people in AA talking about character defects I presumed I possibly had one or two. I knew definitely that I drank much too much but aside from that fact I was a pretty good guy.

One day I attended a meeting where a large sign was displayed:

ments and anger but that's all! Except possibly selfishness—maybe I did have a tinge of that? And what about impatience? Well, yes, but who isn't impatient when other people behave the way they do? Then that one called remorse . . . sure, I was sorry for many of the things I did. In fact,

CHARACTER DEFECTS

Dishonesty — Selfishness — Resentments — Egotism — Fear — Anger — Hatred — False Pride — Self-seeking — Conceit — Intolerance — Bigotry — Laziness — Frustration — Impatience — Condemnation of Others — Inadequacy — Jealousy — Arrogance — Remorse — Self-Pity — Revenge — Worry — Anxiety — Uncharitableness

These words made little impression on me at the time as they evidently applied to someone else—not me.

At meeting after meeting that infernal sign stared me in the face. I resented it. One day I said so to myself and then I realized I was showing evidence of both resentment and anger. Maybe, I said to myself, I did have a character defect or two; maybe I should look them all over a bit more carefully.

All right . . . I'll concede resent-

I'd give anything if they hadn't happened, but what good guy, like myself, wouldn't be? This was a virtue, not a defect.

And so on down the line I went: bigotry—no; condemnation of others—no, except perhaps a little bit. Honesty? No I never stole anything except from my family.

At this point I stopped and asked myself: is *this* strictly honest? Let's go back to that "condemnation of others" again. I answered that "No"

but if I'm strictly honest I must admit that I answered this one with a bare-faced lie.

So I might as well admit it—I've got 'em all. Maybe I'd better take them one at a time. I couldn't quite see how I could be such a louse, but try as I would to avoid it I had to admit that I had each and every one to some degree.

Then another horrifying thought occurred to me: is the list complete as far as I'm concerned? What about lust? I hadn't noticed that one listed but that could be covered by self-seeking. What about lying? Maybe dishonesty covers that one but I don't think so. Some of my lies don't hurt anybody; I just tell them because they make a good story or maybe just to keep in practice in case I ever go back to the bottle again. . . .

I can't keep this up . . . this kind of thing will either put me back on the stuff or I'll never speak to myself again. But wait a minute! Isn't this type of thinking in itself a character defect, known as negative thinking?

Some of these defects are native to my character and some are acquired. I must accept those I cannot change and change those I can. Even those I cannot eliminate entirely I can perhaps divert to useful purposes. Anyway, it's worth a try, so here goes:

Dishonesty: this is a natural character defect of mine but I can refuse to be dishonest *for my own benefit*. That will still let me tell a little white lie if in so doing I can help a guy or prevent hurting his feelings.

Selfishness: another natural, but I can do unselfish things for my own selfish gratification.

Resentments: I can be resentful of those things which interfere with my AA activities. Certainly, I must take care of those other duties but my resentment will make me hurry back to AA whenever the opportunity does present itself.

Egotism: I've got a load of this but it makes me like myself so much that no one, in or out of AA, can make me start knocking my own brains out again. As far as *my* sobriety goes, I'm the most important man in AA.

Fear: I used to have a ton of this but now I can confine my fears to just one thing—that first drink.

Anger: this trait, like profanity, is the most useless character defect a person can have. It accomplishes nothing and is destructive to peace of mind and self-respect. I'm trying to tone this down to righteous indignation.

Hatred: this is but a prolonged and aggravated case of anger. Anger is a rash but hatred is a deadly cancer. This I can truthfully say I have whipped for the time being, at least. I know it is a characteristic that an alcoholic can't afford to have.

False pride: I've still got the pride, perhaps, but I've written off the false. I definitely know that I'm but one drink away from a stumblebum. I am what I am by the Grace of God only.

Self-seeking: this is a tough one. Where does it start and stop? Isn't it all right to seek those things for yourself that enable you to provide

for your family? Surely, there's no argument here. Maybe I'd better play it safe and seek only those things which are rightfully mine, which enrich me either materially or spiritually and which leave no man poorer because of my acquisition.

Conceit: do I love myself? I do, and what's more, I'm going to continue doing so but I'm only going to love those things in me that are lovable. I can keep some of that conceit if I keep it on that basis.

Intolerance: I once knew a guy who knew everything, but time has demonstrated that he was wrong nine out of ten times. That guy was me. I am now trying to bring my average up to five out of ten. Until I pass that mark I am not prone to be too intolerant. I wouldn't want people to agree with me all the time anyway. It would make them as smart as me and I wouldn't like that.

Envy: this characteristic I can not only retain but enlarge. All I have to do is to change my standard of values: I can envy a person with more happiness, more serenity, more humility, more usefulness, and more spirituality, and I can work unceasingly to surpass him.

Bigotry: I've got a very personal God and a very personal religion. It's mine and I'm going to keep it. Others have or are looking for their own. If I retain this thinking I don't think bigotry will prove too much of a problem.

Laziness: yes, I'm lazy. . . . Always have been, always will be. Someone in

AA told me "Easy Does It" and I'm following that advice. It is going to take my entire life anyway to acquire this program whether I rush the job or not. The really good things of this life take a long time to develop and if we try to step up the process we are in danger of ruining the whole thing.

Frustration: working this program so that I will be at peace with the God of my understanding and with my fellow man, it is extremely difficult even for a lazy, inefficient and a rather unsuccessful individual like myself to have a feeling of frustration.

Impatience: of this I have a great deal. I suppose I will always honk my horn and pass out dirty looks at Sunday drivers, and feel considerably irritated when I phone a man and tell him I will be at his house in an hour to take him to a meeting and have him greet me at the door in his undershirt and tell me I will have to wait until he shaves. In cases like this I'm powerless but I'm still trying.

Condemnation of others: this one gives me a lot of trouble. I still like to take others' inventories even though I haven't received delivery on my own wings and halo as yet. Instead of condemning, however, I will endeavor to profit by their mistakes.

Feelings of Inadequacy: this is very confusing to me. In some departments of my life I admit inadequacy. In others I not only feel adequate but actually overconfident. Maybe when I have completely "turned my life and my will over to the care of God as I

understand Him" I will be freed from all sense of inadequacy.

Jealousy: I am very fortunate in that I have never had occasion for a real case of jealousy concerning individuals but I am extremely jealous of the way of life I have found in AA and I intend to retain it with every resource at my disposal.

Arrogance: as with most of us, whiskey made me arrogant but hangovers cut me down to my proper size. I find it rather hard to have a feeling of arrogance after I've honestly examined myself under the revealing glass of these character defects.

Remorse: of course I did many things I am not proud of. Many of those things I don't remember; in many cases it would be impossible or useless to try to make amends. I like to think the old me is dead. So for the most part I try to let the dead past bury its own dead.

Self-pity: I have my sobriety, a God of my own understanding, my self-respect, peace in the family, no bills I can't eventually pay, good health, and a steady income. Yet I sometimes indulge in self-pity. This I say, is just plain stupid.

Revenge: this characteristic used to mean that if some louse did me wrong, I'd get even with him, thus making a louse of myself. This I will try to change. The person who did the most injury to me was old John Barleycorn

and I'll get my revenge on him by severing all my former relations with him, by ignoring him completely.

Worry: I still have a lot of worries but I've found a gimmick that enables me to ease the load: as my shoulders are only so wide, I load them up to the edges with other folks' troubles and I then have no room for my own. I find others' loads are much lighter.

Anxiety: this appears to me but a milder case of worry. I needn't have too much of this. I have formed a partnership with a Power so great that I am sure nothing can happen that He, with my willing cooperation, can't handle.

Uncharitableness: to me, the lack of charity—the first of all the virtues—applies to thoughts and words as well as to deeds and material things. I doubt if I could be completely charitable but I can try. There is no way I can use this defect of character so I must try to eliminate it . . . on second thought, I might be able to use it, because it will always give me something to exercise my soul on when I have eliminated all my other defects a hundred or so years from now.

As our admission and acceptance of our alcoholic condition was a prime factor in finding our sobriety, so let our admission and acceptance of our character defects enable us to find the AA way of living.

T.W.R., Alexandria, Virginia

TWELVE STEPS

and The Older Member

Step Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

IN all the inventory steps, including Step Six, it is of first importance that we keep in mind some sort of positive notion of what we would like some day to become. This, I've come to believe after seven years' acquaintance with the program, is so vital that I'd like to work over the notion briefly before going on to the Step itself.

Everyone, ancient and modern, who is versed in the skills of mental hygiene, affirms that to concentrate on one's faults is risky. Scripture, which even agnostics agree is a useful source of tips on living, warns repeatedly that negative thinking is a dangerous trap. A merry heart is good medicine, a downcast spirit drieth the bones. If your eye is single your whole body will be full of light, but if your light is darkness, how great is the darkness. . . .

Here the alcoholic bent on improving himself may swing like a punching bag. The merry heart was the password of our drinking days, but it turned out to be very bad medicine indeed. And only as we pressed forward into the darkness of our own mistakes did we begin to see any light.



Yet if we went too far we were over the precipice and into the familiar alcoholic abyss which has no bottom, the canyon of uncreative self-castigation and remorse. If we give our attention only to our favorable aspects, we ride a fragile pink cloud which can evaporate instantly, leaving us unsupported.

How, in this climb up the moun-

tainside, does one avoid both the cloud and the canyon? Just what did the knowing ones mean by the "single eye" and the "merry heart"? How can we look squarely at our faults without getting depressed? As one who has had many a dry skid into the doldrums, these questions impress me as being primary.

The answers, I believe, begin to come clear when we reconsider the AA program as a whole. "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character," reads Step Six. By itself, it could be somewhat of a bogey, a sterile and forbidding command to brood on our misdeeds.

But taken as part of a way of life, it's another step for willing feet. The program is defined in the Big Book as "the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience." The essence of that experience is that at long last we are on the road to becoming what God meant us to be. This is something really to be cheerful about, the "light" in our bodies, the wholly adequate reason for having a "merry heart." Solidly established on this platform, we can read Step Six with no threat of gloom. We become in actual fact entirely ready to have God *relieve us of the burden* of all these defects of character, so we can get on with more important business.

Indeed, there's little point to attempting Step Six until this willing frame of mind is achieved—and then the Step is already taken! For the Step by its very wording is not much more than attaining willingness, a

becoming, as it says, "entirely ready."

It's a little more than that, however, as it involves a consideration of "these" defects of character. "These" are presumably the ones we've identified during the fearless inventory of Step Four and openly admitted in Step Five.

As a record of growth, it's interesting to compare the things we've cited as our main character defects at various check-points on our AA road. When I first came into AA there was only one character defect I had any time for, a baffling tendency to rationalize myself into taking the drink that meant sure disaster. God removed this defect, and it has always been instructive to me to recall what machinery was clanking while He was doing it. It was not the taking of Step Six alone that set up the alley for His strike.

Looking back it's obvious that there was no one action *alone* that allowed the trick to be turned, but the whole complex of things which, taken together, we have come to call "the program." The program is a friendly and receptive frame of mind. It's going to meetings and participating when asked and calling up an AA pal when jittery and standing ready to do an ear job yourself. It's Steps One through Twelve, and easy does it and live and let live and first things first and think and proper nutrition and substitution through sweets and gratitude for the Grace of God and the serenity prayer, and probably some other things of which we're unaware.

As I go along through the years "these" character defects come up one by one for removal. And one by one they are "removed"—if, as a definition for that term, we can accept such a diminution of the defect's power that it no longer has authority to dictate my actions. And what "these" or "this" defect might be is always changing. First it was drinking, and that one was removed. Then it was overindulgence of various physical appetites, and that one was so taken in hand that it is no longer a problem. Then it was lust for power, then envy.

Can I say truly that all these defects have been removed from my character? If I did, my AA friends would promptly call for a recount! But anybody who knows me will certify what I feel myself, that every one of these defects has lost some of its driving power. Some of them have lost all of it.

Taking time for a little hindsight, it's interesting to note the combination of mercy and sternness with which the Higher Power goes about knocking a stubborn defect. One of the latest I've had a brush with is worry over money. I became entirely ready to have it removed at a time when I was just about making the financial

grade. There followed five months during which, despite hard and sober and consistent work, I didn't make a nickel! Strangely, at the end of this harrowing experience, the money-worry defect had lost a lot of its power—not mainly through simple denial, but through an increasing awareness of other values. By becoming a little less of a worrier, I became a little more of a help to other worriers.

If God can be stern, I must always remind myself that He can also be kind, and that this is the trait we most commonly experience when we're honestly trying to tidy up our characters. We need not fear letting Him have His way, even with what we may regard as "necessary" defects. He understands and is gentle, and never yanks a defect in a way that removes an essential personality or social support. In mitigating my excessive money-worry, for example, He did not take me to financial irresponsibility.

We must remember that the step says "have *God* remove" such of our character defects as we are ready to admit. He does all things just right. We can trust Him.

This truth is a light to us; it calls for a merry heart.

J.E., Bronxville, N. Y.

Three Dimensions of AA

By Edward Dowling, S.J.

TWELFTH Step work sometimes covers only one-third of the works of the Twelfth Step in the AA program. The Twelfth Step indicates three jobs that outline the three dimensions of AA. They are:

Breadth—"Carry this message to other alcoholics."

Length—"Practiced these principles in all our affairs."

Depth—"Having had a spiritual

awakening as the result of these Steps."

Breadth depends upon length. Length depends upon depth.

There are few finer human experiences than a sponsor's generosity and happiness in the progress of a prospect. These and the incredulous gratitude of the prospect please the angels. Even greater in Heaven's scales are the recaptured domesticities when

"... with the morn those angel faces
smile
Which I have loved long since and
lost awhile."

In addition to these fulfilling inter-personalities, the breadth dimension meshes quantity and quality, as AA spreads from Akron's Mayflower Hotel to the Seven Seas. It verifies the old philosophical axiom that good diffuses itself: *bonum est diffusivum sui*. I have felt at home with AA from Vancouver on Puget Sound to St. Stephen's Green on the Liffey in Dublin, from the Arid Club in Phoenix to the old Beauregard House in New Orleans and the cozy rathskeller club in Saskatoon.

One incident that I will never forget happened in Ireland, in County Roscommon, in the town of Kilrooski at the Cloonageerah crossroads at Rattigan's Pub in the back room, where an AA book and a letter from an AA in America had reassured an Irish mother that her emigrant son had found sobriety in America.

Ironically, "carry this message to other alcoholics" sometimes ex-

cludes alcoholics already in AA. Other kinds of *nonalcoholic* benders are overlooked, such as anxiety binges, benders of hostility, resentment, self-pity, confusion, insecurity, etc. The longer one is in AA the more soul-trying these benders become, the greater is the strength available in the Twelve Steps and the greater are the dividends. Here the dimension of breadth melts into the dimension of length. The breadth of AA depends largely on the length and scope of its application.

"Practice these principles in all our affairs" suggests the length dimension. The Second Step speaks of restoration "to sanity," opening up a tremendously significant scope. The Third Step involves our whole lives. The Eleventh Step takes in everything that is God's will.

I have seen the effectiveness of the AA Steps in many, many human problems apart from alcohol.

As breadth depends on length, so in turn the length depends on AA's final dimension of depth.

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps" indicates the depth dimension of AA. The deeper our spiritual experience the greater the longitude of its application and the latitude of its export.

On the surface one sees the power of AA. Yet as we dig deeper we find the confessed powerlessness of AA members. And deeper still the Power greater than AA, God as we understand Him, God of the Second,



Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eleventh and Twelfth Steps.

The deepest explanation of the dynamism of AA is the power of God which Scripture promises to the humble.

Humility is a sane outlook of mind, an attitude of will, toward myself. The shortest cut to humility is humiliation. We come closer to God, not in our proud achievements, but in our humiliating failures.

This AA discovery is an echo of traditional Christian teaching. We come closer to God where He comes closest to us. The Christian feels that God's perihelion is not the invisible, mysterious Trinity, but the visible, lovable Christ. Not Christ triumphant, but Christ of the humiliating Passion — fearful, lonely, discouraged, futile — in Gethsemane. God could not come lower.

And between the God-Man's humiliations and ours, St. Paul says there is a bridge or ladder. St. Paul tells us that by our sufferings we can "fill up those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ." This participation in the motivated suffer-

ing of the God-Man gives motive to the Sixth and Seventh Steps of AA, which are probably the deepest spiritual experiences of the program.

The Sixth Step goes beyond partial acceptance of humiliation. It calls for "entire readiness." The Seventh Step goes beyond passive acceptance of humiliating suffering. It calls for active asking for the sufferings involved in removing our shortcomings. This is discouragingly austere unless the God of our Third Step also suffered and gave a redemptive significance to the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Steps. If the Third Step leads me to Christ, then the motive and the method of His suffering become mine.

The Sixth and Seventh Steps go further than the Serenity Prayer. These Steps would pray, "God grant me the serenity to enjoy (not accept) the things I cannot change."

An AA member once told me that he had been skeptical about the AA spiritual program until he realized that it was the systematic expression of an old Jesuit prayer he had learned as a boy. The prayer was:

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will — all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it! All is Thine, dispose of it according to all Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me."

I told my AA friend that I was afraid of that prayer. I feared that if I made that offering to God at eight o'clock in the morning I would have taken it back by ten o'clock.

"How do you know you'll be alive by ten o'clock?" he said. "How do you know but that God may give

you even greater help after making that offering? That's the way that AA has taught me to look at it," he said.

Since then I have not been afraid of that prayer. This AA member had given me an understanding of that old Jesuit prayer, which I had not got in my thirty Jesuit years.

A year later I met this AA friend and told him what our conversation had taught me. "I also learned something that night," he said. "I noticed for the first time that last sentence of the prayer, 'Give me Thy love and Thy grace, this is enough for me.' That meant that all we were asking from God was nothing, except everything. For with His love and His grace, I do have everything," my AA friend said.

And that is the deepest dimension of AA — God's love and His grace.

TWELVE STEPS

and The Older Member

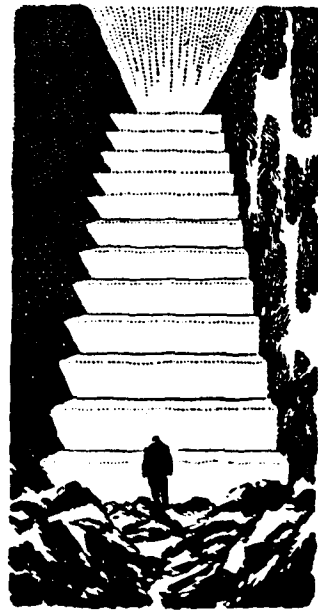
Step Seven: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings

TIME after time during my seven years of AA sobriety I have recognized a character defect and have asked God to remove it and He hasn't done it. I have asked why, and for an answer have been driven to an ever more careful consideration of Step Seven. Here I encounter the crucial word "humbly." If I really want a shortcoming removed I am to ask humbly—that is to say, in humility.

What is humility? It became one of the really vital words in my new AA vocabulary, but just exactly what did it mean?

During my first year or so, humility to me meant an absence of pride. "You've got to be cut down to size," an oldtimer remarked, and I flared in resentment. Even while protesting, though, I had a hunch he was right, and it soon grew into a conviction. Getting humility was going to be a laborious grinding-down process, a grim, bumpy business of getting rid of pride.

This would mean a reversal of the way I'd been living, and thinking. All my life I'd been given to understand that to have no pride was contemptible. The strongest of all the pleas about my drinking (and in the end the least



effective) was: "Have you no pride?" Pride of self and of family, of school, of business or professional affiliation, of social and fraternal contacts, of parents, children, sweethearts, of prejudices and of locality, of possessions and of physical attributes, of nationality, intelligence quotient and creed—these I had been encouraged by a pride-puffed world to esteem as the highest values. Now I was told they

were excess baggage, to get rid of them and be "cut down to size."

The job was slow, and even this long after is only fairly begun. Sometimes I wearied of it, and asked testily what it had to do with staying sober on any given day. But as the humbling stone of truth ground deeper I saw more and more clearly what it had to do with sobriety. Whenever one of my uncountable prides was touched I'd flare in resentment. And prideful resentment, AA's accumulated centuries of collective sobriety was trying to teach me, is an almost certain prelude to a drunk.

The first to go, and one of the hardest of all, was head-of-family, big-boss-around-the-house, or breadwinner pride. During all my drinking I had "prided myself"—literally—on being a consistent provider. I lost no opportunity to toot the theme on trumpet and cornet and beat it out in Morse code on the tom-toms. I was a damn good provider, let all realize this and pay homage.

As is so often the case, circumstances gave me sound help in getting rid of this pride. All in the same year, the industry I'd served for twenty years bounced me out of a job, and my wife of fifteen years, by legal force, tossed me out of my position as head of the family. And now, mind you, I was sober! I had a choice. I could hang on to my prides and enter into an angry war to win back lost prestige. The Big Book warned me against that path: ". . . the rage and the brain-storm are not for us."

Or I could ask "humbly" that my shortcomings be removed. That way I would have to accept good-naturedly the fact that my family and profession could get along perfectly well without me. I just wasn't as important a property as, all this time, I had thought. If they wanted none of me I could no longer, as of old, bully them into line. I'd just have to let them go their ways, and seek other company—AA company.

Before the cutting-to-size approach to humility was ended—or perhaps I should say before it ceased being predominant, as I doubt if it ever entirely ends—the rough diamond of my bumptiousness had had a number of irregularities ground smooth, or at least a little smoother, on the AA wheel. Every kind of "background" pride—physical or mental, social or ethnic, professional or geographic—tended to wither before the fact, clearly demonstrated at every meeting, that men and women completely lacking in these once-important attributes, possessed something of incalculably greater value to me. They knew how to live, and soberly. The more humbly I was willing to listen and learn from them, the more I gained (for from nothing at all to just a little is nevertheless a gain) in humility.

"Who do you think you are?"

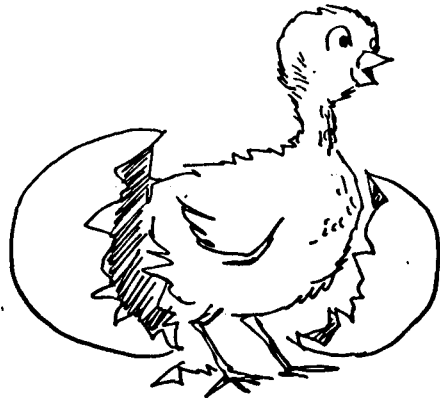
This blunt question has the power to snap me back to a saner notion of my relationships to the universe and to other people, every time I seriously ask it for myself. It helps me to an undersanding of my "size." Who am

I? I'm one of two billion, 500 million people currently trying to make out an existence on the planet. I don't suppose I'm much more valuable to the Creator than any one of the others.

Nevertheless He has accorded me some very special favors. I shouldn't really be here at all. I'm here on borrowed time, on probation. For I'm alcoholic; enjoying an arrestment of a fatal disease. This certainly gives me no license to push people around, or get annoyed with them or rail at them for not being other than as they are. My proper attitude, AA has tried to teach me, is one of simple thankfulness that I'm still around. Perhaps I might even show a little appreciation of that circumstance, in terms of helpfulness. During the times when I'm thinking along these lines I have the feeling that I'm about down to size, and I'm more comfortable.

As the days have rolled into years, I've come to see that there's another and more wonderful aspect of humility than the negative one of getting rid of pride. It's a mistake to regard the search for humility as just the destruction of a prideful shell. When a chick is born the main event is the arrival on the earth of a new kind of life. In the excitement of this fact, the smashing of the shell is all but forgotten. I think our efforts to learn to ask humbly, that is, to attain humility, may be something like that. Certainly there was a period in the hatching when, from the chick's point of view, life must have seemed nothing but an interminable pecking away at an almost

impenetrable shell. But finally it breaks, and he's free.



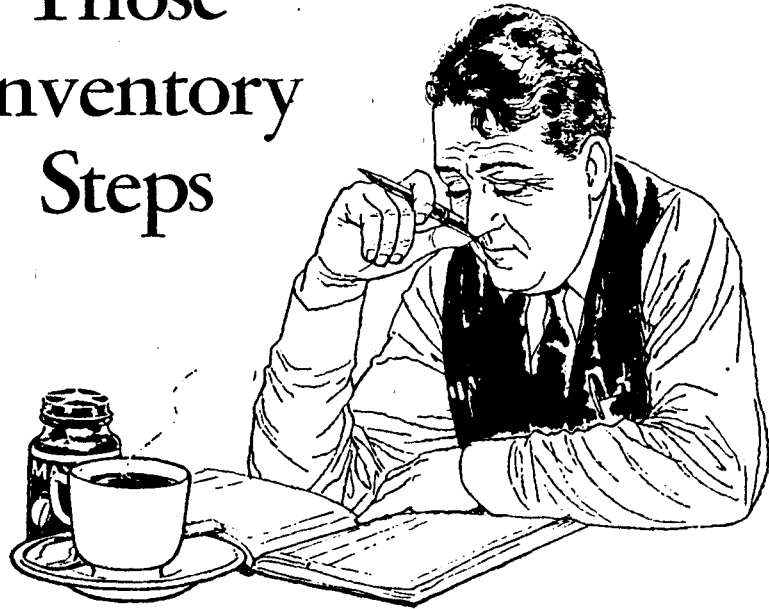
Might it not be a little bit so with us? In recent years I have felt unmistakably the stirring within me of a new and finer and entirely different kind of life. Possibilities for action within this universe have opened up . . . possibilities I hadn't even dreamed of before. May not we, too, know a new freedom once we're broken out of our shells of fears and fixed ideas, of prejudice and pride?

Step Seven will always be to me the humility step. But humility means a little different thing to me, as an older member, than it did when I was brand new. It isn't all shell-smashing now; new life is stirring.

In the actual taking of Step Seven an unexpected dividend comes to the earnest applicant. When we really ask, as the Step suggests, "humbly," our major character defect, pride, is already on the way to being removed.

J. E. Bronxville, N. Y.

Those Inventory Steps



WITHIN the past few months I've heard a great deal of talk about the inventory. There have been discussions on when to make it, how to make it, what to inventory, whether to write or not to write it. I think I've heard more diverse opinions on the inventory than perhaps any other step in the program.

A few days ago I saw Steps Four and Ten from what is to me an entirely new angle. I'll pass it on for whatever it may be worth to those who may still be dreading taking Step Four and those who, like myself, may occasion-

ally forget to "Step Ten" as often as perhaps we should.

The good alcoholic can always find an excuse to neglect the things he knows he should do, and I am an alcoholic. So I took to myself the excuse of weariness to avoid too much conscience trouble over not having made any preparation or given much time and thought to a subject for tonight's discussion. After all, we had all worked pretty hard to make our last meeting a success. Then too, what could I add to the message delivered by that wonderful speaker? There is a man who

has found and practiced successful, happy living for almost ten years. Now I, from the great mountain of my few months of sobriety, presume to follow him! On and on, and on, and on. Good old alcoholic thinking!

Well here it is Sunday already and me with no subject or even the ghost of an idea for one. What to do? In my mind I went back to the beginning of the day and thought about the Lord's Prayer. I had, among other things, humbly asked, "Give us this day our daily bread." I had meant, "Give me the things I need." Then I thought: "What do I need? Apparently a good thorough inventory, from the way my thinking is running." Ugh! that inventory again! Well, I thought about the inventory and what it means to me for a while, and gradually my thoughts turned to inventory as a general thing. Then from somewhere out of the blue I remembered a bit of verse by a famous poet.

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel as others see us.

I repeated this three or four times before it hit bottom. I believe I had an answer to a prayer. I had been given "my daily bread," so to speak. Here was the thought I needed for my inventory. God has given us all that gift. The trouble with me has not been in seeing what others see but rather what I had been hiding, because too many times I didn't like what I saw.

Up to now I had been taking an

Ed. note: for a suggested guide to completing a written inventory, please turn to the article on the following page.

inventory as a sort of insurance to sobriety. If I would be sober I must look for and try to remedy my weaknesses. If I had made any progress it was by the grace of God and I was thankful for it. The odd thing is that I really thought I was being honest. If this thought meant anything I had been going about this whole inventory business from the wrong angle. I had been regarding as a rather unpleasant duty that which really is no less than a gift of God: the ability to see myself as others see me. Even more, the means to become what I want others to see (Step Eleven). How many times I've heard this Bible quotation, "For as he thinketh in his heart so is he."

Steps Four and Ten give me the key to learn what I think in my heart. Steps Two, Three, and Eleven give me the means to think the things I would like others to see in me. Came to believe, made a decision, sought through prayer. . . .

Today I've found what is to me a new meaning in Steps Four and Ten. From now on I can approach Step Ten from a very different point of view. I'll no doubt have to use the mental broom vigorously in the days ahead. It took me thirty-seven years to get like this, but now I will know what I am sweeping out. I know that for me my inventory is as Robert Burns put it:

. . . the giftie gie us
To see oursel as others see us.

B. T., Watsonville, California

ONE WAY TO TAKE INVENTORY

THE question usually asked in discussions of Step Four is: "Have you made a written moral inventory? If so, how did you go about it?" Here is a copy of a guide used by members of the Jaxville Groups in some of their Step Four work. Perhaps it may be of some help to someone.

Answer Yes or No

Are you

1. Lacking in self-criticism?
2. Selfish?
3. Suffering from false pride?
4. Impatient?
5. Resentful?
6. Suffering from fits of temper and ill humor?
7. Cross and irritable at home and at work?
8. Lacking in common, everyday honesty with yourself and others (this doesn't necessarily mean stealing)?
9. Criticizing others?
10. Alibing every chance possible to cover your defects and failures?
11. Lacking in faith in someone, the group, or a Power greater than ourselves?
12. Lacking in tolerance?
13. Putting off until tomorrow what should be done today?
14. Casting around trying to make decisions, unable to decide one way or the other?
15. Pitying yourself, your condition in life brought about by your own making?
16. Attempting to escape from the reality and responsibility of life?
17. Insincere, making promises, pretending interest in others that you actually do not feel?
18. Egotistical? Feeling your own self-importance?
19. Self-centered? Having no thought of anything or anyone outside of your own precious hide?
20. Conceited? Thinking you are "it"?
21. Vain? Spending time before your mirror admiring yourself, failing to look on the inside to see what is actually there?
22. Jealous and envious? Wanting what another has had to work for, admiring another's sobriety but not willing to make the same effort to obtain a like sobriety for yourself?

23. Lazy? Making a million alibis to cover up your laziness, failing to pull your own share of the load?

24. Arrogant? Riding roughshod and assuming great dignity and rank you do not have?

25. Gossiping and slandering?

26. Uncharitable? Having an unkind attitude toward others, not forgiving and understanding in another what you yourself have done?

27. Lacking in hope, in yourself and for others? An attitude of "what's the use?"

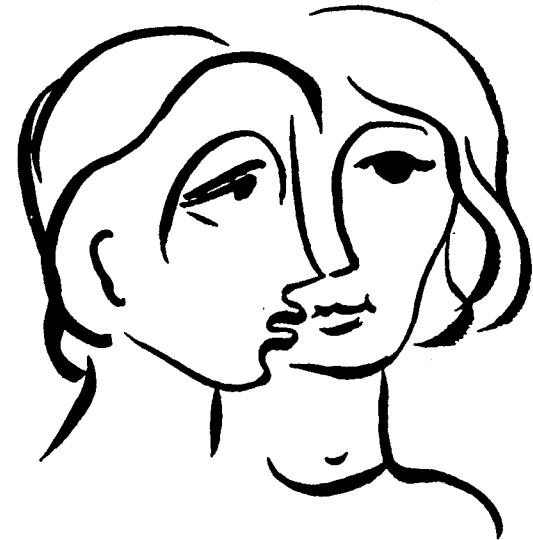
28. Lacking in even a little bit of humility?

29. Anti-social? Do you prefer your own company to that of others?

30. Avoiding responsibility? Letting the other guy take all the responsibility while you sit around and blow off your mouth and do nothing?

Now don't go away mad. The above test definitely is a guide to what may be some hidden faults we have. It emphasizes the negative. Let us remember we have some *positive*, good qualities. So, let's not forget to mark down on the credit side of our ledger—which incidentally should grow and grow as we progress in this new design for living we have found in Alcoholics Anonymous. The reverse of the preceding defects of character, as well as a lot of other fine qualities, should be recorded on the plus side. By all means, jot them down too, so that we can have some kind of balance to our inventory.

reprinted from "At Ease," West Palm Beach, Florida, via "Chit-Chat"



TWELVE STEPS

and The Older Member

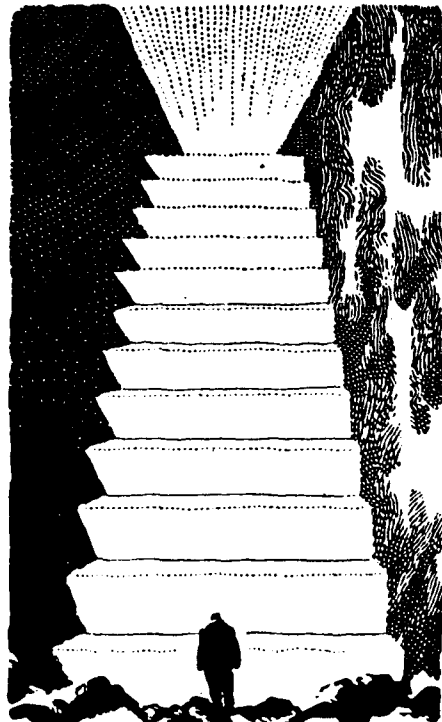
Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

“EXTRAORDINARY things,” a wise friend once told me, “are accomplished by ordinary means.” It occurs to me that over a year has passed since I began this series. I’ve been saying my views are based on seven years of day-by-day sobriety; now I must begin to say eight.

I’m a little bit awed. For an alcoholic, a year of sobriety is an extraordinary thing. Yet it was certainly accomplished by an ordinary person using the most ordinary of means—regular attendance at meetings, daily reference to the Twelve Steps, pitching in on odd jobs. Sometimes it seems to me that all of AA is like that: an organization doing an extraordinary job in the world by means which are not especially out of the ordinary. Astonishing things happen so quietly.

Now I come to the Eighth Step in my review, and I’m looking it over at the beginning of my eighth year. I regard this as a year of special hazard . . . of five men who were particularly close to me in the beginning, two stopped coming to meetings and had

slips in their eighth year. I’ll have to be careful this year. I’ll have to take thought of what the Twelve Steps mean to an older member as well as to



the newcomer, particularly Step Eight—the one which has to do with becoming willing to make amends.

The format for this review is to discuss what the Step meant when I first came in and what it means now, and I remember just how I felt about Number Eight at the start. I didn’t like it. Most of the time I didn’t want to think about the persons I had harmed and was quite unwilling to make amends to them. Rather I inclined to brood darkly over those who had wounded me. Even on occasions when I was ready to admit that restitution was in order, I didn’t have the remotest notion of how to go about it.

“Take this thing cafeteria style,” I was advised. “Select what you want and can digest, and leave the rest till later.” Part of the “rest” I elected to leave “till later” was the Eighth Step.

Looking back, I have tried to find the reason why I so stoutly resisted the notion that my drinking might have hurt somebody, and that I ought to try to make it up to them. I think I have found the reason. It’s this:

Whether we like it or not, we are fundamentally moral creatures. Even the most depraved of us offer moral justifications of what we do. The moral justification I gave for my drinking was that I wasn’t hurting anybody but myself, therefore it was nobody’s business. I kept thumping this theme whenever I was criticized, drumming it into the opposition year after year. Finally I drummed it into my own head so firmly I couldn’t readily shake it: I almost *believed*, sometimes, that

I was hurting only myself. An idea so firmly entrenched is not easily shaken, and this one held on a long time after I’d achieved physical sobriety.

I suppose if a person were unmarried and living alone he could work up a fairly logical-sounding argument along this line. But I was not a bachelor nor did I live alone, and anyway the argument is seen to be full of holes when looked at soberly.

Old John Donne had a point when he made it clear so long ago that “no man is an island.” Take the loneliest homeless drunk we can think of, and let’s see whether he harms people. He harms the room clerk, the bellhop and the chambermaid of the hotel where he’s holed up with a sense that their services are wasted, the cop and judge who finally lock him up and the doctor who treats him, with the frustration of such work. He harms the people he passes on the street by angering some, scaring others and saddening the rest. His friends are harmed by the lack of his friendship, and if he has no friends he’s harming those who need friends, by depriving them. Let’s face it, we alcoholics have hurt people by our insane drinking.

I certainly did. I had a boss, business associates, a wife, two kids, a brother, a sister, a father and a mother, and I damaged them all. Sometimes they could depend on me and sometimes they couldn’t, and they never knew which time would be which. They all had a sense of insecurity where I was concerned, and this was

especially hard on the kids, whose whole world wobbles when one of the parents at its center wobbles.

And I really wobbled. The night of my father's funeral I was drunk and when my mother came to my house for solace I was drunk and when people had a birthday or an anniversary or a solemn occasion or a crisis, I was drunk. I hurt myself most of all, and vaguely recognized it, and this recognition supported the fiction that I was harming *only* me. But no, I was harming many others.

Gradually, as the twenty-four-hour periods in AA linked themselves into weeks, then months and finally years, a subtle but profound change began to take place in my outlook. The change is hard to describe and still incomplete, but its direction is something like this: At first I inclined to feel that the universe was not giving me my just due, that I deserved far more and better than I got, that people were morally obligated to understand me better.

As I change, I tend more and more to feel that I'm lucky God gave me a look-in on His marvelous Creation on any terms, that I'm fortunate to be let off so easy for my misdemeanors, that though I have little property lots of people have less and I'm lucky to have three squares, and that I've just got to find some way to understand other people better than I do. Before somebody points out that my humility is even shakier than usual, let me add hastily that this appears to me to be a *direction of growth* and not a com-

pleted development. But there's improvement. Whereas I used to be sore all the time, now I'm only sore sometimes, and that, I submit, is growth.

Thoughts like this mean more and more to me:

By being on earth at all we affect people.

God has given us the power to harm people if we want to.

Anybody can smash a fine delicate watch, but how many people can make one?

A person is a far more wonderful creation than the most marvelous watch. It's easy to smash a person's happiness, but how many people know how to mend that happiness?

Make amends? Sure, I'll make amends nowadays, if I can find out how. Some amends I can never make, in the sense of re-living years already lived. But I can try to live these present days in the way I ought to have lived all my days. In a way, that's making amends.

And it's funny how a deep change of heart brings about opportunities for restitution you never thought possible. There's a certain man I've always thought highly of; even in my drinking days I recognized him as fine. I flubbed things so badly, however, that our relationship was strained, so I thought, beyond repair. Yet just the other day I picked up the phone and called him on impulse. We had a nice chat, and by even so ordinary a means the extraordinary thing was accomplished: our relationship as friends was reestablished.

The central thing here, I believe is the state of mind, the attitude. "Became willing to make amends," the Step says. Once you've become willing, I've come to think, after eight

years of trying to work this thing, the means of doing it will sooner or later present itself.

J.E., Bloomington
Indiana*

**Ed. note—it's the same "J.E., Bronxville, N. Y." He's moved . . . but only geographically; we'll keep on running the Steps from Bloomington!*

The Spiritual Angle of AA

By Rev. Samuel M. Shoemaker*
Pittsburgh, Penna.

IT was clear to Bill from the first, I take it, that Dr. Jung's simple declaration that science knew no answer, and Dr. Silkworth's incalculable help from the medical angle, and William James' great wisdom in "Varieties of Religious Experience" still left the great need for a spiritual factor which would create a synthesis and offer a dynamic motive to sobriety. The problem was how to translate the spiritual experience into universal terms without letting it evaporate into mere ideals and generalities.

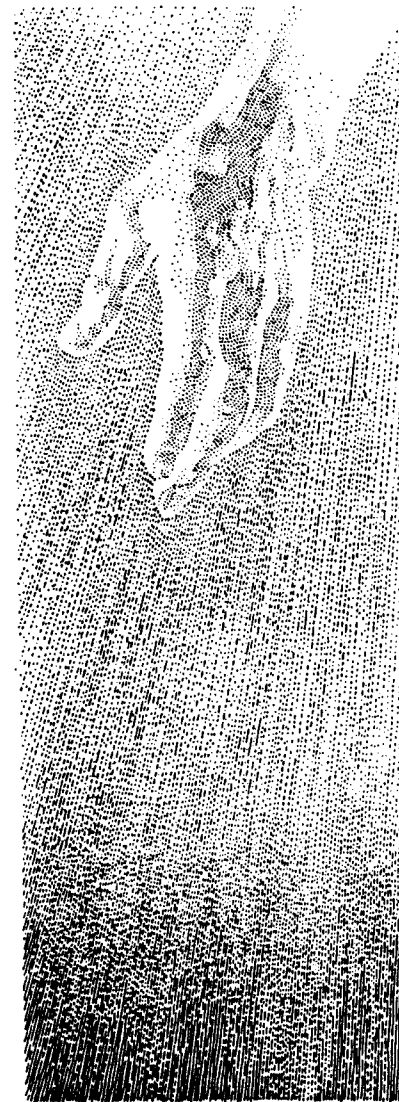
And so, immediately after Step One, which concerned the unmanageableness of life as some of us had been living it, came Step Two: we "came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The basis of this belief was not theoretical, it was evidential. Before us were people in whose lives the beginnings of a transformation had taken place. You could question the interpretation of the experience, but you could not question the transformation itself. In Acts 3 and 4 is the story of the healing of a lame man by Peter and John. A lot of the ecclesiastics wanted to know how it came about. The apostles told them it was through the name of Christ that the man was healed. And it says, "And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say

nothing against it." You can fight a theory about an experience, but you have to acknowledge the experience itself.

AA has been supremely wise to emphasize the reality of the experience, and to acknowledge that it came from a Higher Power than human, and then leave it at that.

It would have been easy, and must have been something of a temptation, to go into the theological business. Here the evidence was. It was evidence of a Power. All right: then let's define the Power! But this would have struck against several possible difficulties. If they had said more, some people would have wanted them to say *much* more, and define God in the way most acceptable to them. It would only have taken two or three groups like this, dissenting from one another, to wreck the whole thing.

Moreover, there were people with an unhappy association with religion—a dead church or parson, some church-going people whose weekday lives did not support their Sunday professions; and this would have added a factor to be overcome in addition to those already present. Also there are the agnostics and atheists, who say they either do not know anything at all about ultimate realities in the universe; or else definitely disbelieve in any definable or reachable god. There



are a good many people who disbelieve in God for emotional reasons. As Unamuno says, "those who deny God deny Him because of their despair at not finding Him."

For an outfit like AA to become dogmatic would have been fatal. So the founders stuck to the inescapable experience, and told people to "turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." That left the theory and the theology—very important as they are—to the churches to which people belonged. And if they belonged to no church, and could as yet hold no theory, then they must give themselves to the God they saw in other people. This is not a bad way to set in motion a spiritual experiment and the beginnings of a spiritual experience. Maybe it is what we all do when we let religion change over from a mere tradition to a living power.

I want to emphasize the psychological soundness of all this. Do not think it applies to alcoholics alone; it applies to everyone who is seeking genuine spiritual faith and experience. When one has done the best he can with the intellectual reasoning, there yet comes a time for decision and ac-

*Rev. Sam, an old friend, says: "AA has been one of the great joys in my whole very joyous life." This is his talk at AA's Twentieth Anniversary in St. Louis last July.—Ed.

tion. It may be a relatively simple decision: really to enter wholly into the experiment. The approach is more like science than like philosophy. We do not so much try to reason it out in abstract logic: we choose a hypothesis, act as if it were true, and see whether it is. If it's not, we can discard it. If it is, we are free to call the experiment a success.

You can sit about in a vacuum—whether this be the privacy of your room, or an academic classroom, or a pulpit—and discuss the truth of a theory forever, and it may do you no good. It is when you let truth go into action, and hurl your life after your held conception of truth, that things start to happen. If it is genuine truth, it will accomplish things on the plane of actual living. If God is what Christ said He is, then He is more eager to help us than we are to be helped. He does not trespass on man's freedom, and we can reject Him and deny Him and ignore Him as long as we like.

But when we open the door on a spiritual search, with our whole lives thrown into it, we shall find Him always there, ready to receive our feeblest approaches, our most selfish and childish prayers, our always entirely unworthy selves, and get down to business with us.

The experimental approach seems to me to be of the essence of our finding the help of the Higher Power. We first lean on another human being who seems to be finding the answer. Then we come to lean on the Higher

Power who stands behind him. William James, in the famous passage from "Varieties of Religious Experience," says "The crisis (of self-surrender) is the throwing of our conscious selves on the mercy of powers which, whatever they may be, are more ideal than we are actually, and make for our redemption. . . . Self-surrender has been and always must be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life. . . . One may say that the whole development of Christianity in inwardness has consisted in little more than the greater and greater emphasis attached to this crisis of self-surrender."

This, of course, becomes the heart of all religion. Most of us come to God in the first instance from a need. If you want to say so, we come selfishly; but I would point out that, before we can be of any use to anybody else, we must find the beginnings of the answer for ourselves, so that this may represent a necessary step in progress.

There is a great hue and cry today about people seeking benefits from God. I'd like to know where, in Heaven's name, a bewildered and defeated person is to go for the help he desperately needs, if he doesn't go to God! Of course he is concerned about himself—he ought to be—he must be, if he is ever to be made useful to others. But later on he must also grow up, stop just using God, and ask God to use him.

One begins a mature religion at the point where he stops trying to get God

to do what he wants, and begins asking God to show him what He wants.

Many people will tell you they have given up faith: they prayed for something they wanted, and it did not come—so either there is no God, or else He is not interested in them.

What childish nonsense! How can you expect God to listen to every selfish half-baked prayer we send up to Him; He'd have the world in worse chaos than it is, in five minutes! Prayer is not telling God what we want, it is putting ourselves at His disposal so that He can tell us what He wants. Prayer is not meant to try to change the will of God, it is meant to *find* the will of God, to align or realign ourselves with His purposes for His world and for us. That is why it is at least as important for us to *listen* as to *speak* in prayer.

Oftentimes we come to Him feverishly and wilfully, and we just have to quiet down before He can do anything for us. When our voices are clamorous and demanding, there is no place for His voice. When we let the wilfulness cool out of us, He can begin to get His will across to us. And, as Dante said, "In His will is our peace."

There are many people who do not like the implication of weakness in the word "surrender." They like to think they are strong characters who can take care of their own destinies. This is fictitious thinking. Everyone in this world is some kind of a weakling; and if he thinks he is not, then pride is his weakness, and it is the greatest

weakness of all. People may think they avoid the overtly disreputable sins; none of us avoids the folly of selfishness, of self-centeredness, or pride. That man is fortunate whose problems are of such a kind that they get him into trouble, and he has to do something about them. Would that temper and pride and laziness and scornfulness and irritability and greed brought people to the same state of conscious need as alcoholism does! No one is strong, and the people who think they are are only self-deceived. We act as if character and reasonably good behavior were the end and aim of existence.

The real questions in life, which underlie matters of behavior, are definitely of a religious nature and can have only a religious answer, an answer that comes from God. Whence came I? What am I meant to be doing here? Whither am I going? These are

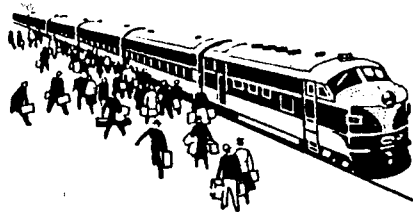


the questions that, unanswered, leave us without direction or moorings. But science has no answer to them, and philosophy only the answers of a human guess. Religious faith is the one candle in the darkness of life's mystery. If Christ came down from God to represent Him and speak for Him, then we have an answer. The lesser revelations to prophets and seers are of the same nature, but not of the same authority, judged (if you will) simply by the size of their effects in human history. All these truly wise men seem to begin with the acknowledgment of their finiteness, their darkness and their need. When we get through to God, by whatever name we call Him, or rather when we let Him get through to us, then we begin finding light and the answer.

The great need of our world and of our time is for a vast, world-wide spiritual awakening. There are many signs that it is upon us. Western man is gradually getting it through his head that he owes the greatest of all human blessings—the blessing of liberty—to God and religion.

There are four factors, it seems to me, in all genuine spiritual awakening: conversion, prayer, fellowship and witness.

By conversion I mean the place where one turns towards God, where one begins to want to be honest about oneself in the light of one's religion. I do not mean perfection, I mean the search for it and the start towards it. It is within the reach of all, and it is the beginning. A lot of religious



people are like a crowd sitting in a railway station, thinking they are travelling. They hear the names of trains and stations, there is the smell of luggage and the stir of travel. But they have never gotten on the train. Conversion is where you get on the train. You leave St. Louis for Chicago, and you are not in Chicago right away; but you are soon out of St. Louis for Chicago, and you are really on the train. Conversion is getting on the train and beginning to move away from where you were.

Prayer—private, group or public—is the place where we get in touch anew with God and His power. God's power is always there, as there is always potential electricity in a wire plugged into a socket that is in touch with a dynamo. But you do not get the power till you close the circuit by turning the switch. Prayer, in ways unfathomable to us *theoretically*, but always open to us *actually*, turns on the switch, opens up the power by closing the circuit. We do not so much "get what we want" as find out what we should do. Awakening, in the individual, or in companies, or in nations always includes discovering the power that is in prayer.

But somehow we never can do this

alone. From the first, Christ drew about Him a company. To join Him, you had also to join that company. The church has always been a scratch company of sinners. It is not the best people in the community gathered together for self-congratulation; it is the people who know they have a great need gathered to find its answer in worship towards God and fellowship with one another. The church is not a museum, it is a hospital. That's why we can all belong to it and should.

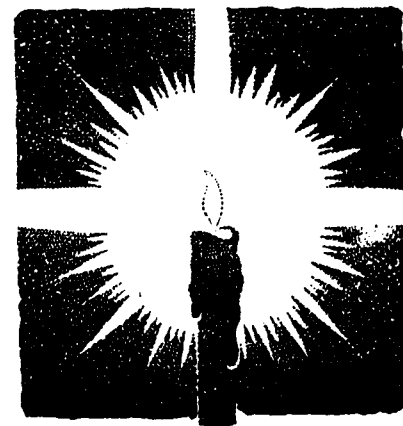
Witness comes by life and by word. A lot of average and self-righteous people think they are "witnessing" every day, but there is not enough difference between them and the rest of the world for it to make any real difference. It is when a spiritual experience has begun—one that changes us deeply on the inside—that it begins to show on the outside. This intrigues people. They wonder what has happened to us. They begin asking questions. And then is the time to open up and witness by words. We do not preach to others, we do not talk down to them, we do not point to ourselves as the answer: but we share those beginnings of victory that we know. Every real believer must engage in Twelfth Step work if he is to keep spiritually alive.

The parallels between these four points and AA's Twelve Steps must be obvious to anybody. To me AA is one of the great signs of spiritual awakening in our time. It is experimental and experiential in nature, not dogmatic; but none can doubt that God is what

has made AA and today inspires and keeps it growing. I am thankful that the Church has so widely associated itself with AA, because I think the church needs AA as a continuous spur to greater aliveness and expectation and power. They are meant to complement and supplement each other.

I believe that AA will go on serving men and women as long as it may be needed, if it keeps open to God for inspiration, and open to people for service. I believe that AA has been wise to confine its organized activity to alcoholics. But I hope and I think we may see an effect of AA on medicine, on psychiatry, on correction, on the ever-present problem of human nature itself and what we can do about it, and—not least—on the Church. AA derived indirectly a great deal of its inspiration from the Church. Now perhaps the time has come for the Church—all the churches—to let themselves be re-awakened and vitalized by the insights and practices which are found in AA.

God bless AA forever!



Closed

Meeting



TAKING INVENTORY

"THIS is rather a tough subject that we have assigned to us for tonight," said the leader of the Closed Meeting.

"It is called 'Inventory.' It is, of course, the Fourth Step which speaks of a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves," the leader continued.

"Note the emphasis on *ourselves*. It is far easier to take the other fellow's inventory and some few members make a specialty of that. I find myself doing it if I get off guard. But the inventory should be our own. Sid, you look as though you were bursting with a big idea. Will you start it off?"

"With respect to a searching and fearless moral inventory, this I doubt.

Most of us are not so brave," said Sid, all 240 pounds of him.

"When we first come into the group we have already taken a little inventory. Maybe it is a very small inventory. Perhaps it is just an admission that possibly once in a while we might drink too much; nothing serious, you understand, and certainly not a problem. . . .

"During the first few weeks we may be shaking apart and who wants to think about inventory then? As we dry up and quiet down we do begin to take inventory but not all in one afternoon. It is more like getting paper off the wall in an old house. You rip off one color and there a worse one lies underneath.

"Perhaps we think we have been alcoholic for only a couple of years. Then after we have been dry a few months we remember about that episode in Denver. That was in 1941! Just a few years? Later on we can recall Peoria, 1937 and St. Louis, 1928! To me it is like peeling paper off the wall."

"A unique summary, Sid. And I see Sara's hand back there."

"Another way to look at it is from the standpoint of self-analysis. We may lie on the psychiatrist's couch three hours a week for a couple of years, lifting layer after layer of our subconscious. But all the time we are fighting the psychiatrist or ourselves. At least we resist bringing out the truth.

"We get more successful but less painful results by attending these meetings. By listening to the discussions, to the play of mind on mind, we can do something for ourselves that we can't seem to do in the doctor's office," added Sara.

"That is thought-provoking, Sara. I would like to make clear, however, that none of our inventory-taking is for the purpose of discovering why we drink. We leave that question to the scientists. We are concerned with how to get sober and how to stay sober.

"One reason we take inventory is because a well-ordered life is conducive to sustained sobriety. To attain a well-ordered life we need an analysis of ourselves so that we may know what to slough off and what to encourage. Yes, Joe?"

"I don't think inventory is a one-time proposition nor is it a twenty-time proposition dealing solely with the past. We have some house-cleaning to do with respect to the past, of course, but Step Ten speaks about continuing to take personal inventory. I do think it is or should be a continuing thing."

"Right! And that suggests something else that presents a bit of a problem in some cases," said the leader.

"Without knowing it, our standards may change—get higher. What was good enough for last year no longer suffices. This may be the basis for disappointment and discouragement. A person may be unhappy, may feel that he is not doing well. He forgets that he is doing fine by last year's standard, but something new has been added. Henry, we haven't heard from you. Certainly you must have a thought on this subject."

"We have not said anything yet about 'the nature of our wrongs' mentioned in the Fifth Step; about the 'defects of character' mentioned in the Sixth Step; or about the 'shortcomings' mentioned in the Seventh Step. And to be realistic, in some cases these are soft terms for what may have been or may be pretty ugly or violent deeds. It seems to me an understatement to refer to cheating on the boss or the wife as a mere character defect or shortcoming.

"What we are in effect trying to do in AA is to clear away the debris of the past—making amends where pos-

sible—and entering upon a new mode of life governed by newly adopted or at least refurbished standards of conduct.”

“Very good, Henry. It is connected, too, with that personality change you hear so much about in AA. Continuous inventory can help us in our

efforts to change ourselves from what we are into the kind of persons we really want to be.

“Shall we close the meeting in the usual way?”

(Suggestions and comments on “Closed Meeting” are always welcome. How about a few ideas?—Ed.)

TWELVE STEPS

and The Older Member

Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

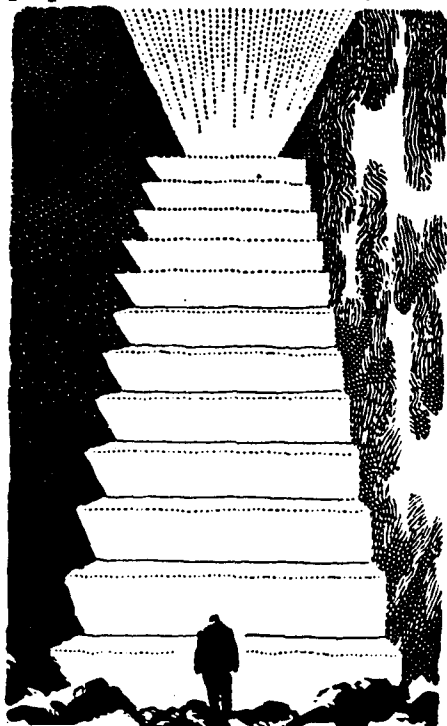
ONE of the deeply disturbing things about the Twelve Steps, taken as a whole, is that they never let an alcoholic off the hook, though sometimes they may appear to temporarily.

Take the so-called "house-cleaning" steps, for instance. You've been through the wretchedness of Steps Four through Seven, and then Step Eight comes along and offers a little breather. "Became willing to make amends," it says. Well, that doesn't take much effort, you just sit on your duff and become. No action is required. Then all of a sudden whammo, Step Nine: "*Made direct amends . . .*"

This Step has always been very unsettling to me, and still is. Not only was I supposed to make amends, but it was to be done *directly*. No pious change of inner attitude alone would suffice; there also had to be a direct confrontation. For a time I squirmed and weasled, trying to use "except when to do so" as an escape clause. Every time I came close to facing up to the real demand of the Step, I rationalized that any restorative action would "injure" somebody, and let it slide.

Finally this evasion became so ridic-

ulous I couldn't kid even myself with it any more. Sooner or later the nasty business would have to be done. Pride would have to be swallowed, humiliation would have to be risked, amends would have to be made to the very people it was hardest to face, often



those least understanding of the illness I had witlessly contracted. That was Step Nine. I could put it off, but could never quite duck the fact that the Step would never be properly taken until I had actually done some of these humbling things.

While writing this I looked out my window and saw a bird light on our porch railing. Then he took off, hurling himself on the breeze, trusting in the powers the Creator gave him to overcome, instant to instant, gravity and the tricks of the wind. When finally I came really to terms with the Step it was something like that, blindly throwing myself into situations that at first appeared to be blind alleys of humiliation, and trusting to God to give me the locomotion to carry me out again.

But how I twisted and argued and rationalized before getting down to cases! I even pulled out the one about how the main purpose of this program was to keep sober for a day, and you'd better not complicate it with all this other stuff, like making amends, or you risked getting drunk! "Yes," explained the voices of experience that hover around all AAs, waiting to be listened to, "AA's prime purpose is sobriety." But drinking, they had found, had a connection with thinking. Keeping out from behind the wheel such berserk drivers as anger and resentment was part of maintaining daily sobriety. Anger was a cover-up for fear; fear was the companion of insecurity; insecurity was the certain result of an unjustifiable

pride—and the specific medicine for pride was the act of humility.

Frankly, I've never done very well with Step Nine. I've done just barely well enough, evidently, to maintain consecutive daily periods of sobriety. In keeping with the spirit of this series, and in the AA tradition of sharing experience, I'll set down one or two of the high points of my efforts in this direction.

First of all there's the case of my first wife, Kate (not her real name; non-alcoholics deserve anonymity too!). Kate was put through several of the hottest back rooms of hell because of my drinking. We had two kids and of course they, poor innocents, could not escape. All right, comes the AA miracle and I sober up and the time comes for me to make amends. And then what happens? Kate goes berserk on hate! All the resentment she'd choked back through all those years now spills over in a destructive flood, sweeping before it every token of restitution or apology, smashing the family. Her recent record, however, does not wipe out my old one. That would only be the ancient eye for an eye. I still had to make amends—*directly*—but how? One day one of the children, who had played over to me on several occasions some of their mother's abuse, began to criticize Kate. I found myself defending her instead of, as was usual, myself. The youngster looked at me in wonder. It put an end to the tug-of-war for the children's loyalties. Slowly Kate began to respond in

kind, and the lessening of tension in the children was noticeable.

I don't offer this as an example of the right way to make a direct amend. It was indirect and partial, a token. I only report it as the best I could do. It was good enough, apparently, that so far I've been allowed my daily sobriety.

There's another case in my story, the case of my mother, much more typical of the business-like working of Step Nine as I have come to understand it. For years I watched from a distance as my mother got older, and lonelier, and sicker, and I was always too drunk or "busy" to be of much help. Mind you, I don't approve of children burying themselves alive for the convenience of aging parents—I don't mean that. But I hadn't been doing even the minimum, decent things: writing, calling up, visiting occasionally, dropping the word of cheer, all the little things that let lonely people know that there is at least one person on earth interested enough to inquire.

Finally she was stricken with a critical illness. I was jolted into a realization that somebody had to act. I acted, and in doing so realized that my opportunity—maybe my last one—to make amends had arrived. This was when I threw myself on God's resources as the bird threw himself on the wind. I couldn't afford what I was doing, the money would just have to *be* there when it was needed . . . and it was. I couldn't spare the time for the hours of leisurely chatting

that helped so much, my work would somehow just have to get done . . . and it did get done. At last I began to have the feeling that in this instance I was meeting the demand of Step Nine—making *direct* amends.

It doesn't seem to me that it is possible to make really adequate amends, really to "make up for" the past. I know it risks presumption to guess what's on the mind of God, but maybe it's all right to describe the kind of deal it appears to me that He's offering me. It's as if I owed a man a hundred dollars and couldn't pay it, and he said if I'd pay five, and pay it face to face, he'd write off the other ninety-five which I'd never be able to get up anyway, and call it square. We can't really make up for the past in the sense of balancing the books. But evidently the deal is that if we do the best we can, and do it directly, we're all square. These two instances—one of them a qualified failure and one a modified success—kind of sum up what I've learned from the many, many Step Nine attempts I've made.

My deepest feeling is for the wonderful bargain you get. You pay five and you get ninety-five as a free gift. For I feel profoundly that whenever I've made the direct effort, disregarding financial or emotional cost, I've been richer. Something has been set straight somewhere that I thought could never be made right. Somewhere, somehow we're all breathing easier when these things are done.

J. E., Bloomington, Ind.

T W E L V E S T E P S

and The Older Member

Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

"**T**HEN I promptly admitted I was wrong," ruefully reported a follower of the Twelve Steps recently "—ten days later!"

How typical of the de-alcoholized alcoholic to put off the hour and the moment of owning up to an obvious mistake! How bitter is the gall of admission, how loath we are to swallow it! Yet how necessary it is to enduring sobriety—and how sternly Step Ten holds us to it!

Number Ten might be called the here-and-now Step. It's not concerned with past disasters, permits no brooding over future possibilities. We "continue" to take inventory. I understand "continue" to mean every day. This day. When the inventory shows us to have been wrong we admit it "promptly." Immediately. Now.

It has always seemed to me that this action has a special function, appearing, as it does, near the end of the sequence. So far our major tussle has been to get squared away with our immediate drinking past. We've had a good look at the record and seen clearly that for us, alcohol meant personal disaster. Miraculously freed from it, we've seen the need of making restitu-

tion in order to keep that freedom, and of plugging in on the spiritual lighting circuit. We've tidied our spiritual house and turned on the lights.

But tidying up a shambles, as any good housekeeper knows, is not enough. To keep things in order requires a light once-over *every day*. Otherwise dust accumulates, fuses blow, roofs leak, basements flood, beds go unmade, dishes accumulate in the sink. In the kind of house we're talking about here, we've got to take today's inventory *today*, and if something's wrong, fix it right away. Otherwise resentments accumulate, tops blow, tears are shed, grudges build, confusion takes over, bats begin to flit back and forth in the mental belfry. Once that begins to happen it's an unhappy state of affairs, even if we manage to hold on to physical sobriety. The twelve-stepper who put off the admission for ten days suffered ten days of mental misery as the price.

"When we were wrong."

What a vast field for speculation that phrase opens up for the philosophically-minded! What *is* right, and what wrong? Thoughtful men and women have been discussing the point

since the first beginnings of human intellect, and have arrived at no hard-and-fast conclusions. It seems that each one must be his own philosopher, and hammer the matter out for himself.

Speaking just for myself, I've had a rugged time with the issue in the eight years I've been trying to live by (or if not "by" at least "with") the Twelve Suggested Steps of AA. In the beginning it was hard for me to see, sometimes, that I was wrong at all. Everybody else was, but not I. If only people would try to understand me a little better they'd see that *they* were wrong, not I. I came to meetings fuming with resentment.

But I came . . . and gradually the program and the people began to have their effect. Now, after all this time, I have quite a different concept of right and wrong than I had in the beginning.

It seems to me they're relative, not absolute things. For example, if a fox or a hawk kills a chicken, nobody sees anything especially "wrong" about it. It's what you expect of hawks and foxes. But if our dog does the same thing there's hell to pay. He's made to understand that such behavior is not tolerated in domestic pets; he must change or be destroyed. If an infant wets his pants nobody minds; high school people are supposed to know better. Savages in a primitive tribe are not really expected to pay taxes; members of a mature society are supposed to accept their share of civilization's bill. And so on up the scale: the

higher forms of life are supposed to exhibit the higher forms of behavior. What may be "right" for one stage of development may be quite "wrong" for another.

Darwin called it "evolution"—good behavior for a fish is not good behavior for a man. Right for man in one stage of development is not right for him at a higher stage. The same applies, I deeply believe, to an individual. Within a single lifetime we can evolve into higher types of beings.

This, I think, is the real root of AA tolerance. When we see an active drunk we aren't too quick to say his carryings-on are "wrong." It's merely the primitive way we all are when we're drunk. When we see a brand-new member bristling and popping with unresolved resentments, we don't get too upset. He just hasn't had time yet to grow—that is, to evolve. And when, after a period of time, we take another good hard look at *ourselves*, we're rather surprised—at least I have been—to see what's happened to our old notions of right and wrong.

"When we were wrong."

When I first came into AA, and looked over my day's activities to see where I'd been wrong, I'd come up with a list of gross acts of rudeness and violence. This might be a typical day's list: Hit one of the kids (how I wish I hadn't!) Yelled and swore at them three times, and unnecessarily. Lambasted my wife for a situation which displeased me, but for which she was in no way responsible. Let

go with a surly tirade besmirching the good name of a perfectly honest, well-intentioned, hard-working man. Blew my top in traffic, endangering the lives and upsetting the nerves of at least a dozen people.

Lest I seem altogether too good to have around, let me confess that any one of these things could still happen, and at any moment. But the fact is that they either don't happen at all any more, or happen infrequently. It's been a very long time since I've been really violent, either in action or speech, with a child. My language has cleaned up a lot, doesn't have nearly the cuss content it used to. I'm less inclined, these days, to blame people, more inclined to understand them. I'm still not as patient in traffic as I ought to be, but improving. In other words, whether I like it or not, whether or not I had anything to do with it or deserve any credit, the big fact remains, inescapable, and must be accepted—I have evolved a little bit.

"Right" and "wrong" mean differ-

ent things to me, subtler, more refined things, than they did eight years ago. True, I didn't slam the kid, but I brushed him off too quickly. I should have been more patient. True, I didn't blast the wife, but I was thoughtless. She wanted to go to that thing more than I knew; I should have taken her. True, traffic is hell, but it's hell for everybody else too.

"When we were wrong promptly admitted it."

Wherever we may find ourselves on the ladder of growth, we know well enough, I think, what is "wrong" for us *at that point of our development*. If we promptly admit it we hasten our progress to the next stage of growth. For myself, I try not to develop too rigid notions of right and wrong; for tomorrow or next week, if I should grow, I'd have to give them up. It's the growth that we're after, no matter where we are on the accumulating stack of twenty-four-hour chips. Day-by-day growth.

J.E., Bloomington, Ind.

A Report to Our Friends

*“...to carry this message
to other alcoholics...”*

YOUR Grapevine has long been a useful and rewarding instrument for Twelfth Step work.

Many of us have passed along our copies or made gifts of yearly subscriptions to friends or to newcomers.

Others have carried AA's message by contributing articles or art work to The Grapevine.

Then there are the many within the groups who do the important Twelfth Step job of getting The GV to meetings and, thus, into the hands of those who have not yet made AA's monthly journal a regular part of their lives.

And, of course, over the years there have been many who have worked hard in the Editorial and Business offices to produce a better and more widely circulated magazine.

These are the people who have made The Grapevine the big part of AA life it is today and who have reaped the reward of giving. Every twenty-four hours more and more are becoming Grapevine conscious and are helping us to grow and increase our effectiveness on a world-wide basis.

Recently, we have tried to launch a more vigorous effort to assist normal growth-by-attraction and we thought you would like to know what we have done and how well it has been received.

First, we noted that seven out of ten groups in the United States and Canada did not have the magazine on sale at their meetings . . . which meant that a great many AAs were not being given a chance to read single copies

and thereby make their own decision as to becoming regular subscribers. So, we started writing to some 3500 such groups, nudging them a bit. The response was magnificent. About 900 groups—or close to 26 percent—placed orders for about 3400 copies on a monthly pay-as-you-go basis. This lowered the percentage of non-Grapevine groups from 70 percent to 60 percent and it now looks like we might even it out at fifty-fifty someday soon.

Secondly, we took a look at the recent downward curve of individual subscriptions and tried to level off or reverse that trend. In December and January, we offered reprints for framing of our Christmas painting “Came to believe . . .” to all individuals entering a new or renewed one-year subscription or a gift subscription. AA came through again. As of December, this year's gift subscriptions, plus the new and renewed subscriptions for December, were running about 25 percent ahead of last year. The reprint offer has been extended one month. (For details see page 36.)

The next step was to set up a direct line of personal communication with the groups. To accomplish this we naturally turned to the seventy-six delegates to the General Service Conference and asked them to go directly to the groups in their regional areas with The Grapevine story. The delegates have begun to respond with typical AA enthusiasm.

Along with this liaison at the delegate level, we hope soon to make per-

sonal contact between the GV working headquarters and the groups themselves, by suggesting that each group establish a new group job: that of Grapevine representative. We will be writing the groups about this in the spring.

Finally, we set about to spread the message of AA through The Grapevine to AA groups in prisons and hospitals, to reach members especially in need of the benefits of AA's monthly meeting-in-print. At present, there are approximately 450 AA groups in institutions and only 104 of them have Grapevine subscriptions! This month we are launching our Group Sponsorship plan to fill this need. We are asking some of the larger outside groups to sponsor The Grapevine into institutions near their home towns.

All of this adds up to good in every direction. Our total increase in circulation this year—3,000 copies—is twice as great as that of any year since 1951. In addition to strengthening the magazine itself, this contributes to AA's primary purpose of helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The better than 33,000 AAs who now have The Grapevine habit every month keep us just about solvent—which is our only financial concern. The more than 120,000 who are without this contact with world-wide AA thinking are our real concern. We know we can reach many more of them—with your help. It is heartwarming to see that we are well on the way.

TWELVE STEPS

and the Older Member

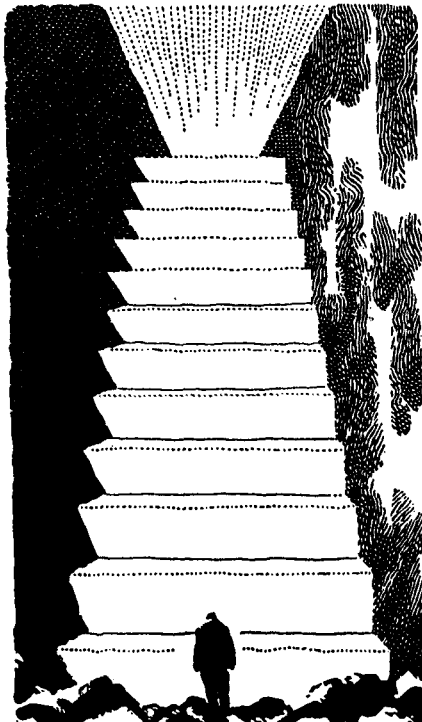
Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

IN the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience over the years, Step Eleven has a number of distinctions uniquely its own. For one thing, it's the longest. All of the Twelve Steps together contain, as I count them, exactly 200 words, an average of a little over sixteen per Step. Number Eleven contains thirty-two—almost twice the median length. The authors were sparing of words. Their generous use of them here could mean only one thing: they considered the Step of extraordinary importance.

It's a devout Step—candidly, forthrightly, inescapably so, not mincing matters. Here for the first time we encounter the word *prayer*. And the word *meditation*.

These are frankly devotional words. To an alcoholic who detests the sanctimonious and is suspicious of the devout, such words can be upsetting. I found them so, I know, when I first encountered them more than eight years ago. I could have no idea, then, that they would some day come to be among the most warming and

strengthening words in all the 200. Just to get our bearings again, I'd like to remind myself that my main job in this series has been to review



our Twelve Suggested Steps as they appear to an older member. The idea has been to try to keep them as bright and shining as they were in the beginning, to prevent dry rot, wet rot, halo chafe and hardening of the ego. I've been at the job nearly two years now and am getting near the end. My memories of Step Eleven come back in a sequence of quick impressions.

As a hopeless, helpless alcoholic a little over eight years ago I gulped AA whole, as a starving man gulps food. The Twelve Steps slid down with a general impression: "I should have been living by such standards all along." They contained all the noblest ideals offered to me in my boyhood; without quite knowing it, I'd been lonesome for them.

Then the long haul began, and a more thoughtful consideration of the Steps. Just what were they asking of me? This word *prayer*, for example—what did it mean? Obviously, it meant something different to these people—alcoholics who were miraculously kept sober—than just going to church. I learned about flash-prayers and silent prayers, thought prayers and prayers of desperation, about morning prayers for sobriety and evening prayers of thanks. I even learned about prayers for other people.

I tried out all these prayers, and I saw all of them work. I did not always get what I asked for, but as time went on I began to see that I always got what in the long run was going to be best for me. Unquestionably, I

was in touch with some Higher Power which knew—as I could not—what my best interests really were, and which operated consistently toward these interests while I maintained contact. It was just as the Big Book said, and as my AA friends had testified.

This was fine, but it was not enough. I began to develop a strong desire to *improve my conscious contact* with this great Power. It was then that the long and carefully worded Step Eleven really came into its own in my AA life. If you want to improve conscious contact with God, it said, pray. And meditate.

Meditate . . . what did that mean? I read up on the subject. Whatever else it meant, the authorities seemed to agree that you had to get alone, by yourself, and you had to be quiet. *Really* alone. And really quiet. Quiet not just in the ears, but deep in the body, deep in the mind, a very deep, still, soul-quiet. Somebody said once that muddy water, if allowed to be still long enough, eventually becomes clear, and that it's the same way with a muddied mind and soul. The turmoil simmers down, if one can wait long enough, put aside distractions with sufficient resolution, really *want* to be quiet and listen. Then, sometimes, if God chooses, there can be a brief conscious contact. A spark can pass. And after that we can know a little better what meditation is. And how very hard it is to be really quiet.

I wonder how many people have had the experience of moving to a new town and having to get re-

oriented as to direction. I remember as a kid our family took up residence in a new place, and for a long time I felt sure north was *that* way, which was really west. Finally, by the sheer intellectual effort of *knowing* what was really north (even though it did not *seem* to be north or *feel* like north) I got myself oriented in the true directions.

Getting re-oriented in the true spiritual dimension was very much like that. At first it seemed strange to find myself talking about God, and asking Him to let me know what He wanted of me, and wonderfully finding the power to do little things it seemed obvious He wanted done. I knew intellectually that it was right—"true north"—even though I was unaccustomed to such talk. All the evidence—sanity, sobriety, harmony, humility, service—pointed unmistakably to the fact that the God orientation was the only possible right one for me.

But for a long time it didn't *seem* right, or *feel* right. I was accustomed to the "practical," materialistic, spiritless, down-to-dirt, unimaginative, self-seeking orientation of the humdrum commercial world. Naturally, the spiritual orientation at first seemed strange. Just as in getting directions straight as a kid, I had to make a determined intellectual effort of *knowing* what was really right and true. In the course of making that effort I came upon a wonderful story, a true story, the most wonderful one ever told on earth.

It begins way back in the mists of pre-history, more than nine thousand years ago (exactly how much more, nobody quite knows). Way back there, some half-savage desert tribesmen became hipped on a strange notion. They got the idea that the force back of creation was a personal force, and that "It"—or "He"—had spoken personally to them. He offered them a "covenant"—a deal. You do your best to play the game of life according to My rules, He promised them, and I'll look after you and yours now and through eternity.

Of course, even in the affected tribe, even way back then, only a few of the tribesmen took the business seriously. The wise money then as now was not taken in: they knew well enough that the way to get along was to grease palms, burn offerings, and look after yourself. Still a few of them persisted, maintaining and improving conscious contact. A record of their experiences was kept in legend and, when writing was developed, written down. And always these writings and legends, written or spoken, had the power completely to overturn and transform *a few* lives among the many who became readers and listeners. Never the wise money, of course, or the majority. But always a few.

This (the few devoutly believed) was the very Word of God—the commandments, the prophets, the psalms—and it was not just for these tribesmen alone, but for all mankind. Then one wonderful day, the story goes,

the Word became flesh, a living man walking and talking, eating and drinking and working and suffering with other men and women, in the ultimate companionship of human strife. God's word was more wonderfully loving than even the prophets had imagined! More lives were transformed (but not the wise money). Out of eternity had come a new voice and a new hope.

And God knows a new voice and a new hope was what I needed a little over eight years ago. It came to me through the voice and the writings of another drunk, one who had meditated and had an experience, one who had taken the Steps when as yet there were no steps, one who gave them to us all, one who had made a conscious contact, and worked to improve it. And I can see, when I have the proper spiritual orientation, the great sweep

of the story, all one story, the same conscious contact, from back in the plains nine thousand years ago, to the drunk in the hospital twenty years ago—to me, eight years ago—and I am awed.

That's what Step Eleven means to me, and of course I have to keep going to AA meetings to maintain my orientation. Because now, as then, the wise money will have none of this. Even among drunks, few are moved to a response: 6,000,000 active alcoholics, 150,000 AAs, one in forty. And not one of those one in forty can afford to forget the wonder, the statistically impossible miracle of what has happened to him.

I can't, anyway. I have to go to meetings and be reminded. The voice of the wise money still rings loud in my ears. J. E., *Bloomington, Ind.*

TWELVE STEPS

and the Older Member

Step Twelve: *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

To hear AAs talking about "twelfth-stepping" made a deep impression on me when I first cast my lot with them. They were using the term not as a noun, which is more or less inactive, but as a verb, which is usually active. That Step Twelve means action is a thought I've tried to hang on to.

Just what kind of action the last of our Twelve Suggested Steps intends is a point on which I've found not a little difference of opinion. To some it means running around after drunks like—as they're fond of saying in our neighborhood—a chicken with its head off. To others it seems to mean not much more than speaking when spoken to . . . when one happens to feel inclined. You can find all degrees between these two extremes. About all one can do, I suppose, is mention what it means to him.

In the matter of thought-channeling, the Step is a little masterpiece. One may start out thinking he's taking a single step, the last and final one. Then he runs into the part about practicing these principles. "These

principles" mean all the other eleven Steps—admitting personal defeat, committing one's fate to God, being honest about our faults and ready to be rid of them, making restitution when it's in order, attending to our prayers. We're to "try to carry this message" and use these methods *in all our affairs*. This actually means a whole new way of life!

What an order!

But was it really so unexpected? I, for one, knew all along that my life would have to be drastically reordered if I were to make a recovery from the madness which was my alcoholism. I just hadn't known where to go. Attending to the Suggested Steps one at a time, none seemed too totally life-changing. But Step Twelve can have the effect of turning one around to look down the hill he's been climbing. "Here," it says, "is the life-changing path you've been looking for. Your feet are on it—keep going!"

Here I've found the best answer, for my own needs, to the question of what kind of action Step Twelve pro-

poses. The action it suggests is the daily effort to live an entirely new way of life—humble, God-centered and honest, with consistent willingness to spread the news that a way out of alcoholism has been found—and in all this keeping the emphasis on the effort, not the achievement.

One time when I'd been "in" only a short while, I passed through a spell of discouragement over my negligible contribution to the group and to the movement. An older member took pity on my discomfiture. "My friend," he said, "you're carrying the message just by being here."

How many times I've recalled what he told me, and how much it has meant! There are times when the moody alcoholic is overwhelmed by a sense of his own worthlessness. The glib explanation that it's only egotism in reverse helps not at all . . . he's on the brink of his alcoholic abyss. At such times he desperately needs the reassurance that the best he can do, be it ever so pitifully little, is sufficient and acceptable to his fellows. I've known times when the fullest extent of my ability to "carry this message" was getting myself to a meeting—glum, yes; dumb, yes; silent, yes—but there. The assurance that this—if it was all I could do at the time—was enough, helped me wonderfully.

Since then I've come to appreciate the wisdom and truth of my mentor's remark. When I passed through my "hyper-active" phase I was sometimes acutely conscious of the difference in

therapeutic potential between a fair-sized meeting and a straggly one. Mere attendance *is* carrying the message, even though not a word may be spoken. One's physical presence says one is interested, is in back of the program, that he identifies himself with the rest of us, that even though the flesh at the moment may be weak, the spirit is on the job—and this is, after all, a program of the spirit.

The wordless message gets across to newcomers like no other message—*he sees the people there*. Attendance at meetings is not only the minimum insurance against relapse, for newcomer and old-timer alike; but also, to my way of thinking, a lifetime responsibility as the minimum necessary contribution toward trying to carry the message.

Besides, it may be the most essential one. Having seen every phase of twelfth-step activity in action, as practiced by all the popular schools of AA thought, and having taken part in most of them, I've begun to think the most important twelfth-step job is the maintenance of interesting, well-attended meetings.

Of course we need people to go out and call on sufferers from alcoholism and their families, to tell them where help may be found. Of course we need people to arrange programs and pass the hat, to get out the letters and pay the bills, to round up the stragglers, greet friends and strangers, and make the movement known. But toward what end does all this activity point? Where does the actual healing

take place? At a meeting, of course.

My friend may have spoken more wisely than he knew. By overzealous pursuit, I've seen good prospects so alienated against AA that they died of their disease. And of course, we've all seen them die because of our own or somebody else's *under* zealousness—we couldn't take the time.

To hold, even to a small extent, such power of life or death is a responsibility, and at some of the turns we're bound to go wrong. But on one point we can be nearly certain: I don't think it's ever an error in judgment to go to a meeting, and take someone

who wants to go. It's our job to maintain a place where people who want help can get it, weekly.

"Here," we say in the biggest twelfth-step job of all, "is where we found healing. Help yourself."

Today, winding up two years* at these little reviews of the Steps, I'd like to try to carry this message: may God see you through this next day in sobriety.

J.E., Bloomington, Ind.

**Ed. note: beginning in Aug. '54 and running alternate months. Thanks, Jerry!*

A CASE OF OVER-EXPOSURE

ABOUT three years ago when I moved to this location I met a neighbor who has his residence just back of my used-car lot. He stopped in my office several times and offered me—in the usual grandiose manner of the alcoholic—a drink. I told him that I had my particular share of the stuff, and was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sometime later, in a conversation with him about my membership in AA, I made the remark that when I joined AA I couldn't have borrowed a quarter, but that now, ten years or so later and as a member of AA, I would venture the guess that I was \$60,000 in debt. All of this was said lightly, my idea being to point out to him what a change in a person's solvency could transpire by staying sober.

About two weeks ago, my neighbor staggered into my office loaded like a set of crooked dice, and said: "Where do I go?" I inquired (delicately, I thought) just "where" where was. He said: "Where do I go to sign up for Alcoholics Anonymous? I've had it!"

He went on to say that he had never forgotten my remark about going from not being able to borrow a quarter (before AA) to being sixty grand in debt—that he had been watching me and my business, the relaxed way I seemed to have, the great numbers of friends that were always coming by to see me . . . and he ended up by saying that he was thoroughly disgusted with himself and his way of life and that he had decided that our way of life was what he wanted.

I am happy to report that he has been to several meetings, hasn't had a drink since that day, and is a most enthusiastic new member here in Marin County.

Could this be called "AA recruiting by example?" "Over-exposure to an example of how AA can work if given a chance?"

Whatever it is, I am delighted to see my friend in AA because he has always been a real nice guy to know even when drinking and now we have a little AA meeting every afternoon here on the lot after he gets home from work.

Anon., San Rafael, California

YOU NEVER KNOW

JUST about eight years ago, my dinner was interrupted by a phone call from the local Justice of the Peace. The conversation went something like this:

"Hello, Pete! I have an awful nice young Irishman in jail here, and I thought you might help him out. He has two faults—he drinks too much, and he gets into fights with policemen. Do you think you can do something for him?"

I replied that either problem was a serious one, and perhaps if we could help him with his drinking problem, the other one would take care of itself.

I finished my dinner and headed for the local bastille, where I met Danny M. for the first time. He certainly was a sad sight. His bleary eyes peered through a badly cut and swollen face. The Justice released the young twenty-five year old Irishman into my custody. I took him to a doctor friend who managed to sew up the worst of the cuts. For two or three weeks Danny attended meetings with me, and then he just dropped out of sight.

Four weeks ago at my regular group meeting, a handsome young fellow came up to me and said, "Do

you remember who I am, Pete?"

I hesitated for a few seconds and replied, "Well, there's something vaguely familiar about that scar on your face."

"I'm Danny M., the guy you got out of jail eight years ago."

He told me he had been all over the country, including skid rows in several of our larger cities. One day when he was taking a personal inventory out on the Coast, after a bad binge, his thoughts reverted back to me and AA. "Could that guy still be sober after all these years?" he wondered. He decided to find out, so he worked his way back to Pittsburgh, hoping to find me, but not believing it possible that I could still be a member of AA in good standing.

Naturally, I was happy to find him, and he was happy to find me. Danny is working now with thirty days of a new life behind him, a very happy new life.

Not all of our seeds bear fruit, but this experience has certainly proved to me that you must keep planting since results may not be immediate—some seeds have to fight their way through a heavy growth of weeds before they bear fruit. *Pete W. Pittsburgh, Pa.*

October 1956

AA Worldwide

THE THINGS THAT I HAVE SEEN in Africa should make Bill W. and all of AA feel mighty proud. Before leaving New York on this trip, I contacted AA in Durban. On arrival I was met by AAs in that city. They had planned to go up into Zululand on that date, to carry the message to sick alcoholics among the natives. Two members picked me up aboard ship and the AA caravan was on the move to Lamontville.

The church was overflowing, with loudspeakers and sound trucks outside to carry the message to those who could not get inside. It was quite a turn-out. This was a history-making trip, if you know the conditions that exist in South Africa today. Hatreds, bitterness, suspicions, superstitions, race against race and man against man.

A gentleman (a Zulu) from the South African Broadcasting Company explained that we were not missionaries, that we had nothing to sell but had come in the name

of AA to offer our help against a disease, alcoholism, that had brought so much suffering, misery and hardship to the Zulu tribe. The crowd warmed up, the response was overwhelming; we were in!

AA had penetrated a curtain that I don't believe any other organization on the face of the earth could have penetrated. With trust and confidence. On that date I sat in a small church in Lamontville and watched hatred melt away, suspicions dissolve and I saw the brotherhood of man at its finest. I also heard a Zulu say: "If all Europeans were alcoholics, Africa would be a much better place to live."

Recently I heard Bill W. say something about AA being a living monument. I have seen that monument in a good many places but I never expected to see it in Zululand!

*Joe R., Chief Cook aboard
the S.S. African Rainbow*

(Reprinted from "AA Exchange Bulletin—News and Notes on Alcoholics Anonymous Worldwide," published monthly by General Service Headquarters.)

TWELVE STEPS TO A MEETING

WHEN FIRST I CAME TO AA and recognized that all my futile efforts toward sobriety were leading only to new disasters, I realized that something drastic had to be done. The Twelve Steps appeared drastic and they were offered as the directions for sobriety. Many questions were asked, some wise, some otherwise, and the answers were there . . . in the literature and from those people who actually had used the Steps to gain and insure their continuing sobriety. I don't remember how many weeks or months it took for me to understand and put into practice the complete twelve suggestions, but I do know that within the limits of the honesty I then possessed, the Steps accepted and practiced were the source of my help and that I didn't then or since ever benefit by rejecting or delaying any part of them.

Maybe it's become a habit now. I'm not even sure I planned it this way, but recently I noticed that at almost every open meeting I find myself practicing the suggested Twelve Steps . . . yes, during the meeting listening to the speakers and later talking to the others who came seeking help.

I don't miss a lot of the meeting, either, and I think I gain something in practicing the Twelve Steps at each meeting. I'm told, too, that practice makes perfect . . . that's a horrible thought . . . me becoming perfect . . . but I don't think it's going to happen, so I won't worry about it.

Coming to any meeting is a renewal of my admission that with alcohol my life was in mighty bad shape, but again I felt assured that this meeting, the spirit and the people here could help me take care of me, if I continued to be willing to let that Power greater than all of us guide me. So that reaffirms the first three Steps.

Then, as I listen to that first new speaker talk a bit about his life, I am reminded of many similar things that I did and the kind of person I was and am. Yes, I'm willing to admit those facts and acknowledge them to God and recite them, too, to someone else, if in so doing it will help him or me. I am resolved again that I don't want to have any part of that old drinking me and with the help of my Creator will crowd out those parts of my character which were so much a part of my

drinking life. That retraces Steps Four through Seven, which I once thought an impossible task.

Frequently, too, and almost regularly, the speakers remind me of half-forgotten people I had harmed and even though I realize now I cannot make direct amends to so many of them, yet I have learned the true meaning of "Charity covers a multitude of sins"; and exercising now, as best I can, true charity and love toward all of the new neighbors I have found, I can gainfully enjoy this reviewing of Steps Eight and Nine.

A meeting at the end of a day is an ideal spot for a continuing inventory. We cannot help but compare the actions of our day with something that is said at a meeting and the spirit of our meeting together makes it easier to promptly admit it. Prayerful meditation is a natural as the speakers remind me that my old way of viewing life led only to disaster, whereas those occasions in recent years when I learned the will of my Creator and followed it were precisely the times when life was really happiness. But surely I need more help and I will prayerfully search for it.

A new spiritual awakening can come at every meeting when I give

up again that old total reliance on my own omnipotence and realize that I am accepting help; and when I get to see and talk to a few new people during the coffee session I might be carrying the message a little bit, too, this night.

I'm not sure yet if practice makes perfect, but I do know that practice makes it easier and that every one of the Twelve Steps can become a conscious part of our lives and can not alone keep us sober, but truly make us want to stay sober. They have helped me find that I can get along without alcohol . . . I prefer it this way.

It's a little different every time. New speakers and other meeting-places help to make it so. I'm sure that practically all of us do just about the same thing consciously or otherwise. It's a good practice and it does become a delightful and fruitful habit.

This practice made with little or no effort makes one wonder if those "rugged individualists" who often claim they never "took" the Twelve Steps might not have done so many times and been practicing and utilizing these suggestions so deep down inside that they hadn't even noticed it.

Anon., Hartsdale-Ardsley, N. Y.

I WISH YOU FOLKS WOULD come to meetings, if only for a visit, for some day when you're carried in, the Lord may ask, "Who is it?"

*H.J., Central Group
Tacoma, Washington*

January 1957

ANOTHER KIND OF 12TH STEP WORK

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A SUGGESTION regarding Twelfth Step work, which I feel a lot of members have overlooked. When I first came into AA, I was a salesman covering from Sault St. Marie, Ontario to Cornwall, Ontario.

At various meetings I have heard members say, "I am not so good at Twelfth Step work." A thought has often come to me, which I would like to express to the Grapevine.

As a salesman, I called at various

towns, cities and villages, across Ontario. At each I was made welcome at AA group meetings and made to feel at home. I was also invited to AA homes, for cups of coffee and talks.

This was a great help to me, and it's this important piece of Twelfth Step work that helped me to keep my sobriety. The whole fellowship across Ontario was of great help to this AA member.

Jack E., Oakville, Ontario, Canada

—and powerless over alcoholics, too

IT CAME TO MY ATTENTION recently, that an anonymous alcoholic objected, strenuously, to non-alcoholics (Al-Anon's families and wives of alcoholics) using AA's twelve steps.

At first impulse I wanted to drop the subject into a deep well, and leave it there, but then I heard it was quite an issue—so I am endeavoring to paint a picture of what we might be if we agreed with our anonymous friend:

1. Admitted we had power to "stop" our alcoholics from drinking!



—that *we* were always able to manage our own lives without any help. The Lord knows I was never able to stop my alcoholic from drinking—one word from me and he did just as *he* pleased. He is now sober; is it my doing, am I keeping him on the ball, giving him that new lease on life that he has acquired? Do I have power to keep a twenty-four-hour check on the guy, preventing that first drink? If I have this power, then I should be able to pass it along to other wives and husbands, and we could be your guiding light. You wouldn't need AA. Now for part two of Step One . . . I was able to manage my own life—it was everyone else who was mismanaging. I "managed" it right into a hell of a mess . . . I hated me and everyone around me. Brother, that's managing! I blamed the men my husband worked with, the distillers who made the stuff ("There oughta be a Law"), I blamed his Mom (poor

Mom!)—but I am perfect, I can manage my own life!

2. Came to believe that I was sane. Everyone else was nuts, or my thinking was good. Being of sane mind, I needed no greater Power. I was so sane that I threw fits, made scenes, grew hysterical over any provocation, went off the deep end without even being drunk from anything so tangible as alcohol . . . just my own emotions.

3. There is no reason to turn my will or life over to the care of anyone since I have done so well with the first two Steps.

4. Inventory: only the alcoholics need this step—haven't we already admitted how good we are?

5-10 inclusive: strictly for the alcoholics—we just proved this in the above Step.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of "Our will for them," and the power to carry it out.

12. Being of such saintly quality, we were never asleep at the switch, so we need no such spiritual awakening, so we will proceed to tell other non-alcoholics who are not yet aware that they are so wonderful, and practice these principles in all our affairs!

Now, having had a review of the above, would you like to head for the nearest deserted island, drop an H bomb on us, or just let us use the Twelve Steps as AA wrote them, and pray that they will help us grow . . . we are just mixed-up people too.

A. H. Wilmington, California



**“I shot an arrow into the air,
it fell to earth, I knew not where.”**

“I RAN ACROSS SID YESTERDAY,” said the leader, “and we dropped into a place for coffee and an AA gabfest. As we separated, he thought our discussion might be suitable for tonight’s meeting.

“It was our opinion that we sober alcoholics are inclined to disparage our unlimited potential for helping others. We felt there is a tendency to underrate ourselves, both here and in the non-alcoholic world, during some stages of our sobriety.

“With some it’s modesty, natural shyness or a sense of inferiority. With others it’s simply a lack of sufficient self-confidence.

“The reason is immaterial. It’s

human and understandable but it imposes limitations on our development both as AAs and as human beings. There might be selfishness, too, in our attitudes. Perhaps in becoming more concerned about our own lives we consequently have grown thoughtless or oblivious to the needs of others.

“Sid remarked that whenever he starts to underrate himself as a potential source of helpfulness to his fellow alcoholic or his fellow man, this bit of verse generally comes into his mind: *‘I shot an arrow into the air, it fell to earth I knew not where.’*

“Applied to daily living, it’s a

fanciful and picturesque way of pointing out the desirability of engaging in various activities whether or not we think we are suited for them.

“Every time we speak at meetings, work with a new or older member or perform any kind of service to mankind in general, Sid and I believe figuratively we’re shooting an arrow into the air.

“There’s no way of knowing whether the arrow will fall on barren or fertile ground. Most times we never find out. Maybe we haven’t even helped ourselves. Neither knowledge is as necessary as the importance of continuing to shoot them.

“I’m not breaking a confidence when I tell you this about Sid. Many of you know he has been an AA member for quite a while. What you probably don’t know is the periodic sense of futility he gets about speaking before groups.

“It comes to many of us with AA longevity and after innumerable talks on alcoholism and sobriety. We ask ourselves: what is there left to say? Or we have a bad night when our opinions seem garbled, banal or inescapably repetitious.

“Some months ago Sid spoke at a place some distance from here. He left the meeting as soon as it ended, convinced he had been a dismal flop and helped no one. Imagine his pleased surprise and encouragement when, much later at another group, a woman unknown

to him came up and thanked him for the night he thought he was so inadequate, saying he had expressed something she needed to believe in.

“That’s a specific example of the wrongness of self-evaluation and the necessity of continuing to shoot arrows into the air. Has anyone else been arrow shooting?”

“I have!” exclaimed Tom quickly. “And my wife is a changed and very happy person because of it. She has gone to many AA meetings with me and as my sobriety strengthened we became more companionable and considerate of each other.

“Then a Family Group started in this city. I went to one of their meetings out of sheer curiosity. I came away most impressed. I discovered these deserving non-alcoholic mates of AA members had an unbelievably fine program of self-help tailored expressly for their problems, fears and anxieties. Their program works for them the way ours does for us.

“I encouraged my wife to join and I’ve gone to their meetings with her. Let me say right here and now that never before in our married life have we understood each other better or had more mutual tolerance.”

“I, too,” chimed in Bob, “like the imaginative expressiveness of the arrow idea. I guess I also shot one in the air when I volunteered to give my name, address and phone

number for an Institutional Sponsorship List maintained at General Service Headquarters, and given out only on request.

"The purpose is to furnish a local AA contact for any alcoholic released from an institution anywhere in the United States. We agree to follow through with any such person who wants to continue his sobriety in an outside AA group. He or she may be a former resident of our community or someone who is coming here to live.

"My arrow hasn't struck 'pay dirt' as yet but it's bound to fall to earth I know not where. Incidentally, any member can offer to serve in the same capacity. Doris is anxious to say something so I'll yield the floor to her."

"Thanks, Bob, but I only want to endorse Tom's extra-curricular activity with his wife's Family Group. In my case, it's general welfare work with a city hospital's blind, homeless and cancerous poor.

"I'm part of a committee which performs this very essential service twice a month. We collect clothes, reading matter and many other things from humanitarian shopkeepers and individuals and distribute them personally to these lonely and forgotten people.

"I wish you could see their faces

on our semi-monthly Sunday visits. We also supply amateur and professional entertainment for them several times a year. In our work we're lucky: we know where the arrows fall."

"Allow me to squeeze in my experience before this meeting winds up," said Russ. "I was never hospitalized or jailed although I should have been. As a consequence I always refused to speak at any one of these institutions, believing there was nothing helpful in my story for confined alcoholics.

"Something made me change my mind. Perhaps it was the eventual conviction that like doesn't necessarily help like. I can't point to any concrete results from my talks. Call them arrows if you want to but I'm going to keep on shooting them."

The leader rose, thought for a moment, and then said: "I'm continually surprised and amazed at what sober alcoholics can do to help others. Tonight has been a stirring demonstration of our recovery from a state of hopelessness to one of helpfulness. Truly has it been said that man has an infinite capacity for sharing goodness.

"Shall we close in the usual manner?"

Take Four...

THROUGH MY self-inflicted alcoholic disease, I have lost a lot . . . I lost respect for everything and everyone, myself included. I lost my family's love for me, my health I was losing fast, and I nearly lost my life.

These are the words I used at a meeting not long after I tried to become a member of AA. I was told at the meeting I could perhaps regain my loss, if I had an honest desire and was willing to take and carry out the Twelve Steps in the program. The things I mentioned might only be lost momentarily.

I must bear in mind, I was told, that I still possess all the faculties that I had been born with, but I had been misusing them. I was advised to change and use them the AA way.

I kept my appointment to be at the next group meeting. That night I changed my thinking. I took the first dose. I'll call it that, as it looked to me like twelve doses to be taken in a course of AA cure for this disease. By taking the first one, I became a member of AA, and I must have got back a bit of my power over alcohol, for now I can say "no" to a drink, whereas before I couldn't. As I keep my appointment to be at the group meetings for "treatments" three or four times a week, I try to take my medicine as directed on the label.

I took Number Two easy. I know there must be a power stronger than mine somewhere to enable me to say "no" to a drink.

Step Number Three was not so easy. I couldn't take it. I found it

hard . . . there must be some reason why, but I can't explain it.

I have been told that for me to succeed in AA, I must take each and every one of the Steps in the program. It seemed to me that the harder it is to take the Step, the bigger the dividend it would pay if taken.

Step Number Four I found a large dose to take—large, perhaps, because there are so many items to be rectified! I have not taken it all yet, but what I have taken has helped me to find a lot of what I had lost. My health came back, the family's love for me also, and I can

walk past my neighbors and look them straight in the eyes, and say good-morning. I found them all just as easy as if I had looked in a lost and found column of the AA circular and found them there.

I would like to name this fourth dose, "An Antidote for Defects of Character." I'll bear in mind all that I have learned in AA and I think after I have drained this Step to the bottom it will make it easier for me to take Step Three and all the others, and it will act as a guarantee for real sobriety, and make it easier for me to gain serenity.

Peter, Fremantle, West Australia

March 1957

RESERVATIONS?

IF ANYONE HAD ASKED ME during my first two or three years in AA whether or not I had any reservations, I would have answered an unhesitating "No."

I had taken the First Step fully. I knew that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable. As my sobriety continued and I worked the other eleven Steps to the best of my ability, I developed a different sense of values and an entirely new and (I think) better attitude toward even my most mundane affairs.

This past year I've become aware of a very important change. Where before I have had in the back of my mind such thoughts as "Well, if anything happened to my husband, no one could blame me for drinking *then*, and of course I could always get right back on the program;" or, "If I had an incurable disease no one could criticize me for drinking again"—now I truly want to stay sober no matter what comes, and

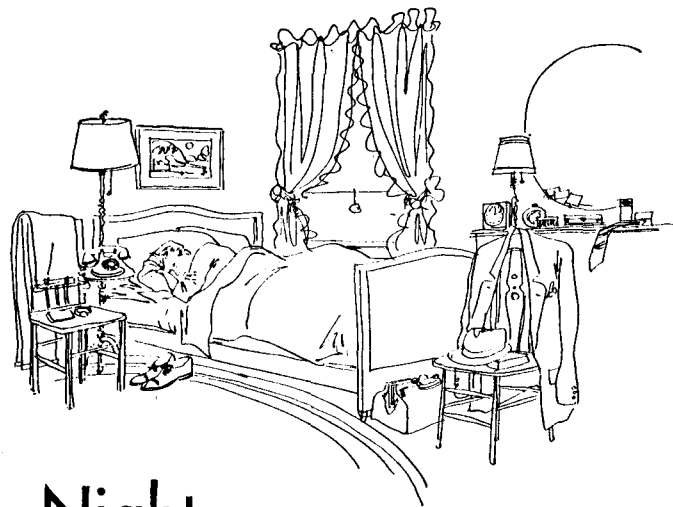
meet whatever life has to offer with the help of AA and my Higher Power. That does not mean I am morbidly looking ahead to dark and dismal things. It's still twenty-four hours at a time for me, although I do confidently plan ahead.

It does mean I have lost what were, for me, reservations. I thought mine was a proper and normal attitude, and didn't even know enough to ask for help to have it changed, and God has not only taken care of it for me but has made me aware of it!

I didn't have reservations about being powerless over alcohol, but I certainly did about drinking again! I know my surest defense against that kind of thinking is constant attendance at meetings and contact with my AA friends, continued practicing of the Twelve Steps in all my affairs, and deep gratitude to and reliance on my Higher Power whom I now choose to call God.

D. H., Hermosa Beach, Calif.





Night Duty

HAVING BEEN an active paid-up member of AA for a while, I naturally aspired to Twelve Step work, which I understood was approved AA procedure.

Having been a member of two volunteer fire companies, I knew I must prepare myself for any and all types of emergencies—day and night runs.

I had the phone changed from our living room to my bedside and on retiring every night, without fail, I carefully put out my clothes and shoes so I could slip into them on short notice.

In my car there were always stored, ready for action, a flashlight, a towing rope, a fire extin-

guisher and a small pinch-bar for forcing locked doors.

I also provided myself with an emergency kit which included the Big Book, ample AA literature, a Red Cross Life Saving Manual, a book entitled, "What To Do Until the Doctor Arrives," first aid bandages, paraldehyde, sleeping pills and a half-pint of likker.

I was ready for all emergencies except one and this is the one on which I need advice.

A man in his late forties had availed himself of my efficient and understanding services on numerous occasions. Between times he had been in several psycho wards and on three occasions he had made se-

rious but unsuccessful attempts on his life. His wife had left him and forgotten to leave a forwarding address. He was unemployed and unemployable. To be concise, he was not favorably situated.

On previous occasions when I had called he lived in a sixth floor apartment about six miles away.

On the occasion when he last called I was totally unprepared for the emergency presented. It was an extremely cold, blustery night with snow blanketing the ground. The hour was 2.30 A.M.

The phone rang. I grabbed for the receiver with one hand and my trousers with the other. The voice that reached my ear was reasonably clear and reasonably sober. It said, "Joe, I'm just calling to tell you goodbye and thank you for all you have tried to do for me."

"Where are you going at this hour?" I yawned.

"I'm going to jump out the window. So long, pal."

Now, I have heard that sort of talk almost as many times as I used to say it to myself, so ordinarily I would have said "ya-a" and gone back to sleep.

But his case was different. This guy was a psycho-alky with definite suicidal tendencies. He also had the motive and the opportunity.

Instead of "ya-a" I said, "That's too bad, Zeke, we'll be missing you, but first, do me a little favor, will ya, please?"

"Sure, what is it?" he asked.

"Just wait until I get there. I've never seen a guy jump out of a window before."

He's a good guy so he said he would, after cautioning me that it would be useless to try to talk him out of it.

"OK," I said as I grabbed my shoes, "what's your apartment number? I forgot."

"102," he replied as he hung up.

I negotiated the drive to his place with much skidding and as I entered the front door, what should be staring me in the face but the large brass numerals 102!

There must be some mistake I thought. This guy lives on the sixth floor but I was also sure I had heard him correctly. I checked with the mail boxes in the lobby and sure enough there was his name on a card on box 102.

He had moved from the sixth floor to the first. Had he carried out his threat he would have traveled about two and a half feet and landed in a foot of snow where it had drifted up against the house.

Now my problem is—and I want the consensus of AA experience in such matters—what should I have done?

Should I have thrown him out of the first floor window without raising the sash or should I have taken him up to his old sixth floor apartment and thrown him out of there?

Anon., Alexandria, Va.

F R E E D O M

A
N
D

M A T U R I T Y

I GUESS IT WAS TIME for me to re-examine the Seventh Step: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings." I wasn't making much headway; I was going backwards, and becoming very discouraged about it. Because, you see, I had no clear conception of what I was doing. I actually thought the Step implied a goal of perfection which I believed impossible to achieve, but one that I should try to reach. When my many abortive attempts to perfect myself had failed (as they were bound to do) I sank back deeper into the very defect I should have avoided—guilt.

So then I had to re-examine Step Seven in the light of my own individual experience. I came up with some plausible and possible solutions.

I believe humility is the door through which my personality change slips in. It is only when I feel this dissatisfaction with myself as I am—and want and need to change—that I *can* change. Arrogance, smugness and self-righteousness close that door. To me, humility is a precious commodity because I have learned in AA that humility, gratitude, and happiness invariably go hand in hand, along with a "smoothing of the way before me." A little success, some compliments, or some self-pity and bang! the door closes again—I am walled inside myself with no fresh air to breathe, and no room to stretch my personality and freely move about.

I don't want to become perfect or God-like. I simply want to become more human. A mature human

being . . . I should be very happy and satisfied with that. I don't aim for perfection, nor do I consciously try to "improve" myself. I am simply trying to throw off all the garbage of hostility and resentments that has rotted my insides, and all the guilt that has weighed me down these many years, and the fear that has paralyzed my personality into rigid habit-patterns. These are the defects that impede or block me; these are the shortcomings that motivate my misdeeds; these are the crippling restrictions of my personality.

Without these dead weights my personality of itself would function freely and smoothly even with its human quota of faults—because, my friends, in my book a defect is one thing and a fault is quite another.

It was true I had lost one defect—drinking. If anything was destructive to a personality this had been. When I stopped drinking did I become more perfect? No! I became more human, and what's more, I gained some freedom.

Right here the goal changes from perfection to *freedom*, and from reform to *maturity*.

I therefore *aim* for maturity (entirely possible) and freedom (also a possibility)—with the idea in mind that maturity comes in degrees as does freedom.

This idea helps me to see that small progress or lack of progress during certain intervals need not arouse any guilt in me.

Growth, I believe, is three-dimensional: lengthwise, horizontally, and in depth. In seeking maturity or growth I have sought new experiences in which I can grow. I have said "yes" to life as much and as often as I was able. I have taken daily inventories wherein I mull over my actions and reactions to people and situations. I have weighed their value in adding to my own storage of good.

In seeking freedom I have deliberately broken habit-patterns. If I had always reacted in one way, I would now react in another—thus breaking the habit-patterns. I began to see that where fear of consequences had always forced me into certain set defensive reactions, once I had broken the pattern and nothing drastic happened—I lost my fear.

I also gained enough confidence to break a few tougher ones. I took chances . . . with my job, with people whose affection I wanted, with acquaintances. The only secure thing I had was the truth. I decided that if I pursued my course of honesty in my relationships with others and myself it would be the saving grace, were I to get into trouble.

Strangely enough, I didn't get into trouble. That in turn convinced me that I could be myself without any horrible consequences. And being myself is a very wonderful experience. If anything has given me freedom, this discovery has. I have found that my truthful,

honest reaction has startled people, annoyed them—but mostly has intrigued them.

Going along in this way, my feeling of guilt has been lightened considerably. It might be said that quite a few layers have been peeled off.

I have been afraid, but I am beginning not to be afraid.

I still have all my old faults, I suppose, and on the surface I may not appear to be any different from the person I was. But inside there's quite a difference—all the difference in the world. I am getting a taste of what freedom really means, and how wonderful it is just to live—sober.

B. D., Village Group, N. Y. C.



Twelfth Stepping the Family Doctor

MY FAMILY DOCTOR has read some literature on alcoholism which I have given him. He agrees, intellectually, that alcoholism is a disease. He recommends AA to his alcoholic patients. But has he really received the message?

I don't think so. For he has never attended an AA meeting.

Recently it dawned on me that this is a Twelfth Step job I have been neglecting. For eight years I've been galloping out at all hours, attempting to carry the message to all sorts of drunks, including some who were still drinking merrily and were not very good prospects. I have been willing to spend any

amount of time on anybody with a drinking problem. But it has never occurred to me, until now, to spend five minutes on a phone call to urge my family doctor to go with me to an open meeting.

This idea, which was good, came out of one of my spiritual relapses, which was bad. It came along with my return to sanity, after a slight detour into the old habit of ready anger, criticism and taking the other fellow's inventory.

I was sitting in an open meeting listening to a speaker who rubbed me the wrong way, and building a splendid resentment. This guy was a phony! He was a ham, up there

working purely for laughs to build his highly over-inflated ego.

He had no real desire to help anybody in the audience. He was just putting on a show. I sneered as he bragged of his drinking exploits. To hear him tell it this character could drink more, have worse hangovers, hit more jails, see more little men and hear more non-existent music than anybody else before or since his time. Also, by his own admission, he was really a Casanova of the first order.

He told off-color jokes. He stated he had "tried everything" to cure him of drinking but nothing worked. Now, I thought, he's about ready to go for the sure-fire cheap laugh. And he did. He made a fool of a doctor whose help he sought.

He told in great detail about a doctor who had tried to help him; what a dunce the doctor proved to be; what a great robber he was to dare to send a bill for his time after "accomplishing nothing." He neglected to mention the dishonesty of the patient, his lack of a sincere desire for help, which would have stymied any attempt to help him at that time in his alcoholic career.

As I was building a really magnificent hatred for this show-off, I glanced across the aisle. There was a nice looking young man, a stranger to me, wearing an Ivy League suit. And he was laughing heartily at the clown on the platform. He laughed at all the spots we were supposed to laugh. I was puzzled. How could

an intelligent looking youngster like this be taken in by such an obviously insincere, uncouth speaker? This bothered me, and I determined to find out who and what he was after the meeting.

At last, the character ran out of gas and a second speaker was introduced. And then the Ivy League boy was listening with rapt attention to a good, orthodox AA talk. At times he had tears in his eyes. He certainly seemed to be getting the message.

After the meeting I lost no time running him down and introducing myself. And who do you suppose he turned out to be? You guessed it—he was a doctor, a young M.D. who had recently moved to our town, hung out his shingle and this night was visiting his first AA meeting. He had read about AA and found his way to the meeting on his own initiative.

I asked him how he liked the first speaker and he said he was great! How do you like that? Great. "Of course," the young doctor added, "he roasted the medical profession but we probably had it coming to us."

Right then and there I got a fast refresher course in humility, charity and tolerance. I needed it. And I got it from a non-alcoholic M.D. lad about the age of my oldest son!

My self-honesty began to return. I remembered my own freshman and sophomore years as an AA

speaker. I remembered some of the blow-by-blow descriptions I used to give of my drinking exploits, including some intimations that I was quite a cut-up with the ladies. I remembered non-parlor type jokes I had used. And I remembered the times I had gone for the ever-ready laugh at the expense of a doctor who told me I was no alcoholic, that I merely drank too much and should cut down my drinking. Then I knew that when I was hating my fellow man on the platform I was really hating myself—the way I used to be. I was hating my own defects of character. And I felt better.

The good idea began to dawn as a by-product of my brief "dry drunk." I reflected that I had seen many non-alcoholics of all sorts responding to their first experience of an AA meeting, like this young doctor tonight. I realized that I have never seen a single one who was not enormously moved and impressed.

Then I thought, what if every AA member took one doctor to an AA meeting? What if even 10,000 did it? The average family doctor sees many alcoholics, in all stages of the illness. He has a crack at many of them long before, out of their own despair, they are ready to surrender and approach AA. He is the doctor with the voice of authority. Some in the earlier stages of our disease will listen to what he says and if he says it with real conviction some may possibly decide to act.

Here, I thought, is a chance to carry the message wholesale to one doctor at a time. So what am I waiting for?

Dr. B——, my friend, you don't know it yet but you are going to an AA meeting. Our open meeting is on Monday night. That is a bad night for you. You work hard on Mondays, with weekend damage to repair, hospital rounds of accident victims, crowded office hours and extra house calls. Medical Society meetings and hospital staff meetings fall on Monday nights. Also the symphony concerts your wife enjoys. And once in awhile, when you rarely have this night off, you like to take off your shoes and watch television.

But from now on you're going to receive a call from me each Monday morning until I catch you able and willing to spend an hour and a half that evening, exposing yourself just once to the magic of AA in action. I think once will be enough—but you will probably find your way back occasionally under your own power.

Knowing you, I don't think it will make much difference who the speakers happen to be.

Whether they are "low bottom" or "high bottom," it will be an AA meeting. The spirit and the Presence and the people will be in that room—the ingredients that will have you walking out of there with stars in your eyes. You will get the message about AA that you cannot

get completely just from reading literature. And you will pass it on to your alcoholic patients in a way you have never done before.

This is a pretty obvious piece of Twelfth Step work I have neglected while racing my motor and spinning my wheels and taking off in

many other directions. This is a message I forgot to carry—a simple invitation to you to attend a meeting. But, Dr. B——, starting next Monday morning I am repairing this oversight. Doctor, you are about to be Twelfth Stepped.

J. L. F., Santa Barbara, California

A Policy with all the "Extras"

WOULD YOU CARE to have a better insurance policy on your sobriety? This policy has all the "extras"—reduction of resentment, added humility, greater activity and a better understanding of the statement, "the more we give away, the more abundantly will it be returned to us." Such a policy will cost you very little or nothing at all, and its benefits are unlimited. This sobriety insurance policy is called working with AA in prisons.

I obtained one of these policies some two years ago, and my dividends already have exceeded my fondest dreams. I am trying, however, to refrain from patting myself on the back for I know that lack of effort and interest will cause the dividends to decrease; even the face value of the policy will depreciate. I do know that as of today, I am more than pleased with this type of sobriety insurance.

At the age of twenty-six, I attended my first AA meeting. The year was 1944. After experiencing jails, sobering-up joints and the insane asylum, I was ready. . . . Then, with ten years of sobriety behind me at the age of thirty-six, I grew complacent. I found myself hesitant

about making Twelfth Step calls. I refused to lead meetings when I very easily could have done so—against my better judgment I was following the advice of some other "old timers" who felt that we should take a back seat and let the new members take over.

In this frame of mind—completely "off" the AA program—I got drunk after ten years of sobriety and happiness.

I want no more back seats!

During my subsequent two-week stay in the hospital, I kept thinking of the injustice I had done to AA and to my many AA friends. One drink of whiskey, my thoughts ran, had completely changed my life. Finally I brought myself to a half-halt. I came to realize that God forgives and that AA would take me back.

These two thoughts carried a lot of weight at the crucial moment . . . and upon my return to AA God did step in: one of my old AA buddies came to me with the idea of taking AA to the inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. I wasn't interested because I had tried this in 1947, and the officials wouldn't even listen to me.

My friend had arranged for a meeting, however, and persuaded me to go. Thank God I went! As I left this meeting I seemed to be an entirely different person—I could see those visions that our co-founder Bill W. saw back in 1934. Walking to the car, I kept thinking how much I had to be thankful for, and an old motto hit me with new power: But for the Grace of God. . . . I was rich and hadn't known it.

Needless to say, I had been "sold"—I was ready to go all the way. My friend told me that he would like me to take charge of this "project" since I was only thirty miles from the prison and he lived some two hundred miles. I readily agreed.

Nothing worthwhile comes easily. . . . I was soon to learn that we had many obstacles confronting us. How well they could be overcome remained to be seen. After several trips to the prison, I could see that the entire administration was leery about this project. Some outside AA groups and members also were doubtful that this venture could be successful.

The State Penitentiary at Parchman, Mississippi is broken into camps, and we were in Camp 4 on a trial basis only. Getting AA into other camps depended entirely on the success of this group. With the Higher Power directing us, I believe, we proved in five months that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is one of the best known

methods of rehabilitation, and that there are some fellows on the "inside" who are just as sincere about wanting to change their way of life as those on the "outside." The administration admitted that this was a "good deal" . . . that they were satisfied. We were then allowed to proceed with the formation of the second group at the Front Camp, the third group at Camp 6, the fourth group at Camp 5 and finally, last December, the fifth group at the Hospital. AA is now available to every white male inmate in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. We started in August 1955 with eight men attending our first meeting at Camp 4. Today, in five groups we have some two hundred members at Parchman. The present administration has gone all out to help us.

In September of 1956, officials allowed all groups to be brought to-



gether for a big Open Meeting with outside visitors and speakers. Never before in the history of Parchman had so many inmates been brought together at the same time, under the same roof. This meeting was so successful that we have been permitted to hold one such meeting each month thereafter.

Despite the unwritten law that no ex-convict could come on the grounds of the State Penitentiary, we eventually convinced the administration that an ex-convict who had come into AA while in prison and was now on the outside practicing and living our program would be a good "dose" for the members, and finally, for our February Open Meeting they consented for us to invite an ex-convict as a speaker. This was the "icing on the cake"—now the administration and the inmates are asking for more of the same.

These fellows are now publishing their own monthly magazine, "Twelve High," and are also allowed to correspond with prison and outside AA groups all over the country. Almost all the members seem to have a new outlook on life. They are hopeful and happy with what they have found in our program. Most of their resentments are gone—and they, just as we, were loaded with them in the beginning. AA at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, just as in the free world, grows larger and stronger—gaining a firmer foothold and

helping the guy who is still struggling in a sea of darkness and despair.

We now have a five-man committee that works with the administration at Parchman and its five AA groups. One or more members of this committee is present each meeting night. Our presence seems to add interest and enthusiasm—and at the same time we are receiving a tremendous boost and increased insurance on our sobriety. Though we feel that we have made mighty strides, we realize that we still have a long road to travel; and along this road will be some "wash-outs," some detours and some bridges gone that we must build as we come to them. We feel that some day, with God's help, this road will be a four-lane super highway.

At present we are primarily trying to get our AA group on a solid foundation within Parchman, although we realize that the program must go much deeper. Every new inmate coming to the prison should be interviewed to determine if he has an alcoholic problem. Depending upon his answer, we might talk with some of the leaders of his community, his family or law enforcement officers in the section of the country from which he came, in order to get helpful background information.

Upon his release we feel that we should have a contact set up with the group to which he may go, giving this group all the information

we can, and then checking back at intervals to see how our man is faring. This procedure would help to accumulate some rough statistics as to how much is being accomplished by AA in prison. It is our belief that it might be possible to do a better job if we could have private consultations with inmates while they are still in prison, since they sometimes will discuss matters with outside members that they are reluctant to discuss with inmate members.

Almost as important as carrying the AA message to alcoholic prisoners is seeing that information is offered to prison officials as to what an alcoholic is and what the program of Alcoholics Anonymous can do toward rehabilitation of alcoholic prisoners. It is desirable that prison personnel attend meetings, and that the administration be agreed on the matter of opening the doors to outside AA members. The more outsiders the inmates see, the more they are likely to believe that AA will work and that, after all, there are some people in the world who are interested in them.

We tell all our groups in the beginning that we are not an employment agency, but that our one purpose is to bring them AA, with the hope that they will find a new way of life. Yet upon their release, many come to us for help because they have no place to go—no home, no job, no friends, no nothing—men thrust into the free world after

years of confinement with enough money to live for two days, some of them sincere and some of them using AA as an angle. We maintain that there ought to be some follow-through to help these fellows get on their feet; yet at the same time we wonder just how far to go and to what extent we should offer help. This question presents a more complex problem in rural than in industrial areas.

Another problem arises when our prison groups want to publish a monthly publication, since the state has made no provision to pay for paper, stamps, ink and other necessary supplies. With the inmates receiving no compensation, the money must come from AA members or from AA groups within the state. This method had not been enough to defray expenses in our case, for very few groups have a surplus. Outsiders have offered to donate money, but to date these offers have been refused.

There are quite a few answers that we don't have here in Mississippi regarding AA at our state penitentiary, but with the Higher Power guiding us we are certain we will be directed in the right way, and we are aware that the officials at Parchman are with us and for us.

There are a few things about prison AA of which I am certain, however. It is Twelfth Step work in its highest form—Twelfth Step work that is urgently needed; and should your state be like mine, you

can get all you desire. Working with these fellows behind bars has brought me my greatest happiness and peace of mind in all my thirteen years as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

One by one I have encouraged other members in my area to attend some of these group meetings with me. At first they were not interested in this type of AA, but after one meeting they were asking, "When may I come back?" My experience with these inmates has been a life-saver—and I almost missed the boat because at first I

wasn't too interested. For me, nothing can be as satisfying to the soul as seeing one of these "lost" fellows regain his place in society through the practice of living—to the best of his ability—the Twelve Steps as given us in this wonderful program. I have come to look forward to my three or four trips to Parchman each week as much as I look forward to my own group.

Today I have a priceless sobriety insurance policy . . . tomorrow it might be a worthless piece of paper, but today it is invaluable.

Dick K., Cleveland, Miss.



Chasing
Rainbows

EVERY SO OFTEN WE ALCOHOLICS get a sudden flash of self-revelation which leaves us startled or dumb-founded.

It hit Ray in such a manner as he was driving toward his group's regular Closed Meeting and the impact was so great he almost jammed on his brake.

Why, he thought, I've been "chasing rainbows" for months, unintentionally deluding myself that sobriety's pot of gold—a new way of life—was to be found by the sheer momentum of multiple AA activities.

In my eagerness to be of service to others, I've taken on too many speaking dates—I've been an indomitable Twelfth Step worker with beginners and slippees—and I've engaged in various institutional assignments to such an extent that I've become known as one of my

group's most active and tireless workers. The perfect description for me would be Wrong-Way Ray!

Somewhere in these pursuits, I took for granted that jumping from thing to thing and place to place would automatically smooth the way to coping with my own personal problems and difficulties. But has it? This sudden understanding of myself makes me think my sobriety is composed mostly of ceaseless movement.

When did I last sit down and really consider the program in relationship to myself and not only to other alcoholics? I just can't remember. Physically and orally, I've carried the message in all directions. Actually, with respect to changing my own life, I haven't lived the second part of the Twelfth Step . . . "and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Ray had mentioned his discovery to the leader who asked him to open the meeting with it.

Now he was concluding his remarks: "This realization has also made me aware that for the first time since joining AA I have been away from home as often as when I drank; I've been close to losing my job because I neglected it; and I'm sure my wife and children look on me as a real nut-and-bolt guy, in addition to having other unflattering opinions.

"I'd like to hear from others who also might have been members of what I now call the Association of Disenchanted Rainbow Chasers."

"I qualify for its vice-presidency," said Mitch, "although I wasn't in your class when it came to running off in all directions.

"You call it chasing rainbows. You must have expected to find serenity, humility, tolerance, wisdom or something equally desirable by the mere process of dividing yourself into many AA pieces of effort. Any of these qualities would represent a pot of gold to a mixed-up alcoholic. You didn't get what you wanted and needed because you spread yourself too thin over too big an area in carrying the message.

"In your case, as in mine, it left an inner void, a sense of unfulfillment, an inkling that something was wrong somewhere—but what?

"My trouble was *group-hopping*. I never stayed long enough with

one group to learn much, but always moved on to another. I was an AA transient whose rainbow of expectancy kept beckoning me on in an attempt to find someone with a magic key that would immediately unlock the solutions to all my difficulties, sparing me the pain of doing it myself.

"This naive and wishful group-to-group pursuit of the unattainable—a miraculously new way of life, instantly!—ended only when I stopped shopping around and took root in one group, at least for a while."

The leader acknowledged Martha's upraised hand and she queried, "Maybe I'm one of the alcoholic twenty-five per cent who, it is said, don't get sober in AA and so drift away. Perhaps I, too, am chasing another kind of illusory rainbow when I return here after each slip? Sometimes I think I'm a visionary, that sobriety is a chimera for my kind of alcoholism."

The leader responded encouragingly, "No, I don't believe you are what you might believe yourself to be. Chasing rainbows is a term we're using here tonight to pinpoint misguided (although well-intentioned) ways we follow on occasion—generally to our detriment.

"Try not to lose sight of one inescapable fact, Martha. Sobriety is not a vision, a rainbow of illusions. It's an established verity in the lives of thousands of us. Hope brings you back here. Treas-

ure that hope. As it increases in strength, so will your desire for sobriety. When it happens, you'll then have something solid with which to work the program, and a better chance of survival. Now let's hear from Ronny."

"Mine was a pre-AA rainbow, a geographical one which curved from the East Coast to the West Coast.

"Way out there, somewhere, I was going to find a place where I could handle my drinking. You see, I wasn't to blame for my lack of control. It was my companions, the neighborhood, city or state in which I lived.

"So I kept moving myself and family onward, ever onward. Westward Ho! Until we ran out of land and came right up to the edge of the Pacific Ocean. Naturally, I got drunk in every place we moved to. At that point, AA threw me a life-preserver and I've done swimmingly ever since."

"I always recommend," observed Ab, "less frantic running hither and thither with a message and a little more self-examination; less searching elsewhere for sobriety and more self-application of the program. Let's try just as hard to change our own wrong attitudes and philosophy as we do the other fellow's."

"There's just enough time left for me to get into this," announced the leader. "At one period during my drinking days, my wife painted a beautiful financial rainbow for us.

"It was her idea that we'd acquire a good bank account so we'd have some security in our home. The necessary first step required me to get on the wagon and stay on Our plan was to live on a very tight budget, not take a vacation, eliminate all recreational and entertainment expenses and thereby save every possible dollar.

"To show her confidence in me, she suggested that we put our savings into a joint checking account. The plan worked perfectly for months. Unfortunately I got drunk suddenly, went on a protracted bender, withdrew all our accumulated savings—our entire pot of gold—at one fell swoop and flung it contemptuously over various bars, together with additional money borrowed to continue on the drunk.

"My wife got so mad she went right out and bought a grand piano to get even and charged it to unsuspecting me. There I was—sick, broke, owing lots of money and now I had a piano to pay off and nothing to pay it with. What a dilemma! What a hangover!

"The piano was expensive and decoratively lovely. And there it sat in my home, year after year, a constant reminder of my folly—and unhockable!

"The pity of it all was that neither my wife, nor my sons, nor I could play the damn thing!

"Shall we close the meeting in the usual way?"

Restore To Sanity?

THE TWELVE SUGGESTED STEPS have meant a great deal to me but there is one part that does not apply to my case.

It says in the Second Step "Came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity," or words to that effect.

I want to tell the cockeyed world I'm not insane and never have been, either drunk or sober. My wife backs up this opinion—she frequently says, "You were no more crazy when you were drinking than you are now," and all within listening distance smile and nod their heads.

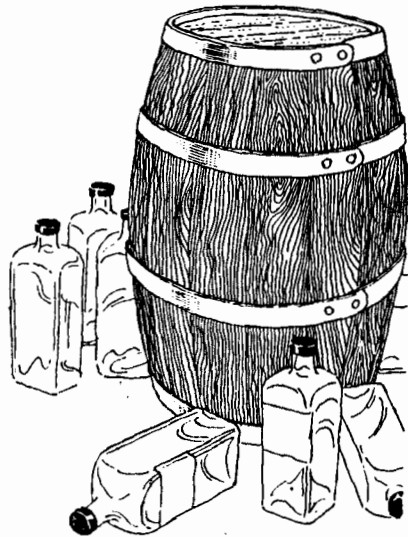
I did many smart things when I was drinking and I will recount one "for instance" to prove it.

My drinking took place before, during and after Prohibition, but the episode I call to your attention occurred during the so-called bone dry era.

I had a standing order for a half-gallon of hooch a day—but don't get the idea I drank that much every day. I did not. I had to save large quantities for the nights.

Eventually my life became somewhat disorganized, unreal, and entirely unsatisfactory. I had to do something about it. I was entirely capable of meeting the situation, however, and I devised a "system."

If, instead of buying a half-gallon at a time I bought half-pint "shorties," I would find it less convenient and more expensive to drink and thereby curtail my daily intake. The prevailing prices at that time in my locality were \$3.00 per



half-gallon and one dollar for a "shorty."

After a brief experimental period I found this system was in some respects impracticable. In the first place the "shorties" were well named. They did not contain a full half pint—instead of sixteen to the gallon it was closer to twenty, which meant that I had to make ten trips a day to the source of supply instead of just one. This was a terrible strain on my nervous and physical resources and very wasteful of shoe leather. (I couldn't drive my car for this purpose—people would recognize it. But if they simply saw me walking into the bootlegger's they wouldn't recognize me—I did not look like myself.)

The factor that was most instrumental in the scrapping of this system was the realization that drinking was now costing me \$10.00 a day . . . as against the former cost of \$3.00.

Being very versatile and ingenious, I was not disheartened. I simply abandoned the idea and adopted a better plan: I found that by buying in five gallon lots, I could get — for \$5.00 a gallon — 100-proof "corn squeezings" made with the very best swamp water. Its mortality rate was less than one-half of one per cent.

I therefore procured a five-gallon charred oak keg and laid in a supply in my "attic study."

My system was very simple: I would bootleg to myself. If I could

afford to pay an outsider at a rate of \$20.00 a gallon, I could afford to pay myself the same amount and at the same time cut out all the leg-work and assure myself of an ample supply.

When I needed a drink I would get down the keg and syphon out a pint and put \$2.00 in the desk drawer. This was the perfect set-up. I had whiskey whenever I wanted it and I was making money in the process.

My measuring bottle was a pint prescription bottle and they ran eight to the gallon, so I was paying myself \$16.00 a gallon for my giggling-water that only cost me five.

With profits derived from this venture, I paid up all my overdue bills and had my various lodge dues paid up three years in advance. Money began to pour into my desk drawer. This too began to pose a problem; I began to worry—about the house catching fire, about thieves breaking in, about snoopy Internal Revenue officers and—last but not least—my tricky wife finding my hoard (on the flimsy pretense of cleaning up the house).

Something had to be done quick . . . and my fertile brain was equal to the test. I would convert this surplus money into additional kegs and likker! So I bought four more, which gave me a total warehouse capacity of twenty-five gallons.

Now another special dividend appeared. The whiskey in the charred kegs was improving with age. By

the time I got to Keg No. 2 there was a noticeable improvement over Keg No. 1 . . . Keg No. 3 was better than No. 2 and by the time I reached Keg No. 5, it had attained a rich mahogany color and was as smooth as a . . . well, *smooth*.

Money continued to pour into the desk drawer. I was headed toward financial independence until one day I made a costly error.

I had drained off a pint from one of the kegs but when I opened my pocketbook, I was temporarily embarrassed.

It was a situation that could be easily remedied later on that day but in order to play safe I opened up an account in a handy book and debited myself in the amount of \$2.00.

From that day on, that charge account was irresistible. I began to charge purchases even when I had the cash on me.

To be entirely frank about the matter, I drank myself out of business but it was no fault of the system. The system was good—a clear indication of my sagacity and mentality even in my drinking days.

Never being the kind of guy who could be stalemated, I got another idea . . . why not sue myself for the unpaid whiskey bill? The actual monetary loss was well in excess of \$400.00 and surely I was entitled to it.

I figured that if the court should rule that I must pay the bill, my family would come to the rescue

and provide the cash rather than see my good name tarnished or my credit impaired. I would then get the same lawyer friend to copyright the system and give him a quarter interest in the profits in lieu of his usual fee.

I called on my attorney—a delightful person who, unfortunately, has since drunk himself to death—and asked him to represent me in this matter.

After I explained the case in some detail, he wanted to know which “me” I wanted him to represent, the “debtor me” or the “creditor me.” Lawyers are so damned technical.

This lawyer did confer with the judge by phone and asked if such a case was admissible in his court. My lawyer did not mention my name but the judge considered the unusual aspects of the case and identified me easily.

The judge, after giving warning about probable interest being attracted to the case by Prohibition, Income and Licensing authorities, said he would be glad to hear the suit. He called our attention to the fact that our community and his Court would receive a million dollars worth of free publicity from the papers all over the nation.

That decided it, definitely. I wasn't going to give all those stinkers a million dollars' worth of profit out of my idea—what the hell, did they think I was crazy?

T.W.R., Alexandria, Va.

September 1957

ONE THING OR ANOTHER

I AM STILL DRY. I haven't had a drink now for five months, thank God and all of you in AA for the help you give me.

This time I was on my own when I left the ship and my AA shipmate, Paddy, to go home. All my fear problem came back to me on the train and I did not know what to do with myself. The only thing I could do was to pray to God for help and I got it. The thing that was worrying me was that I never took Step Five . . . so I went to a priest and admitted all my wrongs and I walked out a new man, thank God. But you can't go on without AA—you have to have it all the time. But about the train and boat journey—it took me seventeen hours to get home to Ireland. I met a fellow in the train and I kept talking to him

all the way. I don't know what he thought of me but I had to talk to someone, and we talked about everything and anything, trying to keep my mind off myself. Then he asked me to go for a drink with him, and I did, and then he called for two beers and I told him I did not drink beer, only lemonade, and he said to me you must have loads of money and I said I wish I had and then told him I drank every penny I ever made and he could not get over it. I had to tell him all of my life story. As I said about the Fifth Step—if I did not take it when I did I would have hit the bottle again. It was one thing or another but thank God I went the right way.

John D., England

AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE SMILING, good-to-be-alive days, and as I joined my friend on the beach in front of her house, my greeting was a more than usually felt one—"A great day for sobriety"—and I said "Amen" to her answer—"A great day for gratitude."

We watched silently as my thirteen-year-old son ran to the water's edge to join her six-year-old. He was building castles, supervised by a tanned, laughing youngster who appeared at that distance to be only slightly older than my boy. He seemed an odd-aged playmate for young Billy and I asked who he was.

"Oh," said Hermina, "that is my Hungarian pigeon."

"Your what!"

"Last November I had a slip. It only lasted a week before I told my sponsor to come pick up the body. I

went back to the beginning—meetings every night, church, twelfth-stepping—but somehow the formula didn't work. The old magic was gone. I stayed dry but that was all.

"By the middle of January I was pretty desperate. One morning I was sitting in my bedroom looking at the framed Serenity Prayer on the wall, and the words, accept the things you cannot change, hit me. I knew what the trouble was. I was just a neurotic old woman. I wanted my oldest girl to unmarried her perfectly swell husband and come home, I wanted her sister to leave college, I was bored with the baby (he was too young and healthy to need me). In other words, I wanted to change all the wonderful alterations in my kids' lives which AA had brought them through my sobriety—back to attendance on me.



November 1957

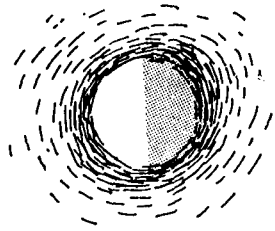
The Courage to Face Reality

I THINK IT WAS ST. THOMAS AQUINAS who wrote that life must be lived, even by those who cannot find the courage to face it. Surely one of the most common reasons that men become alcoholics is that they cannot find the courage to face the realities of life. Yet these remain and, after the longest bout of drinking, are still there to be confronted.

Our Twelve Steps are signposts, friendly guides, to those of us who wish to make our peace with life. We have not only to read them but to follow their directions. The First Step brings us to grips with reality and ourselves; the Second and Third with ourselves, reality and God; the Eighth, Ninth and Twelfth with ourselves, reality and our neighbor. None of the Twelve Steps is irrelevant to our problem; each of them has its place in the realignment of our lives. These Twelve Steps are one whole.

There may lie a danger in overlooking this aspect of the Steps. There would, for ourselves, be a danger in looking on the Twelfth Step purely as a direction to go out and help other alcoholics. The Twelfth Step is more than this; it is the linking up of all the other Eleven Steps. The last words of the Step are of vast importance . . . "We tried to . . . practice these principles in all our affairs." Not merely the principle of help to another, but the principle of continuing to keep ourselves in touch with God as we know Him and the realities of life.

"The Road Back," Dublin, Ireland.

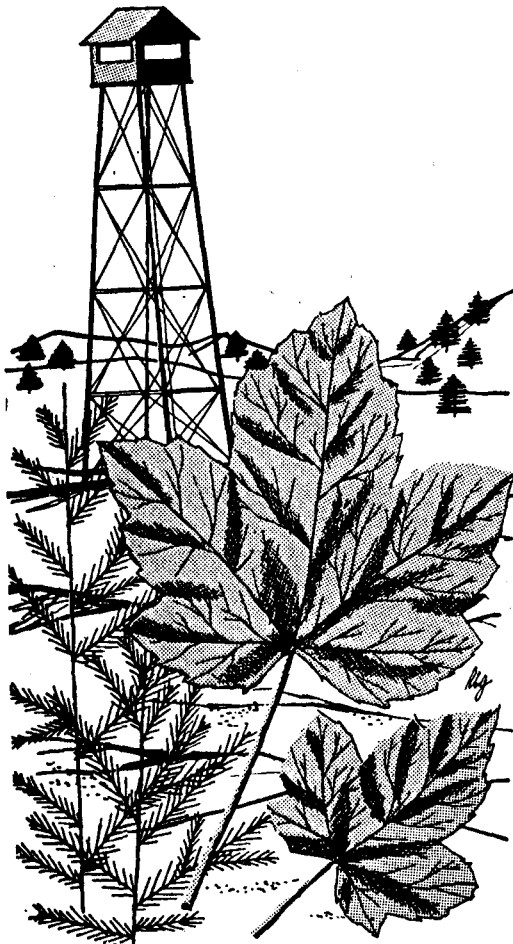


I WOULD like to relate my own experience with Steps Three-Eleven. Of course I don't advise anyone to follow my path, even if this were possible, for what was of value to me because of personal

3-11 FOR THE SKEPTIC

idiosyncrasies might be detrimental to someone else. We are all a little alike and all very different, thank God.

A month after being discharged from a hospital where I had recovered from my last bender, I took what is often referred to as a geographical cure. It proved to be the start of a sobriety that has continued ever since. I went to Mexico City for three months with very little money. Let me hasten to say that I was not at all as intrepid as this sounds. I would not have gone if I hadn't known that there was an active AA group in Mexico City. Immediately upon arrival I called the secretary and during my stay I



went to an AA meeting every week.

For two years prior to this I had tried unsuccessfully to maintain continuous sobriety and each time I drank it was to relieve a quite terrible tenseness that was much more than a simple state of nervousness. Knowing well the danger of one drink I was willing to gamble it to relieve this condition. Occasionally the gamble was taken without serious consequences but inevitably—since I am an alcoholic—I was trapped and the cure proved worse than the ailment. This pattern led to five hospitalizations for I could no longer get sober any other way—or perhaps I told myself I couldn't.

Briefly, this was my background when I went to Mexico. The only difference between my last hospitalization and all the others was that I had told myself if ever one of those terrible strangling moments of tenseness came again, I would fall down and die before taking a drink. I suppose I had reached the point of desperation that I had heard old timers speak of. I knew I would rather do anything, absolutely anything, rather than drink again.

On the face of it, going to Mexico was exceedingly dangerous. Tequila was selling for sixty-five cents a quart or less, as were mescal and gin. I had no one to watch me, if I chose not to, and there was the perilous sense of exhilaration at being in a new and strange country. But I didn't drink and, what was

more surprising, I was not tempted to.

During the two previous years I had been very resentful of my cat, and let me say as an aside that during even the worst of my drinking I was rarely resentful of people. As I sat shaking in a chair this cat of mine would arch its back, yawn in a long, utterly luxurious fashion and then simply lie down in an aura of the most supreme peace and go to sleep again. If I had had any energy I would have heaved a shoe at it. I often thought if I was ever calm enough to sleep in a chair, I would certainly never drink again.

In Mexico I found myself emulating my cat. Not only did I sleep ten hours each night, I took a two-hour nap in the afternoon, and in the morning I sat peacefully on a stone bench for several hours watching the small street scenes, the passing traffic, the trees and flowers, with an absorption the like of which I had not been capable of in years. Everything seemed strange, remote from any immediate concern, and very lovely.

This aloofness, this detachment from anxieties that had formerly plagued me, was due in part to climatic conditions, I am sure, but it was also the result of the conscious application of some simple guides to serenity I had heard reiterated at AA meetings. More specifically, I found that the urgency I had attached to the past

and to the future was dissolving and that the present was emerging in a clear, stainless splendor.

I was happy and this happiness had none of the frenetic and deceptive qualities that I had formerly considered to be happiness. The most tragic loss to me through drinking had been the capacity for simple enjoyment and now this was returning, rather miraculously, not from any concerted effort on my part but almost as naturally as the sun that shone day after day. For the first time I had some inkling of gratitude.

I returned from Mexico, eating rather thinly on my last \$100, driving alone the 3500 miles to New Hampshire where I had tentatively been promised a job in the woods. Because of late spring I was not hired for another month. I sold a small radio for twelve dollars and ate for a week. Two AA friends who guessed my straits loaned me ten dollars and I ate for another week. Peculiarly I had no sense of despair, even wandering around with the change from my last dollar. When the job opened I had to go to a grocery and beg credit for food for three weeks—until I would receive my first check.

During this time I put up no heroic battle against taking a drink. It simply did not occur to me. Nor did any of those tense moments that had come to me when I was secure strike me now when I was completely insecure. I was begin-

ning to realize that whatever happened to me was God's will and that though the experiences might be disagreeable they were of indisputable value to my growth. With this realization the disagreeable became easily bearable, the agreeable a gift.

The job I took was as a look-out watchman in a tower for the forestry department. The tower and my cabin were two miles into the woods from the nearest house. The road up was not passable for the first three weeks and I had to pack in my few possessions and my food. For a week I did not see a single human being. My contact with the outside world for those first weeks was by a telephone that was often out of order. Still I found this solitary confinement good. I enjoyed my aloneness. I had a sense of utter freedom. I had not had a drink for five months.

There was neither electric light nor running water in the cabin I occupied. I read by a kerosene lamp and my water had to be carried from a pump a quarter of a mile away down a hillside. There were two chairs, a table, and a black iron woodstove on which I cooked. Behind a wooden partition stood an old brass bedstead with a certain antique interest. It was genuine 1920 American slum. Yet I found myself quite comfortable—indeed fortunate in having no refrigerator to defrost, no vacuum cleaner to repair, no lawn mower

that needed sharpening, and none of those irritating cracked plastic gadgets which are supposed to contribute to graceful living. My comfort had been reduced to three simple necessities: dry wood, warm wool, and food. The wood stove would hold a fire for only two hours and the mornings were extremely cold. When I awoke, vigor was forced on me, as virtue often is, against my will.

From the tower, which stood sixty feet high on the crest of a hill, I looked down over a countryside where the ugliness of man's mistakes was hidden in the contours of the land. The dry grass and brown acres of brush became slowly green. The birch put out those tender green-gold leaves. The maples, standing in clusters amongst the dark green of pine and spruce, budded in a soft red velvet that appeared on a distant hillside like a regal cloak carelessly discarded. Far off, sometimes shrouded in fog, sometimes dark and starkly forbidding under a limitless gray sky, sometimes upright and glorious in a sunlight filtered of all haze, stood the mountains to which I spoke on the radio when cross-checking a smoke.

The shadows of tremendous clouds moved over the countryside below. A whole area would be gently enfolded in a cool obscurity and then the sun would flood over it as the cloud passed on. Various small and familiar points of iden-

tification would suddenly be lighted once more—the end of a white gabled house emerging from some far elms, the warm red side of a barn, a ribbon of dirt road wandering up a hillside, the jeweled splendor of a stretch of river, the blinding refraction of a small lake set deep in the piled fabric of the unbroken pines.

There was the keen delightful sense of elevation, the remoteness, the enchantment of distance, and yet also a knowledge of lives tucked away down there in the folds of the land, in the gentle valleys, along the curving river, hopes, fears, realizations, growth and change, all transpiring in some mysterious cycle that minutely reflects the wider passage of history, the infinitude of time, the endlessness of space. And because I was happy it was wondrous rather than awesome.

I spent nine hours' a day in the tower, except on rainy days when I cut brush, repaired my telephone line and maintained my road. At six in the evening I came down to my cabin and cooked supper. The evening would be exquisitely still, with only the fragmentary sounds of birds and the hush of a gentle breeze in the pines and maples surrounding the small cleared area. I followed a routine and now the small acts of living became reinvested with dignity, mystery and a quiet joy. I split my kindling and lit the fire. I went down through the woods for water. I cleaned the

chimney of my kerosene lamp. When I went to bed I was deeply grateful and felt a small sense of worth. I had done my day's work as best I could, I had harmed no one, I was sober. I had become downright healthy. I slept not in exhaustion but with a sort of willingness to lay aside my energy for a few hours. Simply, the feeling I had was good.

On Sunday evening I went down to Concord to an AA meeting and after the road became passable by car I spent an evening or two each week at the alcoholic clinic talking with friends or patients. Sometimes when I returned late at night I would climb the tower part way to look at the night sky and the far lost lights of homes.

Having no faith in a personal God—a faith I do not have today—and being unaffiliated with any religion or any society other than Alcoholics Anonymous, I yet have some consciousness of God in an undefined sense, a pantheistic conception that perhaps is most suited to my individual needs. Because of this I found the thought of prayer vexing, particularly a prayer of supplication, and so I had to phrase prayer in a manner that would not be forced and would allow some genuine expression of my intention. This is not a matter of refusal and pride, of stiff-necked stubbornness. It is simply that organized religions and the conception of God as a father who is directly con-

cerned with my small wants have absolutely no reality for me, and to strain for the acceptance of tenets so foreign to my nature would be damaging to whatever integrity continued sobriety has allowed me to recover.

And yet as the summer advanced the gratitude I felt for my sobriety and for the happiness it engendered passed over into a reverence. How could it do otherwise? I felt privileged to be living the life I was. When I went down to the clinic and saw a man in the throes of the shakes such as I had had so often myself, I could not help but murmur silently, "I thank God for my sobriety," and then add, "If it is God's will let him be helped."

I had to phrase my prayer always in this manner, preceding my desire with the words, "If it is God's will." Thus in the morning I prayed, "If it is God's will, let me remain sober this day." As the summer advanced I would pause at the foot of the tower and, in the sunlit morning, in the coolness that lingered from the night, in the undisturbed silence, I murmured, "Let me be worthy." For I had been granted something that I was certain I had lost irrevocably in the dark endless corridors of drunkenness.

It was the will of God to which I always referred and, I hope, deferred. I knew that when I left the tower I would be faced with decisions that seemed important and

that guidance, if any came, would be unvoiced and anonymous. But I knew that no matter what decision I arrived at, it would be the will of God and if the consequences entailed misery then the misery too would be God's will and if I remained susceptible to such acceptance the misery would be of value.

In the evening after supper I made it a practice, a practice that became a deep pleasure, to sit outside by a small wooden table with my coffee. During this time, a half hour or so, I looked intently at certain trees that were pleasing in form, at small vistas of sunlight and shadow that receded into the deep woods, in a conscious attempt to identify myself with some overall arrangement of what appeared to be a parallel between the physical and spiritual worlds. Perhaps I would like to say that I arrived at some knowledge that transcends the normal limits of man's intelligence. I did not. When these periods ended I knew no more than I had when I sat down, but I was quiet, I was rested, and my happiness was sustained when it might very readily have been shattered by some trivial irritation.

When I left the tower and my cabin in November, the skies were almost continuously overcast. On several of the mountains upstate there had been snow. In the morning there was skim ice on my bucket of drinking water in the cabin and two or three inches of

ice in the rain barrel. The woods were damp and safe from the late rains, the danger of forest fires over. I had been sober, without a single drink of any kind of alcohol, for one year. Nor have I had a drink since. I put the shutters over the tower window, locked up the cabin and drove away.

This continual use of *I* becomes rather deafening in my own ears and certainly must to the reader, and yet there is no other way of relating a personal experience. To speak of oneself is often egotistical, but to speak impersonally is often indicative of an unwarranted presumption of knowledge which can be equally prideful. No man can live in a continual state of spiritual exultation. Most certainly I can't. It may even be that my sense of God is wholly literary and has no substantial existence apart from the words I use. Yet, no matter what its origins and its delineations, I did find a serenity I thought impossible, I did stay sober, I did not consciously harm anyone and I did become genuinely grateful and reverent.

So I am glad that these two steps, the third and the eleventh, were written, for my thoughts and longings during that period might have turned toward destructive directions, and I am also glad that AA had not defined their application but has allowed me a self-selection of values.

P. B., Laconia, New Hampshire

In and Out of Step

I OFTEN FIND myself taking a Step one minute and “un-taking” it the next. For instance, Step Three . . . I wake up, full of good resolutions for the day and announce to God (as I understand Him) that I am placing my will and my life in His care. I am full of serenity and contented sobriety—at least at the moment.

A few hours later, with the aid of Steps Four and Ten I find I have taken both my will and my life out of the hands of my Deity because I’m either bursting at the seams with vexation at someone, or I have told a “fib” or probably neglected some duty. So bang goes Step Three, serenity and all.

Then I have a look at Step Five and immediately realize that I shall have to be continuously taking it, if I want to keep a sense of balance, because no sooner have I “admitted, etc.,” the things of the past, when something else turns up which requires the same treatment.

As for making amends, I have a horrible feeling that I am putting first things last because I am kept so busy making amends to people I upset in the daily round, for the sake of peace and quiet, that I never

seem to have time to get around to those whom I have harmed or upset in the past.

For instance, I have vaguely considered making amends to my mother-in-law but, I have successfully rationalized myself into the belief that I can do so only by committing suicide, which would of course injure me and probably a few others.

My defects of character which again, through Steps Four and Ten, manifest themselves all over the place—these I continually sweep into a dustbin and then ask God to remove them, but before He has time to remove even the lid, I have rescued them all back.

If the first part of Step Twelve means the awakening of some spirit in me—from the nightmare of a cock-eyed existence to the desire for a better way of life—well yes, something has awakened . . . but I have to practice an awful lot of principles, in an awful lot of my affairs, at awfully regular intervals to satisfy its need, now that it is awake. Because if it falls asleep again, I may not be able to remain sober.

*Anon., in “The AA News Letter”
London, England*

Out _____ of the Wild Blue Yonder

I BELIEVE IT STARTED during the holidays of 1955-56 when most of the doctors here at the base hospital found out that I belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. The officers and enlisted men still stationed here, who knew me when I was drinking, generally talked about me when mention of a "drunk" was made. The doctors soon found out what AA had done for me and began calling upon me for my experience with booze.

When somebody came on sick call with an alcoholic problem I usually talked to the person for the doctor—if he or she wanted help, of course. I was always glad to have another Twelfth Step call to make. Many didn't want help and many didn't really have a problem . . . they just had a hangover and were looking for a buck slip so as to get the rest of the day off.

It was during the month of March, 1956 . . . in ten days I had been called to the dispensary about

fifteen times. One afternoon about four o'clock, I sat on my bunk and toyed with the idea of starting an AA group on the base. I got up and went to see the Hospital Commander to find out what he thought of the idea. He took my questions to the Base Staff Meeting, where the idea met with much approval. The next step was to get in touch with the Base Chaplain who also welcomed the idea in grand style. Through him we obtained our first meeting place.

After all this, I got in touch with my first pigeon, Joe. At the time he had eight dry months. Joe and I decided on April 15, 1956 as our first meeting, which was held in the Religious Center Building. (We had to give this building up soon afterwards because of its name—too many people on the base thought AA was connected with religion.) Eventually the Base Material Officer gave us an unused tar-paper shack. We were half way through

remodeling the building when we were told that it was to be torn down shortly, but he had another building for us; so we moved into an old barracks for about three weeks, after which we were informed that a farm cottage on the base had been vacated. It would be just the thing for us and our meetings!

We moved in, got furnishings from Base Housing, and had some wonderful meetings there—the old family, kitchen-style meetings. (This building was due to come down later in the fall but at least we had a place for the summer.) Our meetings were fine . . . the civilian folks treated us just fine in their attendance at our meetings, but as far as the G. I.s with a drinking problem were concerned, they just weren't forthcoming. We waited all summer . . . during this time we had quite a few come in for a meeting or two, but that was as far as they went.

Our next move was into the Base Hospital Mess Hall, where the Hospital Commander gave his permission to use the hospital TV lounge for our meeting on Monday nights. The first Monday night we were scheduled to use it, another outfit had it occupied. Here we were again, with no place to meet! Well, since I'm a butcher and work in the Mess Hall, we went into the dining-room and held our meeting. The dining-room has been our meeting place ever since. The folks like it be-

cause we can sit at tables, drink coffee, and be comfortable.

Last April we celebrated our first anniversary. We had a good turnout, but at the end of our first year, we could count only one new sober member. Then something happened, I don't know just what, but between the twelfth and sixteenth month, we had fifteen new faces coming to us for help, and we now have twelve sober members.

In July, I went to Base Headquarters to talk to the Base Commander about the AA program. He told me that both he and the Wing Commander wanted the program at the base. I told him of our need for a building of our own so that the men who are trying to work the program could get out of the barracks, nights and on week-ends, and into the company of sober alcoholics. He encouraged me to hope that we'll soon have that building.

During the month of August while on furlough I visited a large midwestern city, where I met a Lieutenant in the City Police Department who is secretary of the AA group within the Police Department. I learned a lot from him and some of the men in the police group. It is my opinion, as an alcoholic, that the Mayor and Police Commissioner had a very good idea and carried it out: that is, they asked an individual alcoholic if he would start an AA program within the department. He told them he would be glad to—provided they

did not ask him to reveal any names of members or how many were in the membership. The Lieutenant had two AA patrolmen assigned to him, and the three of them do only "AA work" with the police department and the local residents. The experiment is a big success, and it is my hope—I am praying for the day—that the officials of the Armed Forces will do something of the same nature.

We really need at least one AA

"contact man" on every military base—first, to help the G.I.s with a problem; second, to help the men in the guardhouses; third, to go into each squadron and give talks on alcoholism. I don't mean to preach AA or recruit for AA but to let the alcoholics and non-alcoholics know just what AA is and why we, as alcoholics, want to help anyone who wants help with a drinking problem.

S/Sgt. C. B. F.

Westover Air Base, Mass.

January 1958

MESSAGE IN PSYCHO

"GO HOME, SOMEONE WILL CALL YOU this evening and take you to a meeting. AA is a fellowship of men and women sharing a common problem, alcohol. You will learn more at a meeting than I can ever tell you. Try meetings for thirty days. Then, if you feel AA is not for you, turn yourself in to Psycho."

How many times have I said that? How many times have I wondered if I helped? How many discouraging reports of those to whom I have talked? Where was the thrill of going on Twelfth Step calls? Where was the lift from institutional work? Am I doing or saying the right thing? Is institutional work for me? Why do I do it? Do I reach the still suffering alcoholic? Why do I feel so guilty if I say "No" even though I feel so inadequate?

Questions! Questions! Questions! Maybe I had better stick to my typewriter.

It was a meeting I hadn't attended for some time. One of the members came to me and asked if I remembered calling Vi several months ago from Psycho to see that Mary B. would get to a meeting. It seems Vi called her and she took Mary to her first meeting. I had a chance to talk to Mary that night and she hadn't found it necessary to take a drink since that time. "I can't thank you enough for being there," she told me.

Do you know how it feels to drop a nickel in a slot machine and have it light up, the bells ring and you hear the jingle of the jackpot? Well, that was just exactly how I felt. Just the thought now that someone somewhere is sober and happy because I was at the right place at the right time will sustain me always.

Cathi M., Los Angeles, Cal.

The Twelve Steps

THERE HAS BEEN some constant discussion of late in many groups about contented sobriety and about the extent to which the spiritual aspect of our program of recovery should be placed before the newcomer. These two subjects have not been consciously linked together at meetings, but in our view they are closely related. In our experience, those who have attained a reasonable measure of contentment in sobriety are those who have kept the spiritual disciplines and exercises of the Twelve Steps in the forefront of their minds.

Somewhat naturally, physical recovery is the primary target of

nearly every newcomer; without it, recovery proper (mental and spiritual) is impossible. But physical recovery by itself is not sufficient. We all managed in our drinking days to recover physically, but that recovery was never permanent. Something more was needed, a something which has been supplied us by AA's program of the Twelve Steps, a program that is essentially a spiritual one.

There are those who "fear" that the newcomer may be repelled by being introduced to this program or by discussion of it. They are entitled to their opinions, and there is this to be said . . . that a policy of

"easy does it" in the matter and the method of introduction applies here as well as in other facets of recovery in AA.

But it surely can be neither right nor sane to present a newcomer with a copy of the Steps, to tell him that the recovery of some 200,000 alcoholics has been based on them and then not to discuss them fully with him.

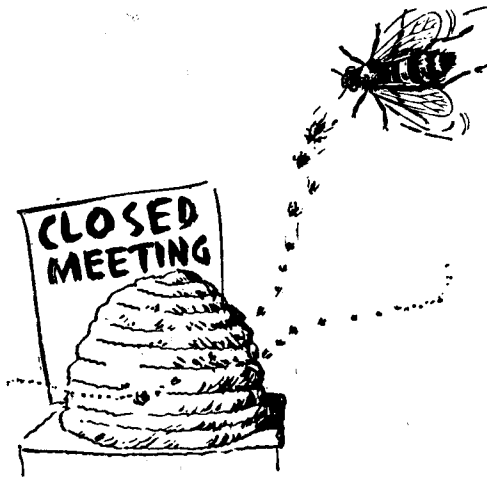
Perhaps older members sometimes overlook the fact that the newcomer has as much intelligence as themselves; he very often brings a fresher enthusiasm. It might be well to reflect occasionally that the backbone of all groups, those members who are piling their days into months and years of contentment in sobriety, are the constant attenders who have not wearied yet of talking about the Steps. It is

also useful to remember that this Dublin Group was founded on the Steps and developed by discussion of them. Had that not been so, there might today be no group for the newcomer to reach out for.

An exaggerated fear of the hypothetical harm that might be caused to a newcomer by discussion, free and often, of the Steps is often traceable to the personal dislike of the "fearer" himself for such discussion. Our own experience has been that the genuine seeker of recovery WANTS to find out all he can about the Steps; and that far from being repelled by talk of them, he is attracted by the vision they hold out to him of sobriety and happiness for the rest of his days.

*Anonymous, "The Road Back"
Dublin, Ireland*

The
Second
Step



RENEE WAS IMPATIENT for the leader to start the meeting. As he finished his introduction, she began, "If no one objects, I'd like to talk about the Second Step—'Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.'"

"There's an inference to draw from that Step—it's this: we might have done things during our active alcoholism which were not quite sane. Also, that we may possibly manifest similar tendencies occasionally in our sobriety. Some members find this inference objectionable or unacceptable.

"Surely I was in the grip of alcoholic insanity when I left my very small children completely unattended, not deliberately but compulsively, and went out to a bar and drank. I knew my place was at home with them.

"No sane person would have act-

ed the way I did. I've heard many, many speakers admit getting into all kinds of crazy trouble before and after AA. So why all this quibbling about one little word in a Step which is only *suggested*—as are all of the Twelve Steps?"

"Maybe I can help clarify it," offered Bill. "I believe it's because we unconsciously associate insanity, in a degrading way, with mental institutions, with people who are completely out of control and require confinement.

"For this reason, we may shy away not only from its acceptance, but also from the mere implication of it. We don't like the connotation, particularly after we've been sober for a while.

"Should we blindly and unreasonably avoid Step Two because of the word 'sanity' in it, I'd suggest combining it with the Fourth Step—'Made a searching and fearless

moral inventory of ourselves.'

"I'm almost sure the combination will reveal at least one instance in our drunken or sober lives which bordered on—or was—madness of a sort. All right, you take it, Tom."

"We ought to define insanity a little more clearly. There are different kinds and degrees in the medical, moral and legal sense. For instance, if we perpetrated a grievous wrong, either unknowingly or unintentionally, while in an alcoholic state, or yielded to an irresistible impulse while sober and did something equally harmful, I would say it was the workings of an unsound mind, at the time.

"We might have been sane before and after the act, but insanity has been indicated during its commission, in my opinion.

"Within this definition of my own, I was alcoholically and temporarily out of mental control when I stole a car, went on a joy ride and smashed it. Drunkenness, or the compulsion to drink, was no excuse. It wasn't the behavior of a rational, clear-thinking man.

"Also within this definition, I was suffering from a temporarily deranged mind when I engaged in wild emotional outbursts or temper tantrums—at home and on the job—during my first year of sobriety. And without a drink, mind you! In my case, the Second Step has restored me to sanity."

"Let's see what the dictionary says," suggested the leader. "From

it, perhaps, we can come up with an even clearer idea of what constitutes insanity, for our purposes here.

"I quote from its pathological definition. 'Insanity is a persistent morbid condition of the mind . . . it is characterized by deficiency of control and perverted action of one or more of the mental faculties. The principal forms are delusional insanity, dementia, mania, melancholia and paranoia.'

"In less severe and objectionable terms, the dictionary also defines insanity as '*lack of sound sense, extreme folly.*'"

"Can't it be rightfully said that almost every alcoholic evidenced a lack of sound sense—extreme folly—at least once during his or her active alcoholism, and quite possibly during one or more periods of our sobriety?"

"According to the dictionary, and it's proof enough for me, I was temporarily insane when I had *vrts* or hallucinations . . . when I had spells of melancholia (bad mental depressions) before and after AA . . . when I showed a lack of sound sense and extreme folly in emotional, intellectual or spiritual matters which put a severe strain on my sobriety. Anne, you appear interested—want to participate?"

"Yes. Many of us who are sober now know the difference between right and wrong. We have the power to make constructive decisions when confronted by a 'certain

something' which might lead to the first drink.

"Yet, knowing the difference and having the power, some of us still take that chance at times and risk the dreadful consequences, including the possibility of never being able to sober up again. If that isn't insanity, in view of our past alcoholic record, what other equally fitting or more descriptive word can be substituted for it?"

"I'm Harry," said a voice in the rear. "I don't know why so many of us become word-quibblers and hair-splitters. We foolishly allow some words in AA to offend or confuse us. 'Insanity' is one of them. Our hackles go right up when a member speaks about alcoholics being restored to sanity.

"Stating that we had knots in the head—or even implying that we did—during parts of our active alcoholism or afterwards, has caused outraged feelings at more than one meeting.

"On the other hand, we express thanks publicly that we are not like normal, sane, rational non-alcoholics. Such a remark is always good for laughs of self-congratulatory condescension.

"It appears we don't mind being considered a little 'tetched'—but showing a lack of sound sense, extreme folly . . . horrors!

"I'd like to hear one or two short personal examples of temporary 'sober insanity' in AA. Who will be first?"

"Me," responded Mabel. "I became insanely jealous of women members when my non-alcoholic husband attended meetings with me and I thought there was a flirtatious look in his eye. It caused violent scenes at home and several times I narrowly missed getting drunk."

Marty rose with, "Despite my bad alcoholic record, and frequent attendance at meetings, I stubbornly refused to accept the First Step completely. I got drunk—and that mad act almost cost me my life."

"Sorry," interrupted the leader. "The clock has raced around again.

"We've covered some ground about insane behavior before and after our AA membership. Nevertheless, there's still a chance that someone here remains unconvinced about the application of the Second Step to themselves.

"Look at it from another viewpoint.

"Were you always able to drink alcoholically without feeling any personal degradation, acute remorse, horrible guilt, unworthiness, hopelessness, or without injuring anyone, including yourself?

"If you continued to drink under such shattering circumstances, and most alcoholics do, how would you identify your compulsion?

"If you've gambled with your sobriety in AA by what the dictionary calls 'deficiency of control'—or 'perverted action of one or more of the mental faculties'—wasn't it ex-

treme folly for an alcoholic and most irrational? Even though you got away with it?

"Shall we close the meeting in the usual way?"

(Ed. note—In response to our request, some readers have sent in suggestions for "Closed Meeting" topics. The one featured this month came from Vancouver, Can.)

Musts In His Life

COMING INTO THIS FELLOWSHIP five years ago I was told that our program was a program of suggestions, mine to accept or reject.

Like many a confused beginner I rejected our Second and Third Steps. The Fourth Step I took in honesty and what I saw filled me with self-pity and remorse . . . till the inevitable had to happen as I was too weak to carry the load alone.

Eighteen months later, when I knew fear, despair and loneliness such as I never want to know again, I crawled back to the only place left for me—AA. Again I was being guided by a power I was rejecting because, on that June night three years ago in the Miami of Canada, my good friend Mac M.—after letting me talk myself out—suggested his group the next night.

There I found a discussion group—something that became a must for me. I had known for years that in order to take alcohol out of my life I had to put something else in. I knew the answer was there in our Twelve Suggested Steps, and I knew I must have help in understanding

them. At discussion meetings I found the help, *and* the answer.

The power of example at these meetings—seeing first-hand what older members were doing about the program—I will be forever grateful for . . . because the program didn't rub off on me as "suggestion" but as "must." I *must have* what these members have, I felt very deeply.

My thinking kept going back to those who wrote our Twelve Steps, and I found myself saying, I *must* follow Step Two, I *must* do thus and so, etc. And so today I still believe that to maintain my sobriety I must put "musts" into my life. . . . I must attend my meetings, I must strive for improvement, I must do what is asked of me, and I must try to help the sick alcoholic to the best of my ability.

Three months after joining Mac's group, I knew I must have a sponsor. All my adult life I had been a leaner on other people (discovered in Step Four) and this character defect scared me in choosing a sponsor. One man in our group—gruff and to the point, with eleven

years of sobriety—I shied away from until I had made the decision to put "musts" into my AA program. Then I asked Knowl if he would be my sponsor, for which I will forever be grateful. After hearing his story and how he worked and lived this program, I felt that he had put many "musts" into his way of life and had not just accepted suggestions. Many a time I have heard him say that if a person worked at our Twelve Steps one day at a time it must follow that he will be sober that day.

I have now moved from my compact four-group area to a large city

where I find I need my "musts" in this way of life more and more each day, and I hope that in writing my experience I can help someone who may be having trouble with the AA program.

A program of suggestions—*yes*. Bill W. and our founders *knew* in their guided wisdom that they could not tell an alcoholic "like me" that I must do something. But through the power of example in AA, and knowing myself as only I do, I can only be forever grateful that AA gave me the tools to turn suggestions into musts in my life.

R. W. C., Vancouver, Canada

April 1958

24-HOUR CONTACT?

RECENTLY THE DOWNTOWN OFFICE made a trial run on extending its hours. For two weeks the office was kept open until 8.00 P. M. In that period only fifty-three calls came in after five; of those, only seven were direct contacts. Verdict, ratified by the Metropolitan Rotating Committee: It really doesn't pay to maintain the after-normal-hours setup.

The names of those who volunteered to answer late-at-night Twelfth Step calls have now been turned over to the telephone answering service. The operators on the service area, of course, pledged to observe the anonymity of the volunteers. Today, the new system apparently is working well.

"Here's How," Chicago, Ill.

(Ed. Note—a recent Grapevine article raised the question: Should there be some method of providing round-the-clock and odd-hours contact with AA in large cities?)

Gratitude . . .
Like Father,
Like Son



YOU FOLKS MIGHT BE INTERESTED in the Twelfth Step work our Dave is doing on his Navy job at Washington. He had given an AA "concept" talk before his sociology class at the University night school.

"My AA talk was well received [he wrote]. Quite a few questions were asked, and I surprised myself on how many I could give a fairly good answer. They were the usual, typical audience questions. My theme was basically the problem of alcoholism as my AA father displayed it." Later on AA will furnish a "qualified" team of speakers for the class.

For his Young Adult meeting (Presbyterian Church) recently a team from AA furnished the program. To quote Dave again, "The AA discussion last night was tops in my book. With great insight, they (AA) sent a woman as well as a man.

"The two worked together like a pair of gloves although they claimed

neither knew what the other was going to say. This I believe since the best AA talks I have heard you give were off-the-cuff.

"He gave a short history of the problems of alcoholism and then described AA, a perfect talk for the non-AA. She gave the typical AA talk, which pleased the group no end.

"His approach to AA is so much like yours. Like you, he enjoys the non-AA type of talk more than the old 'blood and guts' variety. He, like you, is no knight-on-a-white-horse seeking social changes. He scorns the AA big shot and frankly admits that he can never do it alone without AA even after twelve years or more of sobriety. A wonderful man who can provide you, I think, with some new and interesting thoughts."

On another occasion Dave wrote me thus: "Personally, Dad, I believe you do have something to offer in the alcoholism education

field—but not as an AA member. Please don't become an AA big shot! You know better than I what that could lead to.

"But as a one-time drinker and informed citizen, you do have something to offer the public in the way of education. Just don't go off the

deep end in this thing or we will all get hurt."

That puts me in my place, or does it! Seems like pretty good counsel from a twenty-one-year-old who saw his father develop alcoholism and start on the rehabilitation road.

S. C. B., Ithaca, Mich.

A short time after GSH received the foregoing from Dave's father along came another communication which we're adding to the first as a pretty fine message from "one who was introduced to the problem of alcoholism at eleven years of age and is now twenty-one." His mother—preparing a talk for her Al-Anon meeting with the title "How to Protect the Children of Alcoholics"—asked her son for some comments. Here they are . . .

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING is for the children to know what the score is. If they are old enough to know something is wrong, it seems to me that it would help if they knew what was wrong.

Knowing what the situation is, the child—no matter how young—may even be able to help out, at least in the sense that he or she can avoid situations leading up to a family fight.

It is important that they know the father is sick . . . just as sick as if he had the disease of cancer rushing through his body tissues. Another advantage in the child's knowing what is going on is that one day he'll find out from another source if you don't tell him.

It only makes sense that you could do a much better job than some ten-year-old friend of your child who in a fit of anger calls

the father "a drunken bum." We all know how cruel children can be sometimes without meaning to be at all.

Then when the child is in his teens, I would encourage him to look into the problem of alcoholism. Have him read the Big Book . . . attend an open meeting or two—and steer him into a man-to-man talk with an understanding AA.

Perhaps you might have a child who just isn't interested or who wants to forget he even has a father. If this has happened, it is your fault, the mother, just as much and perhaps more than the father's.

You see, he is naturally going to be bitter toward his father, just as you are yourself many times. Of course, it goes without saying that you can be no help at all to the child if you don't have any love left for your husband. But that

love is something I am assuming you have because you realize it is only a sickness.

But if you still love your husband, you must then help the child also to love him and want to help him. This can be done if you have the love and confidence of your own child. If you don't have this, then you most certainly have failed as a wife.

But this isn't complete defeat. It is harder, but if you are willing to fight, I believe any mother can win back her child by demonstrating love and respect. . . .

Remember one thing above all: if the father is an active alcoholic then the child has no father. Thus the burden falls on you. The child

is looking to you for help. If you fail him, bitter indeed will be the result.

One thing I would encourage greatly is the completely frank discussion of the problem between the child and mother. This will help both to face up to the trouble ahead.

Frankly, Mother, as you can see from what I have said, I don't like the title, "How to Protect the Children of Alcoholics." Protect them from what? The best protection I know of is complete understanding of the problem. Otherwise they will form horrible misconceptions which can damage the individual for life.

Dave B., Ithaca, Michigan

May 1958

A LONG DISTANCE 12th STEP

HELP FOR A SHAKY NEWCOMER halfway around the world takes many forms, as the following letter to GSH shows . . .

Dear Lib:

Thank you for your letter and for the good wishes that came with it. I have written to the girls whose names and addresses you gave me and I feel better for having done that.

I am having what I consider my first real test at the moment. My husband is hundreds of miles away attending a refresher course, and I am living on my own. I have no friends here to visit or who could visit me.

A few short months ago I could not have done this without the help (?) of a great many bottles of whiskey, and lots of the wrong kind of company. In spite of that I would have been miserable.

Now I am glad to say I find I am managing quite well, and instead of being miserable I am happy. Lonely, yes, but not alone anymore. Not only do I have the knowledge that the Higher Power is with me all the time, but the knowledge that I can never be alone again.

There are so many of us fighting this battle, and I would rather have a battle than a bottle any day, now that I have some fight in me.

So the thought of those other girls, and being able to write to them, gives me great help, and the strength and courage to go on fighting. I might even get some of that serenity one of these days.

Thanks also for putting me on your mailing list for the monthly AA Exchange Bulletins. I am certainly very glad that Lou W. told me to write to you. I have something to look forward to now, what with receiving the Bulletins and replies to my letters to the others, which will arrive, I am sure, in all good time. I hope I can help them too.

The United States of America seems to be a long way ahead of our country as far as educating the general public is concerned. Alcoholism still carries a stigma here but I am sure that most, if not all of us, are really glad, as I am, that we are alcoholics—since otherwise we would never have learned how to live, not only with ourselves but with others. I did not know until I joined AA that there was anyone in the world who, knowing the full truth about me, would not only care for me but care very deeply. . . .

M. O'D., Southland, New Zealand

May 1958

THE THERAPEUTIC EYE OPENER

I AM WRITING these few lines to let you know what I think of the institutional group who come here to visit with us. I for one will be back in court within the next week or so, and have observed you people since this was started at the hospital. I may sound rather serious, however this is the way I feel.

Your coming here is essentially a change of pace for us, well outside the radius of our daily activity. You affect us directly through the impression we get of you, probably through so-called sympathetic understanding, and you affect us indirectly by your thoughts and actions.

With these visits of the institutional group our final mental make-up is the result of the fertilization of what you folks bring us. Behind every face there is a man.

Most of the intelligent men here try to rid themselves of an inner lack by taking active steps. They

mix with other people. No group, in my stay here at Atascadero State Hospital, has contributed more to ease our minds, give understanding, and help us toward being happy, so that we can better withstand the storms of life.

You people seem to have a similar interest and always enjoy your brief stay. We always wish it could be longer. The AA you bring to us is an absolute necessity for curing the many wounds of our lives, or preventing them. In short it helps to preserve the vigor of our minds and bodies, our health and well being.

I have received one of the greatest therapeutic eye openers by being a member of AA here at this hospital, by using the Twelve Steps to examine myself, and by finding out that in living one day at a time I can conquer my misleading ways.

The institutional group, to me, has made the world a better place to live in than I found it. Of that I am sure.

*R.W.F., Atascadero State Hospital,
California*

Take Step Eleven

One Man's View

by Bill

WHEN it comes to the practice of AA's Step Eleven — "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" — I'm sure I am still very much in the beginner's class; I'm almost a case of arrested development.

Around me I see many people who make a far better job of relating themselves to God than I do. Certainly it mustn't be said I haven't made any progress at all over the years; I simply confess that I haven't made the progress that I might have made, my opportunities being what they have been, and still are.

My AA anniversary is just

ahead; I haven't had a drink in all this time. In fact, I've scarcely been tempted at all. This is some evidence that I must have taken and ever since maintained Step One: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." Step One was easy for me.

Then, at the very beginning, I was fortunate enough to receive a tremendous spiritual awakening and was instantly "made conscious of the presence of God" and "restored to sanity" — at least so far as alcohol is concerned. Therefore I've had no difficulty with AA's Step Two because, in my case, its content was an outright gift. Step Four and Step Five, dealing with self-survey and confession of one's defects, have not been overly difficult, either.

Of course, my self-analysis has frequently been faulty. Sometimes I've failed to share my defects with the right people; at other times, I've confessed *their* defects, rather than my own; and at still other times, my confession of defects has been more in the nature of loud complaints about my circumstances and my problems.

Nevertheless, I think I've usually been able to make a fairly thorough and searching job of finding and admitting my personal defects. So far as I know, there isn't at this moment a single defect or current problem of mine which hasn't been discussed with my close advisers.

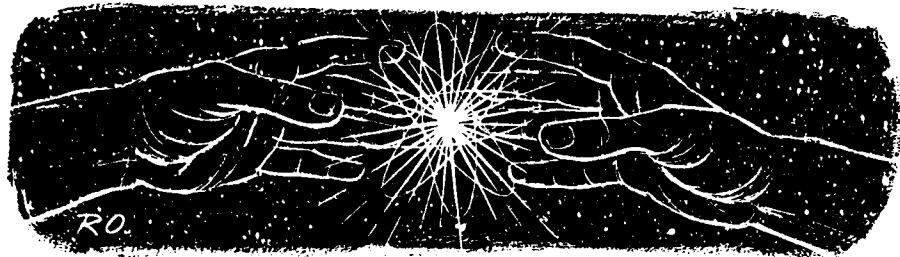
Yet this pretty well-ventilated condition is nothing for self-congratulation. Long ago I was lucky enough to see that I'd have to keep up my self-analysis or else blow my top completely. Though driven by stark necessity, this continuous self-revelation — to myself and to others — was rough medicine to take. But years of repetition have made this job far easier. Step Nine, making restitution for harms done, has fallen into much the same bracket.

In Step Twelve — carrying the AA message to others — I've found little else than great joy. We alkie are folks of action and I'm no exception. When action pays off as it does in AA, it's small wonder that Step Twelve is the most popular and, for most of us, the easiest one of all.

This little sketch of my own "pilgrim's progress" is offered to illustrate where I, and maybe lots of other AAs, have still been missing something of top importance. Through lack of disciplined attention and sometimes through lack of the right kind of faith, many of us keep ourselves year after year in the rather easy spiritual kindergarten I've just described. But almost inevitably we become dissatisfied; we have to admit we have hit an uncomfortable and maybe a very painful sticking point.

Twelfth-stepping, talking at meetings, recitals of drinking histories, confession of our defects and what progress we have made





with them no longer provide us with the released and the abundant life. Our lack of growth is often revealed by an unexpected calamity or a big emotional upset. Perhaps we hit the financial jackpot and are surprised that this solves almost nothing; that we are still bored and miserable, notwithstanding.

As we usually don't get drunk on these occasions, our bright-eyed friends tell us how well we are doing.

But inside, we know better. We know we aren't doing well enough. We still can't handle life, as life is. There must be a serious flaw somewhere in our spiritual practice and development.

What then, is it?

The chances are better than even that we shall locate our trouble in our misunderstanding or neglect of AA's Step Eleven — prayer, meditation and the guidance of God. The other Steps can keep most of us sober and somehow functioning. But Step Eleven can keep us growing, if we try hard and work at it continually. If we expend even five percent of the time on Step Eleven that we habitually (and rightly)

lavish on Step Twelve, the results can be wonderfully far-reaching. That is an almost uniform experience of those who constantly practice Step Eleven.

In this article, I'd like to develop Step Eleven further — for the benefit of the complete doubter, the unlucky one who can't believe it has any real merit at all.

In lots of instances I think that people find their first great obstacle in the phrase "God as we understand Him." The doubter is apt to say, "On the face of it, nobody can understand God. I half believe that there is a First Cause, a Something, and maybe a Somebody. But I can't get any further than this. I think people are kidding themselves when they say they can. Even if there were a Somebody, why should he bother with little me, when, in making the Cosmos run, he already has plenty to do? As for those folks who claim that God tells them where to drill for oil, or when to brush their teeth — well, they just make me tired."

Our friend is clearly one who believes in some kind of God — "God as he understands Him." But he

doesn't believe any bigger concept or better feeling about God to be possible. So he looks upon meditation, prayer and guidance as the means of a self-delusion. Now what can our hard-pressed friend do about this?

Well, he can strenuously try meditation, prayer and guidance, just as an experiment. He can address himself to whatever God he thinks there is. Or, if he thinks there is none, he can admit — just for experimental purposes — that he might be wrong. This is all-important. As soon as he is able to take this attitude, it means that he has stopped playing God himself; his mind has opened. Like any good scientist in his laboratory, our friend can assume a theory and can make an experiment. He can pray to a "higher power" that *may* exist and *may* be willing to help and guide him. He keeps on experimenting — in this case, praying — for a long time. Again he tries to behave like the scientist, an experimenter who is never supposed to give up so long as there is a vestige of any chance of success.

As he goes along with his process of prayer, he begins to add up the results. If he persists, he will almost surely find more serenity, more tolerance, less fear and less anger. He will acquire a quiet courage, the kind that doesn't strain him. He can look at so-called failure and success for what they really are. Problems and calamity

will begin to mean instruction, instead of destruction. He will feel freer and saner. The idea that he may have been hypnotizing himself by auto-suggestion will become laughable. His sense of purpose and of direction will increase. His tensions and anxieties will commence to fade. His physical health is likely to improve. Wonderful and unaccountable things will start to happen. Twisted relations in his family and on the outside will unaccountably improve.

Even if few of these things happen, he will still find himself in possession of great gifts. When he has to deal with hard circumstances he can face them and accept them. He can now accept himself and the world around him. He can do this because he now accepts a God who is All — and who loves all. When he now says, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name," our friend deeply and humbly means it. When in good meditation and thus freed from the clamors of the world, he knows that he is in God's hands; that his own destiny is really secure, here and hereafter.

A great theologian once declared, "The chief critics of prayer are those who have never really tried it enough." That's good advice; good advice I'm trying to take ever more seriously for myself. Many AAs have long been striving for a better conscious contact with God and I trust that many more of us

will join with that wise company.

I've just finished re-reading the chapter on Step Eleven in our book, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions." This was written some time ago. I was astonished when I realized how little time I had actually been giving to my own elementary advice on meditation, prayer and guidance — practices that I had so earnestly recom-

mended to everybody else!

In this lack of attention I probably have plenty of company. But I do know that this is a neglect that can cause us to miss the finest experiences of life, a neglect that can seriously slacken the growth that God hopes we may achieve right here on earth; here in this great day at school, this very first of our Father's Many Mansions.

A Suit for Chuck

DID YOU EVER accept a speaking date and hate yourself for doing it? If you are a bleeding deacon I am sure you have. Several years ago I received a call requesting that I lead a meeting at the House of Hospitality. Caught off guard, I agreed. When Sunday morning rolled around, it was a wet, cold, dreary day. As I left for the meeting I told my wife that I didn't know why I had accepted the assignment. What could a guy like myself tell a bunch of stumble bums off the street that might help them. Anyhow, most of them didn't want any part of AA . . . it was just an opportunity to get in off the street and get some doughnuts and coffee.

As I was driving to the meeting I was trying to formulate my talk. Just what could a guy who drives up in a new car, dressed in clean clothes, say to a group of down and out derelicts. To this day I don't



know what I did say, but after the meeting a bleary-eyed, unshaven man in patched pants and no coat, reeking of canned heat, approached me. "You've got something I want. How do I get it?", he said.

I replied that if he was really serious he could meet me the next Friday night at our downtown meeting. I gave him two dollars and

went on my way home, expecting never to see Chuck again.

Friday night he was waiting for me. His face was clean, his eyes were clear. I was pleasantly surprised. He sat with me during the meeting. Before we parted that evening I gave him five dollars and told him that if he would come to my office Monday I would have a suit of clothes and an overcoat for him. Chuck was around bright and early Monday morning. He told me that he had contacted his wife and daughter, who hadn't seen him for years. His wife agreed to attend some meetings with him. In a few weeks he had a job washing dishes at the university at \$12.50 per week. He walked in my office on pay day and left a dollar on account with Mrs. W. She told him that she was sure he needed it more than I did. However, Chuck replied that he needed to pay it for his own self respect. It wasn't long before he repaid the entire debt.

His next job was night superintendent of a building at \$200 a month. With this income he managed to rent a small place and get together with his family again. It wasn't long before Chuck made another connection with a large national concern. His advancement was almost spectacular. His work carried him to all parts of the country, yet I heard from him often. Always a post card with these words . . . "Still doing it twenty-four hours at a time, thanks to you. Chuck."

Before long he moved into a new

home in Philadelphia that he built, with a two-car garage, television and an organ. During his rapid rise Chuck attended AA meetings everywhere he went. He gave frequent



talks and always wore the suit I gave him.

Last week I received a phone call that Chuck had passed on after a brain tumor operation. He knew he was going to die, and his last request was that he be buried in the suit I gave him. He wanted to be sure to get word to me that he was very thankful for the sober years he found through talking to me on that cold February morning several years ago.

I shall ever be grateful that I kept that speaking engagement.

Pete W., Pittsburgh, Penna.

July 1958

Short Snorts

AA

"What'll you have, gents?" Joe asked the three newly-arrived customers.

"A double Martini on the rocks for him and plain ginger ale for us," said one of the three.

As he set the glasses on the bar, Joe addressed the ginger ale drinkers. "I'll bet you two fellows are in AA," he said.

"All three of us are," one of the men told him. "You see, we come from a small group upstate. In fact, we're the only members." He nodded toward the Martini gulper. "So we take turns Twelfth-Stepping one another."

AA

July 1958

A GOOD QUESTION

WILL YOU ANSWER a question for me? Why are the Twelve Steps written in the past tense?

Paul E. N., Columbus, Ohio

(*Ed. note*—Nobody told us, and it's only our opinion, but here it is: the Twelve Steps first appeared in Chapter Five of the big book, "Alcoholics Anonymous," following these words, "Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a Program of Recovery." And in the Foreword to the First Edition, there is this explicit statement: "To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book." Thus the Steps are essentially a record of experience, a setting forth in detail of exactly how the recovered alcoholics who wrote the book had gone about the business of recovery.

Implicit in them is the invitation—"go thou and do likewise"—if recovery from alcoholism is at stake—but they are not "Rules and Regulations," except as freely and willingly embraced. Rewording the Twelve Steps in the present tense would tend to dissipate a vital part of their power—which is that of suggestion based on example and real experience.)

BELATED BOUQUET

SO THERE IT WAS—an AA Grapevine dated April 1955—in which I read an article entitled "The Twelve Steps and the Older Member: Step Five," by J.E. of Bronxville, New York.* Would I could offer more than mere words of thanks, but better these than nothing, having benefited thoroughly from the reading. Thanks very much.

Ben T., Spencer, Mass.

* Now "J.E. of Bloomington, Indiana"
—*Ed.*

July 1958

IS PROFANITY NECESSARY?

THOUGH I MAY BE the only one holding this opinion I can't resist the temptation to express myself on it. It has concerned me for some time, I wonder if it has anyone else?

Am I my brother's keeper? Step Twelve of The AA program gives me the answer to this question: it is surely yes. I consider AA a spiritual outlook and, regardless of whether or not one likes to admit it, when we acknowledge Steps Two and Three we thereby acknowledge the spiritual aspect of the AA program.

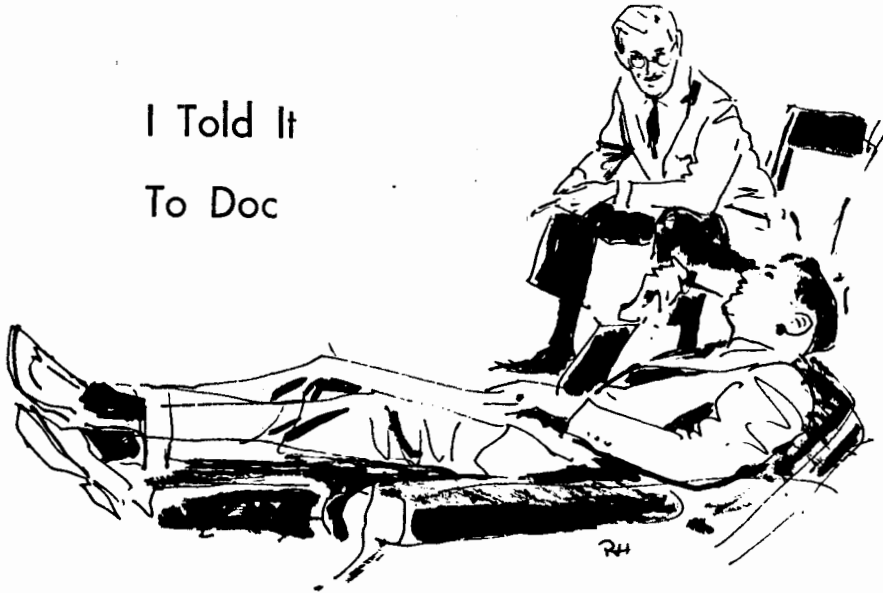
Now to get to the reason for writing this: At various meetings both large and small during the three years I have attended AA, I've heard quite a number of excellent talks—except for the fact that the use of profanity detracted greatly from them.

A story told without profane language is interesting to everyone but when a speaker resorts to profanity to express his viewpoint, then I'll

guarantee there'll be some there who resent having to hear such language. So I wonder— would we not all do well to leave the profanity out completely? Some of the best talks I've ever listened to in AA—and I've attended quite a few area, state and regional conventions—had *not one* word amiss. To me, a public platform is certainly not the place to express our profane usage—in fact, why do it at all?

Tyne D., Conway, S. C.

I Told It To Doc



AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS of good AA sobriety I re-worked Steps Four and Five with the help of a psychiatrist.

Now — to delay at least the “humph” that may already be gathering in the throats of some of my fellow members—let me quote Bill, co-founder of our fellowship, speaking at our St. Louis convention in 1955:

“Though uninstructed in psychiatry,” said Bill, *“we can, after a little time in AA, see that our motives have not been what we thought they were and that we have been motivated by forces unknown to us. Therefore we ought to look, with the deepest respect, interest, and profit upon the findings of*

psychiatry, remembering that up to now the psychiatrists have been far more tolerant of us than we have been of them.”

This is recorded on page 236 of our book *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and, in passing, I want to recommend this book to anyone who has not yet read it. I have found it to be both instructive and inspirational.

Many of us had tried psychiatry in our drinking days and found it to be of little help in attaining sobriety. Therefore we were prone to doubt its value in anything. I returned to psychiatry, sober, in desperation.

I had always experienced difficulty and discomfort in many of my

relations with the people around me. It seemed that a high wall of fear isolated me from my fellow men. Then I discovered alcohol and found that, with a few shots under my belt, the wall melted away. I could draw near to people, and they could draw near to me—at least for a while.

Soon I *had* to drink because my need was so great. And, coupled with my compulsion was a growing physical allergy to alcohol. I needed alcohol—but it was poison to me. So I was caught between two fires, and somewhere along the line I passed the point of no return.

I became a full-fledged alcoholic, running out of control. I was on some kind of a horrible treadmill that kept going faster and faster. I wound up on Philadelphia’s Skid Row, and I was still running. Finally, one dark night, I could run no more. A prayer surged up from the depths of my despair: *“God help me!”*

At that moment the thought of Alcoholics Anonymous came into my mind. Maybe at one time I’d heard or read about AA. I don’t know. All I know is that the thought hit me like lightning. I bummed a dime and phoned AA.

I found hope that night, and understanding. I didn’t have to tell the people of AA what a living hell was like. They had felt the flames. And out of their experience they drew a map for me, and marked on it the chasms of alcoholic insanity

and death, that I might be saved. Into my trembling hands they placed the tools of sobriety.

I was sober. My body mended, my mind healed, and life was good. But then, as time went by and the “honeymoon” waned, I felt the old wall of fear springing up again.

It became increasingly difficult for me to function effectively in anything that involved other people. I was nervous and self-conscious. I could not, for instance, bring myself to speak at AA meetings, and I felt guilty about it. I drew ever deeper into my shell. The only time I could relax was at home, with the door shut and the world locked out.

More than once I thought of drink, and the escape it had provided in the early days. Each time my sobriety was threatened, AA helped me to side-step the danger . . . but I was worried. I studied my problem from every angle, and finally I hit what I felt was a clue.

In trying to work the Twelve Steps I began to feel that I might find an answer in Steps Four and Five. I made many an inventory of myself—but I wasn’t sure how “searching” they were. I had admitted my wrongs—but I wasn’t sure that I knew their “exact nature.” Maybe there were elements within me that I couldn’t detect, no matter how hard I tried—emotional “blind spots,” as it were. Perhaps it was in this hidden terrain that my distress was rooted.

Then on page 61 of our book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, I read this: "What comes to us alone may be garbled by our own rationalization and wishful thinking." And on the next page, referring to the person with whom we discuss our flaws: "This individual may be entirely outside AA—for example, your clergyman or your doctor."

That settled it. I sought out a psychiatrist and went to work on a real housecleaning, *in depth*. The doctor held up a mirror—a clear, unclouded mirror—in which I caught occasional glimpses of my real self and thereby gained, one by one, tiny nuggets of insight.

We worked together two years; the first year an hour a week; the second year an hour every other week. There was a lot of sweat, and not a little anguish—and more than average patience on my doctor's part—but it worked.

In situations where I had previously felt panic, I now began to move with some ease. My relations with other people became more natural. In fact, I found that I actually *liked* some of them! (I liked one person so much—a girl named Mary—that we later wound up in front of a preacher saying "I

do.") I started speaking at meetings. I attended church, with a growing appreciation of the value of a personal religion.

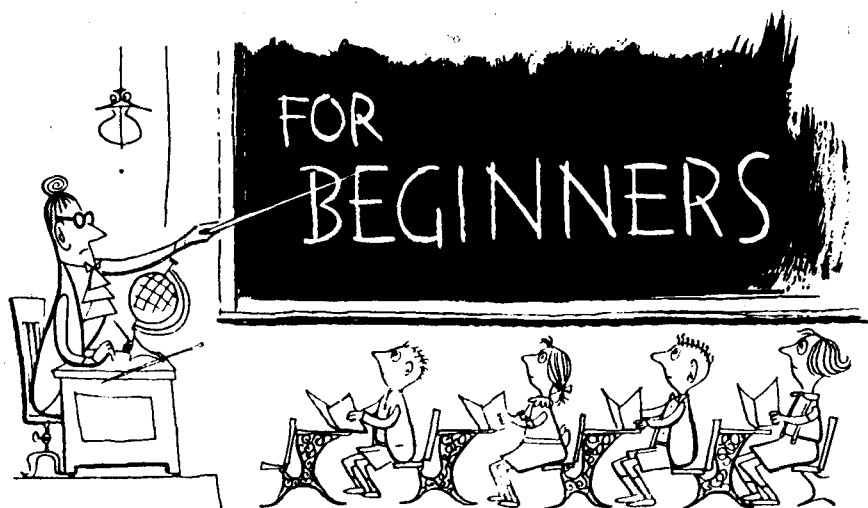
One day I shook hands with the doctor, and left his office for the last time. Two years of AA, then two more years of AA-plus-psychiatry, and I felt that I had at last joined the human race. Oh, I was a novice, all right, and I had to feel my way along in many things, but at least I was no longer on the outside looking in.

Had I recovered completely? To this I must answer, "Truthfully, no." I think perfection in anything in this life is rare. But there was good progress, that could be measured in increasing confidence and serenity, and in a growing regard for other people.

Behind it all, of course, stands AA, because without sobriety there can be nothing else. Once we have attained sobriety we can tackle our other problems, whatever they may be. We can—and I think should—strive always to grow, to make our lives richer and more meaningful.

I hope that, by the grace of God, I will hold fast to AA for the rest of my life. With me, sobriety comes first. Other blessings inevitably follow.

R.J.C. Philadelphia, Pa.



The second of a series of "Beginners' Meetings"—to run from time to time—for newcomers to AA sobriety.

TAKING INVENTORY

LAST week someone asked the question, "Why an inventory? Why is Step Four suggested?" That's a good question and I wish I had a fast answer for it. Certainly I couldn't even try in the short time of this meeting. I'd have to attempt a story centuries old—of philosophies and religions ancient, medieval and modern; of the present day views in psychoanalysis and psychiatry. That's a history of aid to mankind which is a bit beyond my scope.

It occurs to me though, that if we think about how an inventory is taken in AA we may then realize why it is suggested and why it is an

aid to sober living. I think all of us take it but you will meet with some in AA, sober for years, who will tell you that they never took an inventory. Well, maybe so, but I can't help but think they are probably kin to those people who tell you they never said a prayer—maybe so.

First of all, be sure we don't let this Step Four scare us. Don't let us read into it any demand for an examination of life going back to childhood. Don't let us think that this is an attempt at self-analysis; nor should we let it become an enumeration or rehash of old transgressions that should long be buried. I suggest it is an inventory of our

present day self, an attempt to find the mistakes we are now making. We want to find the things we are doing that are wrong, unwise or improper. For our purpose here the word moral means what is right or what is wrong. Are we conducting ourselves properly or improperly? It is as simple as that.

So let's see how it is done. Sometimes it is done backwards and maybe a bit too late. Let's suppose that you or I, in our first months in AA, determined to stay away from that first drink; yet we stop at our favorite bar each night after work just for a coke. Comes the night we stay for two cokes, just to be friendly with the old crowd, maybe even to talk about the good old days when we could drink and had so much fun. We can keep this up for quite a while and get to like it real well. One night we might get the idea we could try a beer—just one. Maybe at this point we take an inventory, or maybe we are not so lucky. Then the inventory is taken after the beer or after the binge, but the inventory is taken. Now we learn that the tavern visits, old bar-room friends and reliving the old days were a mistake, and this behavior was not too wise.

Or let's imagine another situation: you or I—we are in AA for awhile. Some things straightened out, others not. Then for an extended period of time we allow our innermost thoughts to concentrate on those circumstances in our lives that make

for sadness or regret. There can be one big regret or many small ones. This makes for gloom in everything around us. We don't allow ourselves ever to think of the many other things for which we could be grateful. Finally comes a bitter resentment against those we hold responsible for this great sadness of the past and present. What happens? We feel self-pity—a sense of being abused or imposed upon; then we experience the desire for relief and escape or just stay down in the dumps.

The thought of drink has its appeal. Maybe it is even taken. But for those of us who are sober today an inventory is taken somewhere along the line—maybe early, maybe later, maybe too late. Eventually we learn that living in our dreadful past, feeling self-pity, ingratitude and resentment are all mistakes—mistakes that we eliminate if we wish to live soberly and with ease.

You've heard of the situation where someone we know carries on a constant warfare with the boss at work or the spouse at home. Constant bickering—we find fault, they find fault, they use tough language, we answer with tougher replies; they dig up the past, we reply with something worse—results in utter frustration, unhappiness, bitterness. We must break out of this situation somehow. Sooner or later an inventory of ourselves is taken; then we know that these explosions are not for us. If we've had any practice

with Step Four the inventory comes sooner rather than later.

These are rather glaring and obvious examples of how an inventory is taken. I've been through each one of these episodes and lots more. Maybe they point up that all of us have taken a moral inventory of ourselves, in one form or another, many times in recent weeks. We neglected to do so in our drinking days when everyone else was wrong and only we were right.

Of course there are other instances where our mistakes may not be quite as glaring and obvious as those just mentioned. Sometimes our mistakes may be more subtle, down deeper, hidden even from us. Perhaps that is why AA has suggested a searching and fearless inventory. Many mistakes must be searched out and faced fearlessly. It's not easy to admit mistakes, nor is it easy to acknowledge that some of the habitual behavior that has long supported our ego is a mistake.

Fortunately not all of us delay taking inventory until real trouble

engulfs us. When we recognize the difficulties of other alcoholics and accept the experience of AAs some of us will check ourselves. We frequently find that we are making the same mistakes which trapped others. Because we have the same illness that others in AA have, we may see that our errors and mistakes are also probably similar and that continued gratification of emotional whims is not the wisest procedure.

We have mentioned a few instances which indicate how some of us have taken our inventory—some before we encounter new trouble, some while in the throes of dangerous emotions and some, unfortunately, after we have slipped. I don't see how we can avoid taking inventory if continued sobriety is to be attained.

This is another short account of how a part of AA works. We read in the literature that inventory is suggested and we see how other alcoholics do it. We try it for ourselves and then we realize why it is a part of the AA program. *(End)*

September 1958

MICK KNOCKED ON THE DOOR

LAST SEPTEMBER my wife and I were living in a flat down by the sea in Thorncliffe, seven miles northeast of Brisbane. We are both English and met for the first time on the boat coming out to Australia three years ago, marrying a year later. About three weeks after we'd moved in, one Monday evening came a knock on my front door. A man was standing there with his small daughter Fay, aged eight. "Are you Owen? My name's Mick. The Central Office gave me your address. I live almost opposite."

Mick, to quote his own personal story, had kept half-heartedly dry on a Step or two of the AA program for a couple of years, and when a certain set of circumstances came along he had no depth of defense against the first drink.

A couple of beers at a party started him on a jug that lasted eighteen months and took him nearly all round Australia. He was drinking one day with a woman alcoholic when two AA members came in looking for her. It was at this stage that Mick decided that he needed the program more than anything in life, and after sobering up with the Wollengong group he arrived home that day.

So there we were, two of us in the same street, Mick opposite me and me opposite Mick. A firm friendship has sprung up between our wives and we go to meetings together and share our bits of Twelfth Step work. He hasn't looked back, and in a few short months has changed almost beyond recognition. This has helped me a great deal too because that is how it works in AA. My own record had been terribly disappointing. Coming to AA in July of 1949 from a life almost ended by alcoholic degradation and utter uselessness, I had wasted a further seven years fooling around with the program—uneasily dry, fresh outburst, fearfully dry, fresh outburst, remorsefully dry, fresh outburst, unhappily dry, and so on. After five years' exposure to AA I was drunk most of the time on the boat coming out to Australia. It even seemed that I was one of the people for whom AA wouldn't work but that was because I wouldn't let it. There came a day almost a year ago, at the end of a four-day bout, when I felt I couldn't go backward, couldn't go forward, and couldn't live in the present. I found myself utterly beaten and for the first time in all my life I turned to God. I had to—there was nowhere else to go. I was desperate, and I was also sincere, and I have not taken a drink since.

Thus I was dry just two months when Mick came home and knocked on my door.

Owen J., Banyo, Queensland, Australia.

P. S. — I was fascinated by Bill's history of AA in the *Third Legacy Manual*, indeed the whole book took my attention very strongly. Recently it has been going the rounds in our small local group, as I put it in circulation as soon as I'd read it.

September 1958

A PERMANENTLY FRIENDLY BEING

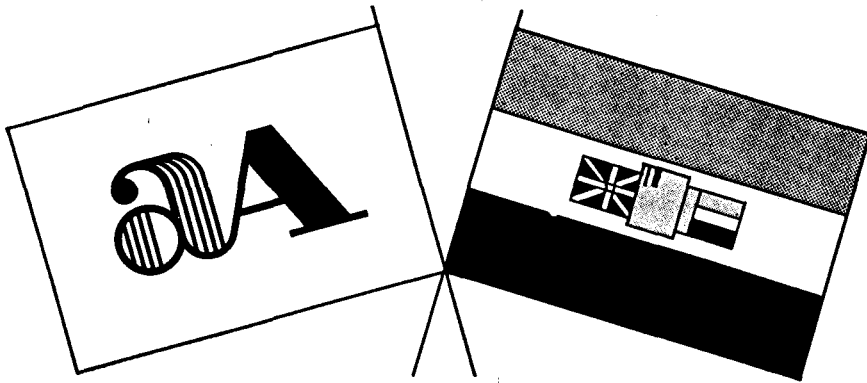
THERE IS A VERY CLOSE cooperation between the medical department of the firm I work for and AA. As a matter of fact the doctor knew of my being in AA and he is pushing AA every time he can. If he knows some fellow who desires to stop he always calls me and there we go. I do not think that this doctor only does so because of the benefits for the firm but also because he has a big heart for sick human beings.

Now you say that we are not paid for doing Twelfth Step work. As long as you mean paid in money, well—that is right, but money is not all that counts. I have been paid for the Twelfth Step so much that it would take hours to summarize all the benefits to me and everybody connected with me. But I'll give only a few: sobriety, happiness, tolerance, health, understanding, humility, and so on. Without AA and the Twelfth Step I would be absolutely nothing. AA is my safe port from which I sail over the seas on which I could never keep the course before. AA is the bridge to the rest of the world in which I had been a stranger. AA is the catalyst that changed me from a hateful, ugly creature into a sociable permanently friendly being. Well, that is what *you* call an unpaid worker. I have never had a job that has paid me so good!

Then about the anonymity. Well, of course I know that we have to be anonymous at the level of public, press, films and tv, but how do you think this works out, actually, in a little town like I live in? Everybody knows everybody.

Everybody knows I was a hopeless drunk. Then comes AA and everybody is curious to know how I have changed. Then comes an open meeting, 200 people attending. My name is John and I am an alcoholic. Well, I need not tell this, because everybody knew this already for fifteen years. In a small town it is almost impossible to stay anonymous. Personally I don't care that they know I am in AA. I was not ashamed doing the most stupid and horrible things whilst drunk, so I am not ashamed at all to let them know I am sober—in fact I am proud of it. Everybody is happy that I am in AA, and I have so many good friends again, I have not time enough to pay them visits.

John, Ijmuiden, Holland



UNION OF
SOUTH AFRICA

Read down: orange, white, blue

THE GIFT OF FELLOWSHIP

MY name is Roy and I am a loner in the Karro, and a member of the Vanderbijl Park Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, Transvaal, South Africa. At the time of writing I have been away for about eight months, in which time I have been able to attend only one group meeting but, I am proud to be able to write, by the Grace of God I am still sober.

My point of view on AA has become more objective at this distance of time and space, and this naturally applies equally to our group. But it is on only one aspect of AA that I would like to make a few remarks. Please pause for a moment and think. What does the term "fellowship" mean to you? I would dearly love to hear some of your opinions.

When I went to the meeting I have mentioned above—a meeting

of the small Graaf Reinet group—I had no feeling of being on the point of entering a room full of strangers. I felt rather that the people I was about to meet were familiar to me. I knew that we would understand each other. It was more like going home than going to a strange house filled with unknown people.

We were a mixed bag that evening . . . An ex-major was seated next to a chap who had not been long out of a work colony. Some of the members were well-to-do men, while more were scraping a bare living. A few were well educated, a few ignorant. Judged by ordinary standards we were poles apart—actually we were closer than brothers and sisters.

For there was a bond between us that is not to be found elsewhere, except perhaps on a battlefield.

That bond was the spirit of fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous . . . a bond of sympathy and understanding, none the less real for being intangible, which stripped away the differences of conventional existence.

We had the privilege—granted to us by God through the medium of AA—of knowing what was in each other's minds, hearts and souls. There is a rare and precious quality about the fellowship which can be felt in the very atmosphere of AA group meetings. So precious is it that those of us who have been granted the honor of partaking of it should regard it as a sacred trust and solemn duty to preserve it and spread it among those who need it and want it.

This duty is part of what we pay for our own sobriety . . . a price we are glad to pay as we gain even in the paying. It is every bit as important to introduce prospects to this facet of AA as it is to hand them a copy of the Twelve Steps.

There is an old and very true saying that one never misses a well until it is dry, that good and necessary things are missed only when they are no longer available. This is why I have chosen to write on this particular aspect of AA. Staying sober has been easy for me, for I have the power of God to help me, and AA has shown me how to enlist the aid of that power. But in my present circumstances the fellowship of AA is almost entirely lacking.

I am quite ready to admit that I have not always placed the value on the fellowship of AA that I now do. Too often have I let the petty resentments and jealousies of my alcoholic nature mar my conception of what this fellowship could and should be. I don't think that I have *always* been in the wrong, but there have been times when I could have benefited from a thorough Tenth Step upon myself, and promptly admitted my faults.

Too many hours of my life have been wasted in building up resentment against a potential friend . . . the net result being the loss of the friend and unhappiness for myself. I feel sure that I am not alone in this, that many alkys go through the same experience. I am equally sure that this would not happen if we all kept the ideals of the AA fellowship constantly before us.

The spirit of AA fellowship is one of the mainstays of the sobriety of us all, and we must guard and protect it at all costs. Once lost it cannot be regained—at least in the same measure in which we originally acquired it.

I have said that this fellowship is akin to the comradeship of the battlefield. On the field of battle men know that they are close to death. Close to the time when they may have to face their creator. This applies to them all, the high and the low alike. There is no room for pettiness there. The humble private who has been nothing but a source of trouble behind the lines

suddenly realizes that he has a job to do which might mean the difference between life and death, not only to himself, but to his comrades. He will often gladly risk his own life to help save the lives of those comrades. The sergeant who has been a regular slave-driver and petty tyrant in base camp turns out to be a man whose first and only consideration is the care and welfare of his men when under fire.

We alcoholics are always upon a battlefield. We too are near death or insanity . . . we are just one drink away from it very often. The spirit of comradeship is therefore manifest in the spirit of fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. It is desirable and necessary. It is also as natural as the comradeship of the soldier's battlefield. Our personal antipathies must be subordinated to this fellowship. A person's looks, dress or actions are of minor importance. We *must* be "all for one and one for all."

So look around at the people near you at your group meeting—every alcoholic is closer to you, at that meeting, than a brother or a sister. They understand you better than a mother or a father. They are sitting there extending to you a wonderful gift—a gift which ranks second only to the gift of your sobriety (which they have already helped to give you)—the gift of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This does not mean that we must tamely accept everything that a

fellow alky might say. We are all men and women with an experience of life that surpasses most. We have the right—even at times the duty—to express our opinions and to criticize those of other people.

But when we do this, let us do it openly to their faces. We demand of life the right to face our critics and we are under the obligation to grant the same right to all our fellow men.

So, although we are at liberty to disagree, we are obliged to do so openly—or we must keep silent. I feel that it is directly contrary to the spirit of AA fellowship to allow anything with which we personally disagree to pass unchallenged at a meeting, and then to discuss our grievances privately at a later date. Many of us—if not all—are guilty of this.

When the spirit of the AA fellowship is as strong as it should be, it can stand any amount of fair criticism between group members, without one member losing one iota of respect for another. In fact, fair criticism, fairly stated, is apt to engender greater respect.

Without mutual respect there can be no affection, and without some sort of affection, no comradeship. We all have something to respect each other for, in AA. We have each to some degree fought the same battle. One must always feel a certain affection for anyone who has helped in any way, and we in AA have all helped each other to some degree, even though

no one of us is directly responsible for helping one or two.

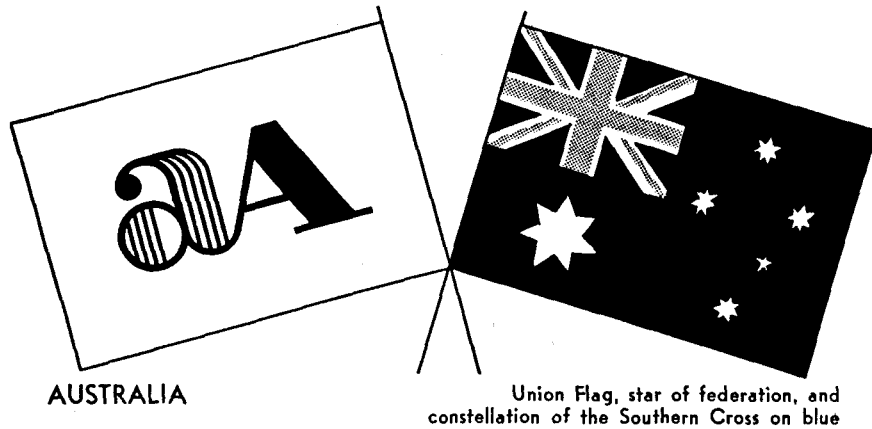
It is the spirit of AA fellowship that encourages us to speak of our alcoholic problems before meetings, because we know in advance that our listeners will be understanding and sympathetic. Alkys are prone to confess things to other alkys that they would not dream of confessing in any other company. They will confess things before a public meeting when they know that they have the support of a number of other alkys. This too is part of the great spirit of fellowship which exists among us.

The feeling of not being cut off from the rest of mankind persists even when one is forced by circumstances to become a loner. Never again does the alky feel quite alone

and friendless. I cannot be with you in the flesh, but my words are being read by you, my thoughts and feelings are being laid bare to you just as though I were there. I am indeed with you in spirit—the spirit of the fellowship of AA. If it were not for that fellowship, I would be alone indeed.

I started by saying that the fellowship of AA is lacking in my present position. But as I have gone on writing that fellowship has become more and more real to me. I feel now that it can never be lacking. I have thousands of friends scattered all over the country—friends, in most cases, of whom I have never heard and who may never hear of me.

Roy, Vanderbijl Park Group
Transvaal, South Africa



FAIR DINKUM IT IS

AFTER numerous attempts, punctuated by deep study and wide reading over many months . . . I have failed! For a long time there has been an urge from within to produce an adequate article on "God and AA." These words rang in my ears . . . God and AA . . . but after all this effort in consuming mountains of psychological and metaphysical data and opinion, it suddenly dawned on me that words are superfluous and futile.

The plain unvarnished truth is that the second and third steps have "blazed up afresh within me" to provide a total answer for a spiritual quest. It now seems presump-

tuous for me to think of airing personal concepts of the Power greater than ourselves.

Upon reflection the simple phrase . . . "God as we understand Him" just about embraces everything . . . and best of all it is personal. This all may sound nothing new or remarkable; but this *second* inspiration of "awareness" comes after a browned-off period in many matters which, maybe, provoked the seeking in books of the answer I find once again in our AA Steps.

This realization has . . . reinvigorated my faith . . . aroused and expanded a shrinking tolerance . . . quelled recurring apprehensions . . .

and enriched me by enlightenment that one must *want* to understand God more and more.

After my splurge of intellectual indulgence, I'd rather keep it simple. I believe that it's the depth of our spiritual feeling or sincerity applied deliberately to our daily living that reflects the influence and quality of our sobriety and

happiness . . . or, in fact, our new way of life.

As we say in Australia, "You've got to be fair-dinkum." And that bit of slang from "down under" describes the maximum degree of honesty in thought and word and deed: fair-dinkum.

Colin R.
Sydney, Australia



CHILDREN who believe in Santa Claus are convinced that he does exist. We who do not believe know that Santa does not really exist. Regardless of our belief, none can deny that the spirit of Santa is abroad at Christmas.

Whether we are church members or not, most of us—good, bad and indifferent Christians, and many of other faiths as well as many of no faith—are infected with this spirit that is abroad throughout the

Christian world at the yuletide season.

We feel more kindly towards our fellow man, we make up old quarrels, we wish a Merry Christmas to total strangers, we kiss all the girls in the office, shake hands with the boss and invite our wife's relatives to share our turkey. We are kind to little children, old ladies and milkmen. We are more friendly, and this feeling is infectious. The spirit of Christmas does exist for most of us

—at least from December 15th to December 25th.

Many in AA will burn the midnight oil for hours on end arguing the pros and cons of the existence of God. For many, God is a reality, as real as a father or friend. For others God does not exist. Some believe in a personified God, a patriarch who is with them always. Some refuse to believe that God or a Divine Power created the earth or man. To some, God is a tremendous force for good. To others He is a myth.

The Third Step of the AA program covers all concepts when it refers to "God as we understand Him." Each can believe as he chooses, as his mind and his understanding dictate. We have no argument with any on this score, including those whose understanding allows no clear concept. Regardless of our individual concept of God, or lack of concept, we must admit that AA seems to demonstrate that a power greater than the individual does exist. At every AA gathering, no matter how small, there is a common influence that draws us together and shares the problems of each. The sincerity, humility and compassion of alcoholics gathered together in the name of AA is witness to a finer and greater power than any of us has individually. The character defects that we retain after coming to AA largely disappear at an AA meeting.

The fact that we are sober is a

living example that AA provides an outside force which can accomplish the miracle we could not do on our own. No matter that some may mistakenly scorn AA as a religious sect. No matter our feeling of resentment toward individuals in AA. No matter our superior attitude towards those who lack will power. No matter the case history of the man who quit drinking on his own and hasn't touched a drop in ten years. The fact remains that AA does exist and it works for us. . . . and for a quarter of a million alcoholics. These are facts that cannot be ignored. They will continue to be facts even if we attempt to drive them away with a few drinks.

And as surely as AA exists, there is in the AA program a spirit of mutual help and self-help that works for alcoholics.

Santa Claus does not exist but the spirit of Christmas does. Whether we believe that the other fellow's God exists, we who have experienced it know that the spirit of AA was the power that returned us to sobriety and sanity, when we were willing to let it go to work for us.

If we can succeed in keeping an open mind on the other fellow's theories and beliefs, the spirit of AA will change our lives. The spirit of Christmas changes many for ten days. The spirit of AA can change us for the balance of our days.

Merry Christmas for the rest of your life!

Ron, Vancouver, B.C.

December 1958

MY FINEST CHRISTMAS GIFT

Each year we receive many "Christmas-y" items long after our December issue has gone to press. Last year we decided to save one or two . . . and here's one.—Ed.

MY finest Christmas gift was a telephone call from a rail-roader who lives in a small town in Indiana. He was at the Chicago end of his run and needed a bit of AA, at least over the phone, to tide him over until he could get back to the fine AAs in Indiana. He'd done considerable research to find me (Margie and I had moved here from Fort Wayne in 1954). It seems I'd made the original Twelfth Step call on him five years back which had been a wide miss. He'd continued to drink for three years

but two years ago he'd voluntarily gone to meetings of my old group in Fort Wayne and managed to get on the program. I'd talked to him before he was ready, but apparently he'd not thrown out the literature I'd given him, including my name. He's now dry two years. . . . We know there must be many cases of the kind but we seldom hear of them five years later. By dint of several phone calls (my 1955 Directory is hopelessly out of date) I was able to supply this AA with information that would enable him to attend AA meetings in Chicago every night and Sunday morning.

Frank B., Chicago, Illinois

Before Knocking

On the 12th Step Door

TAKING inventory, be it by the day or week or at the New Year, brings prominently to mind the thought "tried to carry this message. . . ." A favorite poem reminds me "How many blossoms trampled and how many times these well-meaning hands have I thrust into the heart strings of a friend."

Before knocking on the "Twelfth Step door," I breathe a remembered something taught me long ago, with a little AA twist:

Help me in my Twelfth Step work to see:

- . . . in every aimless question, a human soul groping in the dark for truths;
- . . . in every conceited declaration, a human soul desperately grasping for the dignity of which it has been robbed;
- . . . in every aggressive challenge a human soul steeped in the conflict between this world and the next;
- . . . in every angry denial, a human soul shrinking from the Sacrifice of the Cross;
- . . . in every false statement, a human soul lost on the road, through ignorance;
- . . . in every feigned difficulty, a human soul led by a false prophet;
- . . . in every scornful laugh, a human soul deprived of the only real Joy;
- . . . and to see in every listener, the image and likeness of God.

F. M., Richmond, Ind.

January 1959

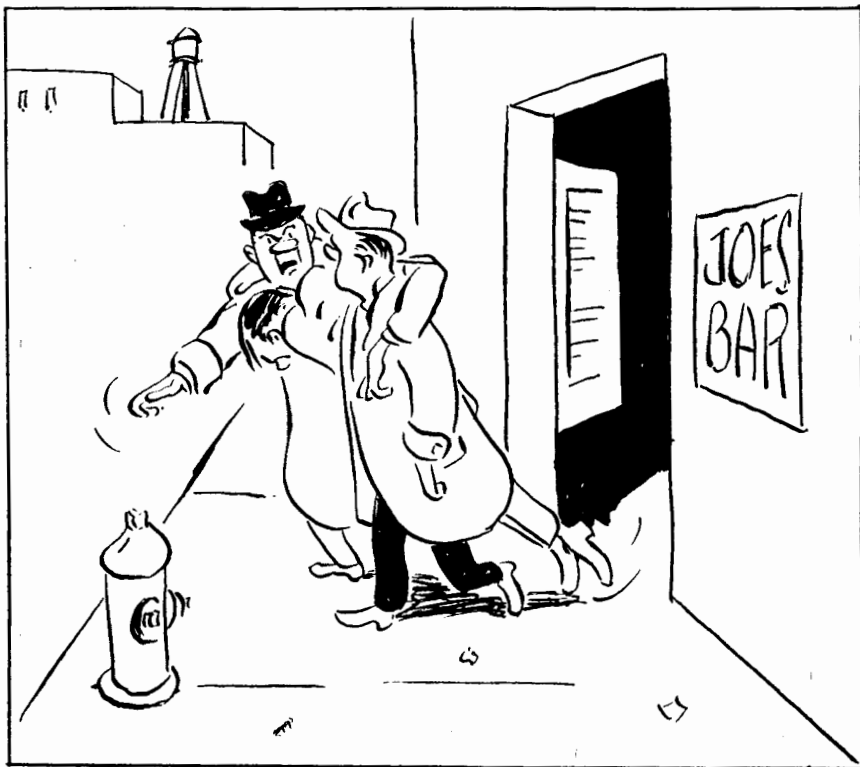
TELLING—NOT SELLING

I AM thoroughly convinced after many tries at twelfth-stepping that it's a job of telling and not selling. I was fortunate in gathering many new members into our fold, but there were many who didn't re-

spond and that got me to thinking: who would buy this? If the new prospect was ready I couldn't say the wrong thing and if he wasn't I couldn't say the right thing.

Jack W., Rutland, Vermont

February 1959



"I thought we were supposed to carry the MESSAGE!"

FOUR CORNERSTONES

THE Twelve Steps—carefully considered, fully understood, sincerely undertaken and conscientiously followed—provide a clear way for the alcoholic to climb out of the sewers of despair to the higher ground of a normal existence, or even to the mountain tops of exalted living.

To be realistically undertaken, the Twelve Steps must first be fully understood. They are much more than an orderly method of walking toward the light—and the strength—which the alcoholic so desperately needs. These steps together form the four cornerstones of the AA “platform,” or program. Each of these steps, upon analysis, can be classified in terms of one of the four cornerstones.

The four cornerstones are: *admission* — *decision* — *petition* — *action*.

An *admission* is an acknowledgment of something one believes to be true. If I do not believe it, I have made no admission. An ad-

mission implies a concession on the part of the intellect as to the truth of a statement. So if I “state,” for example, that I am a Communist and know that my statement is false, I have only stated something; I have not admitted it. If I “state” that I am a Christian or an atheist and do not believe it I have admitted nothing.

Steps One, Two and Five of the AA program involve admissions.

Under Step One I admit that I am powerless over alcohol and that my life has become unmanageable. I must believe this or my admission is ineffective.

Under Step Two the words “Came to believe” clearly mean (in the sense of *admits*) that a Greater Power could restore us to sanity. This step calls on us to acknowledge (and, therefore, believe, *admit*) that a Greater Power could help us.

Under Step Five we make admission of our wrongs to God and to others.

Thus in these three steps we have the first cornerstone of the AA program: *admission*. We must admit our lack of power and the presence of a Higher Power available to us and also admit the nature of our wrongs. We cannot just state our lack of power or the presence of a Higher Power—we must also believe our statement, make a true admission.

Concerning *decision*, the second cornerstone: Steps Three and Six do not involve the same kind of thinking as that concerned in making an admission. These steps move further into thought. A decision involves bringing one’s preliminary thinking to an end and arriving at a conclusion. A decision moves one’s thinking out of the realm of confusion and doubt and prepares one for action.

Under Step Three we decide that we are ready to “turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.” We don’t cogitate or vacillate or play around anymore. We resolve . . . we decide something.

Under Step Six, we decide we are ready to have God remove all our defects of character. We move forward past the point of hesitant and confused thinking: we step out on a definite straight line of thinking—we conclude—we decide. These two steps form our second cornerstone, *decision*.

As to the cornerstone of *petition*: in the actual making of a decision

we do not pray or petition for help outside ourselves. Admissions and decisions are made within the orbit of man’s own mind. We may speak to others of the admission or decision but we, within ourselves, make the admission or decision.

The petition of prayer moves out from the mind of man to a Higher Power . . . God, for those who so name this Power. Under Step Seven we humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings . . . under Step Eleven we seek to improve our conscious contact with God by prayer and meditation.

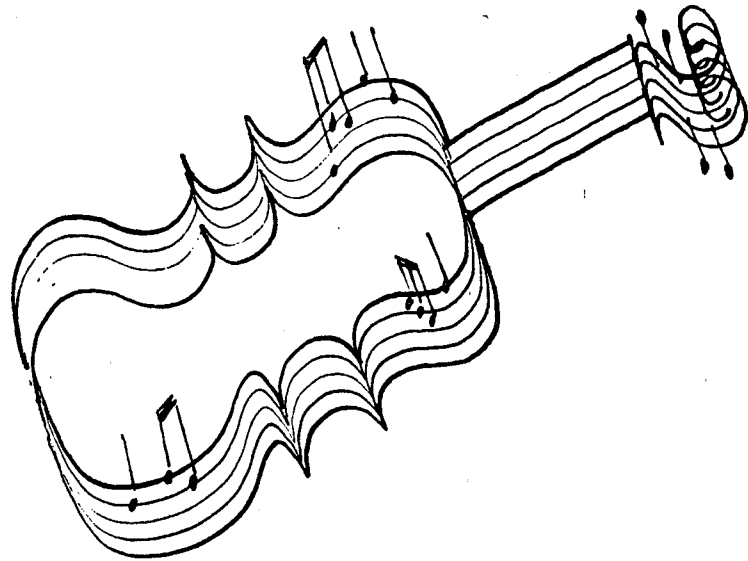
Thus we have a third cornerstone. We have moved out of the realm of pure subjective thinking and into the realm of affirmative mental action. We have sought purification and power through petition and prayer.

In our fourth cornerstone we for the first time move into physical *action*. We try out our muscles. Under Steps Four, Eight, Nine and Ten, we take inventory and make amends. Under Step Twelve we carry the AA message to others, and we try to practice these principles in our daily living.

To sum up: because of our *admissions*, we are able to make *decisions*; because of our *decisions*, we are able to *petition* God for help; because of our *petitions*, we have received new power of *action*; because of our *action*, we have life and have it more abundantly.

Anon., Los Angeles, California

A LESSON IN HARMONY



MANY notes and many instruments go to make a symphony. Life is like that too.

I do not mean the vast discord of a drunken existence, nor the confusion of intermittent tipping between benders. I mean real life; the experience that commences with active participation in AA. Many instruments and much practice are needed for the symphony which is this great new adventure of living. And it is new for me because, until

the time that I came to AA and started to learn how to learn, my actions were the result of "self-will run riot," as the Big Book calls it. I have proved repeatedly throughout my drinking years that self-will-run-riot does not produce a symphony; it produces a cacophony.

Now I cannot see the pattern in my present life. It is not necessary, perhaps not desirable, for me to see the pattern. I am not the composer so that is not my part in it. My part

is to become a part of the symphony by practicing the use of the instruments I am given, of which there are twelve. These are the Twelve Suggested Steps. They are only suggested because spontaneity and enthusiasm are necessary to growth in this new life. There is plenty of self-discipline needed, because there are no laws except spiritual laws.

I need to train my ears for omissions and sounds of disharmony which indicate that the spiritual law is not being fulfilled. These are negligence, dishonesty, self-centeredness, fear, resentment, self-pity. The spiritual law requires that with the help of God, as I understand Him, and of other alcoholics I make myself fit to give and to receive and to practice these principles in all my affairs.

With this help I have been shown how to carry out these profound exercises. Only I can practice them. Principles are things which I used to regard as priggish theory. Now I know them for what they are: Basic truth, moral standards, reasoning. These things I did not know in the life before AA.

Through AA I am learning little by little, by error and by enlighten

ment, by experiences both gay and sad, by the thoughtful discussion of group meetings and the continual surfacing of the group conscience, how to apply these three things to my life. By this I mean my small, busy, daily hour-to-hour life with its myriad variations of mood and circumstance, its speed which makes deliberate forethought often impossible and a sincere desire to do what is best indispensable.

My life's task now is not a task at all but rather a gift so great it is beyond my present comprehension, for I was not long ago born anew and I am in many ways infantile and often clumsy about living. My ears are not well attuned to the composer's desire. Yet more and more often I can hear the mistakes I make, and when my fellow-learners and I discuss the methods of our practicing we can laugh at our faults out of a heart mysteriously light. We are encouraged by the progress of our discoveries.

The instruments are priceless, but they are no use in that dusty corner. I must review them with wonder, practice them with joy, and rely on the composer with serenity.

T. W., London, England

STEP THREE— ACROSS THE BOARD

"THERE are a lot of angles to this program," the guy said after the meeting. That rang a bell with me. I knew he had been a professional thief while drinking, and I acknowledged the fact that I had probably been a more successful crook in the old days, in terms of the take, than he ever had. I could spare him a quarter that day, bus fare to the employment office. He didn't ask for it.

For me now there are many new and splendid angles to be found in following the Twelve Steps. Perhaps if I outline some of my recent experiences other alcoholics may benefit: I have accepted my illness, struck bottom, been through the wringer. I was pretty close to a hopeless case. Today I am a free man.

About six weeks ago I found the courage to change my geographical location. This involved taking a plunge—an act of faith. I decided to turn my will and my life over to the care of God, as I was coming to understand Him. I was testing the Third Step and myself—across the

board. It seemed like a God-given opportunity, since nobody could possibly be harmed.

I had accomplished all I could, where I had been. I had stayed de-



pendably sober for over six months in my job as a night clerk in a small town Maine hotel. The job had been vastly entertaining and was no place

for a lazy man. Before that I had spent seven months in the Augusta State Hospital. The authorities had secured the hotel job for me during a trial release. Last December I won my final discharge. I felt guided—impelled—to find work closer to my wonderful wife, who lies paralyzed in a nursing home in the southern part of the state.

Here honesty compels me to mention three minor slips, none leading to disaster, which I had during the summer and winter. By the Grace of God, these setbacks taught me that I must forever use relentless caution.

I don't know or much care whether people thought I was being foolhardy or not. I had figured the angles according to the Twelve Steps. They had already served me well. With little money and employment at an historical low in Portland, on the Sunday before Christmas I set out, carrying an odd assortment of bags, bundles and a sloppy blanket roll.

Friends had offered me shelter and storage space along the way, people who had known me before as an interminably steady drinker, 'round-the-clock, day-in-day-out. Some loyalty in them, which I marvel at yet, induced them to stand by in just the right way.

This crazy adventure had begun to develop strict rules, to be broken at my own peril. For example, according to one of the rules, to accept hospitality calls for immediate and

concurrent repayment of some kind. I must make myself both useful and scarce, respect my hosts' hours and foibles, be unassuming and adaptable. It is wise always to leave sooner than they expect me to. My entertainment value as a bum who has been locked up will soon wear thin. I am learning to deal with normal people on their own terms. I am almost becoming one of them.

Another rule to be respected under Step Three as I practice it is always to apply for any kind of work I can do through every open channel. I won't get work I don't need. I won't deprive another man or woman. Take a look at my results: Right now I have a job as houseman in a sanitarium where my aged father is a patient. It pays peanuts but with bed-and-board and a little money it puts me in a place where I can make some amends, get to church, attend AA meetings, write some items like this one, while I wait for a better job to claim me the first of next month.

Two days before Christmas I walked into a good small hotel in Brunswick, cold off the street, and saw the assistant manager. Seventeen days later I was offered a job starting February first. It's not forever, but six good weeks, at two-and-a-half times the pay I made before looks better and better. Does it occur to anybody else that my small act of faith is its own reward?

The strictest rule, which on occasion one must hold to against heavy

odds, is this: never beg. Beg only of God. It happens that I set out in a generous season; perhaps unconsciously I was banking on Christmas gifts. Well, I got some and I gave some too. The one that counted was adequate. I spent the holidays beside the woman I belong with. I had no reason to expect unusual generosity and I had not asked for alms. I had merely informed those who had reason to know where I was going, giving little hint of why.

I was getting the best of care. Within ten days of Christmas I had received sixty dollars when it was reasonable to expect about twenty-five. In the following ten days another fifty-five dollars had come my way. Some of it, in good conscience, I could only take as a loan. This includes a twenty dollar bill pressed into my hand on the eve of my birthday by our remarkable parish priest. I am fully aware of his goodness to my wife, indeed his amazing gifts to the whole sprawling parish. But I needed it then; he knew what I was up to after few words. And don't think I forget to pray for him every Saturday!

It was never natural for me to

keep track of money before. It would have been too embarrassing. Now it seems to be part of the deal. I can tell you that I have lived in simple comfort for over two weeks at the YMCA, three nights in a good country inn, other nights clean and warm. I have eaten more than adequately and sometimes with relish. I have spent diverse hours in churches, libraries, museums and in AA quarters. I have had time to write and read, and can afford stamps, change for the kitty and the offering, and minor repairs to equipment. I still have two dollars and sixty-five cents in my pockets, and expect more when I need it. Now this strikes me as close to miraculous—true prosperity.

The pleasure of sobriety is such that I must frequently give thanks for it. At times lately my joy has been so keen that I have had to request serenity. I also find reserves of courage and patience. I must have been made over, converted, by one of those spiritual experiences of which tradition tells us.

If it could happen to me it could happen to a dog. I guess it did.

Allen W., Brunswick Group, Maine

August 1959

a
night's
log

THERE comes a time when we are called to help in an alcoholic case wherein one's fellow man is so far gone he has no reasoning power left with which to make a choice.

For you . . . it is beyond a Twelfth Step call. It is a question of saving the life of another human. It is an instance where only professional medical and nursing care will suffice or life will ebb before our

very eyes. What are we to do in those wee hours of darkness when money is unavailable, hospital admitting clerks insist on adequate credit, physicians will not answer a charity call at an ungodly hour and night desk sergeants turn a cold ear to entreaty? Does prayer help?

Written in jerky fragments between desperate efforts at phoning, the following became a log of events, once rallying AAs had arrived.

3:06

Tonight I feel so inadequate . . . as never before. A poor guy is so far gone I fear he may not last out the night and I can't do a damn thing. My heart is so filled with compassion I can't even take his pulse. . . . Between sentences and fragments of sentences I have been making phone calls in an effort to find someone. . . . Maybe on that last dial my prayers were answered. An AA has promised to come to help. Maybe we can get the police to help. They can order the police ambulance to take him to emergency receiving, if they will. . . .

5:08

The police wouldn't step in nor send an ambulance but at four o'clock a little AA woman and two AA men arrived. Then things started working out. By 4:30 arrangements had been made to have the poor cuss admitted to Tampa General and on the third try had an ambulance on the way. By 4:50 the stretcher-bearers had him aboard the hotel elevator and were taking him out through the hotel lobby. Through cracked lips and from parched throat came inaudible words. He must have been praying. My prayers, silent as they were, were for him. Now I am waiting for a phone call to learn if he lived to complete trip.

5:28

Emergency receiving said he was in bad shape but he'll pull through. He was a total stranger I'd never heard of before and now these few short hours later we feel we had suffered with him through his darkest hours, with life hanging in a balance. My feeling of despair has gone. I feel I have seen at work a Higher Power's divine efforts in answering the plea of a soul at the brink of life's great chasm.

E. N. O., Tampa, Florida

IN THE QUIET HOURS



THE Twelve Steps have literally meant life to me. Not until recently, however, have I wondered about the phrase we hear so often, *God as I understand Him*. Why had it never appealed to me as so many of the AA words do? Why had I never used it in my own speaking or thinking?

Now I know. Because if I could understand God He would no longer be God to me. He would be another human. I think of God as I *feel Him*. That is the only expression I can use with truth. To me, God is something seldom to be described in terms used about humanity, and I question that there have been any words made to describe the God I know.

Most of us, oddly enough, have been fortunate in knowing love sometime during our lives. Perhaps we could agree that the love which

says, "I love you because . . ." usually isn't love. When we try to assign reasons to love we emerge with lack of faith in it. Either we love or we don't. We don't understand why, we only know that we do. When we begin to search for reasons, then doubt must arise. And doubt is death to love.

For me, this is equally true of belief in a Higher Power; of my faith in God as I feel Him. When I must say, "I understand," then I have already begun to doubt. I don't understand God—but I know Him.

I know Him in the quiet, unending, lonely hours of the night. I know Him in the desperate, frantic days of searching for everything else and when He comes with His strength and peace and grace, I know that He is the real object of the search. *T. R., La Marque, Tex.*

August 1959

AA

Getting rid of our character defects via the Fourth Step is regarded as a necessary part of the program, but even the Big Book acknowledges that many of us are loath to relinquish some of our shortcomings. In this respect we're like the small boy who was told to go to bed without his supper for being bad.

"Be sure to say your prayers," said his mother, "and ask God to make you a good boy."

The youngster did as he was told. "Dear God," he mumbled, "try to make me a good boy; but if you can't, don't worry, because I'm having lots of fun the way I am."



CLOUD 99 AND BEYOND

WHEE! Wow! I just had my first birthday, passed cloud ninety-nine just an hour ago. Where am I going? I don't know but I have news for you—I don't much care. If it has taken me a year to pass cloud ninety-nine the way beyond must be much better. The good Lord has only given me twenty-four hours a day to think about this but, being his department, what he wishes me to share beyond that cloud is his business. That is the way AA works for me.

I will soon be fifty years of age and I was never exposed to AA until a little over a year ago. What was I like then? I was a lonesome four-ounce-a-drink-half-pinter, looker-at-television, passer-outer, put-to-

bed, go-to-work, fight-the-job, drunk.

What happened? I don't know because it happened so fast, but somehow during my first meeting the cork went back into the bottle and each day since I have tried to put it in just a little bit tighter.

What am I like now? I don't know. That changes pretty fast too so you will have to ask somebody else. You see, twenty-four hours a day does not give one time for self-analysis.

A little over a year ago I did not believe in God, as a doctor had been responsible for me going to AA. I found out at the first meeting that I was sick and that the only way to get well was to keep coming to meetings. At the end of my second

meeting I had a sneaking hunch there was a power greater than myself. Later, as I increased attendance at meetings, it dawned on me that the only prayer I had said in church for nine years was, "I hope that someday I may come into church without alcohol on my breath." It took a long time for the guy upstairs to answer this one but when he did—what a terrific answer! It gave me AA personified, a way for a beautiful life, twenty-four hours a day to be thankful and grateful—knowing all I need is food and shelter, which is guaranteed by the union contract of the universe, The Lord's Prayer. How does one put into words that he loves life and enjoys the AA way of life? This one I don't know either.

There is one department that is not working just the way it should according to my way of thinking, but how it works is God's business, so who am I to question his ways? That department is to try to carry this message to other alcoholics who still suffer.

My first try was a gal who is still drinking but thinking (maybe she is a neighbor but not alcoholic) and I don't have to make the coffee in the morning anymore. The second try—I took her husband to a meeting after he had pulled the phone off the wall, tried to burn down the house, broken a couple of windows, smashed a few doors and a couple of other miscellaneous stunts that a practicing alcoholic sometimes per-

forms. He has been kicked out of the house a half dozen different times, is still living there, still drinking, once got seven days of happy sobriety. (I still think he sneaked in a meeting during this time.) Well, now I don't have to pack my lunch.

The next try was a call down at Santa Monica Center and I gave it all I had. I was completely exhausted every day for two weeks, took the man to seven meetings. He got drunk again and the last I heard of him he had been let out of jail that very morning. So now, I don't have to water the lawn. I don't remember the next try but now I don't have to clean the garage.

This does not seem right, for here I am trying to work with alcoholics and all the benefits are going to these normal people. All the jobs I did not like (which I don't mind now) have been taken off my back. My family did them because they wanted to do something to help. My niece and nephew (no kin folk of mine) go out of their way to do things for me. My eleven year old son now takes out the cans and bottles and he is pretty proud of his pop. My non-alcoholic wife, whom I have been stuck with for almost twenty-four years and who has been around before, during and after my drinking days, does most of my Twelfth Step work, all of my book work, all my secretarial work, as well as being a housewife and

mother. Even the seven month's old baby seems to realize that she too is in an AA household for she is being reared by an eighteen year old mother who has received and taken on the AA philosophy.

I guess that I am hooked on AA, for how can I ever forget the beautiful way of life which I have lived

on for the past year with five AA living results ever to remind me of this way of living.

All I can say is thank God the doctor sent me to AA. Thank God for my year in AA. Thank God just for AA and please, oh heavenly father, may I keep coming back.

Hal of Malibu

SEEKING AND SHARING

FOR just about a year now a special kind of meeting has been held each Wednesday evening at the AA International Club, on Miami Beach. Known as the Eleventh Step Meeting, it is dedicated to carrying out the injunction to seek through (prayer and) meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand him.

In the late summer of 1958 a small number of us in the Miami area decided that we had been neglectful of this very important part of Step Eleven. Under *meditation* we included far more than the traditional concept of retiring to a quiet corner and thinking profound thoughts. We felt very strongly that profundity, if it ever appeared, did so only as a result of much thought, much study, and much discussion of spiritual things.

Anything that we could read or talk about or observe or share that tended to the better understanding and practice of a spiritual way of life would be of value in our own search for the all-important personal faith.

Accordingly we founded a meeting—not a group, for members of

a number of different local groups attend—dedicated to just these things.

Primarily we wanted to study and discuss the ways by which other men and women down the ages have sought to find their gods. The great religions, the philosophies, the thought patterns, the systems of living, materialistic or mystical, all might or might not have something to offer to us as individuals. We wanted to find out.

Within the framework of AA of course we could study, discuss, debate; but, except as individuals we could neither endorse nor condemn any of the things we studied. From the beginning this point was felt to be immensely important. The meeting would destroy its purpose if ever it were to be turned into a vehicle either to promote or to attack any specific religion or way of thought or life. Contrary to some early dire predictions we have had remarkable success in maintaining the necessary balance here.

A secondary function of the meeting meanwhile became the provision of a forum for the sharing of personal experiences in spiritual growth and spiritual awakening. To

begin with, we were hardly prepared for this. We did not realize how many of us had had personal spiritual awakenings “as a result of practicing these Steps.” Today we wonder how many hundreds or thousands of other AAs have had their own personal experiences and wait only for the opportunity to share them in discussion.

Of course the new venture met with considerable initial opposition. Cries of “religion,” “not pure AA,” “fanatics,” “crackpots,” etc. arose on all sides. In the course of time these subsided as experience revealed that the fears upon which they were based had no foundation in fact.

Attendance at the meeting regularly runs about thirty to forty persons, coming in from groups as far as twenty miles away. Some are old timers, some have only a few weeks’ sobriety. No newcomer has yet been “scared away from AA” by attendance—again contrary to prediction. Many visitors from groups all around the country have come in for one or two meetings during a Miami holiday and expressed deep appreciation of the meeting.

Today we have just experienced the final proof, to us, that our venture has succeeded. A second Eleventh Step Meeting has been formed from those attending the first—it meets some fifteen miles away in the north edge of the county.

Most of the founders of our meeting believed of course that our Twelve Step program is essentially a blueprint for a spiritual way of life. Little as we understood this when first entering AA, it had become increasingly clear to us over the years. Believing this, it was only logical to start such a meeting as we did.

The Eleventh Step Meeting was never intended to replace other types which we have in this area—Speakers’ Meetings, open and closed Discussion Meetings, and Beginner’s Classes on the Steps. Rather it was intended to supplement these, and this is what it has done. There is *no* Eleventh Step “group;” the meeting has no secretary, no formal organization, turns over its entire collection to the International Club. All of us retain our membership in other groups. All of us keep to our individual preference in things spiritual. Some are church members; some are not. We are not trying to develop any new creed, only to study spiritual things, each of us taking away what he or she can use.

To those of us who have been regulars in attendance from the beginning, the meeting has come to have a very special meaning. We have all taken away much more than any one has contributed. We hope that other such meetings will be founded and, if they are, would like to hear from them.

E. B., Miami, Florida

Things That Go BOING-G-G

IN Southern California where each meeting opens with the reading of Chapter Five and the Twelve Steps, there's an occasional slip of the tongue. Some have become classic gags, like "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and our lies had become unmanageable," and "sought through prayer and medication to improve our conscious contact. . . ." But a couple of them have been bright candles for me; their funny flickers slanting new light into corners that needed cleaning.

During my first few months of sobriety, the Third Step was pretty slippery. Particularly since I wanted some things that I was pretty sure God didn't approve of, I was afraid to turn my will and my life over

to Him. It made me feel like the lamb approaching the sacrificial altar. What if He didn't want me to get that job I wanted? What if He didn't think I needed a complete new wardrobe? My stomach dropped like a broken elevator at the very thought.

Then one night someone read the Third Step wrong. "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God as we understood Him." Those missing words, ". . . the care of"! My mind automatically raced back and filled them in as you do when a singer forgets the words of a familiar song: "the care of God as we understood Him." My understanding of God, even before and during alcohol, had been of a loving father who cared for

his children, protecting, providing, offering the lessons needed for growth and understanding and happiness. So if you entrust your will and your life to his care, what's to be afraid of?

Another evening someone read, "We tried to hang on our old ideas." *Boinggg!* Here was a kind of urgency I'd never felt before in this area. I knew I was hanging onto some old ideas. I'd been too busy lapping up the new ones to spend time getting rid of the old ones. Now the mental picture of dangling from the scaffold scared me enough to go back to some inventory, and here are some of the old ideas I was hanging on.

1. You can get by with almost anything if you turn up with an abject apology and a disarming smile.

2. Your high IQ* makes it absolutely necessary that you know or bluff a knowledge of every subject.

3. You are a special person, entitled always to special treatment and privileges.

4. It's never enough to be just a woman. That, any fool female can do with her left hand. You must also be an *Intellect*, a *Success*, and preferably *Very Famous in Your Field*. Anything short of this is *Failure*, not allowed in *Your Family*.

5. You have to get so much done in your lifetime that there'll never, never, never be enough time to do

it all. So hurry! Never mind if your closets are a mess, if you never write a thank-you note, never call someone just to make them feel good. Hurry on to the *Important Things in Life!*

6. If you're not the best-dressed girl at the party, you may as well go home. You have nothing to offer.

7. Never allow any dead air in any conversation. Fill it up with something . . . anything, just so nobody will think you're at a loss for words or, Heaven forbid, dull.

8. When friends come to talk over their problems, always have a ready solution and offer it with complete authority. Don't just listen and allow them to think through to their own answers. If they were smart enough to arrive at a good decision, why would they talk to you about it? And if they don't follow your advice, be sure to remind them when things go wrong.

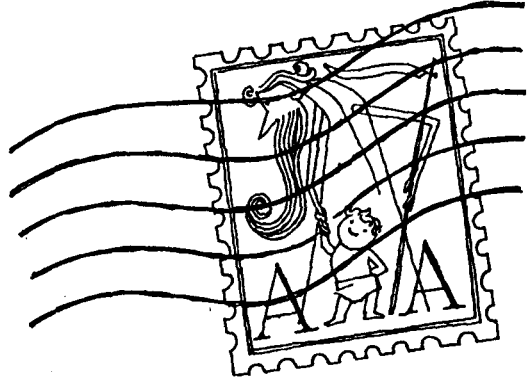
9. Nobody who isn't perfect is worthy of love.

It's a long road from recognizing an old idea to getting rid of it and its reaction pattern. I'm still traveling that road, still toting vestiges of some of those ludicrous old ideas. Some days I trudge. Some days I trot. But most days I enjoy the journey. And every day I'm grateful for those slips of the tongue. Because they've probably had a lot to do with keeping me from another kind of slip.

Anon., Los Angeles, California

* About those people who grade IQ tests . . . wonder if they drink?

January 1960



QUIT FIGHTING IT

TONIGHT at the closed meeting I heard one member say, "I had to quit fighting it!" Having been fortunate in sobriety since my first contact, I had been asked repeatedly, "What is the secret?" "What is the gimmick that helps you stay sober?"

For the first time it dawned on me that I had quit fighting it when I picked up the phone that night . . . I was in a real mellow condition, just before blacking out. I could feel the blood in my veins flowing with the superior knowledge of a genius; I had all the answers. For once, I was in the state I had been striving for each night for three or four years steady. A grand feeling . . . and then it was I picked up the phone and called AA. I called

again and again each number listed in the Metropolitan Washington Directory until I blacked out. By noon the next day I had taken my last drink, had promised to try the first twenty-four hours. There have been so many first twenty-four hours since. Thank God!

I believe that the First Step cannot be worked successfully until one can accept. In other words, quit fighting it. This has been said many times in many ways, but tonight it held full meaning to me, without resenting that I can't take a first drink or thinking that maybe I can indulge in a year or two or wondering why I can't have just one with the gang. No sir—quit fighting it—all the way!

B. K., Washington, D. C.

These Freedoms

At a recent meeting I heard a comparison drawn between the principles we AAs believe in and practice and the freedoms AA affords us, and the freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this great nation. As I listened I got a better understanding of what a truly great privilege it is to be a citizen of this wonderful nation and to belong to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, which I believe affords its members more freedom than any society known to me.

Some of Abe Lincoln's words passed through my mind: "Our fathers brought forth . . . a new nation . . . dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . . . testing whether . . . any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. . . ."

Our pilgrim fathers imbued us with many hates and prejudices,

such as spiritual pride, superiority of race, and many others which we haven't easily forgotten. We haven't grown up as a nation easily or without pain. It has taken generations of slow progress and of holding to the principles which we believe to be right. As a nation we have gone through many dark times and have been threatened by many dangers. We have been able so far to defend ourselves successfully and somehow I believe that as long as we practice the principles of democracy we have an ally none of our enemies have ever recognized or understood — a power greater than ourselves.

In a similar manner, through a series of defeats and disasters of a few individuals, the seed of an idea which became an inspiration was planted in the mind of a man. This seed took life and bore fruit and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous

came into being—the result of the many many prayers for such a miracle. Not the prayers of the victims alone, for we seldom knew ourselves what we needed or wanted beyond the next drink, but the prayers of the twenty or more others who loved and suffered with each of us.

Alcoholics Anonymous developed a Bill of Rights, so to speak, in the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. A Bill of Rights, if you please, which embodies a set of principles which we must believe in and try to practice if we are to recover and live sober happy useful lives. Just as our country has met with dangers from abroad, AA has been able to withstand all threats and dangers from outside interference in our affairs. Somehow I believe if either our na-

tion or AA ever should suffer major defeat it would come from deterioration from inside our country or our society rather than from outside. What is democracy if not a set of principles, a set of ideals? What are our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions if not a set of principles which become ideals toward which we work?

As I listened at this meeting, with these thoughts passing through my mind, I pictured this wonderful country of ours as it must appear to the oppressed peoples of the world. Then I pictured Alcoholics Anonymous as a beautiful oasis in the vast burning desert, for this is what life means to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Anon., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Desire Or Craving?

I HAVE been asked many times why I will not take the first drink. I have also asked myself the same question many times since I have been in AA in order to be honest with myself. I had to search my past

and found that alcohol had only been a symptom. The real reason was in the Fourth Step: if I could analyze myself and try and utilize the Twelve Steps I would not have that insidious craving for the first drink.

I have been sober, God willing, eleven years. My story was truly fantastic. I drank for nine years. The last nine months led me to a condition that proves that only AA, God and a miracle could take the craving for a drink away from me.

In the last nine months of my drinking career, I went from one hundred and fifty pounds to ninety pounds; went to six hospitals to try and stop drinking; locked wards, strapped down many times, always blaming my wife, a non-alcoholic. I could not put the blame on alcohol. Finally, through a non-alcoholic, Myrtle called AA.

When we arrived in front of the Anona Club in Miami, eleven years ago, here is what people saw: a very attractive, intelligent woman, red-headed; also two red-headed boys, ages twelve and six, and a non-alcoholic friend who drove us to the Club. When the AA members took a look at me, here is what they saw: my height was hard to tell, because I couldn't stand up. I weighed close to ninety pounds. My eyes were bloodshot, my color was yellow, caused by drinking paraldehyde with goof balls and paragoric and olive oil. My hair was red: the only natural thing I had. As they have often

told me, I didn't shake, I vibrated. I went to another hospital to get sober.

To the alcoholic who thinks he has to drink again in the Big Book after the Twelve Steps in Chapter Five is a description of how it works:

We were alcoholics and could not manage our own lives:

Probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism:

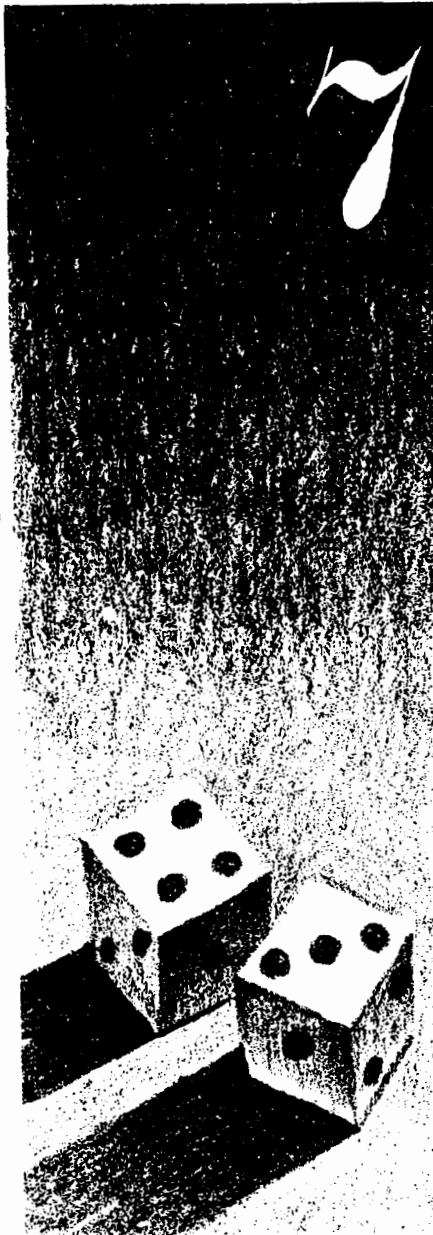
God could and would help us if sought.

In my humble opinion, this proves that only God can take that insidious craving away. I firmly believe that the craving never returns until we take the first drink. I have asked myself many times, "Why won't you take the first drink?"

In eleven years I have had many desires and many emotional upsets. In my ninth year I went through a crisis, or perhaps a test, that lasted close to a year. Thank God I met Ken B. from Toronto. Through a blind man I began to see the light. He told me that I would have to get down on my knees to get back on my feet.

The tenth year has been the most wonderful one I have had—gratitude against attitude. When your thinking gets stinking ask yourself, "Have I got a desire or have I got craving." Then thank God today that your craving has never returned. I don't have to take a drink. I thank God for AA and I thank AA for God.

*Red and Myrtle A.
Miami, Florida*



Come 11

ARE we not gambling with our sobriety when we fail to hit seven and eleven regularly on our Twelfth Step Program of recovery?

Step Seven suggests that we: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings," and Step Eleven suggests that we have: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

We have seen over years at AA meetings a vast multitude of people who are sober and have been that way for a considerable period of time. We note, however, that these sober members could be classified into at least two quite different categories:

(a) Those who have attained a refreshing, cheerful, pleasurable, easy-going, even exhilarated sobriety.

(b) Those who carry sobriety like a burden and seem exhausted, weary, tired and even pained with their role in every-day living.

Both of these groups have attended many meetings, both have followed the inventory steps and have actively engaged in Twelfth Step work.

We fully appreciate that in each of the groups aforementioned each person is by nature a distinctly different individual and we know this phenomenon existed before he drank and is expected to continue after he has attained his sobriety. What we are exploring, however, is not individual differences between people, but the difference in the over-all impact of the AA program on one large body of members as distinct from another large segment of its membership.

Could it be that by exercising self-discipline and attending meetings and doing a certain amount of Twelfth Step work, one group has attained principally physical sobriety and that mental sobriety and poise come only from a Power greater than ourselves, whom some of us choose to call God? Could it be that we can completely relax only when we no longer fear; that we will continue to fear as long as we rely on our own strength and power; that we will lose our fear when we experience a new surge of power within us; that we will experience this new surge of power and control either suddenly or gradually only when we contact the source of higher Power available to us? In other words, could it be that the principal difference between the two sober persons aforementioned is that the one person is gambling with his sobriety by not "hitting" Steps Seven and Eleven regularly, whereas the other person has gotten sobriety plus by obtaining a continuous flow of

greater Power through attention to Steps Seven and Eleven.

Are not some of us so willing to settle for only physical sobriety that we go through life with a lot less than we could get from the AA program? We are so glad to wade in the cool water of physical sobriety that we fail to move all the way into the deep pool of relaxed and zestful living. We succeed in getting out of the stormy sea of alcohol to hold on to the boat by our own efforts when, by climbing all the way in, we could enjoy the warm comforts of the inner cabin of pleasurable living.

Could it be that although our lives can be re-formed by our attention to a portion of the AA program, they can only be transformed by the type of Power connection we are advised to make in Steps Seven and Eleven? In effecting this transformation, by an inflow of divine Power, should we not keep ever present in our minds the fact that the type of prayer and meditation called for is not an occasional request at bedtime. Emerson wrote: "It is not only when we audibly and in form address our petitions to the Deity that we pray. We pray without ceasing. Every secret wish is a prayer."

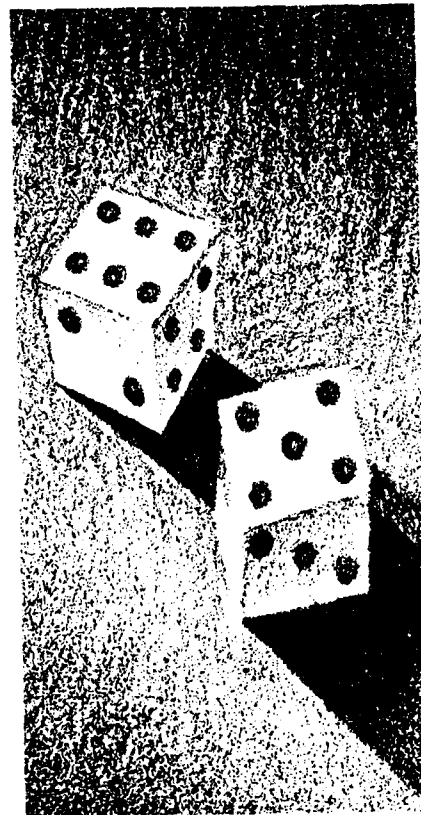
If we occasionally pray for a removal of our shortcomings and for an inflow of new power, but then spend the rest of our time secretly resenting the fact that we can no longer drink, and secretly desiring a miracle which will enable us to resume our drinking careers then

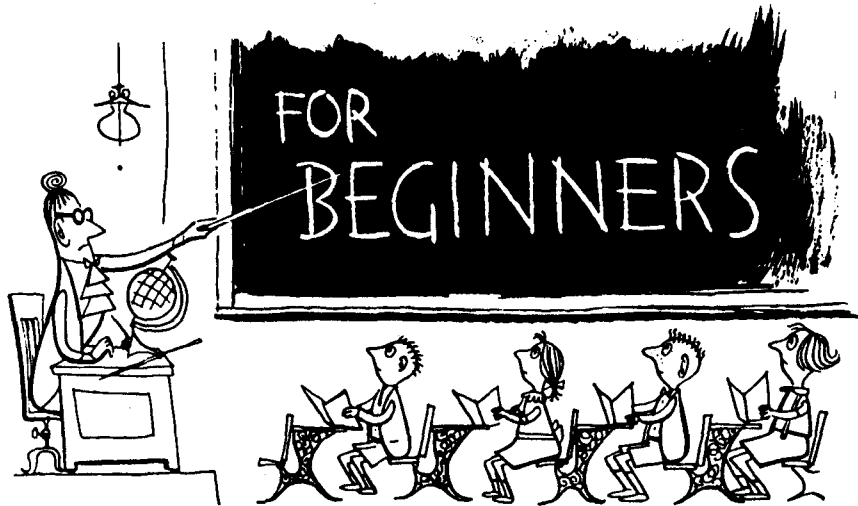
are we not canceling the effect of our formal prayers by our secret wishes and desires?

Steps Seven and Eleven, properly understood and sincerely followed, can bring about a new power which will effectively dissolve any secret desires to return to a life of alcohol.

Why gamble with our most precious possession—our sobriety? Let's take a long look at Seven and Eleven and start hitting these numbers regularly in our AA program.

Anon., Los Angeles, California





One of a series of "Beginners' Meetings"—to run from time to time—for newcomers to AA sobriety.

Sobriety 1 - 2 - 3

I NOW believe that sobriety comes to us one-two-three. Perhaps not quite as fast as we can count it but very likely through the process described in Steps One, Two, and Three of our Suggested Twelve Steps.

At one time I was convinced that sobering up or stopping drinking was a personal, separate thing, which we did in our own way and for our own individual reasons. Then when we had stopped, we looked to AA, its Twelve Steps and its total program for a way of life that would enable us to live successfully without alcohol.

Now I believe and suggest to you that Steps One-Two-Three can truly

be considered the sobering up Steps which perhaps many if not all of us followed when we first stopped drinking. This may be true even for those who had not read or heard of the formal written Steps. The procedure was similar. The Steps were written principally as a record of not only the experience of the first hundred in AA but also of all of us who have followed.

A friend of ours, now in Florida, wrote recently on the occasion of his fifth anniversary. He was recalling the day in 1955 when two of us visited his home to take him to a hospital after a binge of many months. He wrote, "I knew I was

beaten and was beginning to see there was a chance for me too, if I stopped insisting on getting my own way and let God guide my life." In this sentence we have Steps One-Two-Three all rolled up into one statement. No, he didn't say that he followed Steps One-Two-Three, maybe he hasn't yet realized just what happened. It might even surprise him to know that he wrote an abbreviated version of these Steps in his letter, when he described his recovery.

So, too, is it with so many of us. An older friend who listened to many separate discussions and analyses of Steps One-Two-Three during closed meetings always insisted that he took the first three Steps, all at one time, just as he used to take his booze—one big three ounce drink in one big gulp, not measuring out each ounce or analyzing each part thereof. Some are fortunate! They can benefit from the experience of others.

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol. . . that our lives had become unmanageable." This, of course, is an essential part of realizing our plight and doing something about it. It is, however, no more important than the other two parts. Considered alone it would leave us powerless in an unmanageable life.

Then, "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Now we were moving in the right direction and continuing the same thought.

"Came to believe . . ." How truly descriptive of the actual happening. To some, belief came swiftly, perhaps almost as soon as it was suggested or the thought occurred. To others it came later and more slowly. We won't try to ponder why. Time and patience should be an important factor. We will just recognize the facts of life. With all, conditions and circumstances are different. Outside forces and influences plus inner conflict and disturbances have much to do with our individual ability to believe that hope and help can come to us.

Our contribution is to remove the clouds of alcohol, to let the light of belief come through. When we deny ourselves daily a ray of hope appears and the promise of belief shines more brightly.

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." This the third part of a powerful entity. Here we decide that it is not nearly so important to do what we want to do as it is to do what is wanted of us.

"Made a decision. . ." This is the turning point. We are definitely headed in the right direction. Not everything will be smooth from now on but we learn that it is the right road, however bumpy it may be. We decide to make the effort to follow the road which our Creator intended for us.

AA has recorded for us in Steps One-Two-Three, the manner in which many thousands have first be-

come sober. It is a three part recitation of a successful formula.

Could it be that those who are still fighting booze or who thus far have been unable to eliminate it from their lives, are overlooking one or more parts of this formula? Maybe they are using their own unproved method. Perhaps they could follow the old quip, "When all else fails, try following directions." At least it might be well for them to check Steps One-Two-Three to see if their procedure is complete or whether it might be lacking a part or two.

Perhaps for some, a part of this formula may now seem impossible or distasteful. To them we suggest serious, honest consultation with someone who has successfully followed AA's suggestion. Frequent attendance at meetings, plus the practice of as much of the program as is possible to you, may bring success. Steps One-Two-Three are simple, don't complicate them.

You may recall that a certain paragraph contained in the big book *Alcoholics Anonymous* told us that, "Willingness, honesty, and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery."

If we were to transpose these qualifications and rearrange their order to *honesty, open mindedness and willingness*—their initials H-O-W would not only spell out how it is done; how we recover and how we become sober; but also they would be in the same sequences as Steps One-Two-Three.

Not too much imagination is needed to relate Step One to honesty. This was our first effort toward honesty in many years when we finally admitted we were powerless and that our lives were unmanageable.

Step Two calls for an open mind, which permits us to believe that we can be helped, by a Power greater than all of us. An open, receptive mind acknowledges that we are not different; that recovery is possible as it has been for others, if we seek it and accept it. Our long time feeling of hopelessness, discouragement and despair disappear.

Willingness is a most fitting one-word description for Step Three. Our willingness was most evident when we made a decision that eventually enabled us to entrust ourselves and our lives to the care of One more powerful than we. A willingness to be guided, encouraged and led from the destructive errors of our drinking habits has helped many attain sobriety.

Steps One-Two-Three synchronized with honesty, open mindedness and willingness would sound like a tremendous task, were it not for the fact that many thousands have already travelled this path. It becomes possible when we are honestly willing to do what we learn is for our good. We avoid the first drink one day at a time. This we do with the aid of a higher Power and the assistance of the AA program.

(End)

May 1960

PLAYING A VITAL PART

IT is often asked, "What earthly good is AA in prison?" To this I can only say that we build the foundation of good living while we are here in the hopes that some day, upon our release from here, we can put this knowledge into effect and never again come back to one of these places. Of course, some of us stumble and come back, only because we have missed the boat along the line. But if we take the program seriously and work it into our lives according to the Twelve Suggested Steps, in the long run, we will succeed.

Since its inception at this unit, Alcoholics Anonymous has been of definite rehabilitative value in our midst. AA has not only proved to be one of our greatest morale builders but we also find that AA meets a need for a specific type of therapy that was lacking for us prior to AA.

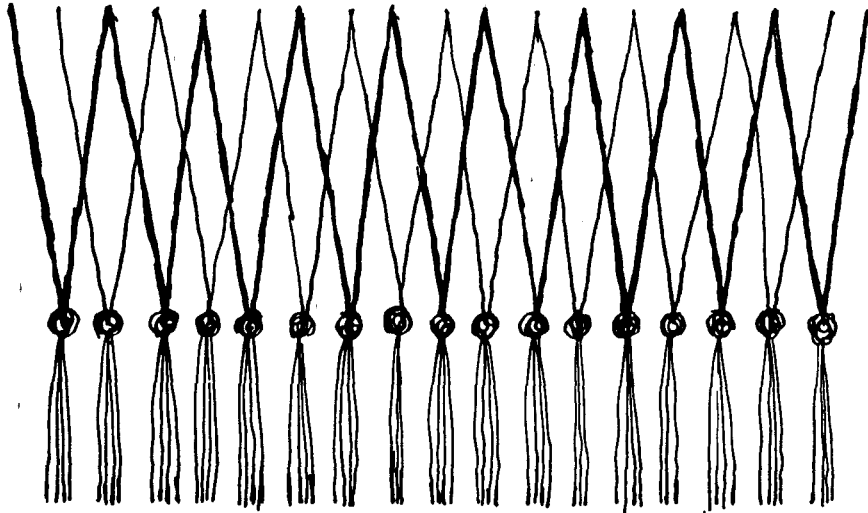
Most inmates attending have an element of humility about them.

Some members of the group originally carried a chip on their shoulders and were bitter at the whole world. Now they seem to have the appearance of persons who have discarded a whole burden.

As one who definitely needs the program, I believe that our meetings have a tendency to stabilize the insecure, encourage the timid to speak up and the over-boastful to be less boastful and, for the problem drinker, the program at least starts him thinking. The therapeutic value of AA is unquestionable. Our meetings are occasions for an exchange of ideas. AA's philosophy develops sincerity, understanding, and even brotherly love.

We are proud of our AA program and extremely grateful for the assistance rendered by the various AA groups in the different towns, cities, units and other institutions.

J. D. W., Huntsville, Texas



Golden Fringe Benefit

WHEN I tucked my little daughter into bed last night, she put her arms around my neck, gave me a big hug and said happily: "Oh Mommy, you take care of me." Patty is just four and a half years old, but her trust in me is one of the most gratifying rewards of sobriety.

What prompted her comment was the result of a Twelfth Step call I had received that morning. It was from a woman I had introduced to AA a few months ago, but she wasn't ready to accept her alcoholism and the help AA could give her.

When she called yesterday she was desperate. She had been drinking

heavily for nearly a week and wanted help badly. I went to her home to see how I could help her. She lives alone with her five-year-old son. Her husband left when he could no longer tolerate her drinking.

The house was a shambles when I arrived. There were dishes caked with stale food sitting on the furniture. Clothes were strung every where. Her boy's toys were scattered all over the living-room floor. There were empty beer cans, part of a bottle of wine and part of a bottle of vodka strewn in the kitchen. There was the musty smell of stale alcohol and smoke. The woman was helplessly

drunk and crying. She wore a torn housecoat. Her son was only partly dressed and was wearing a pair of mismatched socks.

I stayed there for a little while trying to figure out what would be the best thing to do. Then I decided to bring her to my home for the day. I could not leave her alone for she was in no shape to take care of herself and certainly couldn't take care of her son.

After I got her home, I put her to bed. Her little boy said he was hungry so I fed him and left him to play with my daughter. The woman slept for a few hours and when she awoke she wasn't in quite such an alcoholic fog. I got her to eat and spent the rest of the afternoon talking with her. Then she asked if I would take her home, get medical help for her, and ask one of her neighbors to take care of her boy. This I did.

I had had to take Patty with me on this call. A youngster her age can be quite perceptive and perhaps the things she witnessed that day had stirred up old memories within her.

When she was three, alcohol was the most important thing in my life. I resented having her around me in the house because I wanted to drink in peace. I would put her out in the back yard, then would pass out while she was outside alone.

There were times when she would run away and I would not locate her for an hour or more. One day, when she had been missing only a short time, I went out to the street and

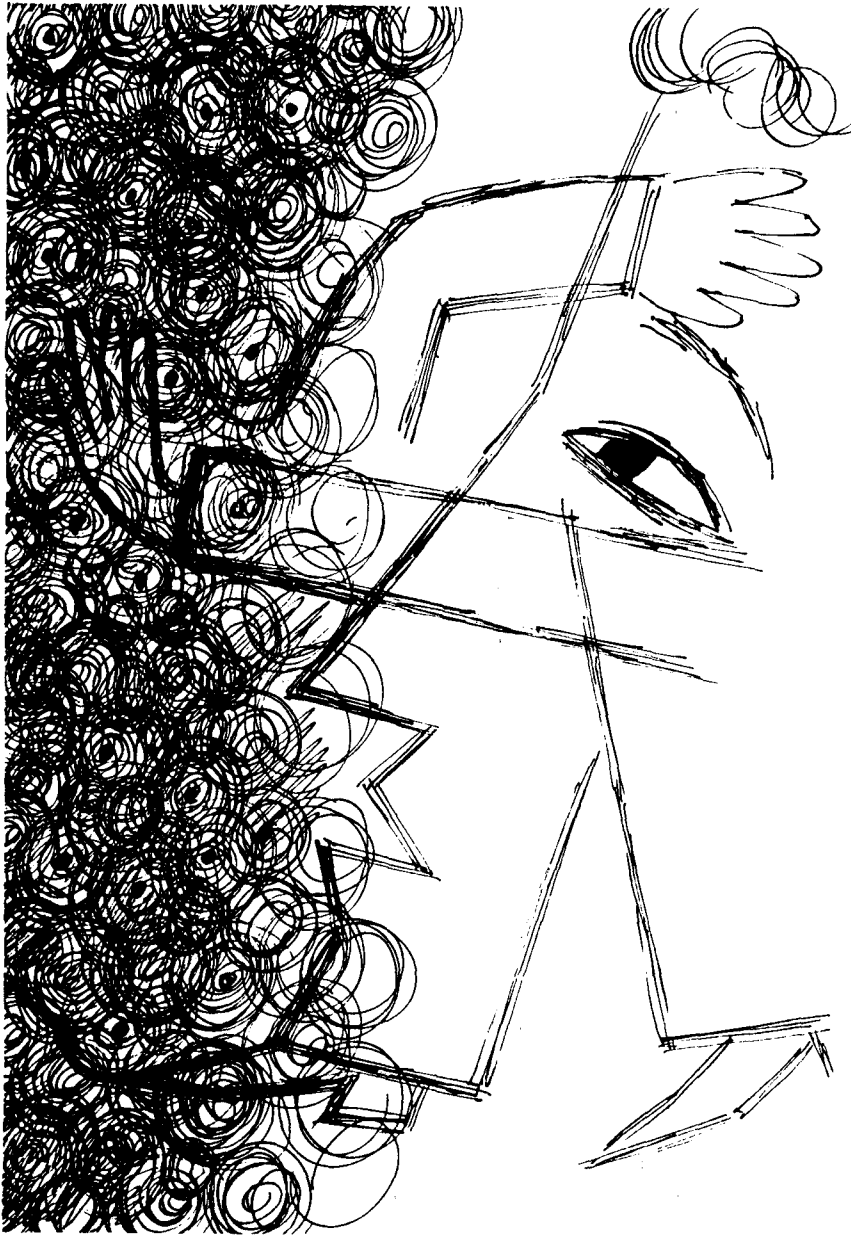
flagged down a car. I asked the driver to help me find my little girl. I had a general idea in which direction she had gone. We drove to a state highway about two blocks from our home, and I saw her go across. She passed through six lanes of traffic on this busy highway and got across safely. I sat in the car watching her in helpless panic, yet this did not shock me into sobriety. I continued to drink heavily that year. I was hospitalized many times for alcoholism. During all the special days of the year like her birthday, Fourth of July, Halloween, Christmas—all the days which can be such gay events for a child—I was either in the hospital or too befogged with alcohol to do anything festive. I was not ready for sobriety and AA's help until my last hospitalization a year and half ago. Then the realization finally struck deep within me that I was destroying myself and this in turn was destroying my family and home.

Last year we didn't miss a holiday. They were all exciting and thrilling events that she talked about for days afterwards. But even more important is that I now possess the ability to assume my day-to-day responsibilities as a mother; I am able to meet emergencies, like the day she got hold of a bottle of deadly ant poison. I thanked God then that I was sober and able to rush her to the doctor in time.

Yes, Patty, Mommy can take care of you today.

G. M., Sunnyvale, California

Stepping Back To Sanity



BEFORE you found AA, do you remember reaching for a drink in the morning with a desperate desire for oblivion? I knew in my heart that it meant another long day of suffering—of shame and bitter remorse. Then followed a night of turning and tossing and a broken nightmare of sleep. Tomorrow would be the same, or perhaps worse. People and issues had to be avoided. Get out of sight and hearing of the boss, friends and family; they neither understand nor care. Just don't bother me; let me suffer—but don't touch my liquor or I'll go out of my mind. What did I say—out of my mind? Yes, out of my mind!

A prominent authority on mental research has said that most misery in life comes from selfishness. If we think of every situation in terms of the way it affects us, if we demand to hold the center of attention, if we are forever seeking praise, if we resent the success of a friend, if we carry gnawing resentments in our minds, if we often complain, if we have a morbid self-consciousness, then we are mentally sick.

I've heard many speakers in AA meetings say that they don't know when they became alcoholics. I don't know either. Neither do I know when I started to lose my mental balance; but when I felt the loss and recog-

nized some of the symptoms of insanity, it was too late to do much about it. I consulted three different doctors. I tried to tell my friends and my wife and a clergyman how I felt, but they looked at me with what I felt was criticism and pity—criticism, I thought, because I didn't have the guts to snap out of it and quit my worrying, and pity, it seemed to me, because I was afraid of everybody and everything. If someone spoke harshly to me it would make me cry.

Much as I hated to spend the money, I paid sixty-five dollars to a psychiatrist for three consultations. Each call relieved me for a few days but offered no solution or lasting help. In fact, I felt I could detect the same look of pity from the psychiatrist that I had experienced with the others.

I then prayed for guidance and understanding. My prayers were surely answered, for within two weeks I was in the hands of capable doctors at a mental clinic and a week later I found a bed at a fine psychiatric hospital. By this time I was both a physical and mental wreck. I'd lost thirty pounds and couldn't get through a day without tranquilizers and couldn't sleep without heavy sedation.

It took nineteen weeks of treat-

ment by wonderful nurses and specialized doctors to bring me back nearly to normal; but don't think for one minute that recovery was complete. The time came when everything had been done that could be done, so far as treatment and medicine were concerned. My good doctor told me that the rest of the cure lay within myself. I must get rid of self-pity, resentment, greed and all the other defects of character I had been nursing.

Where was I to turn? Well, I knew there was just one move—to my Higher Power and to the Twelve Steps. These had given me strength to overcome alcoholism eleven years before and I had sadly neglected them recently.

I began by praying to God each morning and evening and several times through the day. This helped, but it was not enough. I had to help someone else. The man in the next bed to me in the hospital was an alcoholic, so we talked and shared our troubles and blessings together. I looked around and found others who were more than willing and eager to share. This was the turning point, the beginning of my recovery.

In our ward there were many types of patients; just about the same cross-section you'd find at an AA meeting. There were three doctors, a lawyer, three university students, accountants, salesmen, a union organizer, several business executives, and a surprising number of young men in their twenties.

One day I had a visit from an old friend. He was an alcoholic himself, but was always cheerful, out-giving and unselfish. He let down his hair and told me his secret of happiness. Every day he selected five different people and prayed for them individually. He asked God to give these people their needs and to give them wisdom and unselfishness. He never prayed for himself. He told me in no uncertain terms: "There's not a damned thing wrong with you that God cannot heal."

I started using his recipe the next day, and have never looked back. Three weeks after his visit, I was allowed to leave the hospital for parts of a day at a time. In six weeks I was back home and on my job again. Of course, I have to take it easy. When things get hectic and I feel tense, I stop and relax and do something for someone. It may just be making a phone call or mailing someone a greeting card, or taking home a little gift for my wife, but it's something to make me think of someone besides myself.

It's eleven years since I've had a drink. If we are to avoid alcoholic hell, we just don't take a drink. If we are to avoid mental hell, we must continually live the way we are supposed to live—without the shortcomings we acknowledge in AA. We must also share our lives with others and thank God every day for our many blessings. The whole solution still lies in the *working* of the Twelve Steps. *Fred C., Ontario*

In those days I was worried about my friends and about every drunk I met. As a matter of fact all my activities consisted in persuading drunks to stop drinking. I talked to them, took them home and declared them alcoholics and so on. But if they didn't like the Twelve Steps and Traditions I did nothing. About two years I ran about like that. I was still sober all right, but I grew unhappier and unhappier.

Then I got disappointed because no one stayed sober. The public opinion in this country is against AA, I decided, and the alcoholics here are not like in the U.S.A. and the Twelfth Step doesn't fit in the process. Of course, I dropped flat, as you will understand, and I was back in the same misery of booze as before I came to AA. After a few weeks of drinking, one day I was not able to work anymore. Sick and miserable, I looked at the print on the wall and something flashed through my brain. Suddenly the real meaning of our Serenity Prayer (for this was the print on the wall) occurred to me. I understood that all the time I had been busy changing other people instead of myself and I had forgotten the fact that there was only one reason and purpose in AA. To keep sober myself; without the Twelve Steps I would never reach this. A

warmer and happier feeling was inside me after this day and I looked with other eyes to the Twelve Steps and the correspondence and literature from American friends. The sign on the wall is for myself and it looks clear and bright now on this first day of 1960 when I am writing this letter to my American friends. About five years ago my eyes were opened and step by step, day by day, I am learning of you all.

When I now read the letter just received from the Pioneer Group (a prison group), Walla Walla, Washington, I could never have imagined that not taking the first drink could bring so much happiness in one's life. The publications of the Pioneer Group helped and encouraged me to start AA work in the Rotterdam prison and now they are thanking me for doing so. The Pioneer Group have adopted the new group in the Rotterdam prison, send letters and literature and help in many ways.

How to express my feelings and thoughts in my poor knowledge of your language? Can I explain, and hope sincerely I can, to all who read these lines that AA does not know frontiers and that love and friendship beat all liquors, if we look at the sign on the wall. A blessed 1960 to all of you in AA world-wide.

B. R., Rotterdam, Holland

WALLA WALLA'S PIGEON IS A PRISON GROUP IN *Holland*

ON the wall of my room hangs a print. When I look up from this writing it seems very clear and encouraging to me. Years ago it has found its way to my home across the

ocean and at that time it was the first page of the Grapevine. The real value didn't occur to me but it was a nice print and on the wall my friends could see how wonderful AA is.

**STREETS ARE NAMELESS—
PITY THE TWELFTH STEPPER IN**

japan

THE news from Tokyo and the surrounding areas is fairly good. In the year I have been here, three new groups have started. We had our second annual convention on May 14 in Tokyo. Two of the boys

from Okinawa, Gib and Red, came up for it. About fifty attended including the Al-Anons, a reporter from our *Stars and Stripes*, our Chaplain, and one of the doctors from our local dispensary. All thought this was a tremendous success, and we hope to have one yearly.

Keeping the members together is a problem though, as liquor in Japan is not only cheap but easily available. However, that should not be our problem. We alcoholics would always find a way to obtain a drink regardless of the price, or how hard it was to get. Why then let being in Japan affect us? I think our trouble is the difficulty of getting around, and attending the meetings. The roads are miserable — very few streets are marked—and the traffic is something I could not begin to describe. I understand they do have traffic laws, which no one seems to pay any attention to. When driving around here, one does not say, “How far is it?” but, “How long will it take me to drive it?” This excerpt from the *Japan Times* graphically illustrates this complexity.

“ . . . Have you ever noticed the map which is posted at the entrance corner to the American Club? It is a little colored map about three feet square painted on tin and prominently placed for the convenience of the public. It is called an *Annai Chizu* which means guide map. There are thousands of these maps on prominent corners all over the residential areas of Tokyo. The size of each map depends on the size of the area it

covers. They are of little help to foreigners, but to the Japanese they are very useful. . . .

“ . . . Suppose, for example, Shiranai San meets a friend and invites him to come to dinner. They exchange cards and the conversation goes something like this after the formal bows and greetings:

“ ‘Oh, thank you so much. You say you live in Mamiana. I wonder where that is and how can I find your honorable house. Please excuse me for asking.’

“ ‘Just take the streetcar to the Azabu Post Office. You surely know where that is.’ Mr. Shiranai explains. ‘Then walk back to the little fish shop and there you will find the guide map on the corner. My miserable home is clearly shown on this map with my name. Follow the first narrow lane to the left after passing the small temple and it is the seventh house on the right hand side. You can recognize it immediately by the large maple tree that peers over the fence. I’ll be waiting for you. Dozo.’

“ ‘Oh, yes, now I know exactly how to get there,’ replies his friend. ‘These maps are truly most helpful. Thank you so much. I will arrive at exactly six o’clock.’ And he does so with ease, thanks to the *Annai Chizu*.

“There is no city ordinance which requires the posting of these community maps. They are the product of an enterprising community which realizes how necessary they could be for people trying to find other people in this amazing city where streets

have no names and house numbers don't mean a thing. . . ."

I would like to take you all on a typical Twelfth Step call with me. The call will come from either the Chaplain or one of the doctors telling me that they have had a call from a lady in the area of G. H., and could I call her and make the call. I make the telephone call, and yes she wants to talk to someone in AA. With the address in my bag, along with the literature, I start out. It is a fifteen mile drive to this home, which will take about forty-five minutes driving time. The roads are narrow; many people, in dark clothes, are walking along the barely two lane road, along with the hundreds of bicycles and motorcycles. I try to successfully dodge all these obstructions, keeping my eyes on the road for the unexpected holes, telephone poles partially out in the road, and the landmark I must find to make the right turn. After many of these landmark turns, I arrive at my destination.

After a two or three hour visit, make arrangements for her to attend the next meeting, which may be in one of the seven areas, or, try to find the closest place, by driving time, not miles, for her to attend. With a promise to call her the next morning,

I start on my return trip, hoping and praying someone has not torn down one of those landmarks since I drove over it a few hours before. Everything seems fine until I come to a road barricade—the road crews have decided to repair a stretch of road, and I must make a detour. At this point I am completely lost and instead of arriving back home in the usual forty-five minutes' time, it is two or three hours later.

To many of you readers this may sound like an impossible story, but I can assure you that this is typical of some of our conditions here in the Far East. I have made calls under these exact conditions, as have many of the other alcoholics here. Rarely do I hear anyone complain about these all night trips. We just thank God, as we understand Him, we are *able now* to make them, and keep saying, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The groups in the areas of Tachikawa, Yokota, Johnson, Grant Heights, Green Park and Yokohama send their friends all over the world their best wishes.

J. R. H., Tokyo, Japan

... comes the moment to decide ...

“**M**ADE a decision. . . .” The opening words of the Third Step have an especially wide application for most of us in AA. To me, this business of making a decision goes far beyond its specific Third Step meaning of turning our lives over to a Higher Power and into the more ordinary machinery of day-to-day living.

An AA friend writes me that “making decisions is something that we either did compulsively and incorrectly or never at all because we were blanketed in so much fear of making the wrong ones.” This may overstate the case slightly, for I’m sure I’m not the only drunk who can look back on some impulsive and besotted decisions that turned out, happily, to be quite correct, and more recently some sober ones that have been nearly disastrous. Still, I know very well what she means and I have qualified more times than I care to re-

member in both divisions, going off half-cocked and being tied by fear and guilt to an immobility only a hair’s breadth from the catalytic frozen stance of insanity.

How can AA help this decision-making business that crowds our lives? When can we trust ourselves to start making important decisions? What is the answer to the hard fact that sober decisions may very well still be poor ones?

I can’t answer these key questions for anyone else, but an exploration of my own continuing attempts to face and solve them may have some signpost meaning for others. And, as in an AA talk, the re-examination will be helpful to me.

The word *decision* occurs only once in the Twelve Steps, but the implication of decision and techniques for improving our decision-making abilities runs through the whole program, through the Slogans, the

Twelve Steps, the Serenity Prayer and the Big Book.

The fact that we are attempting to work the AA program in the first place is the largest and most important evidence of decision most of us are likely to find, however long we are in AA. Almost universally, before coming to AA, we have spent—wasted—time, measured in months or years, refusing to admit the true nature of our problem. We have spent this time pursuing scapegoats with rod, gun and rationalization, trying to pin the blame for our problems on everything under the sun (and full moon) save only booze.

The awakening that comes to each of us in his own way is an act of decision, and a big one. It is so big a one that most of us are advised to rest on-it for a while, to absorb and use some of the mental ballast that AA offers, before exercising decisiveness on every other problem.

If we accept the general precept that it takes months before an alcoholic’s brain is unsnarled from the knots of a drinking career, we can understand why most AAs counsel caution and slowness regarding major decisions by newcomers.

How do you know when you are ready to make decisions? There can be no hard and fast rule here, but I would suggest, paradoxically, that most of us are not ready to make our own decisions until we begin to accept some reservations about our own abilities—in short, until we are willing not only to ask for, but even

sometimes to act upon, the advice of those friends in or out of AA whose opinions we profess to respect.

As further guidance, I have found it helpful to go from small decisions to larger ones and to use the Serenity Prayer as a constant protection against stubbed toes on the one hand, and alibis for oneself on the other. Don’t decide to enroll in medical school at the age of forty before deciding whether or not you can clean out the cellar. Don’t decide against cleaning out the cellar because its mess is one of the *things you cannot change*; it isn’t. Don’t expect the immediate abolition of capital punishment or the institution of sane drug addiction laws simply because they are *things you have the courage to change*; such matters may be changeable, but the process is slow and not likely to be your doing alone.

Above all, don’t assume that, because you may now be trusted to buy a commuting ticket from Westport to New York without winding up in Antigua, B.W.I., you have inherited a right to make decisions on everything from your daughter’s hairdo to the dinner menus for next June. Try, inasmuch as possible, to limit your decisions to matters that are truly your own business, and also, inasmuch as possible, to things within the magical twenty-four hour limit. When we use decisions to attempt to dictate the lives of others (the nearer to us, the worse, or at least the most immediately disastrous) or to control events in the future, we are past legit-

imate decision-making and back on the road of mental confusion that usually ends in a bar.

But what do we do when, having made a decision soberly and thoughtfully, everything still goes to hell? This is much simpler than it sounds. Very few decisions are ironclad and lifetime binding. Most others can and should be handled by reference to the Tenth Step: “. . . When we were wrong, we promptly admitted it.”

Naturally, this means giving each decision a fair and decent trial and not using the Tenth Step as an excuse for a weathervane existence. But the gauging of a fair try, honesty in re-assessment and ability to remake decisions all become progressively easier with practice.

The important thing is not to shirk the need for decisions when they arise and to start upon our practice

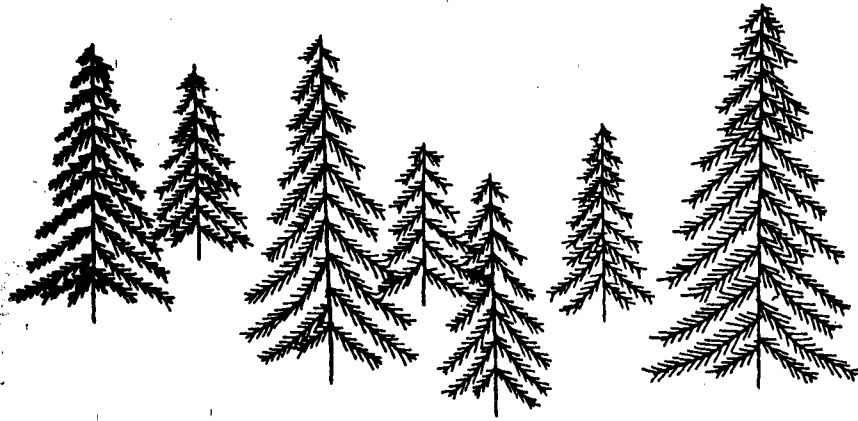
as soon as soberly and safely possible. A bad decision, which can be rectified, is often better than the dangerous drifting of no decision at all.

There is a pertinent rabbinical story about the humble member of a Hebrew congregation who was selected to sound the *shofar* or ram's horn at the synagogue. He was so flattered by the honor as to be overcome. He lifted and hefted the ram's horn and examined it from every angle. He tilted it toward the Ark and toward the ceiling. He moistened his lips and then brushed them dry on his sleeve.

The rabbi put up with almost ten minutes of this before he shouted: “For God's sake, man! Go ahead and blow!”

So be it with decisions.

A. H., San Juan, Puerto Rico



Our Greatest Christmas Gift

How better can we thank God for our sobriety than by bringing the light and hope of AA to others

THIS is the time of year when people everywhere pause in their headlong rush through life to relax for a short time, and be friendly with each other; a time when old acquaintances are renewed, families once again drawn close together, in spirit, if not in person. It is a time when old feelings of bitterness are pushed aside, enmities forgotten, and a spirit of good feeling allowed to enter into our hearts. It is a time when our own problems are forgotten, and we search our hearts for a way to bring gladness to those less fortunate than us.

To many of us this will be our first sober Christmas in many years. To some it will be a time to look back on several years of sobriety. To all, it will be a time for reflection, and a time to be thankful. Many, many Christmases before were somewhat less than happy times. As alcoholics we have all known these times. Years have been wasted, homes broken, and chances for happiness destroyed by our addiction to alcohol. But today we are sober. Today we can help someone. Today we can be useful in some way; some little way which perhaps may not seem like much, but

when all the little ways of being helpful are added together some day, there is a chance they will do much to balance the books . . . a chance that though much of our lives were spent in hopeless despair, some good may come of them yet.

For all of us in AA, there is a way in which we can bring the happiness of Christmas to many families, not just at this time of the year, but every day, through all the remaining years of our lives. For each of the many million drinking alcoholics in this country today, at least a dozen other lives are affected. For each of these same alcoholics, given an opportunity to live the AA way of life, perhaps a hundred other lives can be affected for the better, rather than the worse. This is not just a wild dream, this is true. You cannot live in accordance with the AA principles, and fail to bring about some change in the lives of all those around you.

The gift of sobriety that we have been given is the greatest gift of all. There are so many who do not yet know of our way of life. We can be of great help to these people, and to ourselves, and to the God of our understanding, by passing this gift on to those who are still caught in the trap of alcoholism.

When we think back over our lives how much can we honestly find to warrant the good that has been given to us so freely as members of AA? Can we honestly believe that we are deserving of the many blessings which have been bestowed on us?

Are we being rewarded so richly for the years we spent causing suffering, unhappiness and anguish in our own lives and the lives of every one associated with us? Certainly not. Why, then, are we sober and happy today? Why have we been shown a way to a life of peace and contentment? Why were we spared . . . we who were considered the outcasts of the world? What good could we ever possibly be to God, to ourselves, or to anyone?

We can find the answer very simply. Think for a moment of the whys and wherefores of our lives and there can be but one answer. We have suffered, yes. We have known misery and remorse and all the sordid results of alcoholism. Why? There is always a reason for what happens in our lives. We in AA have been lifted out of the gutter and transplanted into a completely new and different life. Why? Can it be because God wants us to pass this same life on to others who are still suffering the ravages of alcoholism? There can be no other answer.

Let us, therefore, continue to band together, we who alone are so weak, but together can be so strong. Let us continue to carry our message . . . let us try always to bring our light of hope into the darkness of the still suffering alcoholic's life. Let us share our gifts with the many who have yet to discover that there is a way out, and by so doing we can help keep the *Christmas spirit* prevalent all year long.

Bill O., Charleston, S. C.



NO KIDDING

One man's opinion: AA is a Fellowship
not a Friendship Club

ON my arrival at AA it was drummed into my head that the first essential for sobriety was honesty. My first act of honesty was to admit that I was powerless over alcohol. Then I was told that if I could accept a mode of living that required rigorous honesty I would have the basis for continued sobriety.

Honesty has not come overnight. Years of lying, making excuses for myself, blaming others for my failures had created deep-seated habits which have been difficult to overcome. Also, it has taken a long time for me to come to a realistic insight as to the meaning of rigorous honesty as applied to AA. To me it means that I just have to quit kidding myself. To date, my continued sobriety has come through just trying, not from having reached this goal.

I have to quit kidding myself that there is any other cause for my alco-

holism except alcohol. I believe I was not born an alcoholic; I became one. Any character defects or fixated immaturities I may have developed or acquired during my childhood years might have made my life just as fruitless and unsuccessful if I had never taken a drink. But they would not have made me an alcoholic. I could have found other means of escaping from the responsibilities of life such as feigned illness, withdrawal, barbituates or opiates. Any one of these becoming an addiction could destroy me. My crutch was alcohol, and through the development of an abnormal dependence on alcohol I became an alcoholic. If I attempt to excuse alcohol by placing the blame for my past on other causes I am in great danger of drinking again when I come to believe that these defects have been removed. No matter how much I may have improved in AA



physically, morally, intellectually or spiritually, I must remember that one drink will revive that compulsion and allergy and I will destroy everything I have built as well as myself. I am powerless over alcohol and my only reason for being in AA is to learn how to live without alcohol. No kidding.

I have to quit kidding myself that the Twelve Steps alone can keep me sober. In the early days of my sobriety I was told that if I wanted security for my sobriety I should get a "pigeon," work with others. After a few years I knew better. The Twelve Steps could insure my sobriety. I knew a lot about them and I needed nothing else, so I stopped going to meetings. AA had taught me all that was necessary. In less than three months I scampered back to AA. I was afraid. Something was missing. I discovered that the power of these Steps can only be effective for me when used in conjunction with the fellowship; the sharing of experience, strength and hope with other alcoholics. Even today, I feel that I need the other alcoholic just as much as he needs me. We read in the Big Book, Chapter Five, "what we have laid down are guides to progress"—

powerful guides, but only guides—not the whole program, just a part to be used in conjunction with all other parts of AA experience. What would have happened to me had I continued to place moral improvement and spiritual perfection ahead of sobriety, I can only conjecture. No kidding.

I must quit kidding myself that God alone can keep me sober. To rely solely on God, minus my own efforts, becomes just another crutch as shaky as alcohol. To say that "God is keeping me sober" will, if I drink again, put all the blame on Him. That I cannot do. This God (as I have come to know Him) will not do anything for me that I can do for myself. He will not knock the glass out of my hand nor paralyze my feet if they turn into a bar. To me, God is my guide, counselor, and supplier of power; I am the instrument through which He manifests. He is the director, I am the worker. Just to the extent that I can properly interpret His directions as to what I have to do to live a sober life, and just to the extent that I expend the effort necessary to put these instructions into effect, will I be able to maintain sobriety. I have the freedom to choose that which I will do and that which I will not do, but I have no power over the results. Proof that I have been following, even in a halting and a stumbling way, the directions of my Senior Partner, is the fact that I have remained sober until today. No kidding.

I must quit kidding myself that every member of AA is my bosom friend. AA to me, is not based on friendship, but fellowship. Made up as it is of many diverse personalities from all walks of life, all strata of society, all creeds, all sexes, all races, it has not necessarily the basis for friendship within it. There are many people in AA I do not like and there are probably many more who do not like me. We are bound together by one common problem and it is to the solution of this problem that we come together. I can meet with AAs in the group and go with them on Twelfth Step calls, working in harmony and unity to our own good and the good of others. I need have no communication with them in their social or business life, only in their alcoholic problem. If I try to form friendships on this basis I will be unsuccessful and the consequent frustration will breed resentments which could well affect both their sobriety and mine and prevent us from working in unity for the solution to our common problem. Live and let live. No kidding.

I must quit kidding myself that there is any permanence to my sobriety. I achieved sobriety one day at a time, I continue my sobriety just one day at a time. Length of sobriety has no significance except that of distance from the last drink. The first drink is always as close as the nearest bar and the length of my arm. Because I am sober today is no guarantee that I will get through tomorrow without a drink.

To awaken with a clear mind after a restful sleep to the joy of a new day with its new promises is the greatest pay-off of sober living. But I am still faced with the fact that I cannot see into the future. Before noon my plans may have gone awry and I may find myself faced with a greater problem than ever before. Frustration and failure could confront me. With them could come the temptation to throw up my hands and drown it all. Yesterday's sobriety will not carry me through. I must stay sober today.

I am an alcoholic, but yesterday's sobriety brings to me the recollection that I have faced many trials in the past and in the same way I can overcome those of today. I can call on the accumulated knowledge acquired during those sober days in AA, the admission that I am powerless over alcohol, that I have found a power and a courage to overcome all obstacles, that I have the experience, strength and hope, of my fellow alcoholics. By putting this knowledge into practice I will be sober today regardless of the outcome, or the solution to the problem which faces me, whether it is successfully or unsuccessfully terminated. I will have won a victory in any case, a victory over my alcoholism. One day at a time is all I can stay sober. To believe otherwise would be only kidding myself and straying from the path of rigorous honesty. No kidding.

R.M., Toronto, Ontario

Editor's Note: *Nothing delights us more than to print an article which is provocative enough to reap a harvest of replies, and no article in recent years has been so productive as "I Don't Go to Meetings Any More," published back in July. As the following article testifies valuable inventories often come out of ideas which once graped need time to ripen. (The last two references on this lively controversy appear in this issue under P. O. Box 1980.) Since we love a healthy difference of opinion perhaps this will encourage others to send in their thoughts on "not so popular attitudes which may be troubling them." Given enough material we could even start a Controversy Corner!*

People Are Like People

We continue to take a personal inventory
because all we can really change
is **OURSELVES**

IT had been several months since I had read "I Don't Go to Meetings Any More" in the July *Grapevine*, but for some reason I couldn't forget the article, or the lady who'd written it. I found myself thinking of her as I drove along at night and in the morning as I started to work.

What was it that bothered me?

Was it the people in her group she found tiresome—the two women who had first called on her she discovered didn't like each other—the speakers she didn't care for, "these disappointed thespians dredging up their pasts"—the parents who were attending meetings and neglecting their children . . . ?

Then I remembered.

I had been in that group. But the

strange thing was, it wasn't in Elmira. It was in midtown Manhattan. I had seen these same people, made these same discoveries—and not only in my home group. I had gone to California for a few months and they were there, too. They followed me. Then, back in New York again, I had tried attending another, a smaller group and . . . yes, you've guessed it, the exact same thing.

*"Everywhere I go,
I go, too,
And spoil everything."*

This had been my song, my story for ten years of drinking and I had begun to wonder if it was to be a part of my AA life as well. At this point, I think I should say, I had been sober eighteen months (the same length of time as the lady in Elmira) and there

was one fact I was forced to face: Even though I was sober, *people were still acting like people*. And one other fact—not so easy to face—I *still wanted people to change. I wanted them to be more.*

I think I was able to hide most of this—this desire to rewrite others and make them fit in with my notion of the way things should be. On the surface I'm sure I appeared calm, affable. I was grateful for my sobriety and genuinely pleased with many of the changes in my life. Yet inside, at the very same time, with some merciless inner eye, I still saw all the flaws in those around me.

Maybe there is a familiar ring to what I'm saying. "On the surface he was sober, inside nothing had changed." But for me the hell of those days—those months really—was the fact that I knew all of this. I knew all of the old tensions, the old demands and fears—fears of losing what I had, or not getting what I demanded—all of these were still there and very much a part of me. Without booze I felt I had no escape. I was a battleground inside and I was trapped, imprisoned with the conflicts. Someone, or something had to give, and from the looks of things it became pretty clear that it wasn't going to be the human race.

I don't want to sound flip about this. It was not a happy time.

I know now that my case was not unique. Many others have sobered up, learned to stay sober and then been faced with themselves and this

situation. All I'm trying to say to this lady or anyone else, who finds unhappiness in a group of people with too many human weaknesses and too wanting in those qualities we demand of others—all I have to say is—I know. I was there—and it hurts.

I wish that I had some encouraging P.S. to add, some easy gimmick to suggest . . . but why? When did any of us ever choose an easy way? I can only tell how it was for me.

For me I had to realize, admit, accept that the only change I could make was inward. Living as I was, in a state of unfulfilled demands, there could be no peace, there would be only wild frustrations eating at me—and I knew it—until I found a way of coping with these demands.

My first glint of an answer came in reading and studying Chapter Seven in the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions." Bill speaks here of reducing our demands and adds that "the difference between a demand and a simple request is plain to anyone." (Well, it was "plain" in my mind, but my problem was to accept it in my guts, and for me this was not unlike the road I had to travel before I could finally accept the fact that I was powerless over alcohol.)

The whole emphasis of Step Seven is on humility, and I found I was as unwilling to seek humility now as I had been to admit I was powerless months before. The word *powerless* repelled me then, and *humility* had no attraction now.

In a way you might say, I had to

hit another bottom, an emotional, spiritual one this time. I remember every bit of it and it was rough. I wouldn't recommend my way to anyone, but finally one night alone and lost, eaten up with old jealousies, old fears, I was fighting to hang on to the one thing I had, my sobriety. I was near an old panic that many of us know about. I couldn't, I wouldn't let myself take a drink, but I had to find a way to overcome the battle inside, to quiet the tensions. Then this happened: I knew that I had to admit I was powerless over other people. I had to admit this just as, in order to keep sober, I had to admit I was powerless over alcohol.

I can not make anyone love me, or even like me.

Oh, I still have some of my active drunk's talent to create a scene and twist a conversation so someone may be forced into saying what I want to hear, but I have no power to make anyone feel anything. All I can do is work to make myself perhaps worthy of love.

As these thoughts came to me — and they came almost in the words I've written out here—I felt a great relief. It was Armistice Day — after all these years.

After great pain, someone has said, a formal feeling comes, and maybe

inside I still feel a little stuffy, a little pompous about this ancient truth I had to discover as if it were new, but a part of me has relaxed, one of my wars is over and I like the feeling.

I know I climbed that night all the way from pride up to humility. The journey was no fun, as I have said. It was terrible and lonely, but now I believe that it is a journey all of us must make alone. There was some comfort in knowing others had made it and a kind of hope in the feeling that for me it was a journey UP to humility.

There's one more line from Step Seven I'd like to quote here for the lady from Elmira, or for anyone else who is focusing on all those faults other people have.

Bill is again speaking of humility and for me that's all right now, that word now means a goal of perspective, a sense of proportion about myself, myself in relation to other men, in relation to my God and the whole tremendous scene about me. Bill ends his Chapter Seven by saying that if humility could enable us to find the grace to banish the deadly obsession of alcohol "then there must be hope of the same result respecting any other problem we could possibly have."

Anon., New York City

No Place to Go but

The down-and-outer latched onto the Twelve Steps like a drowning man fighting for air—and took his sponsor right up the ladder with him

LIKE so many others, I did not approach Alcoholics Anonymous joyfully or even willingly. I despised what I had become and that forced me to seek help even though I believed it was hopeless.

My first knowledge of the Twelve Suggested Steps appalled me. They were so obviously based on spiritual values that I could not accept them.

In my childhood, I had had a brief contact with one who professed to be a man of God. When he said he would help me find answers to any doubts I might have, I believed him. As the result of my first innocent question, I was publicly held up to ridicule. No doubt, it seemed to him an opportunity to display his wit, but to me it was tragic.

For many years thereafter, I never willingly entered into any place of worship. Even when I grew old enough to realize I should not condemn all religion for the unkind act of an individual, I was unable to be at ease in a church or to accept emotionally any form of religious worship.

With the help of a very wise sponsor, I was able to accept, as a power greater than myself, the combined goodness I could see and feel in the other members of AA. At his suggestion, I postponed my consideration of the Third Step and tried to keep my mind open while I watched and listened to what was happening to others around me. In this way, I found something in which to believe and by which I could continue in the fellowship.

After some months, I was asked to explain the AA program to a very unlikely prospect. In fact, I was told that this man had a "wet brain" and would be able to understand little of what I might tell him. A local judge, known for his lack of sympathy for drunks, had suggested AA for him, and unaccountably placed him on probation over the objections of the probation officers. The man had, I was told, resided in the community for a little over five years, during which he had received sixty-nine jail sentences for drunkenness. He had never

worked in that time but had existed by panhandling. It was then the month of December and he had spent part or all of every month that year in the workhouse. When I met him, my heart sank because he so obviously fitted the description I had been given. He was dirty, ragged and very shaky. If there was ever a low-bottom drunk, he qualified.

Joe, which is not his name, approached the AA program very differently from the way I had. He joyfully and completely accepted all Twelve Steps from the start. He stayed sober and improved in every way. He sought and obtained better and better work, he improved financially, and gained self-respect as well as the respect of others. He was happy and had many friends.

A few months later, Joe led his first meeting. The judge who placed him on probation attended this meeting, the first real contact he had with AA. The meeting was also the occasion of a reunion between Joe and his father, after many years of estrangement.

After the meeting, Joe and I had a talk that changed my own life. I mentioned to him that I had never understood why the judge had granted him probation. Reciting all the reasons against such action, I added that, under such circumstances, judges simply did not ever grant probation. When I intimated that Joe must be as puzzled as I, the expression on his face stopped me in mid-sentence. He said he did know why he had been given probation.

Of course, I asked if he would mind explaining it to me. Joe referred to all the reasons against his probation, and then reminded me that on the morning after his arrest, he was still too drunk to stand and face the judge, so his case was continued. He then said that on his last night in jail before his hearing, he found an old and torn copy of *The Reader's Digest* that contained an article about AA, which he read. Joe told me that he was so impressed that he knelt in the cell and prayed—prayed for the first time in years.

Somewhat hesitantly, I asked him to tell me for what he had prayed and Joe told me he did not pray to be discharged. He knew, he said, that he would receive a jail sentence, since he always had. Almost in a whisper, he added "I asked that when I did get out of jail, I would meet someone from Alcoholics Anonymous, and my prayer was answered."

His sincerity could not be questioned. Although I tried, I could find no other acceptable explanation. However others may explain it, I came to believe, with Joe, that his prayers were indeed answered.

In addition to many other benefits I received from knowing Joe, he helped me break through that barrier I had built around myself which had prevented me from accepting God. I gave so very little to Joe, but in return he brought me a priceless gift. He gave me faith.

J. F., Mt. Rainier, Md.

I Knocked on the Wrong Door



*A mad mix-up of names sent the Twelfth Stepper
off on what looked like a wild-goose chase*

IN October 1958 some of us helped start a group in the VA Hospital in our city and have worked actively at it since. We have received a lot of cooperation from the staff and especially from the Protestant chaplain who is quite a dedicated man.

About three weeks ago the chaplain called me and said there was a patient on the seventh floor of the hospital who had told him he would like to talk to someone from Alcoholics Anonymous about his drinking. The chaplain couldn't remember the man's full name but said that his last name was Johnson and to go on up to that floor and the ward attendant would point him out to me. Since I was pretty much occupied with some other AA work right then and

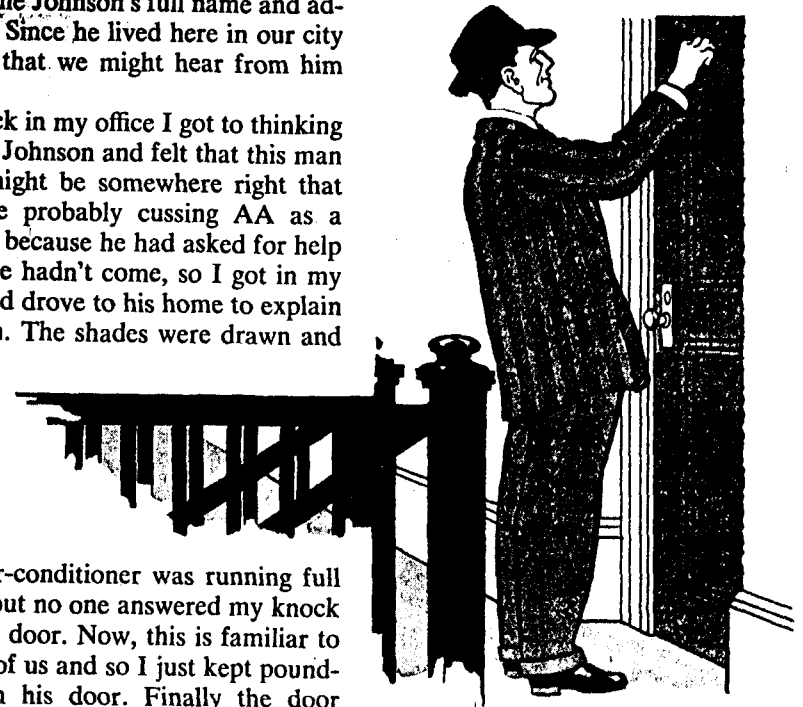
couldn't make the call myself, I called our clubhouse and turned it over to them. Usually that is all that is necessary and the call is promptly made.

On VA Hospital meeting night, a couple of days later, I went up to see Johnson and discovered that he had checked out of the hospital the day before. I didn't think too much more about it, but a week later discovered that due to a misunderstanding the call from the club had not been made and no one had contacted Johnson. This is a mistake that is sometimes made and I suppose we just goofed.

The following week, while talking with the chaplain at the hospital I told him we had missed his man, how it happened and apologized. He then called the administrative office and

gave me Johnson's full name and address. Since he lived here in our city I felt that we might hear from him again.

Back in my office I got to thinking about Johnson and felt that this man just might be somewhere right that minute probably cussing AA as a whole because he had asked for help and we hadn't come, so I got in my car and drove to his home to explain to him. The shades were drawn and



the air-conditioner was running full blast but no one answered my knock on the door. Now, this is familiar to some of us and so I just kept pounding on his door. Finally the door opened and a man stood in front of me, clad only in his britches, barely able to stand. He asked me in and I told him who I was and that I had come from AA in response to his conversation with the chaplain. He seemed rather vague on that point and kept insisting he couldn't remember talking to the chaplain about it. He was talking of suicide and was crying, laughing, heaving, and in fact just pretty damned sick. He finally said he might want to try to get sober and agreed to go to the clubhouse with me. We kept him in the club about two hours and he'd had enough. He said he wanted to leave,

so I took him to the northern part of our city to a place where his girl friend worked and let him out. I had given him a "Way of Life" pamphlet with my name and phone number on it. The last I saw of him he was weaving down the street with that little blue book sticking out of his hip pocket.

The next day I called the chaplain to tell him what happened to his man and he quickly informed me that he was indeed sorry but he had made a mistake in names and that the man he'd talked to was named Jones instead of Johnson. He said he knew Johnson but that both he and John-



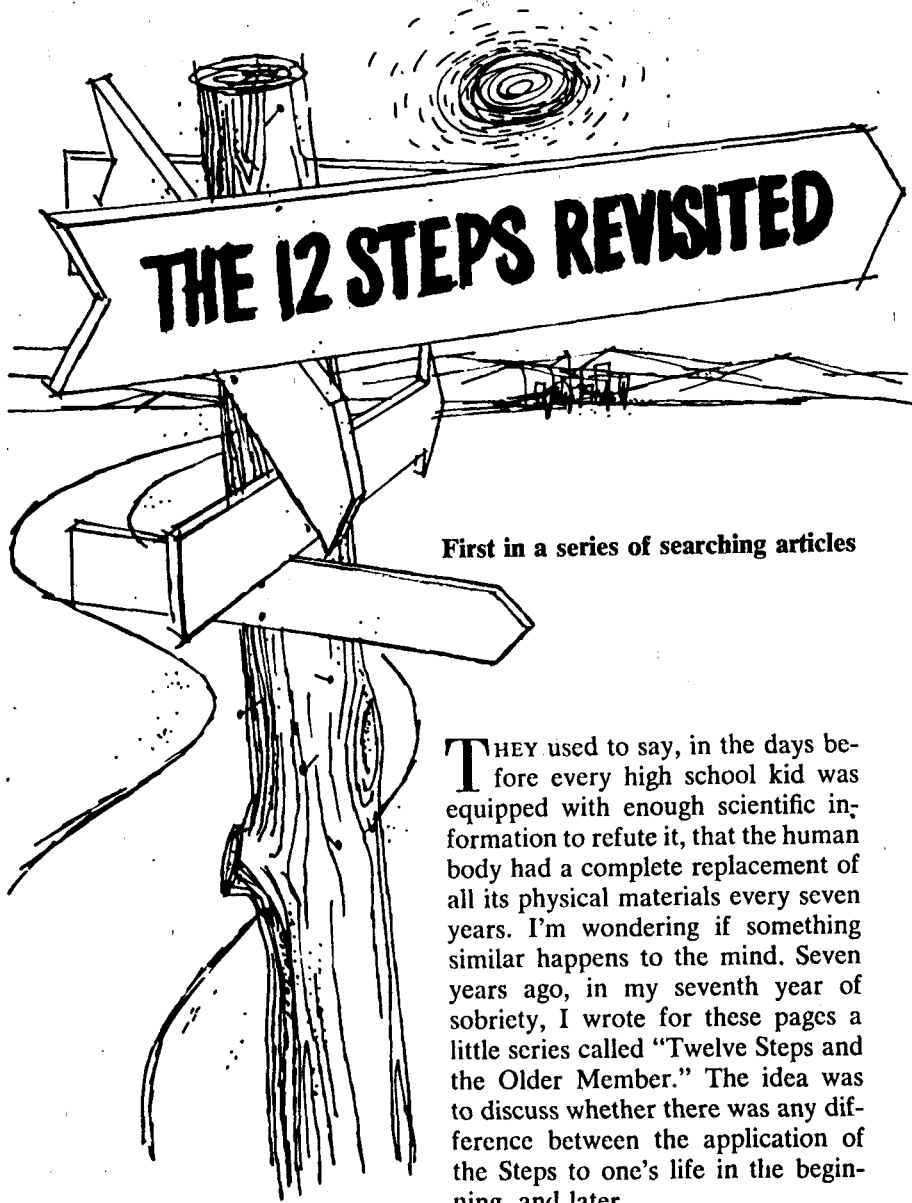
son's doctor thought that AA, or anybody else, was wasting their time trying to talk to him. I suppose I agreed with him and went on about my business.

I quickly was given the name "wrong man Bill," and everybody I knew had a pretty good laugh. Well I suppose it was kind of funny—but there is a sequel.

A week ago the phone at the clubhouse rang about ten o'clock in the morning—yes, it was my friend Johnson. He wanted help. When we went to get him he'd gone without a drink for several hours trying to get up guts to call us, and he acted as though he really wanted what AA has to offer. He was taken to our Twelfth Step House where he stayed five days. He left there this morning, sober, bright-eyed, looking for a job, and apparently literally "risen from the dead." He had been drunk continually since 1953 and hadn't worked a day during that time. His eyes were shining this morning when he left and he looked like a different man. You know the change that took place because you've seen it yourselves.

Now, if he's an alcoholic, we all know he could get drunk again tomorrow, but somehow I'm going to believe that this Higher Power we talk about so much was working a little overtime last week, and that whether my boy stays sober or not, I stood in the very presence of God that day when Johnson opened the door for me, tears in his eyes, and grabbed me around the neck and said he wanted to try.

B. C., Oklahoma City, Okla.



THE 12 STEPS REVISITED

First in a series of searching articles

THEY used to say, in the days before every high school kid was equipped with enough scientific information to refute it, that the human body had a complete replacement of all its physical materials every seven years. I'm wondering if something similar happens to the mind. Seven years ago, in my seventh year of sobriety, I wrote for these pages a little series called "Twelve Steps and the Older Member." The idea was to discuss whether there was any difference between the application of the Steps to one's life in the beginning, and later.

Now I find myself—frankly through

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.*

no merit of my own—in the fourteenth year of unbroken AA sobriety. How do the Twelve Steps look now—any different from fourteen years ago, or seven? It's ground I like to go over with those of my AA friends who are interested, starting, as always, with Step One.

Looking it over, I find that a lot of the things I wrote seven years ago can, so far as I am concerned, still stand. It seemed to me then, as now, that every AA ought to memorize the Twelve Steps and *keep* them memorized, so he can apply them quickly to matters of daily living. Step One seemed to me "the initial Step of identification and acceptance—the 'Me too' Step, the one in which we said, 'Okay, I give in, I can't handle the stuff'"—and it still does.

I was all for "keeping it simple" when talking to new prospects, convinced that if it hadn't been kept so for me, at the start, I'd still be drunk, or dead. I saw AA's first task as being "a kind of volunteer fire department, with unique means of healing very sick people. For them we must keep our tools bright and sterile, our definitions convincing and generally

agreed upon." In this context, Step One could mean to the newcomer exactly what it said, and no more—the alcoholic looks at his mismanaged life and acknowledges his powerlessness.

But, I was audacious enough to suggest, anyone who found no more than that in Step One after seven years, either was a simple soul indeed, or was failing to grow. "It's foolhardy to cut ourselves short at the growth level we achieved in the first three weeks and refuse to go any further for fear it might get complicated. Whether we like it or not the Twelve Steps of AA plunge us head first into questions that have engaged the finest minds of all ages. We prove nothing by leaving the batter's box the first time we're tossed a curve. But if we'll stand up there and swing we might learn something. What we'd learn later would not change the truth of what we had learned before, but might enlarge it."

From where I stand now—which seems not so much a pinnacle as a somewhat cluttered bus stop a piece farther down the road—what I claimed to have learned in the first

seven years seems scant enough, but worth recalling.

The occurrence of the word “powerless” in Step One suggested a look at the root word, “power,” and brought the discovery that nobody knew what it was. Scientists tracing physical power even to the core of the atom could do nothing but give it another name—energy—but could not really define it. As to mental and spiritual power, learned explainers were even more helpless. They could say little more than that when it was there, you knew it.

Power as it bore on my own life, I found, originated almost entirely from sources outside myself. “Other hands and minds created the coins I use, the house I live in, the clothes I wear, the profession I serve, the laws I live under. The friends I know, the food I eat, the planet I inhabit were all created by Someone Else. The whole project seemed superbly managed without me.”

Instead of shrinking me, however, this knowledge expanded me. Though my own role was small, the thing I was part of was big; I was honored to have *any* part in so fine a thing. This feeling of gratitude and identification with something larger I listed as the best fruit of Step One, the abdication - of - supreme - power Step. I testified that I applied it repeatedly to many things other than alcohol, which I couldn’t manage but had tried to. It had proved the only effective antidote to my reassertive

Napoleonic drive. All this, put down seven years ago, still seems solid.

What have I learned since then? Again it seems pathetically little for so long a time, but again worth jotting down. I have learned two things, mainly, and I’ll introduce the first by telling a story — regrettably, a true one.

Not long ago I called at the office of a professional acquaintance and was rebuffed by the first-line receptionist. In that split-second, without warning, I became raging mad; I heard myself say: “*Does he know who I am?*”

This, of course, is the remark of a pompous ass. Because I had become aware, through AA, that such remarks betray a mental state that endangers an alcoholic’s sobriety, I had been on guard against them continually for nearly fourteen years. And yet here I was, trumpeting my self-importance as naively as in the year *before* I’d come into AA! The only difference, and it’s a blessed one, is that instead of brooding on the affront to the point of drinking, I began within minutes to apply the Step One corrective — admitting my powerlessness in the larger scheme of things, accepting that other people were often unmanageable.

This sort of thing has happened so often during the past fourteen years, to myself and to my AA friends, that I can now write it down as something new I have learned—never underestimate the adversary.

“*Plus ça change,*” goes a French proverb, “*plus c’est la même chose*”—the more it changes, the more it’s the same thing. The central coré of rampant ego, always thirsting for new domains, has often changed its face in the past years, but it is the same thing—the bossiness, big-shotism and imperiousness which, if not curbed, could lead me quickly to drinking and disaster. I am a little dismayed to find that for me, it has not become a giant vanquished and forgotten. If anything, it’s a little stronger, calling for a little *more* vigilant awareness. And this, so far, I have been able to find through the same Step One — admitting I’m powerless over my egocentric nature.

I have learned one other thing about Step One during the past seven years—I am powerless also over the passage of time. This again is in the world of universals, shared by alcoholics and non-alcoholics alike. We grow older. I was in my forties when I wrote seven years ago. Now I’m in my fifties, and there’s a difference. Just what is this difference, and what’s it got to do with Step One?

It has to do, I think, with what we’re mainly concerned about in life. It may be compared to a truck carrying a load of coal, then a load of eggs. It’s the same road, truck and driver, but the change in loads calls for a change in driving skill.

All through my early and middle years I was concerned mainly about my own immediate preservation and advancement, with just enough in-

terest in spiritual generalities to keep me sane and solvent. With the approach of the mid-fifties, the end of life on the planet, once safely removed in my mind by a presumed long stretch of years, draws—rapidly, it seems—closer. Close friends have dropped from the ranks all around me. I want mainly, now, to know the meaning of life and the intent of spirit. I have just enough concern for physical security and solvency to keep away gross annoyance. For spiritual intent I look, as always, to the Twelve Steps, beginning with Step One.



Here a strange thing has happened. When we “Step One” a thing we renounce all power over it. When I say, as I do daily, that I’m powerless over alcohol, I mean that I may not get drunk, but also that I may, the outcome being not in my command. However, I can gratefully report that in all these days of giving up power over it, the outcome has always been the same—sobriety.

A comparable thing has happened in other things I have Step-Oned. Whenever I’m frustrated, as happens frequently with me, and I accept powerlessness over the matter and await a directive, the directive is al-

ways the same—that I should strive to be of service. It was only *after* I had glimpsed the principle as a result of working Step One that I saw the connection with the New Testament suggestion that he who clings to life will lose it, but losing life, in a right cause, will gain it. I have to lose my life in this sphere anyway—everyone before me always has—so I may as well be giving it away willingly to those who need some of it. This, as I say, is to me a recurrent ideal, a lighthouse beacon that flashes intermittently in the dark, and not—as any of my

friends would be quick to point out—a guide of conduct I've been able to express consistently in daily living.

But this hunch—that admission of powerlessness brings the consistent answer that life is for service—is the main new thing I've discovered about Step One, as I have tried to apply it in just one AA life, in the past seven years. Put this way, it of course overlaps a little with Steps Two and Three. This is another good thing about Step One—it always leads on to the other Steps.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

NO ONE UNDERSTANDS...

*the wife of an alcoholic—
except the wife of another alcoholic*

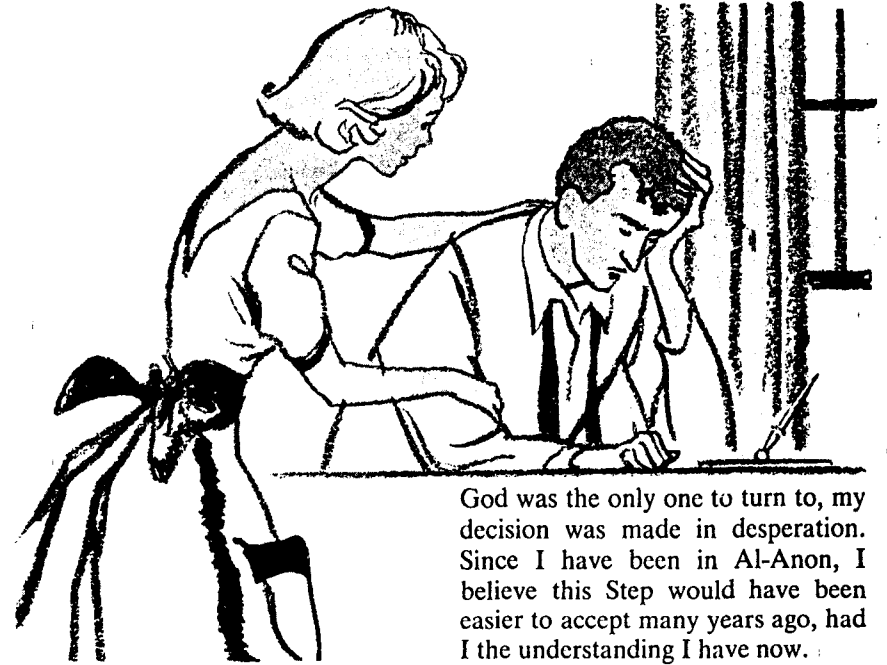
IN the almost four years of being married to my present alcoholic, I have had more peace and serenity than in the almost twenty-four years of being married to my first alcoholic.

I can say that without in any way reflecting on the noble character, the brilliance of mind and the endearing qualities of my first husband, the father of my three sons. He was an outstanding man in all ways; unfortunately, even his drinking was outstanding. He started his drinking in high school and we were married during the "roaring twenties," when it was smart to carry flasks, get a little tight wherever one went and, later, to knock on doors with little peepholes in them and be recognized as a regular customer.

I tried all the tricks that every non-alcoholic wife living with an alcoholic has tried since time began. I drank with him, I nagged, I threatened and cajoled; I brought up the subject of the children time after time, trying to shame him. I shamed him all right; I probably broke his heart a million times over. For, by

then—and I know it now—he wanted to stop drinking but could not. There was no Alcoholics Anonymous for him nor was there an Al-Anon Group for me. So, he died.

I married my present wonderful husband knowing he was an alcoholic, but knowing about AA, also. I am the most fortunate woman in the world to have met and married him. He is good and kind and understanding; so what better way can I add to our marital happiness than by understanding his illness? We have an Al-Anon Group in our little town and I firmly believe that participation in Al-Anon is a *must* for the non-alcoholic whose mate is alcoholic. I have attended every AA meeting it was possible for me to attend and have learned much about alcoholism. But when relapses have come (and they have) I needed something to grasp—something of my own, something that pertained to me individually, an understanding of a non-alcoholic's problem. I knew the understanding I must have for him and his side of the problem, but what



God was the only one to turn to, my decision was made in desperation. Since I have been in Al-Anon, I believe this Step would have been easier to accept many years ago, had I the understanding I have now.

of my side? I preached tolerance of the alcoholic; now I must practice it.

Do you think that the Twelve Steps don't apply to the non-alcoholic?

Listen to this:

Step One: I admitted many years ago that I was powerless over alcohol—it was my rival for my husband's affections, the root of all my unhappiness, and my hands were tied.

Step Two: Do you think I wasn't insane at times? I was—with worry, with defeat and with shame. Perhaps I wasn't ready then, but now, through Al-Anon, I have learned that I must turn my life over to a Higher Power—who for me is God.

Step Three: When I finally realized that I must have help and that my

Step Four: I have always been my own worst critic, but that was as far as I went. I was inclined to say to myself, "That is the way I am and that's all there is to it." Al-Anon made me stop and think for a minute. It made me realize there *is* something I could do about it.

Step Five: Before, I would never have admitted to doing wrong to another person; I was too busy accepting sympathy from friends. Now I can sit in our little group and find things that I did and said that were wrong, and bring them out in the open. It is a wonderful relief.

Step Six: I was always ready to have God remove any of my defects—so long as it wasn't an inconvenience to me. But now, after openly

admitting them, no inconvenience is too great to be rid of them; for you see, with them I am unhappy and without them, I *am*. It's as simple as that.

Step Seven: After the preceding Steps, this one comes easily, and with such a good feeling—knowing that He will help.

Step Eight: The list of people I have harmed is probably endless in my case, but of course, the one I feel I have harmed the most, in my ignorance, is not here to receive my most humble request for forgiveness. I believe he knows, though.

Step Nine: I believe that this Step is a continuous one. I have tried to make amends in many cases, mainly to my children. Not that the cross words and impatience I inflicted upon them in their childhood can be removed entirely; but now I can give them the understanding, patience and tolerance I sometimes lacked while they were small. This Step, for me, continues right on into the next one.

Step Ten: I try each day to think of any wrong I might have done and to rectify it immediately—not to wait.

These two Steps are almost a prayer that I may continue to do the best I can and ask for guidance.

Step Eleven: This has become the easiest and the most pleasurable Step for me. I have always said my prayers, but I managed to find a convenient time for them; and if I were in a hurry, they were postponed. I now set aside a certain time each day and I let *nothing* interrupt. Perhaps that sounds inconvenient. It isn't. Try it. Find the time of day in which you are least likely to be disturbed and keep it for yourself. Once you start, you will soon notice how infrequently you are disturbed in your meditations. I have learned to take time to *thank* God, as well as to make requests of Him.

Step Twelve: This is the only Step in which a word is changed; Al-Anons substitute the word "others" for "alcoholics." This is another thing the Family Group has given me; the chance to help others which, in the long run, is probably the best of all—because in helping others, you help yourself.

G. G., Fort Myers, Florida

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 2

- *Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

ONCE during a period of week end piloting, through a mishap of navigation, I flew a light plane into the clouds over some hilly terrain and got lost. The plane was without blind-flight instruments and I was without training in blind flying, and therefore in moment-to-moment peril of a fatal tailspin. I tried to climb out of the cloudbank but couldn't make it; it was too high. To try to get under it might wind me up in a pile of burning junk on a hillside, or in a power line. Whether I went up, or down, or stayed where I was, my life was in great danger. I was clammy, sweaty scared.

Though not at that time religiously inclined, I prayed. Then I put the nose toward the ground and held it on a steep glide, peering ahead into the murk. Presently I saw a farmhouse immediately ahead. I held a wing on it, circling, and saw a small pasture where a crash landing could be made. Gliding in for the landing, scarcely ten feet off the ground, I

could see under the cloud structure. The farmhouse was high on a hillside; below was clear air over a long valley. I flew on. In a quarter of an hour I was safely landed at my destination airport, limp with gratitude and wonder. A power greater than

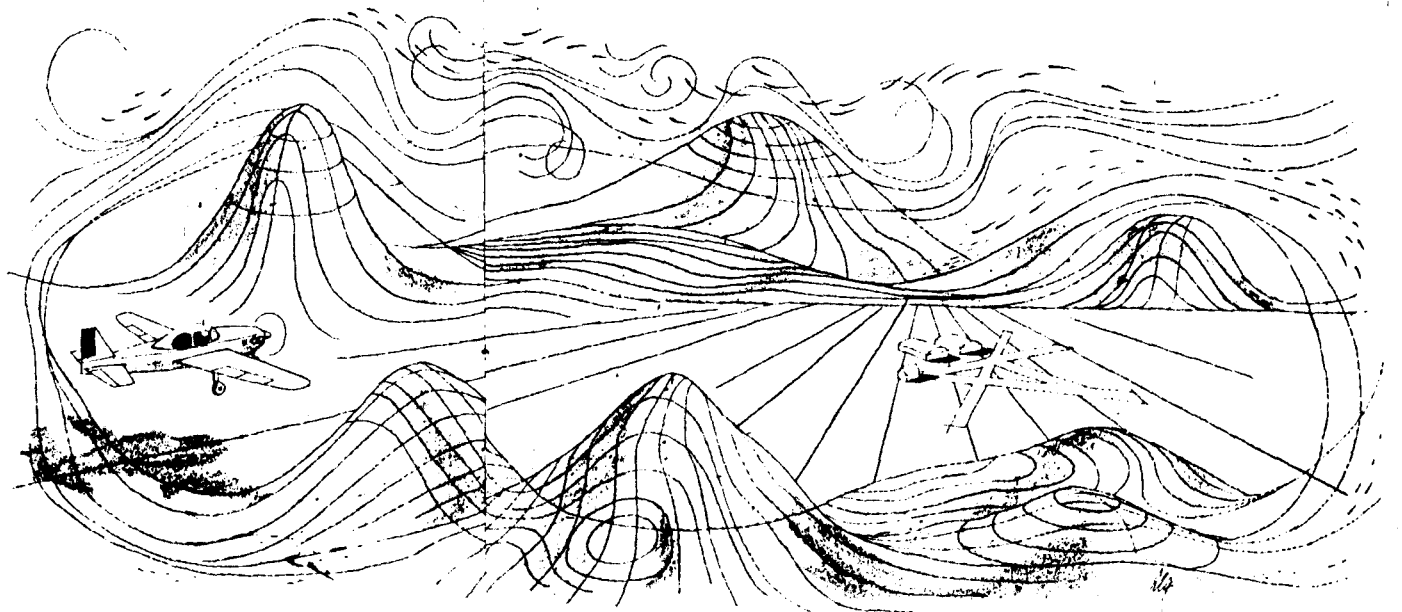
myself had, in response to my prayer, restored me to safety! This happened seven years before I came into AA.

I did not hang on to this spiritual insight. After a day or two of awed reflection I forgot it, resumed my usual ways and usual drinking, which was progressing toward a climax. Seven years later, again fogged in, with all courses of action blocked in alcoholic impasse, I met some people who had "come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Remembering then my deliverance from the cloud-shrouded hills, it was easier than it might otherwise have been to believe as they did.

But in such a world as ours, this belief has never been easy to come by, or to hold on to. Whenever you

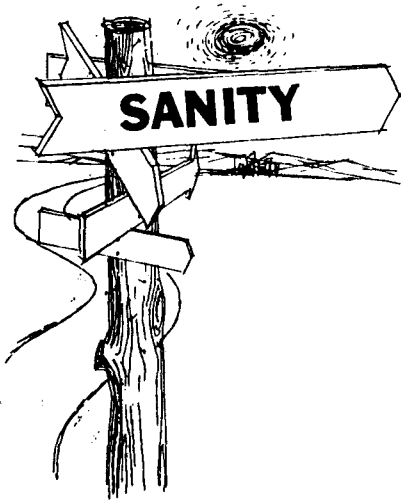
try to say how you felt about a certain topic at a given time in your life, you have to take into account your moods. At various times, in different states of mind, my attitudes toward the issues raised in Step Two have ranged all the way from no, through maybe, to an ecstatic yes.

At this point it would not be out of place if somebody asked, "Who are you, and who cares about your attitudes?" So I identify myself: I'm an anonymous hanger-on in a worldwide battle for daily sobriety. I'm conducting a kind of one-man durability test, now in its fourteenth year, on the Twelve Steps. Seven years ago I made some notes called "Twelve Steps and the Older Member," discussing the changing, growing meaning of the Steps as the years went



by. Now another seven years have passed; time for another check. These are only comments; I write with no authority, and with an awareness that my pretensions could dissolve into a tincture most any day. Still, the project seems worth while. Somebody else may get to thinking, and set the group wisdom to working on matters that will concern us all more and more as time goes on.

In everyday language, what we're up against in Step Two is this matter of whether there really is an invisible Higher Power who is willing to help a troubled person if asked. In a work-a-day world that takes no such power into its practical calculations, can a person reasonably "come to believe" such a thing? This issue ranks high among those that really stump AA candidates and AAs, old and young. It has been, at times, a very hard one for me.



"Oddly enough, the more desperate I am, the easier it is for me to believe it. In the beginning, I was like a man pursued to the brink of a swimming pool by a pack of wolves—which, incidentally, can't swim. "Jump in," friends said, "and paddle around in safety until the wolves go away."

"No," I said, "the pool is empty, I'll only break my head."

"No," they said, "the water's so clear you can't see it, but it's there; jump!"

So, not knowing, I jumped, and found they were right; the water was there, sustaining, healing, protecting.

The difficulty of belief comes, in my own case, after desperation has passed. Self-reliance, which I had always been taught was a virtue, again takes over. Almost before I know it I have come, again, to believe that chain activity involving myself and other self-reliant persons can accomplish about everything necessary—if only they'll do as I wish. But of course they don't, and I'm once more in the cycle of frustration, resentment, anger and a new desperation—stopping short, so far, thanks to God and to AA, of the old-time defiant binge.

This, of course, is not sanity, and I have to go back to Step Two again to be restored. I wanted a serene, unruffled sobriety, but this has not been granted; even my sobriety has been stormy. I have often been impatient that the Higher Power who restores my sanity does not *keep* it restored, that the belief shining so clear and

bright on Wednesday morning is often fogged in doubt by Thursday night. This has given me a hard time, and I'll tell you how, after fourteen years of working at it, I have, for the time being, puzzled it out:

Moods are emotions; they come and go, swing high, swing low, hit joy and depression. If God had given us only moods we'd be at their mercy, but He gave us something else—intelligence. Intelligence tells us that if a thing is true it stays put, regardless of our mood. Two and two equals four for the happy mathematician and for the sad one, and right here is where I am rescued. Twenty-one years ago a Higher Power saved me from some aeronautical difficulty on urgent request. Fourteen years ago the same Power gave me sanity through an alcoholic haze, after all the sanity-producing authorities of science had been invoked and failed.

Seven years ago I was able to write, "He is as awesome and as new, as spontaneous and as undiscovered, as friendly and as potent today." In

all the intervening years I have watched the same Power restoring others to sanity. This has provided my intelligence with ample cause to believe, with an enduring certainty and regardless of the day's mood, that a power greater than ourselves can restore.

It leaves open, of course, the pressing question, "Why don't I *stay* restored?" This, I think, is business for other Steps. I am one who holds the Steps should be taken one at a time. Step Two asks only the acceptance of a simple, world-shaking proposition that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. When that proposition is accepted as a working belief, the Step is taken. Intellectual certainty, based on accumulated evidence, can buttress the belief against the onslaught of shifting moods. For myself, come up or come down, the years have brought no reason to recant. A Power greater than myself can restore me to sanity any time He wants to, there's absolutely no question about it.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

GRATITUDE FOR A SOBER DECADE

*To this grateful woman alcoholic,
these years bring "an inside happiness,
something like falling in love"*

LAST June I celebrated my tenth year in AA, but despite all the benefits, my spiritual progress has been slow. Recently, I re-read the 1960 International Issue of the Grapevine, and I wondered and marveled over the widespread influence of AA, and came to the conclusion that I had never read anything more courageous than the opening article called "Alone Across Africa."

Suddenly, I have a small conception of what my inadequate efforts at Step Three have done for me, and my formerly unmanageable life. I realize that, because of this key Step, my AA husband and I have been able to pick up the pieces of our lives and live them together. Though sober, my decade in AA has not, until now, been a happy one. Only God knows why I stayed sober through some of my experiences, and certainly I have no feeling that I did it by myself. I realize through the Third Step that no matter how irregular, or how small, one's efforts are, God is gracious enough to give us enormous rewards. Sometimes I think the simple wording of that Step contains all the grandeur of all philosophies rolled into it. To me, it was divinely in-

spired, as is also its position among the Twelve.

I am grateful for all things said over and over again in AA meetings. They are like themes interpreted, and stated differently, by each of us for the benefit of all. They help us realize the big ways, and the little ways, in which we identify with each other.

I am at this moment gratefully aware that I learned from AA members the adventure of Step Eleven: *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.* The few times on which this drawing closer to the God of my understanding has happened to me, I have felt myself to be the most fortunate and happy and grateful person in the whole world. This is to me what is meant when, in AA, we talk about happiness. I believe in a special kind of AA happiness that can get us through any type of disaster, or, most important of all, that can get us through our own low moods and dry drunks. This inside happiness is something like falling in love.

A. C., Washington, D. C.

TOPER'S TALE

EPISOT No. 5: The Trusting Soul

A COMMON trait of many alcoholics is the weird combination of incredible naiveté and Machiavellian craftiness that comes over them when they drink.

I displayed both characteristics to a remarkable degree in my drinking days. My innocent, trusting, Dr. Jekyll side led me to confide in strangers; then the calculating Mr. Hyde would come along and go to fantastic lengths to protect me against dangers, real and fancied.

In Montreal, one time, I attended a professional meeting. This was to be followed by a banquet, and the banquet, I had learned from previous experience, always was followed by a tour of the town's outstanding high and low spots.

I got well oiled with the aid of a pint during the meeting, and the banquet wines and liqueurs preserved the edge, so that when it came time to go out on the town, I was primed.

Suddenly I got a thought. I had more than a hundred dollars in my pocket and I knew I would spend it if I took it along. The idea of checking it at the hotel never dawned on me; instead I got a Big Idea.

I saw a nice, friendly looking man sitting in the hotel lobby, doing nothing. I approached him, took out two fifty-dollar bills and said: "Sir, would you do me a favor? I'm out to get drunk tonight with a mob, and I know I'll blow all this dough if I carry it on me. Would you mind it for me?"

There was a look of incredulous amazement on the man's face. Muttering something like "Sure, glad to oblige," he took my hundred dollars and stuck it in his pocket.

Our tour of the gay quarter was quite a success, I think, because I had a colossal hang-over the next day.

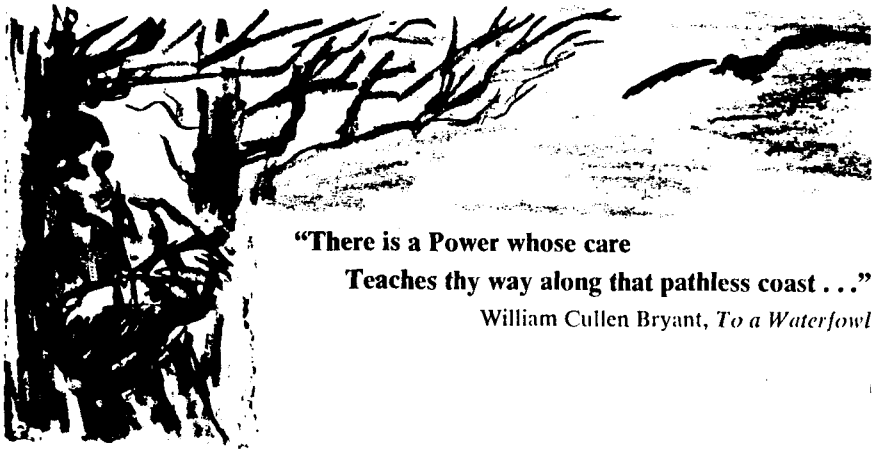
But the only mention of my hundred dollars didn't come for more than two weeks. I was riding in the club car of a train, between Chicago and Toronto, and I overheard two men in a conversation.

"I heard the damndest story," one of the men said. "It seems a guy was sitting in the lobby of a hotel in Montreal and a perfect stranger walks up and hands him a hundred bucks and says. . . ."

I got up and moved away. I already knew how the story ended.

R. N. T., Toronto, Ontario

Send us an account of your most hilarious or bizarre experience while drinking. Don't worry about writing style; just send us the facts. There are no prizes, but you'll feel better in the morning. Mail to Grapevine, P. O. Box 1980, New York 17, N. Y.



**“There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast . . .”**

William Cullen Bryant, *To a Waterfowl*

HOPE WILL SERVE

says to me: “Try to give them some hope, John. Remember when we had none.”

But upon me, as upon thousands of other AAs, the idea did bear in, fairly quickly, that here were men and women staying sober somehow, and that perhaps I might, too. So the first twitches of hope came quite early.

At my first meetings I was always on strings, taut, suspicious. My eye wormed inward upon myself. I discounted or rejected outright much of what I heard from the speakers, especially when they spoke of God, as they understood Him. But not everything. As a boy I had been something of an athlete. I had found it easy enough to take the say-so of my trainer. I hadn't argued with him if he told me to make so many starts, to practice getting off the mark quickly, or to trot such and such distances to warm up.

Looking back, I think I went about

the AA program somewhat as an athletic routine.

I didn't accept some of the sales talk, but I did want the article itself, sobriety. I wanted a drink, desperately: but I wanted to stop drinking even more desperately. These AAs were sober. I would try to become sober by going through the motions they went through. Older members of course told me to go to lots of meetings, to ask help of some Higher Power in the morning and to say thanks at night, if I had stayed sober. I did these things as by rote, without conviction.

Even going about it as a drill I could not help coming up against this business of a Higher Power, and that was a sticking point. However, even if only as an amateur naturalist I had always admitted the existence of inexorable principles, such as evolution, and powerful forces such as those which govern migration in birds. Woe unto the bird which does not respond to the southward migration force when autumn comes, with winter fast behind. I said as little about it as I could, because I was inwardly ashamed even of this submission, but I accepted these forces rather sneakily for myself, without precise definition, as a sort of working hypothesis. Perhaps they would serve for “Higher Power.” Certainly they were greater than myself. And they helped me to get through “God, as we understood Him,” with a bit of a gulp.

Routinely, I asked for help. Less

routinely, I learned to say thanks. At first the thanks were words only, mumbo-jumbo, “thanks very much” said with about as much grace as I had used in overtipping waiters when I was riding high on hooch and showing off. Yet, from the start, the recitations I heard at meetings and some of the reasons for gratitude given in AA literature made sense to me. I, too, had driven my car during alcoholic blackouts, yet I had killed nobody and I still had two hands, two feet and eyes.

I would look for reasons for being thankful. It was a fine day: a bird sang: I would be grateful for the song even if it came from one of the humdrum singers. And it also meant that I had two ears to hear with. In time I had moments of thankfulness without having to search for reasons. I remember walking in the woods with my wife on our first sober Christmas together—the first with me sober. Thankfulness came spontaneously. It was so poignant that it stabbed. The line between joy and pain is fine. So, when I began to feel thankful I began to have “twinges” of happiness, even.

Now my eye turned outwards, sometimes, to the other fellow rather than always into myself: to newcomers in AA, for example, fighting a bottle just as immediately as I was myself. Late in life I was beginning to discover a very old, open secret which I had long passed by, on the other side of the street. This was simply that there is more happiness

BECAUSE I had so little belief when I came to AA, like many others I had to coast on hope for what seemed a long time. Like others, too, I have in my time solemnly told my fellow AAs right out in meeting: “Sorry, can't make Step Two. All I can truthfully say is: I have come to *hope* that a Power greater than myself might restore me to sanity.”

Hope itself had not come immediately. Calling AA had been for me an act of desperation, almost without hope. To this day, when I go to make an AA talk my wife usually

to be had in trying to do something for somebody else than in seeking your own gratification. And, selfishly, there was more sobriety to be had in trying to help others to sobriety than in forever thinking only about your own.

Trying to be grateful and saying "thank you" every night did more to make me over into a human being, again, than anything else in the program. Certainly it made me readier to accept the program, *when* the time arrived.

Having so little belief during the first year, I found myself resorting to "dodges," almost tricks to get myself to work AA. I had few prayers at that time, except the Serenity Prayer. But I did know the Lord's Prayer and I used to recite those parts of it which seemed to fit my case. I was full of resentments and found it hard to forgive the comparatively few injuries done to me, in spite of the many injuries which I had done to others, most but not all through drinking. I found it helpful to underline these words of the prayer: "Forgive *us our* trespasses, as *we* forgive those who trespass against *us.*" Whether reciting this aloud or silently to myself I would "punch" the words I have italicized. I still do.

I work in a large building with long passageways and am often there at odd hours when the place is deserted. I soon found that the Lord's Prayer goes marvelously to the sound of footsteps echoing down an empty corridor. As grasshoppers may be

said to "sing with their legs," so I was learning to pray with my heels.

Much of this was mumbo-jumbo still, like those early "thank-yous," because I was still side-stepping Higher Power, gliding round the Second Step. But the words "Thy will be done" kept coming back. *Thy* will. What, or whose will? Anyway, not mine. And other words rang back to me: things would work out "in God's good time"—not mine.

I had been in AA for about fourteen months, just dry for about half that time and more truly sober for the rest, when I experienced an eye-opener. I met a young taxi driver at his second AA meeting, went home with him and talked into the night. I found myself asking him some routine questions. The lad (I'll call him Y.) was deeply troubled by what drink had done to him, and anxious for help. I was all the time wondering whether he would have the same difficulty with Step Two as I was having. To my relief he told me that he had had a "standard" upbringing, that he still believed in God and would have no difficulty in asking help from a Higher Power, whom he quite cheerfully named as God.

I was very happy about this. It meant that Y. would have far less trouble about accepting the program than I myself had had. I walked home feeling elated. As I crossed a bridge on my way I began to apply this line of thinking to my own case: "What a fool you are, John X. Here you are happy as a cricket because this young

man is not going to have the difficulty you have had. He will find it easy to ask help of a Higher Power and this will help to keep him sober. God, as he understands Him, is good enough for Y. But what in thunder has been keeping you sober fourteen months, John X?" From there on I metaphorically kicked my own fanny, all the way home.

From that day I have stopped boggling at Step Two. I do not hesitate to identify my Higher Power with God. I recognize that my understand-

ing of God might not be recognizable to some others as the God they understand. I have come a long way from that bridge, and doubtless I have a long way to go still.

That was over six years ago. Now, when I talk at AA meetings I skip that old pass "Sorry, I can't make Step Two."

Instead, I often end with this: "I have come, not only to hope and believe, but to *know* that God, as I understand Him, can restore and has restored me to sanity, up to today."

John X., Ottawa, Ontario

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 3

- Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him

FOR a time during World War II, I was privileged to live in England while it was being bombed, and see how valiantly a nation can rally to an emergency. After the war, my British friends tell me, there was a lapse from these high standards of courtesy, generosity and courage. Not everybody, but most people tended to retreat to the old bog of rancor, indifference and selfishness.

Sometimes I wonder whether something similar may not happen in AA. Certainly there has been a tendency toward it in my own case. During the critical battle with my deadly enemy alcohol, I was ready to go all the way with good to overcome this single evil. No sacrifice of time, property or status was too great for the prize of sobriety. I came to Step Three. Turn my will and my life over to the care of God? Gladly and without reservation—here it is.

Now, after a sequence of twenty-four-hour periods carrying me into my fourteenth year, I'm getting an

inkling of what Step Three may mean over the long haul. The enemy that had been a fire-breathing dragon squarely blocking my main highway, now takes the form of a small, venomous snake slithering through the weeds in the byways. Some of the

tumult and shouting has died. The struggle has entered a quieter, inward phase, subtler, possibly less exciting, but I think more profound.

Shouldn't persons as well as nations gird, not just for the crisis, but for the long pull from here in? Fourteen years ago, when I entered AA—even seven years ago when I was writing for these pages an "older member's" comments on Step Three—it seemed to me that the "decision" called for was in the nature of an outgoing, almost aggressive act. I was supposed to find God and give Him—thrust upon Him, if necessary—something He didn't have and possibly didn't want.

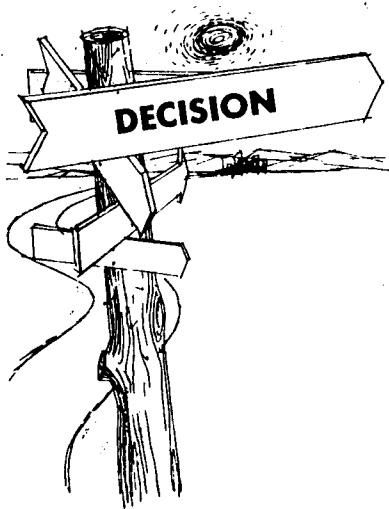
As I understand it now, our wills and our lives are already in the care of God. In Step Three we only stop

fighting an existing fact—the one really decisive circumstance of our entire existence—and consciously acknowledge what already is.

Playing in a tree near my house is a gray squirrel who, I am almost sure, hasn't the least awareness of the fact that his will and life are in the care of God. Nevertheless they are—he can will nothing or live nothing not provided for by nature, a creative force which springs, I confidently believe, from God. Aside from some anatomical details, the big difference between the squirrel and me is that I can become aware of this relationship with God and the squirrel cannot.

Does this awareness change anything? I think it does. If I know my will and life are bounded by God's





creation and hence in His care, and do nothing about it, I'm but little ahead of the squirrel. If, however, I try to find out what God is interested in and make friends with Him, there's no telling what I may some day become—certainly something better than I now am.

At this point I can hear some of my keep-it-simple friends asking, justifiably, what this has to do with keeping sober. It has this to do with it: I'm pretty sure that if the AA program didn't offer me a continuing chance to grow, I'd soon be drunk. We are not saints, but I'm not short of human frailty, and have room for vast improvement without seeming to buck for sainthood. In AA you grow or shrink; I, if I can, would like to grow, both in understanding and in capacity to help.

Of course, knowledge that our lives and wills are totally enclosed in

God's creation, doesn't mean we have to play along with Him. The universe is set up to allow for quite a lot of rebellion. However, as I come to know Him a little, He seems gentle and good as well as mighty and sometimes stern. I no longer *want* to rebel. I'd prefer to find out what He's interested in, if possible, and get interested in these same things myself. We might then be closer than we are now, and I'd like that.

What is God interested in? It's easier to say what He's *not* interested in, and foremost among these things is making a certain anonymous alcoholic, J. E., into a rich man. The way he manages my finances fair gives me the willies. Casual. But I've always had daily bread, and when I think of the people in underdeveloped countries, He seems fantastically generous. Incidentally, I think He's working full time to see that the underprivileged get more; it's not God but people holding things up. But beyond providing us all a sufficiency, I cannot see that God is greatly interested in dough.

He is interested, I think, in developing better people. I say this, of course, with no inside track or special authorization; just from reading about Him and watching how He seems to be working in AA and other areas, and respecting my own hunch. Evolution always starts with something in existence, then improves on it. It's my surmise that whenever we're helping someone, including

ourselves, to be a better person, we're doing something God is interested in. Our will and our lives are then not only in His hands, but are harmonious with His will and life, realizing the full meaning and purpose of our creation.

All right, you say, here's a chap obviously needing improvement. I say he needs coffee, you say he needs sleep—who's in line with God? My guess is that if we both really want to help the man, God isn't against either of us. Through time, experiment, intuition, He'll lead us to the *really* right way. Maybe our friend could use *both* coffee and sleep. Anyway, we can't stand forever on dead center because we're unsure of God's will. We have to chance being wrong.

For a long time, it bothered me that the times of vivid awareness that my will and life are really in God's care, were brief and far apart. Lately, I'm less concerned about that. I, like the squirrel, have nuts to gather—human things to do requiring such concentration that I am unaware of God, even though in the midst of Him and doing tasks He has assigned me. When the job is done, though, as Step Three puts it, I make a decision.

"Make a decision"—a more com-

plicated business than I ever imagined! Once, in my frustrated pre-AA efforts to make sense of life, I got psychoanalyzed and learned something about my mental machinery. Besides an often perverse ego and some conflicting unconscious drives, I have a carping superego that bedevils every decision I try to make—arguing, negating, scolding. Nevertheless, doing my best with what I've got, I decide to turn my will and my life over to the care of God—and this, to me, is the same as realizing my life and will are already in His care.

In striving for this awareness, it helps me to remember some things about my own relation to the universe, and to other people—that there are nearly three billion people on earth, that people have lived, worked and died here for twenty thousand generations, that the earth is big, that the sun is ninety-three million miles away, that the Milky Way is two hundred light years across, that it's only one little galaxy among billions, that somehow I'm a part of a magnificent, continuing, creative stream. Slowly, the grandeur of Him, to whom my will and life are entrusted, begins to come through.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 4

● Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

JUST to show how easy it is to take somebody *else's* inventory, here's a little story. Some time ago I visited my old group, noticed a rift between a wealthy retired clique and some working stiffs, and suggested it was time to take group inventory. There quickly descends on my head the wrath of an old-timer, eighteen years dry. His neck red and cheeks mottled, he demanded to know how I could have the effrontery to criticize this group.

It was easy for me to see that he could have corrected me without the flare-up. Having disposed of the group's and the old-timer's shortcomings, I thought of doing a little Step-Four job on my own. Before long, the flaws of the others seemed puny by comparison.

Step Four is, in this one man's view, the hardest, trickiest, most dangerous and most perplexing of all the Steps. It is the threshold to self-knowledge; without crossing it one can never enter the castle of serenity.

Yet one can stumble on it and fall into the moat of despair. Many "cafeteria-style" AAs, who advocate helping yourself to such Steps as you have an appetite for, fight shy of it. The Big Book, however, considers it so important that it gives Step Four

more pages (seven) than are allotted to any other Step.

When I first came into AA fourteen years ago it was Step Four, more than anything else, that called a halt to my constant complaining and blaming my woes on others. It set me to scrubbing up my own behavior. Seven years later, I saw Step Four as the pivot on which we are turned from being a problem to society toward being a help with society's problems. Writing "The Twelve Steps and the Older Member" in these pages seven years ago, I discovered through Step Four that "We are not the only sick people in the world! There are others, and they need our help! With this realization we end our spiritual retreat and begin our advance."

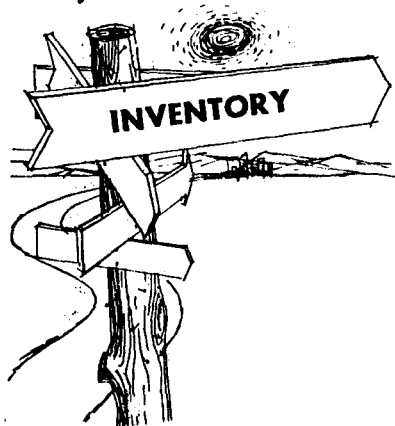
Now the question arises, have the *last* seven years taught me anything further about Step Four? I think they have, and would list these things: The Need of a New Self-Image; the Meaning of the Word "Moral"; the Source of Fear; the Road Block: Self-Reliance; the Trap: Self-Accusation; the Importance of Writing It Down.

The founders of AA attached great importance to *writing our inventory down on paper*. We can't stay sober unless we do something about the behavior that so antagonized people. To do this we must examine ourselves the bad parts as well as the good. The human mind tends to exclude attention to anything bad about itself. Paper, however, ignores mental whimsy. Once it's written



down it stays—a helpful reminder and a goad to complete an unfinished job.

So, practicing a little of what I'm preaching, I'll write down a little of my current inventory. Bear in mind that the title of this series is "The Twelve Steps Revisited." It's something for the older guy and gal, mainly, and has to do with some of the problems of getting on in AA, and in years.



When I take inventory these days, the most persistent of the useless items found is an outdated self-image. As a young man I was a flat-bellied, lean-jawed, wavy-haired egotist, more or less constantly, and more or less successfully, on the make. I married late in my twenties, after years of thinking of myself as a handsome rogue. I am appalled at the persistence of self-images formed when we were young. Today I am no longer handsome and trying hard *not* to be a rogue. My paunch cannot be concealed, a bag of wrinkled

skin resembling a turkey's wattle is forming under my chin, my hair is almost white, and attractive young women always call me "Sir." Yet, in spite of myself, the old habit of wanting to play juvenile heroes persists; there are times when, compulsively, I think of myself as an up-and-coming young man.

Years of inventory-taking have taught me that an unrealistic self-image is a prime source of fear and resentment. When we live in a sand castle made of fantasy, or of memories of yesteryear, waves of truth are always threatening to wash it away. The impending loss of our stronghold makes us fearful. Resentfully, we defend it against the rising tide of reason. However, the minute I adjust my self-image to what I really am—a middle-aged alcoholic, grateful for his recovery and aware of his limited importance—fear and resentment begin to dissolve. When my notions about myself are in line with the truth about myself, I am relatively at peace.

I think that understanding this has helped me to be a little more patient with other people. The old-timer who got sore when I suggested a group inventory is a case in point. Rich, distinguished-looking and retired, he had become a little smug in his AA cocoon. He thought of the group as a band of angels living in perfect harmony, with himself presiding benignly as chief angel. Scared when his illusion was threatened, he resentfully denied that dissension ex-

isted. My guess is that he'll simmer down when he begins to see himself and the group as we really are—a group of former drunks still short of sainthood. As for myself, I'm beginning to see that I could have proposed the group inventory more tactfully.

In the past seven years I have come to a new idea about the meaning of "moral." I used to be afraid of that word. It had an accusing quality that made me cringe. I now see that it has to do with my own notion of my reason for being on earth. If I'm doing what I think I'm for, I'm moral. If not, I'm immoral.

People, I have found, can have all sorts of ideas about what they're for, therefore all sorts of moralities. To the hedonistic philosopher, the highest morality is to have a good time. As I have worked it out, with AA's help, a Higher Power is busy at something called evolution, which is mainly helping creatures, including myself, to improve. I conceive my purpose in life to be co-operating in this work. So, when I take a "moral" inventory, I judge my actions on a basis of whether they help or hinder someone in this journey toward becoming something better.

When I was small, I was severely scolded or beaten up when I did something wrong. In taking some of my early inventories I tended to raise hob with myself when I discovered obvious character defects. This, I eventually learned, was the self-castigation that leads to despair, not

the self-examination that leads to improvement. I now believe that the greatest defects are intolerance and unforgiveness. We have to leave the door open for good-humored acceptance of our shortcomings, once we've discovered them, as a preliminary to getting rid of them. Self-scolding only makes us miserable.

There is good reason for us to be self-forgiving. Some of our worst character defects were not of our own making, but were taught by social custom from our birth. All the slogans that make for self-centeredness—Paddle Your Own Canoe; God Helps Those Who Help Themselves; Stand On Your Own Two Feet; Get Ahead; The Early Bird Gets the Worm; Devil Take the Hindmost; Freedom of Choice—were hammered into us from childhood and taught as high virtues. Little wonder that we turn out to be inconsiderate of others. Little wonder that we have trouble changing, once we decide to try to be a little more friendly, a little more human. I have come to think that I have relatively little freedom of choice and action, and very little power of my own. What matters in Step Four, I believe, is how we use what little power we have.

Seen in this way, there is nothing about Step Four to be afraid of. That being the case, we can make an inventory that is really fearless, as well as really searching. And we ought to write it down.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

September 1961

Answers to a call for help

From Vancouver, B.C.:

To P. J. [whose letter in the May 1980 Grapevine told of finding his son on Chicago's skid row]: I'd like to suggest you try (if possible) to get your son into a place where he can be separated from booze long enough (six weeks) to have the opportunity to make a decision about which way he wants to go.

And if it fails — as well it may—remember, you tried to carry the message (not the body), and in so doing, you got another twenty-four hours of sobriety out of it.

Another suggestion: Regardless of how well intended your efforts, perhaps his father is not the best one to make this approach. Relatives seldom manage to keep their objectivity. Perhaps the aid of a doctor and a fellow member of AA would be the way to go. I believe that you should probably stay quite out of the picture.

Not having walked that road (with a son doing what yours is doing), I don't feel I can in good conscience sermonize on it. All I can say is "Accept what you cannot change." Do

you really have any other alternative?

You've made my day, because you gave me a chance to carry a message to someone who's troubled. R. S.

From Chicago, Ill.:

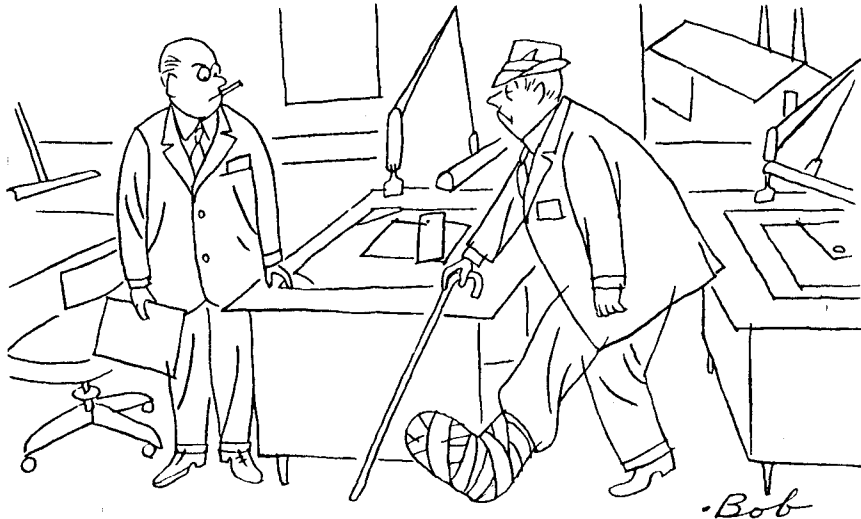
Thanks, P. J., for sharing with us. My prayers are with you and your son.

Much of our skid row is on the near west side. I just returned from my regular weekly meeting at the Salvation Army. "Sally" recently invited us in, and it's great. This meeting at 9:30 AM Thursdays is the highlight of my week.

And there's a 10:30 AM Saturday meeting at the Helping Hand Mission. Good people, too. So you and your son are not alone in Chicago.

J. G.

TOPER'S TALE



The Limping Lie

DRINKERS may run out of money, friends, time—even, on rare occasions, liquor—but one commodity they never run short of is excuses.

I came close to it once, though. I was working as patrolman in an auto factory and I'd been drunk on the job so often that I'd received warning that the next time would be my last. Consequently, I did what smart alcoholics do. Rather than show up drunk, I'd stay away entirely. My

wife would call up and make the excuses.

On one memorable occasion, we felt we had used the "touch of the flu" gambit too often and decided to try a more fanciful bit of deception. My wife said this time that I'd tripped on the stairs and sprained my ankle.

As luck would have it, this was a bad day. Two of the other men were sick, the boss said, and he could arrange that I just sit at a desk and

answer the phone all day. Would my wife please drive me over at once?

The panic was on. We swathed one ankle with yards of bandage until it was double normal size. I practiced limping. I walked on a cane and put a slipper on the "injured" member. We set out for the plant.

I don't know if the boss got a whiff of my breath as he greeted me, but I suspect he did. At any rate, he suddenly insisted on having a doctor look me over. I was in a sweat but he overruled every protest and summoned the sawbones.

I was sure I was a gone goose, but the doctor, in a very dead-pan manner, probed my ankle tenderly as I let out appropriate moans. Finally he looked up. "You'll have to take the day off," he said. "Go to the hospital first and let them x-ray that ankle."

I went through the hospital routine, still moaning, then limped

home. The next day I reported back for work, for I knew the report had to be negative. I still wore the bandage and still limped, for I was determined to brazen it out.

But the boss had nothing but sympathy for me. I worked at the desk through the week, then went back to my regular duties, limping less and less each day in a fine display of finesse.

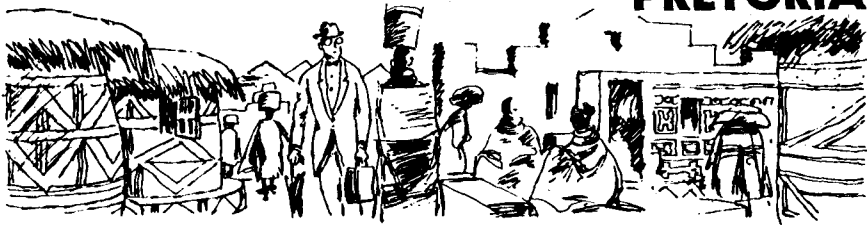
This happened years ago and I often wondered how much the doctor knew. Did he know I was faking? And if so, why didn't he put the finger on me?

I got the answers a short time ago. The doctor knew what was going on but he was sympathetic because he happened to have a drinking problem of his own. How do I know? He told me so. At a recent meeting of our little AA group.

Anonymous, Canada

Send us an account of your most hilarious or bizarre experience while drinking. Don't worry about writing style; just send us the facts. There are no prizes, but you'll feel better in the morning. Mail to Grapevine, P. O. Box 1980, New York 17, N. Y.

PRETORIA



No Case Is Hopeless

*The pigeon, a deaf mute
who knew no English, "got the
message" through a
Latin Bible*

ONE Friday night I received a phone call from one of the padres in my area. He asked me to call on a young fellow in his parish who had not drawn a sober breath for a couple of years, and whose mother was becoming desperate. It was very late and very wet, but I agreed to go. After a search I found the place, a small dilapidated cottage with no light showing. I started to leave, but something prompted me to return and knock on the door. Eventually a light went on and an eerie, unintelligible sound came from inside. My feelings at that moment were everything an alky's feelings should not be. A moment or two later I heard another voice, that of a woman with a foreign accent. There was quite a commotion before the door was finally opened and I was confronted by an old lady in very shoddy nightdress and a man of be-

tween thirty and thirty-five in nothing but a pair of underpants, and very much "under the weather."

It soon became apparent to me that the man was my patient and that he was a *deaf mute*.

The old lady asked me in and began to make some coffee. In theory I don't suppose I would have been blamed if I'd made a discreet withdrawal. But somehow I couldn't.

Try to imagine my immediate reactions. Here I was at midnight on a cold and miserable night, asked to impart the philosophy of AA to a highly intoxicated deaf mute. My sole means of communication was an ill-clad, shivering old lady who spoke a little broken English and no Afrikaans, and I was without the faintest knowledge of their language—Hungarian. What now?

It was not an easy job. Although Harry was not unintelligent, he found it very difficult to grasp the fundamental meaning behind the notes in simple English that I passed to him over the kitchen table. I, in return, could seldom interpret the reasons for his seemingly stupid questions written in an almost incomprehensible mixture of languages. This went on nightly for two weeks and Harry

did not stop drinking. I then supplemented the notes over the table by enlisting the aid of Mama, as I call her, to act as interpreter with the use of sign language.

This was not quite so simple as it sounds, as Mama seemed to experience difficulty in transcribing a word like serenity into sign language. It seemed to convey to Harry that he must sleep and this he refused to do.

Although he did not stop drinking, these nightly visits seemed to have the effect of regulating his drinking hours, and he now came home every evening by 7:30, much to the delight of Mama. Harry is an instrument mechanic and stopped every evening at the local for his usual quota after work. One evening after about three weeks, however, my phone rang at 6:30 and Mama screamed at me that Harry had come home at 5:15 without having had a drink. "Eureka"—the game was on! Alas, the following evening, a Friday, Harry turned up at 10 P.M., sozzled. Was I mad? No.

I spent many sleepless hours trying to figure out how I could put it across to Harry. At last, a brainwave—I would twelfth-step the Hungarian Consul, who would in turn translate it to Mama, who could transmit it to Harry in the sign language. Ingenious, I think you will agree, but impracticable, as there was no Hungarian Consul at the time.

Eventually I contacted a firm of shipping agents and asked them if they could put me in touch with a firm who dealt in goods with Hun-

gary. This they kindly did (little realizing the motive behind this request). I managed to interview a very busy Hungarian Director, who in turn passed me on to a not-so-busy Hungarian immigrant who could speak tolerable English. With his cooperation the lengthy process started afresh. Harry seemed to take a new interest in this rather complicated set-up, but he still did not stop drinking. Doubtless this was because he did not relish the idea of abandoning the company of drinking friends, who did not have to rely on sound or speech to enjoy one another's company.

Three months went by; I visited Harry practically every night. Finally, after a very bad week-end bender, I asked the Hungarian interpreter if Harry could understand the Latin version of the Bible. I was told that with a bit of assistance he could do so. I asked them to try to make him understand the first few verses from the First Chapter of St. James. They not only did this but I think they went through the whole of it.

Harry has not had a drink for months now. He has been transferred to the Federation and the last message that I received from Mama was that he has shown such promise that he is being sent to America for further studies in his trade.

This case has served one purpose, however, and I think that you will agree—*no case is hopeless*.

*Dave H., Newsletter,
Pretoria, South Africa*

Virgil's Twelfth Step Call



The classics are full of good AA philosophy

IT may come as quite a shock to you to learn that I can read, and do. I am amazed at the type of books I seem to gravitate to despite my limited comprehension. I don't attribute this to AA, however. Strangely, I always desired to learn things not covered by "Foxy Grandpa," "The Rover Boys," "Frank and Dick Merriwell" and "The Liberty Boys of '76."

As a natural consequence, I gravitated to the Old Masters and I picked quite a few who had an amazing knowledge of our program. In fact, I found but few instances, from Homer to Freud, that didn't.

I found in the Bible, for instance, that old King Belshazzar had a beautiful case of DTs after drinking wine

from the Temple. Stolen wine at that, mind you.

Shakespeare can tell you more about wines than you can learn in a hobo jungle in a week.

Being a very complicated person (and who of us isn't?), I found the AA program entirely too simple. I had to find a harder way to learn the self-same principles you simple jokers taught me.

In the first place, I was convinced that I, out of all the people in the vast expanse of history, was the only one who ever drank as I did, as long as I did, or had experienced the difficulties I did.

True, I had heard many case histories that topped mine, but I also heard you admit you were liars, so I

discounted everything you said. No, you wouldn't do. Besides, you had a confessed personal interest—some sort of gimmick. You publicly admitted that the recounting of your stories "helped you." Personally, I wasn't interested in you.

I had to go way back to persons long dead whose truisms had been proved by the passage of time—persons who were not fabricating fables in order to help me and thereby help themselves.

As I read, I uncovered evidences of AA knowledge and understanding by looking for it in obscure places, and many I delighted in and profited from accordingly. I could believe these guys—they no longer collected copyrights for their efforts.

Unfortunately, with one exception, I did not mark the passages but simply read and digested them. The exception was a story written sometime between 1310 and 1321 by a guy named Dante, who had a hell of a story, literally and figuratively.

He starts off by saying: "Midway upon the journey of Life I found myself in a dark wood, where the Right Way was lost." It seems strange that I did not see him in all that eternity when I fumbled around in those same woods looking for a way out.

Now, this guy Dante thinks he sees a light that can lead him out of this Valley of Despair and so he begins to climb by his own herculean efforts, but he runs up against a she-leopard named Temptation and he begins to back-track. And then a lion

named Pride gets in his way and he can't go ahead, and about this time a she-wolf named Avarice enters the scene and poor old Dante really goes into a tail spin and slips all over the landscape.

According to this writer, there was a beautiful gal named Beatrice who was sweet on this Dante and she had died early in life. She was married to some other fellow and possibly this is the reason she died early. At any rate, she petitioned the Queen of Heaven, just as folks petitioned Heaven for us. The Queen of Heaven was touched by this plea but, being a non-alcoholic, she called in a gal named Lucia to take care of this Twelfth Step job. Lucia had been around. She knew a gal shouldn't Twelfth Step a man, so she called in another member named Virgil. To help maintain their anonymity, I won't give their last names.

Now this Virgil fellow knew his way around, all right. He took the slipping Dante by another and unknown path so that he could avoid destruction by those three great enemies of the New Man—Temptation, Pride and Avarice.

As sure proof of the fact that Virgil was an alky, even after he had got his pigeon safely past his dangers and deposited on solid ground, he persisted in carrying on, through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven.

I wonder if, as in this case, sponsorship can't be carried a bit too far?

T. W. R., Alexandria, Va.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE?



How we can best rededicate our lives to the service of the sick alcoholic

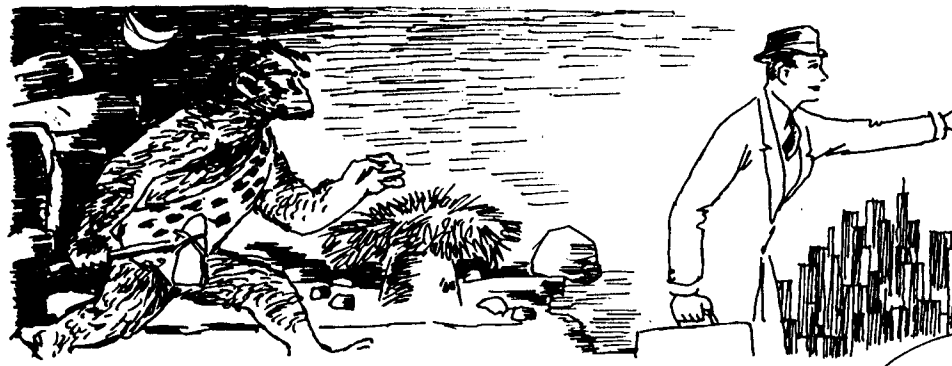
I HOPE I'll never forget the evening I came home after about the third or fourth AA meeting I had attended. I was carrying in my mind's eye and in my heart a picture of these new people I had met. They had said, "We are not saints . . ." yet their words and, more important, their activities seemed to belie that statement. The warmth and love, the outstretched hand of our Fellowship was a moving experience for me. I was on Cloud Nine and searching for a way to describe these remarkable people to my good mate who was awaiting me with tongue in cheek and cynical eye.

"They are like nothing you've ever met before," I said, enthralled. "They are like saints, but their halos are at a jaunty angle, like a song-and-dance man's straw hat."

My feelings might not be expressed by others in exactly these terms, but they are not uncommon in our Fel-

lowship, particularly when we are new on the program. Time has not disproved this first glow. Although we have our share of failure, alcoholic death, tragedy, phony people, odd-balls (who am I to talk?) and the usual cross section one finds in human society, time has served to strengthen and mature my conviction of the essential greatness of our program. It has enabled me to watch the growth, the flowering of character and the goodness in a large number of my fellow AAs.

It is my belief that we are fortunate enough to be an important working part of a great step forward in mankind's progress toward a better world. This continued evolution of man is not put forth by *me* as a thesis. Nearly every scholarly author on the subject will state that, although man may have developed to his optimum physically, he is still evolving mentally. And some include the concept



of the evolution of the spirit. I recently saw an interesting design on the paper jacket of a popular anthropology book. It pictured a hunched ape-man trailing after a handsome specimen of modern man, who, in turn, was following a creature robed in white, with wings and halo. Without opening the text, the author's main treatise is clear: Evolution has not come to a standstill; mankind has not yet arrived; his growth capacity is enormous. He can, in the future, become a being as far removed from modern man as he presently is from his ape-like ancestors (providing he doesn't blow himself off this good green planet first).

I know that we AAs are not unique, and decry any statement that sets us apart from other men and women. As one of my friends says, "Alcoholics are just like anybody else, *only more so.*"

We do not have a corner on the market where man's emerging mind is being developed. However, I do not think it presumptuous to regard

our AA program as one of the major world-wide steps into that dim possible future where man can live a better life, at peace with himself and his fellows.

As a solution to a health problem alone, our program deserves to rank along with the great medical milestones—the work of Pasteur, Mme. Curie, Dr. Salk and others. Don't take my word for it. Read the telegrams sent to our Twentieth and Twenty-Fifth Conventions by Dwight D. Eisenhower.

We have members who have risen to great moral and ethical heights in their life, on our program. We can point to people who, though nameless, have shown a selfless devotion to the principles of AA and to the sick alcoholic, which, in any other endeavor, would put them in the newspapers. In my own experience, I have seen two fine people die of cancer. They did not drink, nor did they complain. They continued their AA work to the end and, even when forced to bed, were a shining example to



others. I have known people doubly afflicted—with alcoholism and with concomitant ailments such as blindness, multiple sclerosis and diabetes. They have shown courage and faith in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles that are beyond the power of words to describe. I do not cite these examples to bolster an argument; they are plain facts concerning real people in AA. That they are not statistically valid in any sense, I am aware, but you and I know that they are typical examples of the many beacons of hope that successful members of AA have presented to their fellows and the public at large. They can probably be duplicated a hundredfold in AA groups around the world.

“Yes,” you will say, “but the majority of us AAs are simple souls who pursue our daily living without achieving such valiant nobility.”

True, but we must never underestimate the potential of any man. Drunk, we were a deadly menace on the highway, a burdensome invalid

in the home and an embarrassing social problem, a drain on the taxpayers (etc. ad nauseam). The mere fact that we are sober and in fair to excellent health is a great step forward. Add to this the fact that as an aggregate we have climbed from two sober alcoholics twenty-six years ago to the estimated 300,000 today, and a glimmering of group potential can be envisioned. It is axiomatic to our sobriety that in order to maintain it at all we must progress in the areas of moral and ethical values.

How truly precious is our AA heritage; how pregnant with meaning for the future! If it is true that many of us, either as individuals or as groups, are capable of what the foregoing implies, we have a great obligation and duty to fulfill. And there are many pitfalls along the way.

As a sterling example of the AA member who is loaded with and struggling against many character defects, I feel I can safely voice our need of a constant running inventory, both group and individual. Where can we start this inventory? What are some of the areas we should examine and strive to remedy, cut out or improve? How can we best rededicate our lives to the service of the sick alcoholic? To deal with these questions thoroughly in this article is impossible. Whole books have been written to aid us in living up to our Steps and Traditions. But perhaps you and I can get a start toward re-evaluating a few critical areas in our AA life together.



1. *We must not rest on our oars*

We have been reminded time and again in recent years, by talks and in reading, that we have barely scratched the surface of the alcoholic problem. We have been told that our first quarter-century is but a beginning and that the future holds great challenge for us all. We have been warned against complacency and against subscribing to the policy that having accomplished a great deal, we can relax and coast along. The warning is well taken. For example: Dr. Hodel, lately connected with our State Hospital, estimated that there are 12,000 alcoholics in Hawaii. Only a few hundred are attending AA meetings. Statistics on a national scale are even more imposing than these. We must tirelessly carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

2. *New horizons*

AA is in the unique position of being a tremendously respected organization in the world today. What we say and how we act are regarded with lively and sincere interest. People look to us and our leaders for some of the answers to the baffling

problem of alcoholism. People seek our advice and recommendations. The threshold we cross today extends our influence into the areas of public health, legislation of public funds, education, institutional administration, industry, medicine, psychiatry and social work. AA as such does not enter these fields, but we as individuals are being called on more and more in an advisory capacity. However, people tend to judge an organization on the performance of its individual members. This is not fair, but we have to live with it. If we are to protect the good name of AA we must ever be aware of our Steps and Traditions when venturing into public service.

3. *Our shield of anonymity*

Our Twelfth Tradition becomes all the more meaningful as the demand for our services grows. We were told many years ago that just one of us drunk at the level of press, TV and films would cause untold damage. Most of us took this to heart and abided by a self-enforced anonymity. A look at some who broke anonymity at the public level has justified this advice. These occasions have not only

been sad but they quite take the force out of our potential to help the sick alcoholic. If we are to pledge our lives to the future of AA as suggested at the Twenty-Fifth Convention, we must guard against our typical character weaknesses such as egotism, vanity and power-hunger.

Rumblings of conflict between groups and between individuals in AA at a public level reach our ears from time to time. Temper tantrums and wild emotions inflict themselves on the scene where steps are being taken to establish alcoholic service centers, clinics and the like. Some of these are inevitable and are classifiable as good normal growing pains. But some are excessive and reach ears not geared to understand our own brand of "alcoholic thinking." Let us remember that there are no "wheels" or "big shots" in AA. "Our leaders are but trusted servants. . . ." Are we living up to that trust?

4. *Working with professionals*

Let us seek to meet with true humility those who sincerely want to help our people: the psychiatrist, the doctor, the prison warden, the clergy, the skid-row mission leader, the alcoholic committees and our political leaders. To be sure, their approach to our problem may not be "right." All the more reason for us to hold our tempers and take up the burden of working closely with them in an effort to close the gap between our misunderstandings. Let us also remember that we do not necessarily know all the answers. Some of these

people have made a study of our problems and have much to contribute in the way of constructive advice and help.

I always get cold chills whenever some blatant statement like this comes out: "I don't believe in doctors or psychiatrists! I got sober on AA alone. If I can do it, anybody can do it."

Heaven help the pigeon who falls into this man's hands! We may end up attending a funeral. If we read the Big Book and any AA literature, we will find that a thorough physical check-up by a competent physician is recommended for *all* new AA people. If the doctors in a community are not educated AA-wise, isn't it our duty to see that those interested in us get our books and literature so they can do a good job for our people?

These are only a few starting points for a group or individual inventory, but I believe they are vital to our survival and to the future of AA. The late Peter Marshall has said that we should not worry so much about our personal *rights*, but should be more concerned about our *duties* and *responsibilities*. If we can succeed in this, we can be assured of making a significant contribution to mankind's progress. And we can be reasonably certain of fulfilling our destiny—the maintenance of our own sobriety and the gentle leading of our sick ones, with God's help, out of the valley of the shadow into the light of hope.

M. S., Honolulu, Hawaii

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 5

• Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

ORDINARILY you go along the street or drop in at a meeting and somebody says, "How are you?" and without thinking you say "Fine." Things may be terrible, your whole world may have just fallen apart, but you say "Fine."

I suppose on the whole it's a good custom. It cuts off random complaining and acknowledges that nine times out of ten the greeter doesn't really care how you are but is only making a conventional inquiry.

It comes as a kind of surprise, when we encounter the Fifth Step in AA, to discover that there are people on earth who really take an interest in how we are, and wouldn't mind being filled in with quite a bit of detail.

It comes as a surprise and, once we get used to the idea, a relief, because somehow human beings need this honest exchange now and then in order to go on living. Commenting on this, the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson once did a bit of verse about a man everybody thought was

on top of the world all the time, "he glittered as he walked"; then one day went out and shot himself. There are times when we have to tell somebody how we *really* are. Step Five takes care of this need better than anything else I know.

How important this action is to getting sober, and *staying* sober, and growing into a cheerful and useful sobriety, is attested by the position given it in the Big Book. Step Five, you recall, leads off the chapter headed, "Into Action." All the Steps before this are regarded as preparation. But when you get to Step Five, brothers and sisters, you're in action. You're "building an arch through which we shall walk free at last."

The purpose of this series, as I guess readers know by this time, is not to tinker with the Twelve Steps, but to give a case history of a fairly average effort to work them over a period of time. People change as time goes by. The same things acquire new meanings. My job is to tell how the Steps hit one person when he first

came in, then seven years later, then seven more years after that.

When I first came into AA I carried a load of resentment I could hardly walk with. A business associate I had befriended and given a splendid opportunity had just given me the good old double-hex, gone over to my opposition and helped heave me out of a firm I had myself founded. I was so mad that at times I think I could almost have killed him. My wife had taken up with another man and successfully sued me for divorce, cleaning me out, and I didn't take that kindly either.

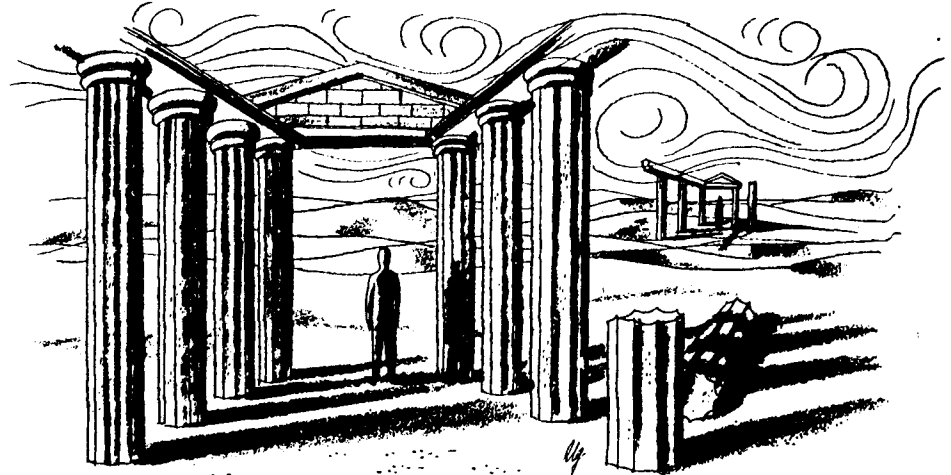
But I was trying to follow the tradition of the stiff upper lip, keep the old chin up, *Illegitimi non carborundum*—don't let the so-and-sos grind you down, as the Latin scholars say. And, though by some miracle I was staying sober, I was getting no-

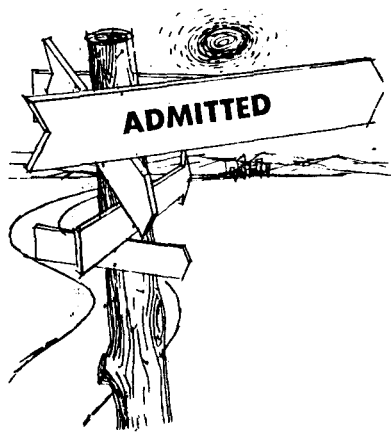
where with the quality and enjoyment of my sobriety.

Gradually, however, the friendliness of AA began to make me feel that I might be able to open up about what was really wrong with me and not lose friends but possibly actually gain some. After a few months I took Step Five—first having written my inventory down on paper as suggested in the Big Book in Step Four.

Step Five was not easy for me. Seven years later, in the Grapevine series on "Twelve Steps and the Older Member," I described my feelings. I can do nothing today to improve on that description:

"For me," I wrote, "a terror goes with a sense of having been in error. I am almost physically allergic to the word 'wrong' as applied to myself. I tense up and shorten my breath and feel scared at the mere mention of it."





I go on the defensive at all points, fairly bristling like a mental porcupine, yet with an underlying deeply panicked sense that my defense is not going to be successful. The word 'wrong,' directed personally to me, means shouting, scolding voices, threats of beatings and incarceration and ostracism and disgrace—an eternity of unfriendliness. It means ultimatums impossible to meet, standards that cannot be attained."

But somehow I took the Step. It happened in this way (I further wrote):

"One night after a meeting, at an hour when most good AAs are sound asleep in their beds, I called up a member I scarcely knew—Carl C.—and told him I had my list ready, as directed by the Big Book, and wanted to take the Fifth Step, could I please come over? I don't know how I can ever express my gratitude for the kindness and understanding that man

and his wife showed me that night. Obviously a thoroughly mixed-up pigeon, tense and nervous, I descended on them and began my painful recitation of wrongs. They gave me coffee and cake, they were patient and understanding and good, and Carl C. heard me out.

"When it was over I found I had learned something. I had learned that the Power called God was a *kind* power, before whom one who had done wrong need not stand in fear. And I had learned that there are kind human beings, to whom one could admit error without fear of attack or denunciation. This made it possible for me to *admit* wrong; thereafter I was spared some of the exhausting effort of trying to maintain a façade of phony bluster intended to *conceal* wrong."

Seven years after these events I presumptuously set down for the Grapevine some advice about taking Step Five: "Follow carefully the directions of the Big Book, and don't be scared if you're scared. Don't press on too rashly; if the going gets too tough retreat to Step Two—the Higher Power is kind and can restore us to sanity. But don't procrastinate too long. We cannot continue in the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience until we can live with God, ourselves and man without fear of being found, from time to time, to be somewhat in the wrong, along with the rest of day-to-day humanity."

Another seven years have passed since this was written. Meanwhile I

have applied Step Five many times, seeking out a "close-mouthed, understanding friend," as the Big Book puts it, and going over what's been wrong with me lately. It is easier than it was the first time, and less formal, but I still use written notes sometimes.

Nothing could be more important, in this one AA's opinion, than keeping open these channels of candid, constructive self-discussion. If you don't, as I wrote seven years ago and have seen no need to retract, "the old alcoholic phoniness begins to reconstruct itself back of a new front of unctuous and respectable sobriety. People are less inclined to 'go into all that' in their talks, and more inclined to pontificate. It becomes harder and harder for friends to get through the shell and reach a real person."

Have I, as the Big Book predicted, finished building the arch through which I walk a free man? Frankly, no. I'm still not entirely free of fear of admitting I'm wrong. But I'm better than I was, I have improved, I'm *freer*. Perhaps the quality of my sobriety is not all it should be. But my lowest quality sobriety is better than my highest quality drunk. And the Steps have given me uninterrupted sobriety, to my daily and, I hope, continual gratitude.

I came into AA still a youngish man. Now I am in my mid-fifties, and some things have changed. Older people, you know, do not take kindly to correction, hate to admit when

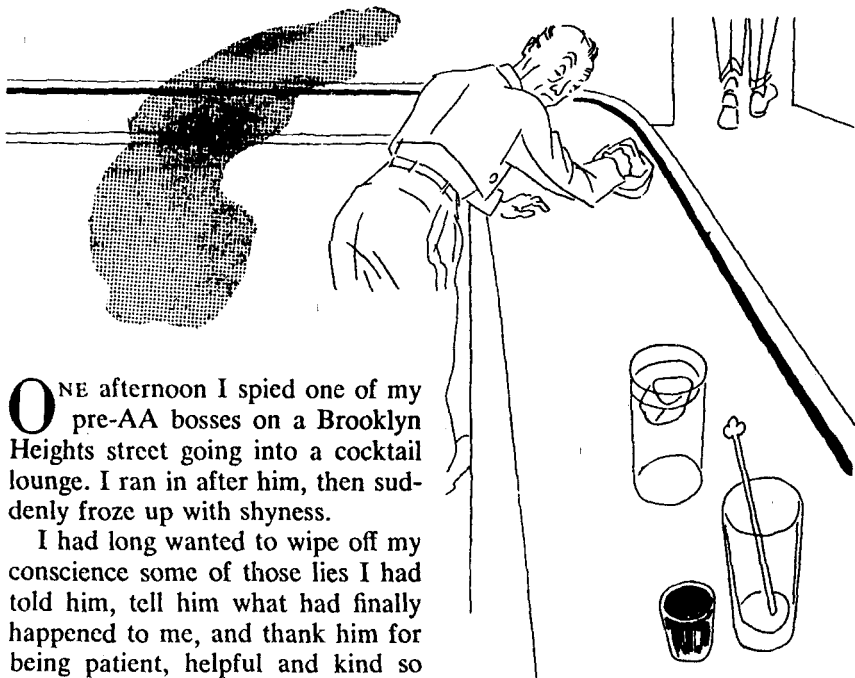
they're wrong. If, as an old duffer, I'm to be fit to live with and able to make any kind of contribution to AA or to anything else, I'm going to have to watch this. I foresee no chance to ease up on Step Five, but will have to lean on it more heavily than ever as time goes on.

I've remarried since coming into AA, and would like to say something about marriage in the later years. AA has helped me discover that the later years of marriage can be even more exciting than the romantic years. Oh, my courtship of my second and most wonderful bride was a heady business and I wouldn't have missed it. Our child-rearing years were full of surprises and had some tough going, but the kids' responses showed us we were getting somewhere. Now the kids, one by one, are going off to school and getting married. More and more the word "family," to my wife and me, will mean each other. What we make of the rest of the trip depends pretty much on how we treat each other. So sometimes the "close-mouthed, understanding friend" for my wife (who, though not an alcoholic, works the Steps) is me. And ever so often she serves as a fifth-stepper for me.

As I now see the Fifth Step, it's a kind of way of living. Sure, you have to take it formally, by arrangement, complete with your written inventory, the first time. But at some point after that, it seems to me, it ought to begin to be second nature.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

How AA Came to Them



ONE afternoon I spied one of my pre-AA bosses on a Brooklyn Heights street going into a cocktail lounge. I ran in after him, then suddenly froze up with shyness.

I had long wanted to wipe off my conscience some of those lies I had told him, tell him what had finally happened to me, and thank him for being patient, helpful and kind so often. In fact, his firing of me had been a kick toward AA that I needed.

Now that we were foot-to-foot on the brass rail, I did not know how to begin. What if he didn't even remember me?

I ordered a ginger ale, and finally asked, "Excuse me, are you Mr. Johnson?"

He turned on me a frosted glare of non-recognition, and just stared. "No, I am not," he said sharply at last, and turned away: I was ashamed to see that I had embarrassed him.

I apologized. Said I had mistaken him for a fellow I used to work with

at such-and-such a place, and then left.

I hadn't turned the nearest corner when he caught up with me. He was smiling, and said, "My name is Thompson, and I think I remember you."

I was awfully glad to get to say my little piece after all those years. He acted politely interested, and said casually, "Mm-m-m. Tell me a little about this, uh, AA."

I did. He joined. Never underestimate Step Nine!

Brooklyn, N. Y.

The Blacked-Out Boy

*Now he was in bad trouble,
and only one Grand Juror could
believe his story*

I HAD never served on a Grand Jury before but suddenly I knew that this teen-age boy was telling the truth.

Call the boy "F." He had just passed his eighteenth birthday when he stood uneasily before us twenty-four men and two women. The Grand Jury wanted to believe him but did not. Only I believed him. I had had that kind of black-out myself: total non-recall from a beginning-point of complete innocence. Then bang! And the police have their hooks in you, with evidence you can neither comprehend nor credit.

Here he was now—a decent kid who had turned a pistol on a bartender and got a drink—and a ton of trouble too.

It flashed through my mind: "What can I do to help this kid?" How could I bring AA to bear in *this* affair? How did I *know* this boy was telling the jury the truth about never owning or touching a gun in his life?

I don't know how I knew; I just know I did know. As he stood before

us, acutely embarrassed, acutely remorseful, in the merciless isolation in which most Grand Juries study the men and women they must indict or let go, I could inhabit the tingling bewilderment of this pleasant, cooperating, self-scourged youngster, trying to tell the truth. And telling it exactly, too, up to the instant when derangement took over from order.

Ballistics experts identified the gun as harmless for hold-up purposes. It was a starter's pistol, used at track meets, and fired blanks only. It was empty at the time of the hold-up. And "F" didn't want money; he only wanted a drink.

Other things came out: "F" was a substantial contributor to his family's support. He was one of seven brothers and sisters. He worked for the post office, had never been in trouble in his life, had left school after the tenth grade, passed civil service exams and worked hard from the first day of his employment.

"F" was told that the arresting

officer had every right to shoot him dead since he ("F") was obviously drunk, apparently armed and was using his gun in a threatening manner.

When it was recommended he be turned over to the Youth Council Bureau for advice and guidance, I sought out the Assistant DA who had presented the case. I told this man I had done considerable work with AA (without revealing my own actual identity with it). I told him that while I thought the Youth Bureau was equipped to do a good job in such a case, it was possible that "alcoholism" was seriously involved here and that unless this came out, the Bureau's efforts might come to naught.

The DA agreed. I was encouraged to talk to "F" and I did so. The DA asked to be present, saying he personally knew very little about alcoholism.

"F" made a clean statement about his drinking. It had been going on—

almost always with trouble—since he was sixteen. Then I told the boy, in the presence of the DA, just what alcoholism is: I said I had no interest at all in temperance, was no preacher, didn't care who drank or how much. I just said I was most terribly and sincerely interested in those cases of drinking where the drinking cannot be controlled.

"F" said that being the recipient of such disinterested interest was something entirely new in his life.

I wanted to bring AA (or its wisdom) into the affairs of this boy, and I did. I got stuck with a bit more than I bargained for; now I've been asked by the Youth Council Bureau to serve in an advisory capacity on the Board.

Of course I will. Two years ago I wouldn't have. I couldn't have. I wasn't in AA and I could neither have understood "F" nor been able to explain him to others.

R. F. S., New York

The program and psycho-therapy meet in

“ANOTHER HUMAN BEING”

THE AA principles we practice in all our affairs first came to my attention more than ten years ago. Very probably I endorsed them, and advocated their use by alcoholics.

You see, I have always had very high principles. In the most drunken of my drunken days I clung to my principles, holding them close to me, voicing them, displaying them, until a blackout would happen along and take me from them—or them from me, as the case may be.

Vague though my principles may have been, they were at least specific enough to stir up conversation. The larger the issue under discussion, the higher my principles. But there was something very wrong with them. They were anchored in mid-air, unattached to reality. My oratory, in those days, was described as that of a prophet, operating at a loss.

Then, about five years ago, I became ready for Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't quite know how it happened. I had shopped around, extensively and expensively, and I was

exhausted, financially and otherwise. At any rate, whatever the mysterious components of the miracle are, I was ready, at last, for AA.

The process of becoming ready knocked out some of these prejudices, which I called principles—but not all of them. I brought the remainder into AA with me. Today I still have them. They are still as simultaneously vague and specific as they were in my drinking days. And they don't do me any good today, either. But, fortunately, they don't do me as much harm as they used to. That's because the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has given me another set of principles not quite so big and grand as my old ones, but with a difference. I have been shown that this set needs to be applied, and practiced, in order for them to exist and to live.

In my particular case, my recovery seems to involve my learning how to practice a certain three of the Twelve Steps. This is not to say that I consider these three more impor-

tant than the others, or that I can concentrate on these three and ignore the others. In school, I couldn't get by basic arithmetic without learning *all* the multiplication table, and therefore had to put forth special effort to master the 7's and 9's. I've had a similar experience in AA.

Let's start out with Step One, which took me more than five years to understand and accept. This is the Step that requires me to admit I am an alcoholic.

If I grasp this fully, I am aware—not only each day, but each moment—that I am an alcoholic. Whether I am troubled or untroubled, cold or warm, rich or poor, in pain or euphoric, arrogant or humble, I am that *and* an alcoholic. To practice this principle I must not only be aware of my alcoholism, but act or behave in a manner that illustrates an awareness of it. This means attending meetings, and nourishing friendships in AA. If I practice the first principle, or Step, I will not tempt or tease myself with speculation about a return to social drinking.

The other Steps that required special work on my part did not immediately show themselves.

When I had been on the program about three and a half years there occurred one of those emotional crises we all have from time to time. It just happens that mine was the worst such crisis in my history. It can best be described as a sort of general anxiety, verging on panic. It

was severe, painful and frightening. It wasn't anything anyone was doing to me. It wasn't caused externally. It came from within.

I tried to drive it away by telling myself it was childish; that I was acting like a baby instead of a man. To the best of my knowledge it was not a crisis of whether or not to drink. It just wasn't that specific. But the pain of it was specific, and I knew I would drink if I didn't find a way to stop it.

I began taking in more meetings (one nightly) in an attempt to break the spell. During the meetings the bad feeling would leave me and I would breathe easily. But, after the meetings, it would return.

I searched the program to see what else could be done. It occurred to me that one of the things I had not felt it necessary to do as yet was to take the Fourth and Fifth Steps: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” and “Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Confident that action on these omissions would pull me out of the tailspin, I called an AA friend and asked him to take my Fifth Step with me. He agreed.

So I took my Fourth Step and spent a few days painfully recalling my evil past, and wrote reams of inventory. I took these notes along to my Fifth Step and read them to my friend, adding many more items as they came to mind. It took two ses-

sions to complete the ordeal. Then I waited for the clouds to roll back and for my emotional well-being to return. I must emphasize that, until this crisis occurred, my AA life had been very good.

I waited—and nothing happened. Meanwhile, another friend in AA had recommended a psychotherapist. I was reluctant to consider him, however, for I regarded such therapy as an admission of my failure to make AA work for me. But I was hurting too much to ignore my need for help.

Had the Fifth Step let me down?

Reviewing my Fourth Step, I saw now that my written inventory was shallow, evasive, concealing and untrue in spirit if not in the letter.

The damnable thing was that I had not purposefully or consciously avoided the truth. It was simply a reflection of my temperament, which was to make an inventory in parable form. The difficulty was that I couldn't unscramble the parables. Having taken an inadequate Fourth Step, the Fifth Step naturally failed to produce results.

At that point my objections to the psychotherapist were overcome. I needed trained help.

From the first, I made it clear to

the therapist that I wanted to come to him to take my Fourth and Fifth Steps in the Alcoholics Anonymous program. He agreed to take me. I have since come to believe that he didn't quite make the distinction I did about it, and that he considers me just another patient. That is *his* problem. I needed—and still need—the distinction. To me, my sessions with him are not psychotherapy; I am taking my Fourth and Fifth Steps.

This relationship began almost two years ago. I am still on my Fifth Step with the therapist. My crisis disappeared shortly after I began to practice this principle this way. My wife, a member of Al-Anon, indicates to me that she has benefited by the general improvement in my behavior and demeanor. I can think of no more authoritative source for a testimony that the Fourth and Fifth Steps must be practiced in my daily affairs if I desire emotional well-being.

Unlike my old drunken principles, which lived in the past and future, my AA principles are part of my Today. When I don't practice them each Today, I feel bad. When I do, I feel good. And AA has shown me it's good to feel good—one day at a time.

L. T., Malibu, Calif.

February 1962



"Oh, I don't know him really well. He just twelfth-steps me once in awhile."

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step **6**

- Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

IN commenting on Step Six, the Big Book simply dumps the matter in your lap, wrapping up the whole business in one short paragraph. It asks whether we're willing to be rid of the things we've admitted are objectionable. "If we still cling to something we will not let go," it says, "we ask God to help us to be willing." With that, it leaves us on our own.

Number Six often puts me in mind of the Archimedean paradox: "Give me a place to stand," he said, "and I will move the world."

My defective character sometimes seems to me as heavy as the world. Often I would like to have it moved, but how can I when I am *in* it? With Archimedes I cry, "Give me a place to stand!"—a place outside my world, from which I can change it.

I have wondered many times whether the Step was deliberately cryptic. After all, it asks seemingly little—a readiness, a receptive state of mind. Only when we set about actually achieving this state of mind do we get an inkling of how much is

involved. We are being asked to accept the most profound evolutionary change it is possible for a human being to undergo, the change to a new and flawless self.

When I first came into AA, in the burst of gobble-up-the-program-in-one-gulp enthusiasm, Step Six seemed to pose no particular problem. I had read that some of the newer biologists had decided human evolution had entered a new phase. Physical, unconscious change had given way to conscious improvement of mind and character. We participated with the Evolutionary Force—which I choose to call a Higher Power, or God—to make new beings of ourselves. I was all for getting on with it, and saw no great obstacle to the quick achievement of near-perfection, or at the very least, an advanced state of spiritual development.

I soon had my come-uppance, and seven years later was still trying to put together the pieces. At that time I felt (fortunately I have a record of my notions at this time—the "Twelve

Steps and the Older Member" series in these pages) that my job was to cope, one at a time, with a series of character defects. As one was disposed of, I reasoned, I'd go on to the next.

"As I go along through the years," I found myself saying seven years ago (and after seven years in AA), "my admitted character defects come up one by one for removal—if, as definition for 'removal,' we can accept 'such a diminution of the defect's power that it no longer has authority to dictate my actions.' First it was drinking, and that one was removed. Then it was overindulgence of various physical appetites, and that one was so taken in hand that it is no longer a problem. Then it was lust for power, then envy."

Today, fourteen years after my first AA meeting, I have another notion about character defects and Step Six. Before going on, however, I reiterate that the purpose of this "revisiting" is to promote discussion, not to manufacture dicta. I believe that Steps have meaning, and that their meaning can be enriched by sharing experience, batting it around. I'm only, as we say, "telling my story," the after-AA part, the strivings to work the Steps, with the advice and consent of AA friends, through the passing days.

In my efforts to achieve the willingness of spirit suggested by Step Six, I have had to make a distinction between *defects* and *traits*. A trait, to my way of thinking, is something

caused by a defect—a result, a symptom, a side effect. One defect may cause a great number of traits. These may appear and disappear, but I will not be finally rid of any of them until the defect itself is dealt with.

We can illustrate this with what happens in the case of a physical defect. Suppose a man is born with one leg shorter than the other. That's his defect. As a result he will limp, avoid running sports and be careful on stairs. These are traits.

For a long time I tended to treat traits as if they were defects; I was ready to have the limp removed without having the leg restored. Of course it didn't work, and I was driven back each time to find what really was the defect, not of body but, in this case, of character.

There was a considerable list of traits—rage, arrogance, hate, as well as some of the milder ones such as envy, despair, fear and greed. It has never been unbearably hard for me to become willing to have God remove these things. Most of them are uncomfortable, and usually I'm only too pleased at the idea of getting rid of them. But time after time I have found that this willingness is interfered with by the trait itself. How can you be willing to have fear removed when you're caught fast in the grip of fear?

Gradually, I think, I have come to recognize the defect from which these traits emerge, like jets from a fountain. This defect I know by the

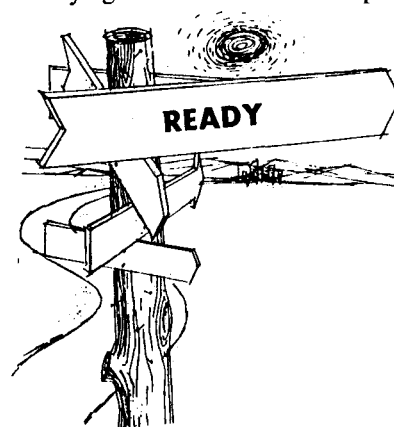
name, "unresolved discontent." Just in the measure to which I allow the Higher Power to deal with this discontent—resolve it, explain it, remove it—do I find relief from the multitudinous symptoms.

Discontent can take many forms; it's no wonder it took me so long to discover it was all the same thing. When my prime character defect is having its way with me, it seems that nothing can allay it. If I'm in the warm South I want the cool North. If I'm working I long for escape from the tyranny of toil; if I'm idle I crave the security and status of a job. If children are in my care I feel bogged down by them; if they're not I worry about them. If I'm the center of at-

tention I'm uneasy and want to be alone; if I'm alone I want people to pay more attention to me. When everything's going my way I find things dull and without challenge; when things go against me I feel crushed and discarded. I can experience craven fear and angry courage at the same time. It's head-splittingly painful, and has driven me to produce all kinds of symptom-traits—grouchiness, boastfulness, obsessive resentment, selfishness, and, in the old pre-AA days, attempted escape through drinking—all the offshoots of my central character defect, unresolved discontent.

Discontent in itself, I am persuaded, is not a bad thing. It was be-

cause I was discontented with myself as a drunk that I accepted AA and found sobriety. Discontent with appearance can lead a man to shave, put on a clean shirt and thus effect a decided improvement—or a woman to fix her hair, repair her make-up and try again. The discontent I speak



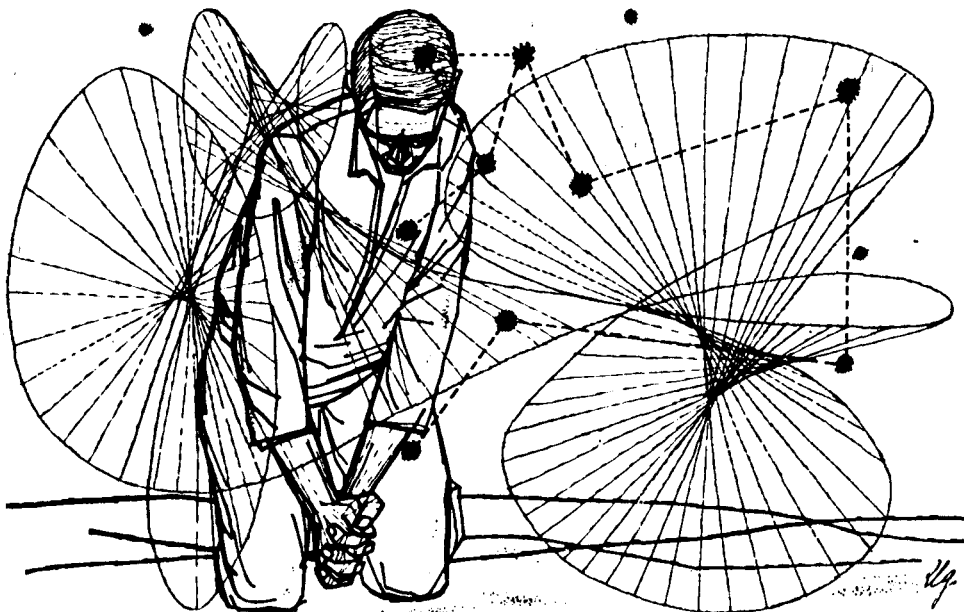
of is the gnawing, insatiable kind, impervious, so far as I know, to any agency other than the Higher Power Himself. When I have at last diagnosed this discontent as my prime defect, and become willing to have God remove it, I seem to begin to get some help.

These are the ideas that have come my way, (from God by way of AA and other sources) that strike centrally at the defect itself:

"I must learn not to want more than my share." In the close-of-meeting Lord's Prayer we ask for daily bread. When I demand more than this I inflame my defect. When I accept daily bread thankfully and ask no more, the defect subsides.

"I must learn to accept the world as it is." The universe has been so set up that it is impossible for beings of our present construction physically to be two places at the same time. Therefore I must break myself of the habit of always wishing I were somewhere else, and settle down to full enjoyment of where I am. Some of the evil in the world I can change, some I cannot. But I certainly cannot reduce the amount of evil in the world by adding anger and resentment. What evil I can't change I must understand and forgive.

"This misery is only a hard stretch on the road to a magnificent fulfillment." At times when the force of the defect seems overwhelming, when I seem to be all defect and no character, I try to remember that this too shall pass. In the old drinking days of trying to avoid the wretchedness of straight-out tussle with the defect, it grew and grew until it threatened to destroy me. This way, with the help of God and AA, I am growing stronger, the defect weaker. In the end God and AA will prevail. I think the new biologists are right, that God has transferred His evolutionary work to direct character-improvement among His people. In place of the old-style men and women who fought, hated, slandered, hurt and destroyed, He's making a fine new breed able to love, to understand, to comfort and to serve. In making myself mentally ready to have God remove my defect I am moving, even if ever so slightly, ever



so slowly, toward a higher state of being.

"I am not alone." To become willing to have a central character defect removed means, for me, a spiritual struggle. Many people besides myself have had spiritual struggles—I am not alone. I have friends, not just vague figures from literature or antiquity, but live ones—Bill, Jim, Walt, Sally, Mim, in the meeting hall—going through the same struggle. They help me, I help them, none of us is alone. Moreover, we have convincing evidence that a Higher Power is with us. Are these special times, generating special fears? I think not. The slingshot, in the days when there were only a few hundred thousand

humans on earth, was as great a threat to survival as the H-bomb of today, when there are nearly three billion humans on earth. God was steadfast then, He is no less so now.

"I have much to be thankful for." Whenever I think of my days in AA—of the very beginning when there were only a few such days, and of now when there are many, I realize anew that something wonderful has happened to me through no act of my own. With this realization comes a deep gratitude and with the gratitude, peace. When I can achieve this mood and sustain it I am entirely—*entirely*—ready to have God remove the unresolved discontent I believe to be my central character defect.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

FIRST 12TH STEP CALL



at last, he was going to help
a real alcoholic . . .

As I walked about the streets of Albany one Tuesday afternoon, I thought, "Six weeks sober, this is a record. I must watch myself. I won't drink—I won't drink." I kept repeating this as I walked, even though I hadn't thought of a drink in six weeks.

This new world was strange to me, but I was happy thinking about the previous night's AA meeting. It was wonderful to be alive. Everyone

seemed happy, even the kids fighting in the street.

Not knowing anyone I could visit—the few I could call up were working—I wondered what I could do. It was then I remembered what Bill had said: "Talk to another alcoholic, especially one who needs help."

"Where will I find one?" I thought, and my past answered, "In a hospital."

Now I had a plan. He will need

cigarettes. He will be so glad I came; and when I tell him there is a "way out" he will never forget me.

The next hour was spent in buying cigarettes, walking to the hospital and thinking of all the things I had seen and heard in AA.

I seemed to freeze as I drew near the hospital. Doubt said, "Keep away," but I pushed, and finally opened the door.

I still remember how the woman looked up at me when I shouted, "I want to see an alcoholic."

"Who do you wish to see?" she asked quietly.

"Any alcoholic," was all I could say.

A bit confused and, I guess, worried, she asked me to have a chair.

When I looked up, there was a doctor, wearing a butcher coat and crew-cut, very big and at least part German. "What do you want?" he asked.

"To see an alcoholic."

"Who?"

"Any one."

"Why?"

"To try and help him." I didn't mean to insult the good doctor, so I

added, "And to help myself."

"What is wrong with you, that you need help?"

"I am an alcoholic."

Now I had him. I didn't realize it at the time. He played the role of the pupil, and the teacher was a very confused, still mentally and physically sick alcoholic, but sober and happy.

He searched to find what I had, and I gave freely of the little I had absorbed.

The doctor ended the visit by telling me that, of the few alcoholics they had, some were too sick to listen, others didn't want any part of this AA. "You are lucky indeed," he said. "Come back again. Next time there may be someone you can see."

I gave him my cigarettes for the boys and left.

This was my first Twelfth Step job. I had seen no alcoholic, but, I had "tried," and the Step said "We tried to carry the message. . ."

My own feelings were a reward greater than I could have dreamed of. I had gone to help someone, and I had. Me.

R. F., Farmingdale, N. Y.

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 7

- Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings

SOMETIMES the mere reading of Step Seven gives me a deeply excited, tingling feeling. I think of those moments—and what AA who has been around for a time has not known them, or something like them?—when I felt I was actually in touch with the Higher Power as I understood Him. I think of the even more vivid experiences of some of my AA colleagues. And I experience a thrill, as new and fresh each time it comes as it was the first time I felt it, that the very source of the universe can be directly approached—not just by saints, geniuses and biblical characters, but by miserable self-defeating drunks and ex-drunks, capable at any moment of reverting, like myself.

At other times I read the same Step and think, “ask Him? Who’s Him? God? Who’s He?” The possibility of being in communication with the Creator seems as remote as Mount Kilimanjaro; a Creator’s very existence seems doubtful.

Later I learned, through reading, that these contradictory feelings are almost universal. Veteran writers on

the spiritual life—and I accept the Big Book’s statement that the AA program is “the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience”—even have a name for this state of doubt: “the dark night of the soul.”

This discovery helped me to answer questions I had asked as a newcomer and have heard many times since: “How do you take the Steps—all at once or now and then? In order or skipping around? And when?” The question answered itself. I couldn’t wholeheartedly ask anything of a Power I was not in touch with and wasn’t sure existed. I had to take Step Seven when the feeling was on me that the Power was near and in touch and available and listening. Then, and then only, could I ask what I had to ask in Step Seven and really, deeply mean it.

“But what if such times never come?” I used to wonder. That was in the beginning. I am now bold to assert that to anyone who really tries, and who continues really trying over a long time despite discouragements, such times will come.

I have formulated some notions

about things that keep these times from coming more frequently. The times God seems improbable, I have noticed, usually coincide with the times I am most involved in everyday commerce and controversy. In grandfather’s day a lot of people used to say “I’ll meet you at one o’clock, God willing.” Now people meet at appointed times “if traffic permits,” and there’s a difference.

We are affected by this difference. The unspoken assumption of everyday life is that there is no God who matters. Through habit we come to accept this assumption. It feels so right, when you’re swinging along with the regiment, to be in step. It’s hard, even dangerous, to contend that everybody is out of step but Johnny, even though it may be true. We in AA have rediscovered that there is a Higher Power who cares about each one of us, regardless of what the regiment may think. We have found it to our advantage, insofar as sustained sobriety is our goal, to ask Him to remove our shortcomings. We do this when and as we can, and this is our Step Seven.

Besides “Him” and “asked” and “remove” there are two other words I have found important in Number Seven—“humbly” and “shortcomings.” I’ve learned something about shortcomings during the past few years I hadn’t known before. It’s how they differ from other things called “limitations.” There are certain human limitations God is unlikely to remove in this stage of existence, no

matter how much we implore Him.

A lot of my early difficulties with this Step arose from confusing these two words. For example, God gave me, in small measure, three native talents. I have fumed a good part of my life that I have not realized my youthful dream of dazzling admiring onlookers with my easy passage from a superb performance in one field to an even greater achievement in another. I thought this failure was a “shortcoming,” and asked God to remove it.

Now I see I was asking something God had never granted. We all have limitations. I cannot walk unequipped on still air, nor can anyone else. Even the great and versatile Leonardo conceded that Michelangelo was a better sculptor than he was, and Raphael a better painter. To excel in any field calls for lifelong singleness of purpose, particularly in our age of specialization. There are fixed limitations of our earthly condition and it is out of bounds to ask that they be removed.

“Shortcomings” is another matter altogether. A shortcoming, as I understand it, is failing to measure up to a reasonable—not an unreasonable—expectation. It is reasonable to try to render the help that is within our power when it is asked; to reduce the voltage of fear, anger, pride, envy, impatience, intolerance and malice that flickers through our lives; to try to get rid of the resentments that could destroy our sobriety. To slight any one of these efforts is, as I

have come to see it, an AA shortcoming. I believe God will work with us toward removing them if we ask Him to, humbly.

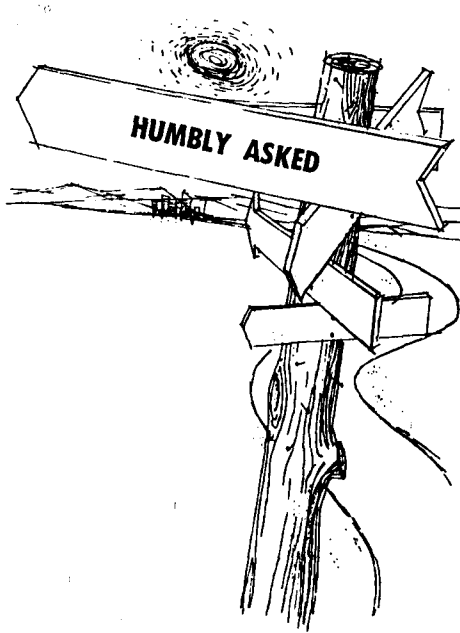
Humbly? The classic explanation of humility, Bible readers will recall, is in the story wherein the solidly-on-the-program Job, vexed at his run of bad luck, challenges God: "Show me my fault!" God does not argue, but asks Job, "Can you cause the sun to come up or the moon to rise?"

In any dealings I may have with God, I have found myself better off to try to keep my status straight. Part of my assigned job in this series is to outline the first impression of Step Seven on a newcomer, and how it looked seven and then fourteen years later. On this word "humbly," I'm quoting from something I wrote on Step Seven in "Twelve Steps and the Older Member," as it appeared in the Grapevine seven years ago:

"What is humility? It became one of the really vital words in my new AA vocabulary, but just exactly what did it mean?

"During the first year or so, humility to me meant an absence of pride. 'You've got to be cut down to size,' an old-timer remarked, and I flared in resentment. Even while protesting, though, I had a hunch he was right, and it soon grew into a conviction. Getting humility was going to be a grim, bumpy business of getting rid of pride.

"This would mean a reversal of the way I'd been living, and thinking. All my life I'd been given to under-



stand that to have no pride was contemptible. The strongest of all the pleas about my drinking was: 'Have you no *pride*?' Pride of self and family, of school, of business or professional affiliation, of social and fraternal contacts, of parents, children, sweethearts, of prejudices and of locality, of possessions and of physical attributes, of nationality, intelligence and creed—these I had been encouraged by a pride-puffed world to esteem as the highest values. Now I was told they were excess baggage, to get rid of them and be 'cut down to size.'

"The job was slow and, even this long after, is only fairly begun. Some-

times I wearied of it, and asked testily what it had to do with staying sober on any given day. But as the humbling stone of truth wore deeper I saw more clearly that whenever one of my uncountable prides was touched I'd flare in resentment. And prideful resentment, AA's accumulated centuries of collective sobriety was trying to teach me, is a frequent prelude to a drunk.

"The first to go, and one of the hardest, was head-of-family, big-boss-around-the-house, or breadwinner pride. During all my drinking I had 'prided myself' on being a consistent provider. I lost no opportunity to toot the theme on trumpet and cornet and beat it out on the tomtoms. . . .

"As is so often the case, circumstances gave me sound help in getting rid of this pride. All in the same year, the industry I'd served for twenty years bounced me out of a job and my wife of fifteen years tossed me out of my position as head of the family by legal force. And now, mind you, I was sober! I had a choice. I could hang on to my prides and start an angry war to win back prestige. The Big Book warned against that path: '. . . the rage and the brain-storm are not for us.'

"Or I could ask 'humbly' that my shortcomings be removed. That way I would have to accept good-naturedly the fact that my family and profession could get along without me. I just wasn't as important a property as, all this time, I had thought.

If they wanted none of me I could no longer, as of old, bully them into line. I'd just have to let them go their ways and seek other company—AA company. . . .

"At every meeting I saw that men and women completely lacking in attributes I had once considered essential possessed something of incalculably greater value to me. They knew how to live, and soberly. The more humbly I was willing to listen and learn from them, the more I gained (for from nothing at all to just a little is nevertheless a gain) in humility. . . . I'm here on borrowed time, on probation. For I'm an alcoholic, enjoying a respite in a fatal disease. I'm in no position to rail at people for not being other than as they are. My proper attitude, AA has tried to teach me, is one of simple thankfulness that I'm still around. . . .

"I've also come to see that there's another and more wonderful aspect of humility than the negative one of getting rid of a prideful shell.

"When a chick is born the main event is the arrival on earth of a new kind of life. In the excitement of this fact, the smashing of the shell is all but forgotten. I think our efforts to learn to ask humbly, that is, to attain humility, may be something like that. Certainly there was a period in the hatching when, from the chick's point of view, life must have seemed nothing but an interminable pecking away at an almost impenetrable shell. But finally it breaks, and he's free. . . ."

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

THE GREEN DEMON

*Jealousy is poisonous—
but this AA member found an effective antidote*

I CAN mark one thing well, in looking back at my whirling nightmare of drinking, it was the only time I was ever completely jealous of total strangers! It amazes me now to remember that I had ugly and envious thoughts about innocent people I passed on the street—people who never knew me and had never done me the slightest harm. I resented their good fortune, their fine clothes, their poise, their normalcy. I wanted to see them taken down a peg or two, or even down many pegs to where I was!

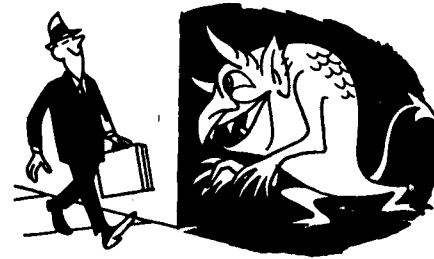
I am no longer jealous of strangers. Yet, this is not to say that I have been purged of the terrible emotion. It is only to say that my capacity for jealousy has become more subtle, often cloaking itself in seemingly righteous feelings. It is now directed toward people whom I know personally. What used to be blind jealousy, seething almost on the surface at all times, has now become “conditional” jealousy, kept under lock and key unless certain nerve-ends in my life are rubbed the wrong way.

Then, in almost an instant, the cold fury rises, as it always did.

Fortunately, it does not usually rise all the way. For I have done battle with this demon Jealousy, and I charge that he is a great destroyer of happiness and stability. It is impossible to be both jealous and happy; the two conditions are what engineers call “mutually exclusive.” I want to be happy, I want to be sober and I want to progress. Therefore, I must exclude the very beginnings of jealousy at all costs, for the pain of rooting it out is nothing compared with the pain of being its victim.

Most of the jealousy I suffer from today is in a disguised form; I have simply allowed it to appear in a new mask. It soon makes itself known, however, for abruptly something good is missing from my life, and I feel tense and bitter and unhappy. It is my old enemy again, and I throw him out.

I give AA’s Fifth Step a great deal of the credit for my progress. The Fifth Step is something of a mystery



to me; I’m unable to understand why it should be such an effective part of the program. It is, though, and it got me off dead center on this problem. Unable to quell the vicious feelings myself, I talked them over with certain other members, and sometimes even brought them up at group meetings. There was marked improvement almost every time, particularly on the occasions when it had seemed especially difficult to mention the subject. If a person is able to recognize that he is a victim of jealousy, then the Fifth Step—talking the thing over with another human being—will certainly help.

I suspect, though, that most people who suffer from jealousy, are afflicted with a disguised form of it. It has escaped detection, and remains in the shadows like a beast of prey, appearing only now and then to make sudden, lightning attacks when its victim is most vulnerable. Jealousy in its meaner forms is too crude for most of us, but we would do well to look for the subtle expressions of it.

Many of us cannot help feeling

jealous under the following circumstances:

1) When somebody else gets something (a promotion, a possession) which we have wanted for ourselves.

2) When we are bested in a hotly competitive situation, and our own abilities are shown to be second to another’s.

3) When we are rejected.

4) When somebody else is praised to our own disadvantage.

In most cases, our jealousy is towards acquaintances and close relatives. As I mentioned, it was only in the primitive world of constant drunkenness that I could be jealous of strangers. One should not be deluded just because he is indifferent to the successes of people he reads about in the newspapers. Were these stories about people whom he knew intimately, he might find himself smoldering with rage because fortune had blessed such “undeserving people” while bypassing him. And it does no good simply to hold the violence of your feelings in check, while outwardly appearing to be glad for your friends’ good luck. The damage is in the way this evil thing poisons and strangles the human heart—and eventually destroys fine personal relationships.

Aside from recommending the Fifth Step, I have no world-shaking news of fast-fast-fast relief for the jealousy sufferer. I believe that any person who is able to face it as a problem, and to search for it in him-

self, is already on his way out of the woods. Still, here are a few things to keep in mind about jealousy:

1) It may stem partly from our own feelings of inadequacy. We secretly doubt ourselves, and resent anything which calls attention to our own lack of achievement.

2) It indicates a lack of trust in God; an unwillingness to accept the role God has assigned us for reasons known only to Himself.

3) Jealousy is the wreckage of thwarted ambition. Too much ambition, in the AA member, often means a loss of contact with the principles of the program. Such a person loses even if he wins, and loses more painfully when he loses.

4) It has a lot of self-centeredness and lovelessness in it. After, all, we must admit that we don't really love the people whom we envy. In fact,

we are at that point dangerously close to wishing them bad luck! We are then thinking only of our own twisted desires.

One last thing to remember about jealousy is that it is a universal human affliction. Even the saints suffered from it; even Peter and Paul suffered from it, despite their marvelous spiritual experiences. So it is not a question of whether one is bothered by it, it is simply a matter of degree! And don't forget that there can also be jealousy between AA members trying to do good work. As Henry Drummond said in his wonderful little book called "The Greatest Thing in the World," "the most despicable of all the unworthy moods . . . assuredly waits for us on the threshold of every work, unless we are fortified with . . . grace of magnanimity."

M. D. B., Jackson, Mich.

May 1962

12,000 mile Twelfth Step call

From Wellington, New Zealand:

Most of my meetings these days are spent outside of Wellington and largely in Melbourne, Australia, I do however, still attend sometimes at home and whenever I can, a prison group. Recently there was an open public meeting during which two films were shown. The projector broke down but nobody got "drunk." Speakers were rapidly mustered to "pull the fat out of the fire" and I was roped in. That day was also my birthday and I told the audience that my wife said, "John, dear, I don't know what to get you for your birthday because you seem to have everything."

"Yes, Edna, I have my sobriety, which is everything." I answered.

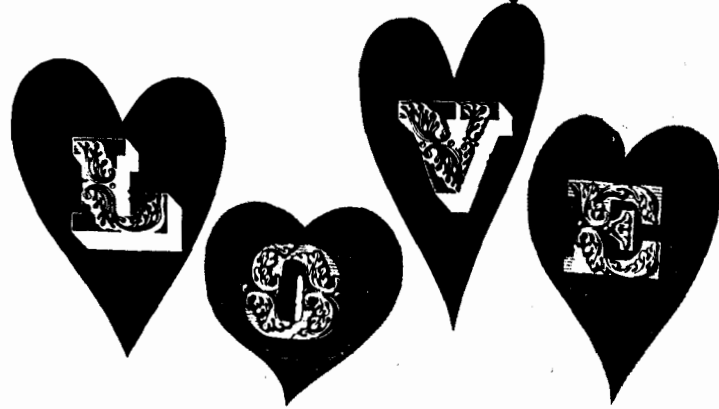
I sent my sister in England, who is an alky, a tape. This must surely be the longest Twelfth Step ever made, 12,000 miles away and most incredible of all, it has worked where all else failed. My sister is on the

road to recovery. She is still wobbly and wants crutches but please God she'll make it.

AA has strong roots in New Zealand and is here to stay, it is the hospital side of the alky treatment that is lacking—no proper treatment and difficult to get public interest aroused.

J. E.

THE ABILITY TO



How an insight illuminated a lonely mystery

SINCE my first day in AA I have been hearing about love as manifested in our Fellowship. I heard the members talk about the privilege of making Twelfth Step calls, the love they felt for drunks. I sat through these meetings, nursing the shame that I did not always feel this.

In trying to work the honesty part of the program, I had to admit that I did not always like to call on drunks and that I had little tolerance or patience with them. I accepted the calls because I had been taught from the beginning that my sobriety depended upon it. There was also an element of fear—if I refused to take calls, I would be criticized by the group, and their approval was of utmost importance to me! When I had to call on a particularly low-

bottom alcoholic, I sometimes felt actual revulsion.

This honest evaluation of my feelings was as far as I could get. I was filled with guilt and self-loathing because of my attitude. I tried discussing this with one or two other members, but they didn't seem to understand. I finally got to the point where I couldn't tolerate the word "love." Because I thought I could not experience it, I couldn't believe that others could. I called them "phonies." I cried that they were desecrating the word—practicing cheap emotionalism.

I noted that Christ had commanded us to love one another. I reasoned that if it was a commandment, then it must be a thing that could be willed. At this point I de-

ecided I must be hopeless. The more I willed it, the more elusive it became.

I have always found beauty in the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, have heard it referred to many times in our literature and meetings and carried a copy of it in my wallet. One day while reading this prayer, the full realization of its meaning began to come through to me. This saintly man was praying to God that it be granted that he seek to love more than to be loved—not that he express love to its fullest, not that he express it at all, not that he seek it completely but only that he seek it more than he sought to be loved.

Hope began to grow in me. I suddenly realized that here was a man, who had lived through the same experience as I, reaching across the centuries to me. The hard core of my guilt began to disintegrate, and there came to my mind what I have always considered as two key words in AA—"willingness" and "grace." I must become willing to seek to love

more than I sought to be loved and ask God's grace in granting this. We are our desires. If I began to desire the ability to love, so would it be granted.

Slowly, very slowly, I began to feel a stirring within my soul. Meetings seemed to have a greater depth. I began to feel a new emotion toward the newcomer. Twelfth Step calls were indeed a privilege. I began to feel—love? Could this be love? Yes! I remembered that there are degrees in everything! Because I had not felt the great love for mankind as expressed by a Schweitzer or a Ghandi, I thought I was incapable of any love. The old alcoholic perfectionist!

Now when I attend meetings it no longer bothers me to hear the members speak of love. I am not sitting alone with guilt and shame. I am sharing, I belong, I am a part of the group. God grant that I may continue to seek not so much to be loved as to love.

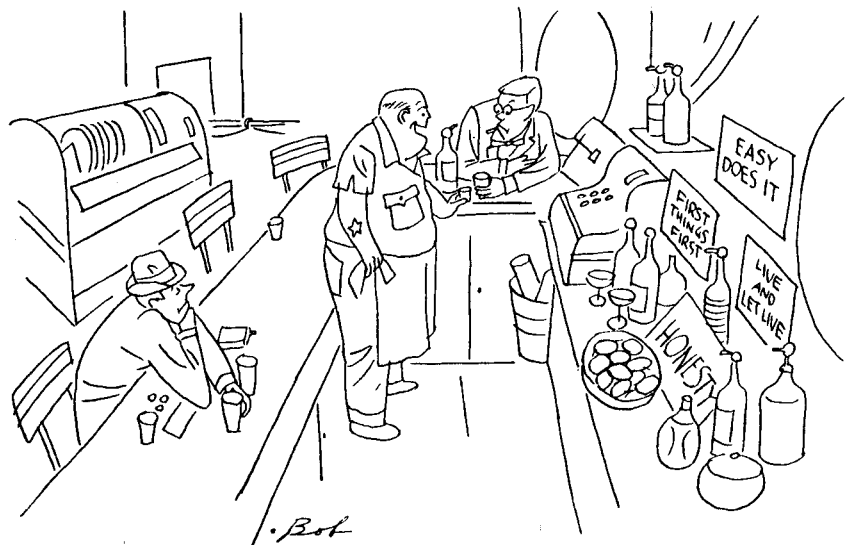
Lexington, Ky.

May 1962

The greatest service we can do for another is to help him help himself. There is no better way to help one to help himself than to bring him to a knowledge of himself. There is no better way to bring one to a knowledge of himself than to lead him to a knowledge of the powers that are lying dormant within his soul.

Ralph Waldo Trine

May 1962



"I'm AA—don't look now, but I think I have a pigeon."

NEED MONEY? TRY THIS

*For the recovered alcoholic,
fighting his way back to financial health,
the best guide is right in the 12 Steps*

YEARS ago I saw an adaptation of an ancient Hindu play called "The Little Clay Cart," which contained a line I have never forgotten: "The lack of money is the root of all evil."

I embraced this sentiment enthusiastically. I liked its smart-alecky air; its cynicism, its exculpation. I liked the specious philosophy which condoned my sense of both lack and failure. Here was meat and drink for my alcoholic personality. In effect this reflected what I had so often said to myself in the past, and was to say more often in the future: "There is nothing the matter with me that a hundred bucks wouldn't cure (or if that's too much, I'll settle for ten, thanks)."

It took a number of years of sobriety to get that kind of thinking straightened out, and I haven't finished with it yet, not by a long shot.

Money is a universal problem. It is material, it is metaphysical, symbolic and tangible. There is such a thing as "hard" money and "soft"

money; cash can be cold and it can burn holes in pockets. Money is, I think, as volatile, as elusive, as contradictory, as unanalysable as human emotions. It is, in fact, tied up with our emotions, with our physicality, with our spirituality. It impinges on all of these and affects them. Witness the dual terminology:

Bankrupt is a financial term, but I as an alcoholic know the meaning of emotional, or spiritual, bankruptcy. There is a vital relationship between financial depression and emotional depression; between financial crises and emotional crises. Economists speak of the paralyzing effect of financial stress on business or trade. In my own experience I can relate financial unbalance—such as an unbalanced check book—to emotional imbalance. I get thrown when figures don't add up properly.

As a writer I used to marvel at other writers who could not work unless they were threatened with starvation. In the writing field this is regarded as the classic stimulus to cre-

ativity. My case was the opposite. Financial bankruptcy, or the threat of it, had an absolutely paralyzing effect on my work faculties.

With me, money and drink had one thing in common: I wanted them both and I wanted them NOW.

Fear, for me, was the binder, the inhibitor, the great defeatist. It was neither character nor courage nor desperation that led me to conquer fear but a swig and more swigs from the blessed bottle.

Of course it would controvert the Second Step to imply, or even to suggest, that sobriety is a cure-all for financial ills. But, as in the case of other troubles, a return to sanity at least enables us to stop and look at a situation, to size it up, glimpse the possibility of remedies, and take steps to apply them. I believe that the ability to deal with money is more than an instinct for figures; it is character. For money is a discipline, primarily; but with most of us alcoholics it is a neurosis, whether we have "too much" or "too little."

It is my belief that any person of ordinary intelligence, if he dedicates himself exclusively to the amassing of money will inevitably achieve his goal; and I further believe that his very dedication will destroy him. So what has he gained? The whole world, yes, but at the loss of his soul, which is to say, for us alcoholics, at



the cost of our serenity, our peace of mind, our *sobriety*. For the successful coping with money embraces a metaphysical concept: the healing and saving grace of Faith, Love, Trust. It is in these areas, it seems to me, that the willing AA with his painfully, even agonizingly, acquired change of thinking can be brought with all his needs and through the Grace of God and the Twelve Steps into an utter and beneficent reliance on a Higher Power.

Money, to the metaphysician, is a symbol of infinite supply and is therefore inexhaustible. This may be of poor comfort to someone who has lost his job or is behind in his alimony; but the fact remains that money, as with everything else, is dual in nature. The Faith which moves mountains may be used to build fortunes; but with us in AA what does the fortune profit us if we let the mountain block our way?

T. D., Manchester, Mass.

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 8

*Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing
to make amends to them all.*

THERE'S a spicy bit of folklore around called "The Hell-Bound Train," in which the devil taunts a trainload of alcoholic wraiths as follows: "You've mocked at God in your hell-born pride, you've plundered and cheated and sworn and lied; you've swindled, murdered, robbed and stole; not one hasn't perjured his soul." It's enough to make a repentant alcoholic curl up and disappear into the nap of the nearest rug.

A conscience making accusations of this sort is an uncomfortable thing to live with. Since one of the primary aims of the AA program, as I understand it, is to help members live more comfortably, we have to do something about the uneasy conscience.

Repressive techniques, most of us

have found, don't work. I have never been able permanently to get rid of an uneasy conscience by telling it to go away, or by getting busy with other things and trying to forget it, or by pretending it wasn't there. The only things that have worked for me, in more than fifteen years of trying to live by the program, are admitting I've got it, asking forgiveness of God and man, and making amends as suggested in Steps Eight and Nine. Eight is the "on your marks, get set," Nine is "go!" Right now we're on Eight.

To get into a frame of mind to make amends is a hard thing for an alcoholic—at least, this alcoholic—to do. It brings to mind times when, as a child, I was made to say "I'm sorry" for some unintentional mistake. I wasn't really sorry because I hadn't intended to do wrong. I re-

sented being rammed into the guilty seat, and wound up at the end of the scene with a worse conscience than I'd had at the beginning.

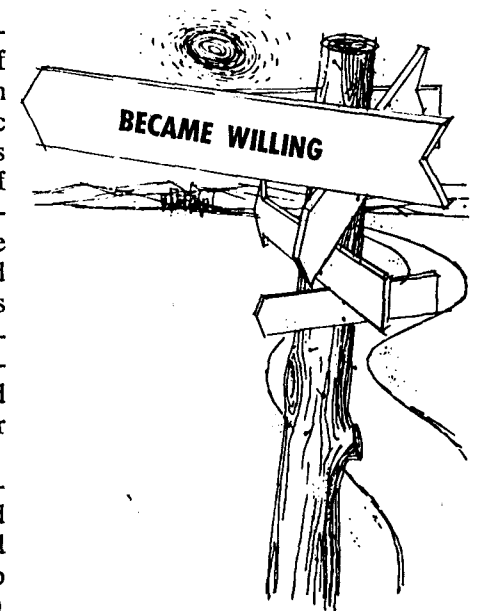
As a full-blown alcoholic, even after introduction to AA, some of this childhood attitude persisted. I strongly resisted suggestions that I express regret and make restitution. It wasn't really my fault, something within me was arguing, that I had become an alcoholic. Through no deed of my own, I had inherited a constitution that was susceptible to the sauce. I'd been born into a society that encouraged the use of alcohol and thrown among companions who worshipped it. I had only done what everybody did. Was it my fault if things had gone wrong?

Only gradually did I come to understand the essential childishness of this point of view. Slowly, I began to see that no human being, alcoholic or not, could live at peace in this world unless he had made himself part of a network of harmonious human relationships. This could come about only when he had established inner harmony by coming to terms with his own troublesome conscience, and outer harmony by making amends to those he had injured and with whom he was in regular contact.

Steps Eight and Nine are the "human relations steps." It will be noted that *other people* are not mentioned at all (except for brief reference to "another human being" in Step Five) until Step Eight. Now, after having

done something about getting right with a Higher Power, we're ready to take on the job of getting right with human society.

The authors of the Steps showed great wisdom in breaking up the work of restitution into two parts. Step Eight, the getting ready, is an essential preliminary. To make amends less than wholeheartedly would defeat the purpose of Step Nine. I gradually came to comprehend that until I was ready to take on to myself the full responsibility for my actions, including the influence on them of a million years of history and twenty thousand generations of forebears, I was not really adult. Whatever might have been so-



ciety's fault and heredity's fault, I accepted as *my* fault, along with those offenses which originated with me. (I have a hunch one of the reasons the Higher Power is so ready to forgive is that He acknowledges the racial burden we bear). Then I tried to get ready to make good wherever possible.

This has never been an easy process for me. But it is the only route I know to that estimable goal of a reasonably harmonious inner life and friendly outer relationships. My own difficulties have already been partly chronicled in Grapevine. Seven years ago, in the "Twelve Steps and the Older Member" series, I got going on how this step looked to me on first arrival in AA, and after seven years:

"I remember just how I felt about Number Eight at the start. I didn't like it. Most of the time I didn't want to think about the persons I had harmed. Rather I inclined to brood about those who had harmed me.

"Take this thing cafeteria style," I was advised. 'Select what you want and can digest, and leave the rest until later.' Part of the 'rest to be left for later' was the Eighth Step.

"Whether we like it or not, we are fundamentally moral creatures. Even the most depraved of us offer moral justifications for what we do. I justified my drinking on grounds it wasn't hurting anyone but me.

"Old John Donne had a point when he wrote that 'no man is an island.' Take the loneliest homeless drunk you can think of, and let's see

whether he harms people. He harms the room clerk, the bellhop and the chambermaid of the hotel where he's holed up, with a sense that their services are wasted, the cop and judge who finally lock him up and the doctor who treats him, with the frustration of such work. He harms the people he passes on the street by scaring some, angering others and saddening the rest. His friends are harmed by the loss of his friendship; if he has no friends, he's depriving those who need friends. Let's face it, we alcoholics have hurt people by our insane drinking.

"I certainly did. I had a boss, business associates, a wife, two kids, a brother, a sister, a father and mother. They all had a sense of insecurity where I was concerned, and this was especially hard on the kids, whose whole world wobbles when one of the parents at its center wobbles.

"And I really wobbled. The night of my father's funeral I was drunk and when my mother came to my house for solace I was drunk and when people had a birthday or an anniversary or a solemn occasion or a crisis, I was drunk.

"Gradually, as the twenty-four-hour periods in AA linked themselves into weeks, then months and finally years,

"This is the human relations Step..."

a change began in my outlook. This change is not complete, but its direction is something like this: At first I inclined to feel that the universe was not giving me my just due, that I deserved far better than I got. As the change progresses, I tend more to feel I'm lucky God gave me a look-in on His marvelous creation on any terms, that I'm lucky to be let off so easily for my misdemeanors.

"Thoughts like this mean more and more to me: God has given us power to harm people if we want to. Anybody can smash a fine watch, but how many can make one? A person is more wonderful than the most marvelous watch. It's easy to smash a person's happiness, but how many know how to restore it?

"Make amends? Some amends I can never make, in the sense of re-living years already lived. But I can try to live these present days the way I ought to have lived all my days.

"It's strange how a deep change of heart brings opportunities for restitution one never thought were possible. There's a certain man I've always thought highly of. I flubbed things so badly our relationship was strained, so I thought, beyond repair. Yet just the other day I picked up the phone and called him on im-

pulse. We had a nice chat, and by even so ordinary a means the extraordinary thing was accomplished: our relationship as friends was re-established."

Gradually, just by being around AA and soaking up some of the excess goodwill our society can generate when it's working well, we really become willing to make amends. Really *wanting to* takes the strain out of actually doing it. When the time comes, we sit down and make our list.

My list was short. This was the human relations step, I reasoned, as well as the conscience step. Thereafter, whenever my conscience began to yell at me I could yell back: "Okay, I'm working on it!" I decided to restrict my amends to those with whom I had continuing contact. Old friends whose addresses I'd lost, burned-out flames and broken associations of other days were set aside. My job is to live with the people I live with. Wife, in-laws, children, relatives, work associates, present friends—it is to these staunch ones I must make my amends. Step Eight is getting the list ready and the heart ready. Step Nine—actually making amends—comes next.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

"An experience I'll never forget"

HOSPITAL CALL

RECENTLY I had a most dramatic experience and one that I shall never forget. I visited two men in the hospital. One of them had been sober eighteen years in our Fellowship and the other sixteen years. Although I knew them both, they had not known each other before this hospitalization because their group affiliations and activities had been in widely separated suburban areas of this metropolitan city. Both were contrite and desolate. Both were trying painfully to analyze the reasons why they had this fall from grace. Neither of them said that God was a sham or that AA was a hoax. Nor did either of them suggest that the Third Step was a joke, that the Eleventh Step should be torn up, or that they resented their inventories or Twelfth Step work. Both of them seemed to think that in spite of everything they had not

done their best, and that probably after so many years they had become complacent about their sobriety. In any event when they fell on their faces, both of them turned instinctively and immediately to the Fellowship and the Higher Power which had saved them before, and both of them are now starting from scratch with a lot of love and understanding and tolerance from their brothers in AA.

As I reflected on this later it seemed to me that both of these men had done as much as I have done to strengthen their sobriety and improve its quality. If they had been complacent, then so have I during my sixteen years. But I could look back and see that in every instance of my complacency, some little miracle which was not of my own making, had come along to save me.

Sometimes it was a new sponsorship, sometimes an invitation to lead which I subsequently performed well enough to receive several additional invitations to lead. Other times it was simply the interest of some newcomer looking to me for guidance. But however it happened, the miracle of this Fellowship had stepped in to save me when I became complacent.

Sobriety is a gift which we did not deserve in the first place and which we never earn. The other graces beside sobriety have to be earned and in our striving for them we show our

gratitude for this precious gift of sobriety but we never earn it. God owes me nothing, nor does AA. If either my sobriety or my life should end tonight I have had my just desserts and more. But I earnestly pray for more life and more sobriety because I want it so very much, and if given it, I shall try to show my gratitude through action as never before. Meanwhile I know that I have paid no premiums and have established no reserves, and I know that but for the Grace of God I am as close to my next drink as were those two fellows in the hospital.

L. H., Cleveland, Ohio

MOMENTS OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Editor's Note: Since the moment of spiritual insight, whether mild or intense, is so much a part of the life of so many AAs, the Grapevine will from time to time publish accounts of such experiences. The following accounts are drawn, with the permission of the publisher, from Raynor C. Johnson's book, "Watcher on the Hills," and from correspondence with AAs. Co-founder, Bill, reminds us not to put too great store by these special moments, since the daily living of the AA life is a spiritual experience of a high order. They do, however, shed a light to be recalled during life's more prosaic stretches.

CASE 1. "I was packing up a house for my son—he had gone to sea and his wife and family had gone off to our home in Wales. The furniture van had left, the house was empty, and I, feeling a little forlorn, was wandering round the garden thinking of the happy jolly times we'd had while they were living there. I caught sight, in a flower bed, of a bright colored ball which suddenly made me cry, and all at once I seemed to be in a changed atmosphere. It was a little alarming at first. Everything looked the same but seemed charged with something more real—very hard to explain. It was as if suddenly, for a flash, I was seeing the significance of things—material things being just symbols—like seeing familiar objects in another plane of existence. This curious feeling lasted about ten minutes, and then I was back to normal—but in those few moments I had sensed a great happiness, and a sureness of something that I felt was eternal life." S. T.

CASE 2. "Sometimes, when I am more than usually awake, I do have a deeply moving experience. There is nothing mysterious, or in any way magical about it. It is just ordinary experience of the world and oneself, only much more lucid and comprehensive. I cannot but regard it as the rightful compass-needle of my whole life. It may happen unexpectedly in response to some particular and even insignificant event, which now suddenly opens up vistas of significance; or it may come when I try persistently to 'get the feel of' being a self in relation to other selves and the rest of the universe. In either case it brings an unusually precise and poignant awareness both of my present surroundings and of things remote in space and in time. It seems to be simply a very comprehensive act of attention, an attending to everything at once, or to the wholeness of everything at once. And in response to all that this act of attention reveals I feel a very special emotion which I can describe only as a tension of fervor and peace. O. S.

CASE 3. I have given much thought to trying to express my very precious one and only mystical experience. What would I not give for another? I was in bed at the time it happened, and my elder son, then aged sixteen, was very ill with congestion of the liver. I lay there for sometime worrying about him, and then realized that no good could come of that state of mind; so I deliberately set to work to relax and reverse each fear-thought. Finally, I was meditating on God using the words, "Be still, and know that I am God," and lingering mentally on what was implied by these wonderful words. Suddenly I became aware of a super-real state of being, with a completely relaxed feeling of blissful peace and trust in a Power of Supreme beneficence and perfect harmony. One felt at one with it all and yet retained one's individuality. (This is one of the times when language fails, for it is a paradox when expressed in words, but while being experienced no difficulty exists.) The state also includes a feeling of coming home after weary wanderings, being surrounded by the welcoming warmth of loved and loving ones—only of course greatly intensified. I have no idea how long it lasted, but its significance for me has been incalculable and has helped me through sorrows and stresses which, I feel, would have caused shipwreck in my life without the clearly remembered refreshment and undying certainty of this one experience. M. E. A.

CASE 4. In September 1950 I found enough of the AA program to stay sober but not enough to relieve me of old fears, hates and resentments. In December 1957 I awoke one morning about 2 A.M. My whole being was in a state of glow with a feeling of peace and goodwill I cannot describe and had never

felt before. I was not conscious of a body. Two months later came the realization that I had found power to control my fears and resentments and that it was well with my soul.

D. C.

CASE 5. This transpired over a period of about three weeks in April and May of 1958. I am male and an agnostic. Twenty-five years of excessive beer consumption; second marriage with two children; three separations in last three years; separated at this time; finally understanding that I was having "trouble" with drinking. I tried AA with no reservations for almost a month. Then I put in a week of study and thinking. I became aware of an alien entity in my own mind insidiously feeding me with a new way of thinking and so thoroughly discrediting my old way of thought that even I was forced to accept this new mind's outlook rather than the one I had been used to all my life. All desire to drink left me.

The next phase was getting to know and operate with this invading "Mind Monster" that had twisted my neat (?) and ordered (?) life so completely about. Now I had to come to grips with this influence without delay. However, the more I came to "grips" with it, the more content I was to relax my own grip and just enjoy the contact. Now I'm so thoroughly relaxed that I've forgotten how to fight and just accept; we can't be strangers, living together this way.

L. P.

CASE 6. About a week after I joined AA, July 31, 1956, my father phoned me and got into a hassle about an unreasonable request I could not comply with. As I left the phone, I was so upset that I was assailed by the most overwhelming desire to drink that I had ever experienced. I almost saw a bottle hanging in the air in the kitchen, in front of me. I knew, absolutely, that I would go to the liquor store, and that I would come home and get drunk. All my AA left me. I was engulfed by this desire. I became two personalities. One side almost pushing me out of the door, and then the other side, saying, in my head, "If you take that drink, you *know* what will happen." I felt as though I were being torn in two pieces, so terrific was the struggle between these two personalities, yet I was unable to merge them, either "to drink" or "not to drink." I knew, at that moment (my real bottom), what it was to be absolutely helpless, that my whole fate depended on the outcome, and the following words were literally wrung out of me, "God, please help me in some way, not to get this bottle."

The only sound in the room was the radio, from which issued the ending of a commercial. There was a second's silence, and then a woman's voice came on, singing, "Give us this day." I stood motionless, there was a feeling

of rushing relief of tension, and the words, "twenty-four hours, twenty-four hours," came into my mind, and I was suffused with an enveloping prickly sensation, and a knowledge that this was the help I needed. I stood, stunned, then gradually thought returned to me. This was not just a coincidence, luck, or what have you. This was God helping me. I "knew" it. I recovered my self-possession, went to the phone and called my sponsor, and felt perfectly normal.

B. S.



Our "Peace Corps" For Zululand

arrived in South Africa when three AAs set out to tell the Zulu people that alcoholism is a disease and not a disgrace

SINCE the first letter that was sent to GSO from the land of the Zulus, October, 1956, about the only thing to me that seems to make any sense, or have made any progress towards the betterment of mankind in South Africa is AA.

On September 8, 1961 *Time* magazine reported: "Eighty young volunteers bound for teaching and road building jobs in Africa." They were the first Peace Corps members to go out into the world. So says *Time*.

The first Peace Corps to reach the African Continent wasn't a Harvard boy or Vassar girl. It was AA, back in July, 1956, when three ex-drunks went to Lamontville with the South

African Broadcasting Company, to carry the message to those Zulu people who were alcoholics. That was a history making trip if you knew the conditions that existed in South Africa then and the conditions that exist in South Africa today. Hatred, bitterness, suspicion, superstitions, race against race and man against man. AA went to the Zulu as a friend and to tell him that alcoholism was a disease and not a disgrace. That alcohol had no respect for race, creed, color or religion. For the first time in many, many moons the Zulu knew that he had found a true and trusted friend.

As the late "Lefty Henderson" of the Yale School of Alcohol Studies

once said: "We are all brothers under the gin," and so the link between the European and the Zulu had been forged—that is among the alcoholics—with trust, confidence and respect.

We see very little of the real man with physical eyes; the different factors in a man's make-up can be classified according to the angle of vision. AA looked deep and discovered beneath black skins: human qualities, attributes of intelligence, virtues and will. The brotherhood of man had reached the world of the dark unknown. In an Africa that is aflame and is bursting at the seams with old and new hatreds and bitterness, I can better understand what the Zulu meant when he said more than five years ago: "If all Europeans were alcoholics Africa would be a much better place to live in."

Un-sponsored, AA had come on its own—from Capetown up to Kenya Colony, the home of the Mau Mau. Among the Cape people—Africans, Asians and Arabs—all are

getting on the spiritual road that AA was paving up the African coast and out into the Kionga Triangle of Portuguese East Africa, a former German colony. I once heard Bill, our surviving co-founder, say, "AA is a living monument." Today one can see that monument shining and alive in the midst of hatred, bitterness, darkness and chaos.

It wasn't the girl from Vassar or the boy from Harvard that carried the first Peace Corps to Africa. That night, and on that date back in 1956, in a small church in Lamontville when three ex-drunks stood before more than a thousand Zulus, and told them that they had come in the name of AA to offer their help against a disease known as alcoholism that had brought so much misery and suffering to the tribe; that night when I saw the brotherhood of man at its finest; that night when the nucleus of the brotherhood of man was formed among the Zulu peoples—the first Peace Corps was born.

J. R., Brooklyn, N. Y.

I Married An Alcoholic — On Purpose

R for a Happy Marriage:

The 12 Steps and the AA group

The 12 Steps and the Alanon group

mix well in the mortar of life

and take in daily doses

I REMEMBER the night Mark first mentioned it. We'd known each other only a few months, and were beginning to "get serious." We were driving along when he kind of gulped, braced himself and said "I have something I have to tell you."

Now, any girl knows that can be the remark that ends all fine things, so I braced myself. Mark went on. "We seem to be getting pretty interested in each other, and I think you should know I'm an alcoholic and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous."

I didn't know what to say, I remembered the first time I ever heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was having my hair washed by a pleasant, twinkling Irish hairdresser, Mary, and she started to giggle. "We had a time last night," she said, "we went over to the AA meeting, and I want to tell you, it was a riot."

"How could it be funny," I asked?

"Oh," she said, "they get up and

tell about all the things they did when they were drunk and in jail and in the hospital. They laugh, too." To me that was dreadful. Laughing at people's trouble! Had my hairdresser been laughing at Mark?

Little did I know that I would soon be doing the same thing. Nor could I suspect that in my own life—Mark said I "couldn't become an alcoholic if I tried, I throw drinks away"—the principles of living worked out by Alcoholics Anonymous would become guiding beacons. That took time.

In the days before I met Mark, I had been married, had four children; yet things had not worked out the way I thought they should. The family was not a family. The excuses my husband gave for not working became thinner and thinner. I just said, "I guess he's retired." It was a retirement, from the whole world of reality. The day finally came when he

went his separate way—there was a divorce—and the kids and I went ours.

The next four years were filled with hard work, gaiety, confusion, accomplishment—the usual diet for divorcées with children. Then I met the one whom, because he must remain anonymous, I'll call Mark. It was a real case of love at first sight, and had all the romance of "South Pacific." But we were not young kids and Cloud Nine was a dangerous address. He was still reeling from a recent and bitter divorce.

In the car that night he went on to explain that he had had years of trouble for which he had sought many solutions, but only when he had come to understand his alcoholic problem had he found any answers at all. Becoming a member of AA had not only saved his life, literally, but had given him keys to many doors. His life could become better through this program for living.

I was filled with admiration. Here was a man who had a problem and had done something about it. How superficial was my praise! But it was sincere. I had much to learn. My education started with attendance at AA meetings and is still going on—Mark and I have been married for twelve years, the "living happily ever after" based on the AA program.

I took a real gamble on the effectiveness of AA in keeping Mark sober—my second marriage, my future and my children's future would depend on that first of all. It was a



tremendous step of faith, and a rewarding one. I would do the same thing tomorrow; the AA program is solid.

One night I encountered an old friend at an AA meeting who explained he was trying to interest families of alcoholics in starting an Alanon family group, an organization of people who were not themselves alcoholics, but had had to live with the disease in their families. He believed he needed AA just as much as his wife did.

As Dr. B., a well-known AA physician, says, "the family of an AA needs psychiatric help just as much as the AA—damage has been done all around," and hence the growth of groups consisting of wives, husbands, parents, children and all others concerned.

I began to see daylight. The problem of the first marriage—I had been mixed up with this much longer than I knew. And things had been happening to me of which I knew very

little. I started attending family group meetings; and ten years later, I still am, with gratitude.

The backbone of both AA and Alanon is a statement of Twelve Suggested Steps—principles which are an exciting discovery because they are still not completely explored and mapped out in my life, but when practised lead to fuller and more serene living.

We wives weren't so sure we needed help. Some of us went to AA meetings to back up our husbands, or, in bleak and dark despair, reaching out for any straw, any friend, any place to go where we could lift our heads. Or in uneasiness, because our mates were beginning to outgrow us, and we did not want to be left behind. Or from deep spiritual conviction that a Higher Power was leading us.

Many reasons, but all were rooted in the unhappiness of living with an alcoholic whose problem we did not understand, resented. A problem which worked havoc in the home and with the family—broke our hearts. Here was an answer.

Alanon meetings are patterned after AA. Members tell stories of their experiences; discuss solutions that work as well as situations that seem insoluble; we apply the Twelve Steps. The majority of alcoholics are men, therefore the Alanon family groups have a predominance of wives. However, there are plenty of situations of the opposite kind, and we keep hoping more husbands will

“...inventory-taking opened the door...”

join. In several cities there are stag groups, for men only.

Any one of the Twelve Steps is vital in itself. The first one I tried on myself looked easy, but turned into a boomerang. It is the Fourth and reads “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves,” and believe me, this personal housecleaning is quite an experience. I found mistakes I'd been making for years which were candy-coated feelings of virtue. I found a few good things which needed reinforcing. I found faults so glaring I wondered how anyone had been able to live with me—and I thought I'd been pretty patient with others. Inventory-taking opened the door so all the other Steps could start working for me.

I went back to the First. “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable.” An Alanon is powerless over the alcoholic and his alcohol, and this needs repeating all the time. So often I could see the answer to Mark's confusion, still can, but am completely powerless to do anything about it, and, as time goes on, am even learning not to say anything or to try. I can only change me. This was a devastating discovery. But also a relief, for trying to change my chil-

dren had been an exhausting and fruitless struggle. Suggestion, persuasion, threats, punishments, yelling like a shrew did no good for my daughter who was messy all the time. She is now a relaxed housekeeper, untidy but happy.

Next I jumped to the Eighth Step, “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.” I am not sure we know we have harmed people in a great many instances and it seemed that the effort not to harm any more was the best way to handle this. My children, I knew, needed loving amends made to them, and I was willing.

Step Ten takes up the continued need for vigilance, “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.” I remembered how terribly hard it was to say “I'm sorry” when I was a child, and how Mark and I struggle to say “May I admit I was wrong?” Today when my teen-ager comes home from school I have to apologize for losing my temper at her last night. Easy? Not on your life!

Six of the Steps mention “A Power greater than ourselves” or “God as

we understand Him.” Step Two states that we “came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” I had no trouble in accepting the Power greater than myself, but needing to be restored to sanity really was an insult.

However, my thinking had really got way off—my feelings of power, my vicious resentments, my self-pity, my hardness after four years of running a family and a house alone. I thought of Elsa, who had been through years with an alcoholic husband, and even when he joined AA and became a solid member, her resentments and unforgiveness were really close to insanity. Today she is a wretched alcoholic in her own right.

In Step Three we made “A decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*” This involves the idea of surrender, a too difficult way of life for me right now, but I keep chipping away at it, and think the effort is fruitful. And “as we understood Him” leaves us free with or without religious affiliation to seek where we wish and how we wish, for help.

After the inventory of Step Four, we admit in Step Five “To God, to

ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." Mark seems to bear the brunt of this Step from me. He's usually aware of them anyway.

In Steps Six and Seven we are "ready to have God remove all these defects of character," and "humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings." We get willing and then we ask. So often we plunge into a request for quick help in an angry, hasty desire to get over a bad time, but these Steps involve a calm decision with all our faculties alert to the task.

The Eleventh Step states we "sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out," to accept God's will, to try to keep our own under control. I am a strong-willed female and this is a whole program in itself for me. God's will should have a chance to be heard, or to take action. Hard for

me to listen or to wait? You bet! But it's worth the effort.

The Twelfth Step? I remember the first time Mark and I went out together on a Twelfth-Step call, he to the alcoholic husband, I to the wife. Diana was a lovely young woman, so distraught and wondering what she had done wrong, and how she could have helped more. I gave her my Alanon book and talked to her. She was so relieved to find it a disease over which her husband had no control, and that help was available if he wanted it. Two jobs, a move, and two wives later he is now trying, but Diana is strong and creative in the knowledge of the message. Of course, this program is most needed by families with a still active alcoholic. Mark, thanks to God working through AA, has been solid.

Each one of us, Mark and I have found, remember that the program is a reaffirmation of each one of us in our place on earth. My gamble paid off!

M. T. E., New Haven

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

*Through practicing the Steps we learn that our
ego-image is not fixed or static*

I WILL never forget a pigeon named Karl. A buddy of mine, Mac, and I had received a call through a physician friend of AA. We were put on the trail of this character who, we were told, wanted to sign himself into a big state hospital which had an alcoholic rehabilitation program. We found the man all right, at the home of his ex-wife. He was well dressed and well spoken. And, unknown to us, he was on the outside of a fifth of vodka. He told us he had had one or two. We mentally allowed him six or eight. But not a whole fifth. On our way to the hospital (some eighty miles from where we picked him up) he began to shake and begged us to pull up at an oasis so he could have a double shot. I whispered to Mac, "If we get him in a saloon we may never get him out. Let's pick up a pint and let him nibble until we get him out there."

Mac got the pint. Our pigeon got the cap off the pint and up-ended the bottle. When he took it down it was about a quarter reduced. When we got to the hospital we had an inert mass of beef. The pint was empty. Karl passed out so cold we

could not wake him! The hospital wouldn't accept him unless he signed himself in. Mac said, "Let's leave this body at the nearest hotel and reclaim it tomorrow morning."

We paid eight bucks for the room and toted Karl upstairs. In the room we pulled off Karl's jacket and shoes, loosened his tie, covered him with a blanket and left a note telling him to stay put and we would be around for him in the morning.

We got there bright and early but Karl was not in his room. We found him in the dining room. He had just finished breakfast—two eggs, two-and-a-half-minutes each, melba toast and a pot of coffee.

His hair was uncombed, his shirt was filthy. He had not a nickel in his pants. And when we got there he was reading the financial section of the morning paper which he had grandly sent the waiter to get for him at the newsstand in the lobby. When we converged on him he greeted us with condescension and offered us some good advice about his favorite stocks.

Now this man had been in and out of hospitals, on and off skid row, again and again in the past ten years.

It had been at least fifteen years since he was in the brokerage business. Yet his image of himself, undiminished and unchanged by reality, was that of a prosperous broker, a pillar of the community, too well-bred to be a snob but very much aware of his social position. He was living in a fifteen-year-old dream. And the tragedy of it was that he never came out of it. The hospital was able only to dry him out, not to reach the real man. And a year or two later we heard of his death.

The tragedy of Karl started me to thinking, more actively than ever, on the mystery of a man's image of himself. As practicing alkie we were great actors, always the heroes, naturally, of melodramas we wrote, costumed, directed and played out in our own minds. We stood at the bar and were G-men trailing a dangerous international spy; we were explorers just returned from the steaming jungles of Boolaboola. We were Casanova, reborn, in slacks and sports jacket, and with every drink, up to a point, we seemed to look more dashing and romantic in the amber-tinted mirror behind the bar. All of it the stuff of dreams.

But what of the waking moments, in the grim, harsh light of the next morning, trying to shave without slicing ourselves to ribbons? Was our view of ourselves any more realistic then? Did we really know who and what we were? I began to wonder.

Years after I finally got dried out in AA I came across a discussion of

this question of "Who do you think you are?" in a book "The Way of Zen," (Pantheon Books, 1959) by the philosopher, Alan Watts. He wrote: ". . . the conventional 'self' or 'person' is composed mainly of a history consisting of selected memories. . . . According to convention I am not simply what I am doing now. I am also what I have done, and my conventionally edited version of my past is made to seem almost more the real 'me' than what I am at this moment. For what I *am* seems so fleeting and intangible but what I *was* is fixed and final. It is the firm basis for predictions of what I will be in the future and so it comes about that I am more closely identified with what no longer exists than with what actually is!"

Watts goes on to point out that the memories which make up a man's picture of himself are highly selective. The number of events to choose from is infinite and a man picks to suit his own personality needs, and conventional standards. If we try to pick a new set without guidance we run into difficulties.

The "I" which I have taken for granted for so long, turns out to be not a solid structure at all but a shifting, fluid thing, like a handful of

water. The question, "Who am I?" so frightened a friend of mine that he wound up in a mental hospital after a bad breakdown. The psychiatrist who put him together again sternly forbade him to think about who he was and told him to concentrate his mental energies, after working hours, on a hobby. He has been quietly gardening in summer and building fine furniture in winter ever since, dutifully obeying the doctor's injunction not to wonder just who he is.

For this lad, flight from the tormenting question, "Who am I?" was probably the only safe measure. But we in AA seldom find so drastic a remedy advisable. In taking our "fearless moral inventory" we find out some surprising things about who this individual is who bears our name. And in the Steps dealing with the removal of character defects we come to learn that the ego-image, a mosaic of memories, is not a fixed and static thing. Old virtues appear from the past, blessing us; good actions we had forgotten lighten the picture for us a little. We recover the memory of times which we had forgotten when we *were* brave, and when we *were* unselfish and when we *were* understanding and tolerant of others' weaknesses and wickedness.

It seems to me, after a good many sober twenty-four-hour periods, that one of the greatest things AA brings to us is a change in the image of ourselves. And the point of change is the Eternal Now which is the country of God.

I once walked down a famous street with an AA friend, a former confidence man. He pointed out the hangouts of dope peddlers, hotels where he had once "taken off a score" from some larceny-minded "mark," bars inhabited by pimps and steerers. That stroll through the streets of a familiar city was like a guided tour of evil. Finally he said, musingly, "That guy was really an anti-social character. He just sort of turned into smoke and drifted away my first week in the Fellowship. I don't know where he went but I'm sure glad he's dead." He was speaking of himself-that-used-to-be. He had made the change-over to the New Man so completely that he could talk about his former adventures as if they had happened to someone else. As, in very truth, they had.

Our first jolt of reality, as alcoholics, comes on that awful day when we realize that something is the matter with the booze or at least its ef-

fect on us. Just maybe we can't handle it any more! And from there, the honest look at ourselves, begins the transformation miracle.

Fifteen years ago I did an outstanding piece of work in my profession; people are still talking about it. But it is as if they are concerned with something another man did for I have hardly one single trait in common with that man back there. The things that he loved, or thought he loved, proved false. The things he hated proved objects of compassion. The things he wanted turned into shadows. Many of the things he despised proved to be treasures of the heart. That man is dead. I, thanks to God and AA, am alive.

I do not mean that I have cut off all memory of my past life. But it has been reinterpreted. I appreciate people whom I ignored then. I have compassion for people I admired then but admire no longer. Everything is changed, including my ego-image of myself. It is no longer solid, immovable. It is a light, airy thing, built of the breath of the Creator. The old, proud boast, "I'm going to live my own life!" has become non-

sense. I have a definite feeling that instead of living "my own" life, as I would tie "my own" shoelaces, that I am *being lived*.

The girls in AA also need to make a new selection from the memories of the past when they are building, through the program, the New Woman. Alcoholic girls can get into such messy situations and are so cruelly exploited and abused, tormented by their own consciences worst of all. I think that the girls, even more than the alcoholic men, need to be able to pick a new set of particles from the past to make a strong and confident "self."

When we have taken the final drink, been to the first meeting, taken the initial inventory, helped with the first Twelfth Step call, when we have learned the beauty of life in the Everlasting Now, each of us must perform the office of coroner for the old self. Casting a steady backward glance we must be able to say to ourselves, "That man is dead." Standing at the pin-point of Now is a new man, a child of God, constantly reborn.

All right.

Just who do you think you are?

L. C., Detroit

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step

9

*Made direct amends to such people wherever possible,
except when to do so would injure them or others.*

SOMEWHERE around the house I have a note from an acquaintance, chiding me because I was inadvertently rude to him in a preoccupied moment. I'll have to make amends, because I can stay sober only by working the Twelve Steps, and one of them suggests amends be made to those we harm. It brings me back to Step Nine and requires me to rethink my relationships with the universe I live in.

I've been trying to work the Steps for almost fifteen years. My experience with Step Nine falls into two distinct parts, which may be called "In the Beginning," and "Later." In the beginning, when through AA I got my first clear look at the wreckage a fifth of a century of problem drinking had caused in my life and others, it was quite clear whom I had

harmed and to whom amends were to be made. "Make a list," Step Eight said. Let's go down my list, as it was in the beginning:

First, my then wife. I had harmed her grievously and wanted wholeheartedly to make amends. I tried for a year. Every offer of amends, every gesture of conciliation, was savagely rejected. Poor gal, the hurt had been too much for her: she had turned permanently bitter, vengeful, vindictive. Sadly, I read Step Nine over again. "Whenever possible," it said. Here, amends were apparently impossible. I gave her the divorce she demanded and the property she had sued for, checked her off the list and went on to the next names.

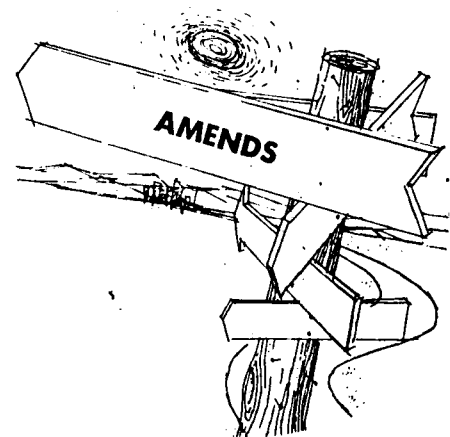
My children. Making amends to my children was doubly hard, since they were subjected to an incessant

barrage of "anti-Me" propaganda. A home and our visiting times were limited. Here again I invoked the *whenever possible* clause. If I couldn't make amends to them in the grandiose, flamboyant, alcoholic style to which I had become accustomed. I'd do it little by little, in small ways, showing them my devotion "whenever possible." It worked. The day before my son was killed—after I'd been sober more than four years—we'd been puzzling over his geometry problems together as good friends. At my daughter's wedding I was an honored father of the bride.

And so on down my list. I sent a check for fifteen dollars to a bookstore from which I had stolen textbooks while in college. I showed a more human concern for my aging mother, whom I had left to sink or swim during the lonely years of her widowhood. I reviewed my professional relationships. Had I swindled anybody? If I had, it had been done so clearly within the bounds of corporation law that I was legally honest, and, for all I know, morally so. I checked through my few remaining friends, trying to restore good relations "whenever possible."

In all cases my aim was the same. I was starting a new life and I wanted to start it clean. I wanted no leftover recriminations or hard feelings if I could possibly avoid them. All cases were clear-cut. There was *no doubt* that I owed amends, and for gross alcoholic offenses. There were no fuzzy edges or hazy issues.

Does all this sound glib and easy? It wasn't. I'm a proud, vain, overdefensive, insecure alcoholic, and in those days I was far worse in these respects even than I am today. To face another openly in the role of wrongdoer went against the nap; I protested in every fiber. To mix the metaphor still further, I swallowed very hard when asked to eat crow. But I had before me the examples from the Big Book—one man had actually stood up in church one Sunday and told publicly how his alcoholic lying had ruined another man's career. On the other side of the straight-and-narrow were horrible examples of going too far and injuring "them or others." I know of one penitent souse who threw a testimonial dinner for his wife, burning up a hundred-dollar bill that should have gone to the support of their four children, and thoroughly embarrassing the wife. But whenever an unmade amend stood in the way of good



day-to-day relations, I tried to plow ahead. The incentive was that great prize on which life depended—sobriety.

The second stage of my struggle with Step Nine—that which is here designated as “Later”—is an entirely different matter. In this stage, right and wrong is less distinct, issues are not so sharp-etched. It’s immeasurably harder to know, in any particular instance, what’s the right thing to do. I like to think this is because I’ve been growing, during these years in AA. As I try to see more deeply into the twists and turns of human nature, I’m less inclined to make positive, snap judgments. Also, my own offenses—and hence the appropriate amends—are of a much more subtle nature. It’s a simple enough matter to see the need for amends when you’ve smashed a chair in a drunken rage. But I haven’t demolished any furniture in fifteen years. Have I, then, nothing to make amends for?

I think of the analogy of a ship plying the stormy North Atlantic without a compass, and finally, through a combination of luck, divine guidance and the Coast Guard, making port—AA. In port, a compass—a set of principles to be used for orientation—is installed, but the ship still must sail the Atlantic and endure its storms. In stormy seas the compass needle tends to seek the general direction of north, but swings wildly to either side of the true direction. Only in a calm is the needle solid, steady and true.

“... *these mental storms do harm people...*”

So with the more refined offenses for which I must make amends in the later years of sobriety. In the storms of living I can never know, within a very broad arc, what’s right or wrong. I am not entirely without guidance, however. If “right” may lie anywhere within a whole quadrant, the other three quadrants are definitely wrong. Swings in these directions harm others and call for amends.

Retaining the nautical figure, one still must have some idea of what one means by “true north”—the ethical guide by which one steers. Since I am traversing a calm stretch of water at the moment and the needle is steady, I’ll try to define my own latter-day AA lodestar:

It seems to me that the only appropriate basic attitude for any sailor on life’s voyage is an affectionate thankfulness that the Universe—or some Power within it or responsible for it—has called him into existence and allowed him to observe, even participate in, this breathtakingly marvellous creation all around us. When I’m sailing true, and feel that the Spirit is somewhere, somehow close by, I feel warmly, personally grateful to a loving God for giving me life on these generous terms.

When I’m sailing true, but the spirit seems far away, I can still feel grateful that the processes of nature have dropped consciousness into the middle of this fascinating flux for a brief look-see, and I’m grateful to be alive on any terms. The proper frame of mind for a human being in repose, I have come to think, is thankfulness for life.

But there are storms. Storms follow well-defined storm tracks. They occur over and over again in the same areas, following the same patterns. Charting my own emotional storms from the safe port of AA, I find major repetitive patterns. Here I’ll have to switch metaphors again, and invoke the stage simile the Big Book uses when it says the alcoholic likes to “write the script and play all the parts.”

The play I find myself acting parts in—compulsively, often without being able to help myself—is Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar.” Usually I’m in the middle of the play before I realize it’s started. I am a modern Julius Caesar, an emperor of vast domains, to whom all must pay homage on pain of my severe disapproval. This would be bad enough, but presently another character walks on my stage and I must play

that one, too. It is Brutus, who hates dictators, pompous asses and overbearing people in general, and who plots with sly conspirators to cut the great Caesar down to size. So poor Caesar is stabbed so full of holes there’s nothing left of him. Is Brutus happy, now that the dictatorship within my little tinhorn psyche has been overthrown? No. He sees that his own rule is even worse than Caesar’s. Despondent over his mistakes, he hurls himself on his sword. That’s the end of Brutus and Caesar. And what have we got left? Me—a middle-aged alcoholic grateful for life and sobriety. I come to my senses, shake my head, realize I’ve been acting Great Men again, and try to repair any damage my play-acting may have caused.

And we do harm people (or perhaps I’m the only sober alcoholic who goes through these psychodramas, and am not justified in saying “we”?) during these storms. The acquaintance whose feelings I injured—mentioned at the beginning of this article—is a case in point. At the time I ruffed his feathers I was either Great Caesar Burdened With the Cares of Empire, or The Honorable Brutus Pondering by What Means to Overthrow Yon Heinous

Tyranny. In either case I didn't have much time for small potatoes the likes of my friend. I hurt his feelings—and, of course, if I'm to keep on the Step Nine part of the program, will have to make amends.

As the damage of such "dry slips" is not so gross as the carnage of the active alcoholic, so the amends are more subtle. Instead of a formal apology to my slighted acquaintance, I think I'll find some direct way to let him know I *do* value him as a human being of at least equal value. Here, the clever people are forever being humbled and confounded by the clear evidence that their cleverness brings them no advantage before the love of God. Like it or not, Caesar and Brutus have to deal with

the fact that, before the Higher Power, they're the equals of the Third Torchbearer and the Voice Offstage. When the play is over, I'm always glad to be myself again, ready to make amends for any foolishness that may have taken place while I was being, in spite of myself, one of the other characters.

As we stay in the program, the old alcoholic coarseness, rudeness, and lack of consideration for people goes away. Sensibility and sensitivity return. We see more clearly where we have offended against the tenderness of a delicately balanced universe. And having seen, we want to make amends. It puts things back in balance again.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

Up from Atheism

*I discovered that there was indeed
a power greater than myself
and whether I believed it or not it worked.*

AFTER reading in the May 1962 issue the article "An Atheist Speaks Out," I ran for my fall-out shelter, helter-skelter. With the siren of self-righteous, justifiable anger sounding in my ear, I grabbed up my pen of contention ready to do battle. I was going to defend God! Imagine that. I felt truly contaminated. Not only was my "genes" radio activated but those of every AA member from here to eternity. I frantically imagined all sober alcoholics returning to our old "do-it-yourself" method. You know, we could quit drinking by ourselves any time we wanted to. I also pictured hundreds of thousands of drinking alcoholics marooned on "Tight Little Islands" for ever and ever.

But after the all-clear sounded and my inflamed eyes returned to normal vision and the smoke of vitriolic vituperation left my indignant nos-

trils, I saw an image, an almost forgotten image of myself six years ago, peering from the pages of the May Grapevine. There I was a quasi-atheist or a pseudo-agnostic or perhaps just an atonic, quasi-mixed-up gal. Anyway I certainly had no "invisible" means of support at that time. I was the original do-it-yourself kid. Shucks, I hardly knew the difference between an atheist or an agnostic until I had it cleared up for me in "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions." I gathered that a religionist claims proof that God was, an atheist claims God isn't and an agnostic claims they are both full of prunes.

As my blood count returned to normal I began to recall my attitudes about the subject when I first came to AA. I reread the chapter in the Big Book, "We Agnostics." I began remembering my own faltering steps

and the steps I followed in my search for serenity, recalled bits like: "Rarely have we seen anyone fail who has thoroughly followed our path." "Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—That One Is God. May you find Him now!" And "Here are the steps we took"—I found to my dismay that I could

work only the first one from my quasi-agnostic, pseudo-atheistic throne. It still goes. But I had to discover it for myself. No one rammed it down my throat. In fact, nobody paid the slightest attention to my stony-eyed attitude. This quasi-mixed up kid had, of all things, invented a religion all her own. I was a devoted believer in "unbelief." I worked hard at it. You have to,

something's always popping up to prove you wrong. Ever on guard—that was me. For “nothing” and against “everything.”

After a few sneaky experiments on the sly (things got even worse, if possible, after I stopped drinking) I discovered that there was indeed a power greater than myself and whether I believed it or NOT it *worked*. It was working for others who did not have so much cheek to put their tongue into. And lo, it wasn't long before I called this tremendous power, GOD. In trying to be different just to be different, I still could not dream up anything better than that to call Him.

Thus began the greatest adventure of my life—getting acquainted with my Higher Power. I dread to think of what might have happened to me had I remained antagonistic to this great invisible Power. Having once been a devout unbeliever, let me

affirm and re-affirm that. Science proclaims: “The greatest power or force in the universe is invisible”—it's a wonder to me I didn't disbelieve in electricity, I don't know what it is, I can't see it, or touch it, nor can any man. And until I've been everywhere and know everything there is to be known on earth or in outer space, until there is absolute proof that there is no God, I shall believe and use this force in all my affairs. Anyway, there might be, as another has said, “some place I still knew not of and He might still be there.”

My sponsor used to say, “I'd rather die believing that there was a God and find out there wasn't than die believing that there was no God and find out that there was”—Amen.

Anyway, after all's said and done, I know now I couldn't thumb my way into heaven. I have to arrive under my own power and in my own way. Going MY way, anyone?

M. U., Boulder, Colo.

How The Twelve Steps Were Born*

by Bill

AT 17 William Street, Newark, New Jersey, Henry had an office which was the headquarters for a rapidly failing business. He also had a secretary named Ruth. The other assets consisted of a huge desk and some plush furniture.

Each morning I traveled all the way from Brooklyn to Newark where, pacing up and down in Henry's office, I began to dictate rough drafts of the chapters of the coming book. I worked from a hastily drawn-up list of possible chapter headings. Week after week, Henry raced around among the stock subscribers, prodding them for money. Much of these funds had to be devoted to office expenses and groceries for Henry, Ruth, Lois, and myself, and we kept going on this basis until April, 1939, the publication date of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

As the chapters were slowly roughed out I read them to the New York group at its weekly meeting in our parlor at Clinton Street. Copies

were sent to Dr. Bob for checking and criticism in Akron, where we had nothing but the warmest support. But in the New York meeting the chapters got a real mauling. I ridiculed them and Ruth retyped them over and over.

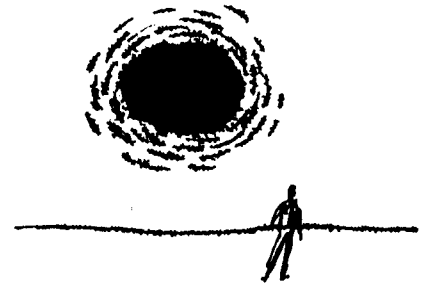
So the job went until we reached the famous Chapter 5. Up to that time I had done my own story and had drafted three more chapters with the titles "There Is a Solution," "More About Alcoholism," and "We Agnostics." It was now realized that we had enough background and window-dressing material, and that at this point we would have to tell how our program for recovery from alcoholism really worked. The backbone of the book would have to be fitted in right here. This problem had secretly worried the life out of me. I had never written anything before and neither had any other member of the New York group. The hassling over the four chapters already finished had really been terrific. I was exhausted. On many a day I felt like throwing the book out the window.

I was in this anything-but-spiritual mood on the night when the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous were written. I was sore and tired clear through. I lay in bed at 182 Clinton Street with pencil in hand and with a tablet of scratch paper on my knee. I could not get my mind on the job, much less put my heart in it. But here was one of those things that had to be done. Slowly my mind came into some kind of focus.

Since Ebby's visit to me in the fall of 1934 we had gradually evolved what we called "the word-of-mouth program." Most of the basic ideas had come from the Oxford Groups, William James, and Dr. Silkworth. Though subject to considerable variation, it all boiled down into a pretty consistent procedure which comprised six steps. These were approximately as follows:

1. We admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol.
2. We made a moral inventory of our defects or sins.
3. We confessed or shared our shortcomings with another person in confidence.
4. We made restitution to all those we had harmed by our drinking.
5. We tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of reward in money or prestige.
6. We prayed to whatever God we thought there was for power to practice these precepts.

This was the substance of what,



by the fall of 1938, we were telling newcomers. Several of the Oxford Group's other ideas and attitudes had been definitely rejected, including any which could involve us in theological controversy. In important matters there was still considerable disagreement between the Eastern and the Midwestern viewpoints. Our people out there were still active Oxford Group members, while we in New York had withdrawn a year before. In Akron and vicinity they still talked about the Oxford Group's absolutes: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. This dose was found to be too rich for New Yorkers and we had abandoned the expressions. But all of us, East and West, were placing increasing emphasis on Dr. Silkworth's expression describing the alcoholic's dilemma: the obsession plus the allergy. By now we knew from experience that the new prospect had to accept Step One or get no place.

This particular evening, as my mind ran over these developments, it

*From "A.A. Comes of Age."

seemed to me that the program was still not definite enough. It might be a long time before readers of the book in distant places and lands could be personally contacted. Therefore our literature would have to be as clear and comprehensive as possible. Our steps would have to be more explicit. There must not be a single loophole through which the rationalizing alcoholic could wiggle out. Maybe our six chunks of truth should be broken up into smaller pieces. Thus we could better get the distant reader over the barrel, and at the same time we might be able to broaden and deepen the spiritual implications of our whole presentation. So far as I can remember this was all I had in mind when the writing began.

Finally I started to write. I set out to draft more than six steps; how many more I did not know. I relaxed and asked for guidance. With a speed that was astonishing, considering my jangling emotions, I completed the first draft. It took perhaps half an hour. The words kept right on coming. When I reached a stopping point, I numbered the new steps. They added up to twelve. Somehow this number seemed significant. Without any special rhyme or reason I connected them with the twelve apostles.

Feeling greatly relieved now, I commenced to reread the draft.

At this moment a couple of late callers arrived. One of them was my boon companion of those days, Howard A. With him was a newcomer, dry barely three months. I was greatly pleased with what I had written, and I read them the new version of the program, now the "Twelve Steps." Howard and his friend reacted violently. "Why TWELVE steps?" they demanded. And then, "You've got too much God in these steps; you will scare people away." And, "What do you mean by getting those drunks down 'on their knees' when they ask to have all their shortcomings removed?" And, "Who wants all their shortcomings removed, anyhow?" As he saw my uneasiness, Howard added, "Well, some of this stuff does sound pretty good after all. But, Bill, you've got to tone it down. It's too stiff. The average alcoholic just won't buy it the way it stands."

I sprang to the defense of the new creation, every single word of it. A terrific discussion developed which cooled only when Lois turned up a couple of hours later. "Why don't you forget about it for a while," she said, "and have a cup of coffee." This we did.

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 10

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

KNOW thyself," Socrates advised. A later philosophical insight made it even more imperative: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Both these tenets have a bearing on Step Ten, which is supposed to keep AA members' lives under "continued" examination.

I have been examining my life for nearly fifteen years in AA and a number of years before that, and there was a time when I questioned whether such scrutiny made any sense. I once spent seven years in a detailed examination of my life called psychoanalysis. I was more muddled at the end than at the beginning, and far drunker. It was only when I learned, through AA, the difference between a creative and energizing self-examination and mere brooding over the past, that the psychotherapy took hold. According to Step Ten, mere examination—"personal inventory"—is not enough. In addition, you have to "admit it promptly" when you're wrong.

This word "wrong" implies a set of values. Before I can admit I'm wrong I must have in mind some notion of what I think is right. When I first came into the Movement I was confused about right and wrong and had no clear notion of what my life was for. Gradually, through going to meetings, reading, and AA give-and-take, I became capable of answering life's two basic questions—"Who am I?" and "What am I for?"—with greater confidence. Who am I? A mid-twentieth-century alcoholic snatched from self-destruction by a Higher Power. What am I for? To make some daily contribution, however small, toward the betterment of the human society in which I have been placed.

With this to go on, the admonitions to know myself and examine my life took on new meaning. I was now able to look over my life, not just to brood over it, but to correct it, tinker with it, try to find out how to make it fuller, more purposeful,

more effective. This gave my self-examination a purpose. When a person has a purpose his morale is high, he feels better, and accomplishes more of whatever he thinks is worth accomplishing.

Let me give an example. I read recently that one of the distinguishing marks of the alcoholic was his tendency always to remember the unpleasant episodes of his life with greater vividness than the pleasant ones. Taking my inventory *à la* Step Ten, I asked whether this was true of me, and whether it was right or wrong. I discovered that it was indeed true of me, but puzzled considerably over whether it was right or wrong. I concluded that one *had* to face the unpleasantness in one's life really to know oneself, but that it was certainly wrong to fall into prolonged brooding over the dark side only.

Suddenly I began to think about my father, who died years ago. I had habitually thought of him as a quarrelsome, punishing man who made me feel at times, when I was quite small, that I was more his mortal enemy than his cherished son. My fear of him was a pall over my boyhood and, insofar as I suspected all men of being similarly hostile, over my whole life.

Then, one evening when under the influence of Step Ten, I remembered something he said not long after I had graduated from high school. The first ominous rumblings of the Great Depression were being heard, and

Dad was flat broke. But he said it was now time—I'd been working nearly a year—for me to go to college. "This thirst for learning you have will pass if it isn't satisfied," he said. "You have to go now." God knows where he got the money. I suspect he was paying back loans for many years after I'd finished college, but he never once hinted at the hardship he and my mother and my sister and brother must have endured to make my diploma possible, and his checks were always on time. I am forever in his debt for opening to me a life of infinitely greater scope than would have been possible without his penetrating understanding of my need, backed by his prolonged and patient giving. This insight, gained through Step Ten, gave me back the memory of a loving and considerate father.

More than that, it restored a certain radiance to my life. Did I have memories of one who bawled the daylights out of me and scared me half to death? Very well, I also had memories of a father who was deeply understanding and unswervingly loyal. I *know* there is kindness, courage, solid trustworthiness in human beings, because I have experienced these qualities through my father. I was wrong to have brooded for so long over my earlier and less pleasant experiences with him. When I saw my wrong I promptly admitted it, and immediately became, certainly a happier, and perhaps better, person for it.

"Promptness" is of fire-alarm importance whenever, through Step Ten, we find ourselves to have been in the wrong. If we delay admitting the wrong it may bury itself in our psyche and fester into misery. I find, in looking back over what I wrote about Step Ten the first time round, that I was aware even seven years ago that the word "promptly" deserved special emphasis:

"Number Ten might be called the here-and-now Step. It's not solely concerned with past disasters, permits no brooding over future possibilities. We 'continue' to take inventory. I understand 'continue' to mean every day. This day. When the inventory shows us to have been wrong we admit it 'promptly.' Immediately. Now.

"It has always seemed to me that this action has a special function, appearing, as it does, near the end of the sequence. So far our major tussle has been to get squared away with our immediate drinking past. We've had a good look at the record and seen clearly that for us alcohol meant personal disaster. Miraculously freed from it, we've seen the need of making restitution in order to keep that freedom, and of plugging in on the spiritual lighting circuit. We've tidied our spiritual house and turned on the lights.

"But tidying up a shambles, as any good housekeeper knows, is not enough. To keep things in order requires a light on-*ce* over *every day*. Otherwise dust accumulates, fuses

blow, roofs leak, basements flood, beds go unmade, dishes accumulate in the sink. In the kind of house we're talking about here, we've got to take today's inventory *today*, and if something's wrong, fix it right away. Otherwise resentments accumulate, tops blow, tears are shed, grudges build, confusion takes over, bats begin to flit back and forth in the mental belfry. Once that begins to happen it's an unhappy state of affairs, even if we manage to hold on to physical sobriety. The twelve-stepper who puts off the admission for ten days suffers ten days of mental unease as the price.

"'When we were wrong.'

"What a vast field for speculation that phrase opens up for the philosophically-minded! What *is* right, and what wrong? Thoughtful men and women have been discussing the point since the first beginnings of human intellect, and have arrived at no hard-and-fast conclusions. It seems that each one must be his own philosopher, and hammer the matter out for himself.

"In the beginning it was hard for me to see, sometimes, that I was wrong at all. If only people would try to understand me a little better they'd see that *they* were wrong, not I. Now, I have quite a different concept of right and wrong.

"It seems to me they're relative, not absolute things. For example, if a fox or a hawk kills a chicken, nobody sees anything especially 'wrong' about it. It's what you expect of

hawks and foxes. But if our dog does the same thing there's hell to pay. If an infant wets his pants nobody minds; high school people are expected to know better. And so on up the scale: the more developed forms of life are supposed to exhibit the higher forms of behavior. What may be 'right' for one stage of development may be quite 'wrong' for another. Darwin called it 'evolution.' Within a single lifetime we can evolve into higher types of beings.

"This, I think, is the real root of AA tolerance. When we see an active drunk we aren't too quick to say his carryings-on are 'wrong.' It's merely the primitive way we all are when we're drunk. When we see a brand-new member bristling and popping with unresolved resentments, we don't get too upset. He just hasn't had time yet to grow—that is, to evolve. And when, after a period of time, we take another good hard look at *ourselves*, we're rather surprised—at least I have been—to see what's happened to our old notions of right and wrong.

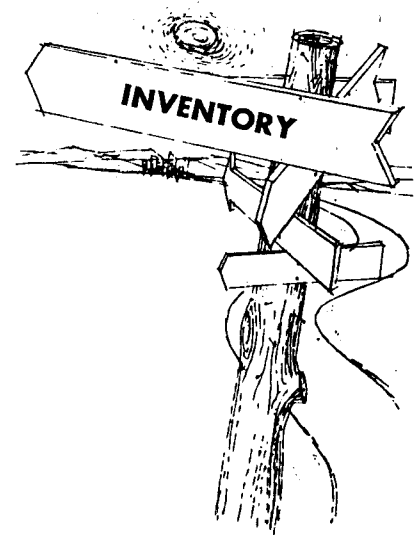
"When I first came into AA, and looked over my day's activities to see where I'd been wrong, I'd come up with a list of gross acts of rudeness and violence. This might be a typical day's list: Hit one of the kids (how I wish I hadn't!) Yelled and swore at them three times, and unnecessarily. Lambasted my wife for a situation which displeased me, but for which she was in no way responsible. Let go with a surly tirade be-

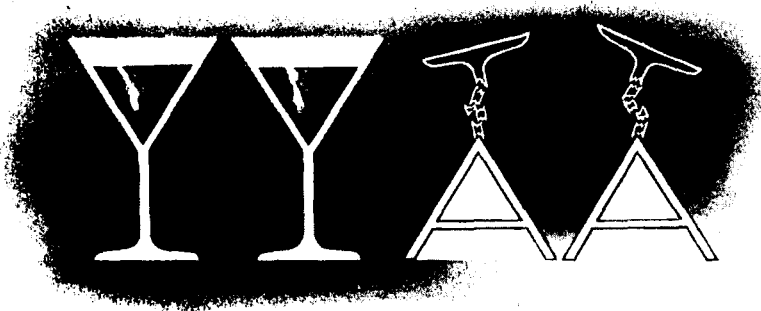
smirching the good name of a perfectly honest, well-intentioned, hard-working man. Blew my top in traffic, endangering the lives and upsetting the nerves of at least a dozen people.

"Lest I seem altogether too good to have around, let me confess that any one of these things could still happen, and at any moment. But the fact is that they either don't happen at all any more, or happen less frequently. I have evolved a little bit.

"Wherever we may find ourselves on the ladder of growth, we know well enough, I think, what is 'wrong' for us *at that point of our development*. If we promptly admit it we hasten our progress to the next stage of growth."

J. E., Guilford, Conn.





The Guy Who Licked Liquor

*A recovered alcoholic takes his courage
in both hands to accost the company's
super-salesman—who might have a problem*

I DIDN'T know why he bugged me; I had been sober several years when the incident happened—long enough to have rid myself of any reservations about being or not being an alcoholic. But this dapper man, always impeccably groomed, had the uncanny ability to set my nerves on edge.

We work in a sales office where the desks are lined up in rows with a narrow aisle between, and the competitive spirit is highly endorsed by the management.

But this alone could not account for my feelings. My little friend sat across from me and he was a *real salesman*. He could take a vague lead or tip and close the deal while I was still fumbling with the papers. I am new to the sales field and expected ineptness on my own part

so the competitive sense had not yet gotten to me. All I felt at first for the fellow was admiration and awe at his sales ability.

He would sell feverishly for two weeks, lead all other salesmen in the office, and then disappear for days. This was mysterious but soon resolved when the office girl hinted that Mr. X occasionally "went into orbit." Then a couple of times I answered the phone during his absence and heard this obviously drunken voice (absolutely stoned) identify itself as Mr. X.

Thereafter, my interest in Mr. X increased greatly. Under the pretext of learning the business, I talked to him at length. I deliberately broke my anonymity once when we were alone and rambled on about my drinking problem, hoping to arouse

some spark of interest. I drew a complete blank. Mr. X would nod understandingly but volunteered no personal insights although I was certain he must have known that the entire office staff was aware of his difficulty.

And Mr. X continued to stay on top of the sales charts, disappear, return weak and shaking but still dapper, and greet my conversation with cold silence.

In the meantime, my own sales had risen at one point but were not consistently good. I wondered if I was in the right business. I thought about Mr. X. "Maybe what I need is to try his pattern. If I had a few under my belt, I bet I could be more glib and put on a little more pressure to clinch a sale. Could I control I?

The way he does? That must be the way one should drink and work!"

I didn't need anyone to tell me what this kind of thinking meant. I doubled my attendance at meetings and thought seriously about leaving the job. The little man was getting me but good.

Maybe you can guess what happened? Last week, trembling but still looking like a fashion plate, Mr. X called me aside and said, "I've had it! I can't live this existence any more. Can I go to some of those meetings with you?"

I have decided to keep my job. My sales are averaging out pretty well and the little guy across the aisle needs me. And I need him.

Anonymous

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 11

- *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

As I near the end of this series, the second time around, I have a strong urge to sit back and yarn-spin . . . to consider the way we've come these past months and years to scout the path ahead for a furlong or so.

Back in the summer of 1954, after seven years of AA sobriety, I looked back over the road I'd come and discovered I'd had a somewhat different type of experience from those recorded from AA's early days. True, my personal crisis had been to me as terrible, the redemptive power of AA principles as inspiring to discover and as exciting to live, as to any of the pioneers. But the thrill of first exploration was not (I then thought) to be mine. I was a rank-and-file member, a plodder along well-beaten paths, an emptier of ash trays, folder of chairs, greeter of newcomers, maker of twelfth-step calls on drunks who had already heard of AA.

I was very grateful to be just that, since being it had saved my life and sanity. But was it not a different *kind* of experience? And shouldn't some kind of record be kept of what happens in the life of an ordinary dud who came along years after the Big Book had been published? The Grapevine staff told

me to give it a try, and the result was the "Twelve Steps and the Older Member" series, which ran from 1954 into 1956. "As I enter my seventh year of consecutive 24-hour periods of sobriety in AA," I wrote in Step One of that series, published in August, 1954, "I am meeting more and more members who feel that the program—which to me is the Twelve Steps—comes, in time, to mean something a little different than it did during those first critical and uniquely exciting months. By this I certainly don't mean that we who have become a little older in AA can afford to relax. But the necessary vigilance can become such a habit that it maintains itself with little creative effort. We no longer have to think with the desperate intensity that was needed to hold our early sobriety. When we don't have to think very hard we tend to stop growing and start fossilizing.

"To me, and to a number of my AA friends, the Twelve Steps have remained a challenge and a goad to hard and systematic thought."

Hard and systematic thought! Pup though I was in AA (only seven years dry in 1954) I had written something I don't have to retract today, seven years later. Step by step, as I wrote out my experiences, I began to make another and quite wonderful discovery:—*each AA life is a new pioneering experience!* The newest newcomer is just as authentically an explorer into the infinite as were Bill and Bob when they founded AA on June 10, 1935. Nobody can take the Twelve Steps for anybody else. Each individual who sets his foot on the road suggested by the Steps finds himself on his own endlessly challenging, sometimes perilous journey into undiscovered territory.

The point at which my own exploration makes contact with the frontier of the unknown is Step Eleven. Here, it seems to me, do we most closely approach ultimate mystery. Here do we find the most consistent challenge to "hard and systematic thought." Carrying out the spirit of the series, which was to set down the experience of a single rank-and-file, Johnny-come-lately member, I'll recount what Step Eleven meant to me when I first came into AA, what it meant seven years later, and what it means now. Here is the account of my experience with this Step after seven years, as printed in Grapevine for April, 1956:

In the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience over the years, Step Eleven has a number of distinctions uniquely its own. For one thing, it's the longest. All of the Twelve Steps together contain, as I count them, exactly 200 words, an average of a little over sixteen per Step. Number Eleven contains thirty-two—almost twice the median length. The authors were sparing of words. Their generous use of them here could mean only one thing: they considered the Step of extraordinary importance.

It's a devout Step—candidly, forthrightly, inescapably so, not mincing

“Getting re-oriented... at first seems strange...”

matters. Here for the first time we encounter the word prayer. And the word meditation.

These are frankly devotional words. To an alcoholic who detests the sanctimonious and is suspicious of the devout, such words can be upsetting. I found them so, I know, when I first encountered them more than eight years ago. I could have no idea, then, that they would some day come to be among the most warming and strengthening words in all the 200.

Just to get our bearings again, I'd like to remind myself that my main job in this series has been to review our Twelve Suggested Steps as they appear to an older member. The idea has been to try to keep them as bright and shining as they were in the beginning, to prevent dry rot, wet rot, halo chafe and hardening of the ego. I've been at the job nearly two years now and am getting near the end. My memories of Step Eleven come back in a sequence of quick impressions.

As a hopeless, helpless alcoholic a little over eight years ago I gulped AA whole, as a starving man gulps food. The Twelve Steps slid down with a general impression: “I should have been living by such standards all along.” They contained all the noblest ideals offered to me in my boyhood; without quite knowing it, I'd been lonesome for them.

Then the long haul began, and a more thoughtful consideration of the Steps. Just what were they asking of me? This word prayer, for example—what did it mean? Obviously, it meant something different to these people—alcoholics who were miraculously kept sober—than just going to church. I learned about flash-prayers and silent prayers, thought prayers and prayers of desperation, about morning prayers for sobriety and evening prayers of thanks. I even learned about prayers for other people.

I tried out all these prayers, and I saw all of them work. I did not always get what I asked for, but as time went on I began to see that I always got what in the long run was going to be best for me. Unquestionably, I was in touch with some Higher Power which knew—as I could not—what my best interests really were, and which operated consistently toward these interests while I maintained contact. It was just as the Big Book said, and as my AA friends had testified.

This was fine, but it was not enough. I began to develop a strong desire

to improve my conscious contact with this great Power. It was then that the long and carefully worded Step Eleven really came into its own in my AA life. If you want to improve conscious contact with God, it said, pray. And meditate.

Meditate . . . what did that mean? I read up on the subject. Whatever else it meant, the authorities seemed to agree that you had to get alone, by yourself, and you had to be quiet. Really alone. And really quiet. Quiet not just in the ears, but deep in the body, deep in the mind, a very deep, still, soul-quiet. Somebody said once that muddy water, if allowed to be still long enough, eventually became clear, and that it's the same way with a muddied mind and soul. The turmoil simmers down, if one can wait long enough, put aside distractions with sufficient resolution, really want to be quiet and listen. Then, sometimes, if God chooses, there can be a brief conscious contact. A spark can pass. And after that we can know a little better what meditation is. And how very hard it is to be really quiet.

I wonder how many people have had the experience of moving to a new town and having to get reoriented as to direction. I remember as a kid our family took up residence in a new place, and for a long time I felt sure north was “that” way, which was really west. Finally, by the sheer intellectual effort of knowing what was really north (even though it did not seem to be north or feel like north) I got myself oriented in the true directions.

Getting re-oriented in the true spiritual dimension was very much like that. At first it seemed strange to find myself talking about God, and asking Him to let me know what He wanted of me, and wonderfully finding the power to do little things it seemed obvious He wanted done. I knew intellectually that it was right—“true north”—even though I was unaccustomed to such talk. All the evidence—sanity, sobriety, harmony, humility, service—pointed unmistakably to the fact that the God orientation was the only possible right one for me.

But for a long time it didn't seem right, or feel right. I was accustomed to the “practical,” materialistic, spirit-less, down-to-dirt, unimaginative, self-seeking orientation of the humdrum commercial world. Naturally, the spiritual orientation at first seemed strange. Just as in getting directions straight as a kid, I had to make a determined intellectual effort of knowing

what was really right and true. In the course of making that effort I came upon a wonderful story, a true story, the most wonderful one ever told on earth.

It begins way back in the mists of pre-history, more than nine thousand years ago (exactly how much more, nobody quite knows). Way back there, some half-savage desert tribesmen became hipped on a strange notion. They got the idea that the force back of creation was a personal force, and that "It"—or "He"—had spoken personally to them. He offered them a "covenant"—a deal. You do your best to play the game of life according to My rules, He promised them, and I'll look after you and yours now and through eternity.

Of course, even in the affected tribe, even way back then, only a few of the tribesmen took the business seriously. The wise money then as now was not taken in: they knew well enough that the way to get along was to grease palms, burn offerings, and look after yourself. Still a few of them persisted, maintaining and improving conscious contact. A record of their experiences was kept in legend and, when writing was developed, written down. And always these writings and legends, written or spoken, had the power completely to overturn and transform a few lives among the many who became readers and listeners. Never the wise money, of course, or the majority. But always a few.

This (the few devoutly believed) was the very Word of God—the commandments, the prophets, the psalms—and it was not just for these tribesmen alone, but for all mankind. Then one wonderful day, the story goes, the Word became flesh, a living man walking and talking, eating and drinking and working and suffering with other men and women, in the ultimate companionship of human strife. God's word was more wonderfully loving than even the prophets had imagined! More lives were transformed (but not the wise money). Out of eternity had come a new voice and a new hope.

And God knows a new voice and a new hope was what I needed a little over eight years ago. It came to me through the voice and the writings of another drunk, one who had meditated and had an experience, one who had taken the Steps when as yet there were no steps, one who gave them to us all, one who had made a conscious contact, and worked to improve it. And I can see, when I have the proper spiritual orientation, the great sweep of the story, all one story, the same conscious contact, from back in the plains nine thousand years ago, to the drunk in the hospital in 1935, to me—and I am awed.

That's what Step Eleven means to me, and of course I have to keep going to AA meetings to maintain my orientation. Because now, as then, the wise

money will have none of this. Even among drunks, few are moved to a response: 6,000,000 active alcoholics, 150,000 AAs (*since grown to 300,000—Ed.*), one in forty. And not one of those one in forty can afford to forget the wonder, the statistically impossible miracle of what has happened to him.

I can't, anyway. I have to go to meetings and be reminded. The voice of the wise money still rings loud in my ears.

What I had learned during my "first lesson" in Step Eleven ends here.

Now we shift from 1955 to 1962. Have I learned anything more in the past seven years? I think I have.

The first thing that strikes me, in looking back over my first go at Step

Eleven, is that I concentrated entirely on the first part of the Step—prayer and meditation—and neglected the equally important second part: “knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” It is important for this AA to remember what a great many religionists forget:—that meditation and prayer can never be ends in themselves. They are, as Step Eleven makes clear, means of establishing cooperative contact with our Higher Power (be He person-to-person God, as He is to me, or ethical system, as to our high-minded agnostics), discovering His purposes, and laying hold of the inner resources to carry out these purposes in day-to-day living.

During the past seven years I have gained greater sympathy for the *older* brother in the parable of the prodigal son. In this story, readers will recall, the newcomer—the younger brother—gets all the breaks. He goes on a prolonged and expensive binge and then, instead of catching hell when he gets home, gets the red-carpet treatment. The older brother, who’s been soberly minding his business all this time, feels unfairly treated. Something like that has happened in my AA life. When I first encountered Step Eleven I devoutly longed for a rich and full spiritual experience of the inward, mystical kind—a spiritual “making merry,” to use the terms of the parable. This was granted. My spiritual experience was not a fiery vision, but quite enough to leave me stunned. I now looked forward to long years of deepening intimacy with the Higher Power who had revealed Himself to me so gloriously. If I have come this far in only a year or two, I told myself, what wondrous progress might I not make in ten or fifteen years! Why, I might become almost a saint!

Alas, it has not worked out that way. We old-timers have become the older brothers—the “elder son” of the parable—without spectacular rewards, feast days or other extraordinary celebrations to mark whatever day-to-day well-doing we may achieve. Oh, we have our moments of real contact, our times of deep enlightenment, our cosmic reassurances. But the all-out clambake, the killing of the fatted calf and the making merry—these things are reserved for new prodigal sons, newly arrived at their father’s house from far countries. We elder sons are expected to continue our unspectacular labors with no special fuss being made over us.

Does this mean we labor without reward? Far from it! “Son, you are always with me,” the father in the parable tells the elder son, “and all that is mine is yours.” During the past seven years, the last half of the Step—knowledge of God’s will for me—has come clear. I now know with certainty that God wants me to become less and less a person who hates, falsifies, bedevils and exploits, and more and more a person who loves, understands, comforts and serves. I know that as long as I stay in His home and work in His fields, all that He has is eternally mine. I know that my will and my life are already in His care, even when, through forgetting this fact, I depart from

his shelter and his work to tag along on some ill-starred caravan to a far country.

In the final phrase of the Step—“the power to carry that out”—I still have monumental trouble, and it goes like this: I see clearly what I am to do, and, in the course of doing it, encounter somebody else who—whether through knowledge of God’s will for him or in pure rascality—sees equally clearly that he must oppose me. This circumstance generates a ballooning resentment in my breast; to relieve it I release great quantities of hot air. When *that’s* over, I go back through the inventory Steps, and work up *again* to the crucial Step Eleven, and *again* ask for power to carry God’s will for me into the immediate situation, and thus again go to work in the fields as an esteemed but uncelebrated elder son. And so, though I have not come nearly so far as I had hoped, I’ve come a long way from where I was.

J.E., Guilford, Conn.

January 1963

I saw one AA work Step Nine

THE NEW YEAR'S PRESENT

by Emerson S. Schwenk

FOR five years I've sat behind this desk and I can't remember a week without someone coming in off the street WANTING! Wanting car-care, a meal, groceries, clothing; one drunk even wanted a prayer! All had the most plausible reasons: "My mother is sick, needs drugs; I have no money. I've been in prison, just got a job and need to be staked until Friday when I get paid . . ." etc.

I have searched the faces of these people and my own motives and always I say to myself, "How do you know he won't do what he says? There are honest people in trouble and there should be a place where they can go to ask help without a social case history or an FBI clearance. If not the church, where?"

Christmas came and went. The day after came and went and then Bob came. He was escorted to the chair opposite my desk and I said, secretly, inside my mind, "O Lord!" even before he opened his mouth. My muscles tensed all over. I didn't want to say, "Yes" and I have a terrible time saying "No." I listened. It was a new story.

"I'm a member of AA. We meet

in your dining room. I sat there the other night and I noticed your walls are not exactly good-looking. I know, I'm a painter. I wondered whether you'd like me to paint them? Of course, you'd have to buy the paint, but I'm trying to rebuild my life and this is one way you could help me . . ."

I heard rumblings inside my head. . . . "There's a catch to this somewhere . . ." and lots more cynicism began to form lines like, "He'll never do it!" But he did. When you come to our church you'll see his handiwork.

There's a moral in addition to the truth of this story. Here was a man who said he was down, way down. So he wasn't afraid of a church in a decaying area. Nor was he afraid of Negroes, whites, dirt, left-wingers, shoplifters, delinquents (name your own list). He wasn't even afraid of Unitarians for he never heard of us. All he saw was dirty walls. Having standards for himself and the church, he wanted the walls clean. So he painted them and painting was his way of going up. You taught us something, Bob. Thank you very much.

February 1963



FROM THE EDITOR

"ON THE BEAM"

In appreciation of the splendid contribution made to AA-style sobriety by the many excellent periodicals published by community and area units, the editor will from time to time give this page over to a quotation from one of these fine local journals, and offer Grapevine's felicitations. This month we salute "On the Beam," Washington, D.C. with the following quotation from one of its recent issues. Good luck, "On the Beam"!—Ed.

"Most folks who have been around AA for any length of time have come to realize that the only way to get sober is to stop drinking. Also, the only way to stay sober happily is to get out of the driver's seat, let go and let God take over. It also helps to take the cotton out of our ears and stuff it into our mouths and listen to those who have been successful on the AA program. Listen with an open mind; retain what you like; but! and that is a big but—do not cast aside that with which you do not agree or just plain don't like—it may be useful some day.

"The Twelve Suggested Steps were passed on with the hope that they would be of future assistance and guidance. The founders did not say that you *must* follow these steps, but *suggested* that if the steps were helpful to them they might possibly be helpful to others. No membership rolls are kept in this fellowship, except total group strength, but with such guiding lights as the "Twelve Steps," the membership has grown to an estimated three-hundred thousand.

"Another wonderful thing about these steps is that although they are set forth in a very chronological order, it is generally agreed that the best way to work them is *your way*. Always be ready to accept constructive criticism or suggestions but remember that, what is good for someone else may not necessarily be the best thing for you. The way back is long, hard, and beset with obstacles. But accept by faith and with trust, that which thousands of others have tried and proven."

W. P.

March 1963

Moments of Spiritual Awareness

1. On a night in a hotel in Cleveland, Ohio, long after I had abandoned hope, when I was without liquor or the means of getting it, and when I believe I was very close to a second suicide attempt, a man appeared seemingly out of nowhere. Through a series of remarkable coincidences—he was not supposed to be in town, I was not supposed to be in town, neither had the other's address—he found me on this night and told me that if I wanted to stop drinking, he would take me to a place where I *could* stop drinking. We left that night for a hospital in Florida. I did not find AA until later, but I have never, since that night, felt fear or dread or apprehension. I believe that God put out his hand to me that night and continued to sustain me until I was able to grow in the Twelve Steps to confident sobriety.

J. W. Princeton, N. J.

2. My mother had a drinking problem and died of what the doctor charitably diagnosed as "hepatitis." A few years later I realized that I had inherited the same problem or at least the same personality traits, which lead me to alcoholism. One day while standing in front of her grave, after trying desperately and unsuccessfully for some weeks to stop drinking, I blurted out, "Mom, surely you have the answer now. Please help me." Suddenly everything grew dim and I perceived in a manner I can't describe the one word: "RECEIVE." That was all. The experience was over and I was aware of the countryside once again.

This, of course, had quite an emotional impact on me. I decided that I would ask a minister for an interpretation, but while I was trying to get up enough nerve it occurred to me that I had a bigger problem to discuss (first things first). So when I finally did see that minister, I forgot all about my experience and frankly admitted to him that I was an alcoholic. I had taken the First Step without knowing what it was.

Rev. J. got in touch with AA on my behalf. This was a little over a year ago, and you can well imagine how many times since then I have given thanks to God that my mother was able to get me on the program *four years after her death*. I did eventually ask Rev. J. about my experience, and he reminded me of Jesus' words in Mark: "Freely have ye received; freely give."

J. S. C., New Hartford, N. Y.

March 1963

Carrying the message

From Miami Beach, Fla:

For many years I wondered what the message was that I was supposed to carry to the sick alcoholic, as directed to do in the Twelfth Step.

This situation worried me to the point that, in all honesty, I must admit I purposely avoided as much first-hand contact with the raw drunk as I possibly could. To approach a new member with this inner quaking would make me physically sick and it drove me to long hours of meditation on the Twelfth Step.

At that particular time, and with split second timing of course, I was involved with the formation of the Eleventh Step meetings, and by complete acceptance of the direction of the Eleventh Step—to seek to improve by prayer and meditation my conscious contact with God, as I understood Him—I received from the same source that I received my sobriety, the answer to my question, “What is the message I am supposed to carry?”

The beautiful simplicity of the revelation was its greatest virtue. The answer to the Twelfth Step, as it applies to me, is contained right within the Twelfth Step. “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry *this* message to alcoholics, . . .” and *this* is the message I carry. K. F.



NOBLESSE OBLIGE

He tries to share what he has received with everybody

ABOUT the only thing I learned in one of my high school history classes was the meaning of the French term *noblesse oblige*. It rhymes with "oh mess o' peas" and usually meant, in the days of feudalism, the obligations noblemen had towards persons of lesser rank. Today, there are few nobles to be *noblesse*, and there are even fewer required to display *oblige*. It's a lost tradition.

Still, it wasn't a bad idea, and it probably helped take the curse off some of the worst aspects of feudalism. And perhaps there is an unwritten law in the universe that demands *noblesse oblige* of each person who has something which his fellow men haven't. In AA, for example, we

have access to spiritual ideas which have somehow bypassed many people. There is a certain nobility in being a member of AA. Out of weakness has come great strength—a direct gift from God.

Yet, we live in a world that is spiritually impoverished. We are surrounded by desperate people, some of whom never drank in all their lives. A few are people whom we should envy, according to the world's standards of money and success. But according to our standards, based on spiritual values, they are terribly poor.

My point is this: members of AA can, by the power of example, carry our message to everybody, not just the recovery message to the alcoholic

who still suffers. All around us are people who suffer from resentments, self-pity, fears, jealousies, feelings of inadequacy, and all the million demons that ever plagued an alcoholic. We can probably help by expressing encouragement and understanding to these people. It doesn't even require direct verbal contact. It merely means directing a feeling of good will and human sympathy towards people who seem to be carrying a great load—and it also means not adding to their burdens.

We pass these people every day: the tired and aging policeman on the corner, worried about his wife's health; the unsuccessful minister who is trying to serve his congregation, but is also wondering if the church board has plans to replace him; the garbage disposal man whose back has bothered him for years, causing some of his working days to be almost unendurable agony. We pass these people every day, without taking note of their pain. Worse yet, we may even react self-righteously to them, if they don't treat us just right.

In reality, though, we AAs are the fortunate ones. Nobody has taken the loving care to write a Twelve Steps or establish a fellowship for an aging policeman worried about his wife's health or a disposal man whose days are a gray horror of pain. They carry their burdens all by themselves, and often perform with admirable fortitude. We may not be able to ease their situation, but, as people who have known agony our-

selves, we can at least make a mental identification with the person who suffers from anything at all.

There is one type of sufferer with whom we should be particularly patient. This is the man who is so prone to angry outbursts that he can be instantly inflamed by the slightest criticism or disagreement. Most likely, many AA members were at one time in this condition themselves, but have improved through the teachings of AA. Hence, they can understand his utter lack of self-control; they can recognize how his affliction is really a rather impersonal emotion stemming from a blind fear of almost everything.

Now, the person who has had to master himself can, quite easily, learn just what it is that usually triggers the other man's anger. He thus has a moral responsibility not to provoke the other, deliberately. True, the anger stems from the other man's character defects, but we know the man is sick and tormented, perhaps physically as well as emotionally. We who have been in this state so often can surely yield gracefully on the many small points that could detonate conflict and increase tension.

This, then, is the kind of *noblesse oblige* the growing member of AA can display. He can recognize that other people do have burdens and lighten them if possible, and he can resist the temptation to add to their burdens.

Of course, I am not speaking from Olympian heights of sinlessness! I

burn with shame when I think of the many times that I have ignored the best teachings of AA while dealing with many non-AAs. How much happier all of us would have been if I had "gone all the way" by refusing to answer an insult with an insult, or to respond to criticism by criticizing. I have often abused people in speech and action, without having the slightest feeling of guilt at the time. I thought of myself as being the "sick

person," the one who should be shown some consideration, the "poor recovered alcoholic" who was trying valiantly to make his way in a world that wasn't trying to understand him. This, of course, was mostly self-interest and self-justification. Like many alcoholics, both wet and dry, the therapy that I have needed much of the time is a good swift kick in the pants, self-administered.

M. D. B., Jackson, Mich.



RENACIMIENTO

(ray-nah-see-myehn'-toh): a rebirth

La historia del grupo que "12th-stepped" un otro grupo y los resultados

I WAS born at León in Nicaragua, but I grew up at the city of Choluteca in Honduras. This is why those two places have a very special place in my heart and are the theater of the events.

When I got enough maturity and the spiritual awakening which our recuperation plan tells us about, the first thing I thought about was to help those towns and share the gift God put in my hands in giving me back my judgment and sobriety.

On October 12 of last year I had that opportunity. It was in this way

that with the companion Arturo H. we made this trip, this time as messengers of the Grupo Renacimiento.

To begin with, a torrential rain pursued us after we left Tegucigalpa until we reached the capital of Nicaragua and then León. I have never liked to travel under a storm, maybe I am a little coward, but, when I drive, thunderbolts make me feel panic. However, when we started this trip and took the international highway, we crossed ourselves and I said: "I put our lives in your hands God, please protect us."

When we were met at the church of La Merceda, before the meeting started, we talked with the different members. My surprise was enormous when I heard that some of them have been meeting for six years, that first thing I thought was: My God, and how can I help them being an AA for only two and a half years? and my companion had less time.

After this small disconcert, we went from surprise to surprise. In the first place they didn't have their own place, then they didn't have literature, not even for the new ones. They did not even have a small frame with the Serenity Prayer, or of any of the proverbs that we have immortalized, such as "First things first," "Easy does it," etc. They didn't know Dr.

Jellinek's scale.* Well, this was the end; they didn't have a single cent, because they had never passed the hat.

Then, I really thanked God that it was me the one who had to light the match, first because of my native origin, and secondly not only because I was born in that city, but also to finish the coincidence, I had been baptized at that same church.

There is something I wish to put in the first place on this report and it was precisely the humility and vehemence with which we were welcomed and then their wonderful generosity when they asked us with emotion to talk as long as we wished, that they

*Dr. Jellinek's chart on the stages of alcoholism. See reference, p. 14.

had only met to hear us. That tolerance and goodwill they had is something I'll remember all my life and I'll never forget all those faces filled with anxiety and not losing any gesture or phrase of my companion and I during the three and a half hours that the meeting lasted. They didn't care about the uncomfortableness of the chairs or the hours and you could even hear the buzzing of a fly.

I told them in a simple way and from my own experiences about the principal points of the Jellinek scale. I finished this talk with the recitation of the First Step, which my companion Arturo from the Grupo Renacimiento discussed together with the second and the third one, in a wonderful way.

Then I made a call for passing the hat and I talked about the need to struggle for having our own place, which gets to be for us, the AAs, the most solid base in our recuperation and practice of the Twelve Steps. I was able to get such emotive, real and honest concepts that they contagioned all my companions with faith and enthusiasm, and to such a degree that in the two nights of meetings there were \$20.00 cordovas collected. This is something really historic since, after not giving for six years a single cent, they all contributed happily that night, and the following night those who weren't prepared also did it.

There were more persons at the second meeting. They even called the

companion from Managua and there were two new members. That night I had two pleasant surprises, the first one that because of the rain we the visitors were a little delayed since we feared that nobody would go and we would get wet in vain. The lesson? They all were there, even with the storm which lasted five hours without stopping, and for that reason we had the opportunity to stay longer together at the end, not as a meeting.

The second surprise of that night was given to me by the two newcomers, whom I knew and one of them had been with me at school and we hadn't seen each other since thirty years (I am forty years old). Here we have a new experience and of course it is a great one. We started our friendship as children when we were at school. Then our destiny separated us when I went to Honduras and AA has reunited us with more sincerity and better purposes: strength and hope. This friend, even though it was his first visit to the group, made a wonderful talk telling about his experiences, saying that due to his drinking he was today a Bachelor in Science and not a colleague of mine (I am a doctor in Pharmacy) as his dream had been.

But what was the top for us, the representatives of the Grupo Renacimiento, was when we heard all the companions from Nicaragua so filled with faith, hope and enthusiasm, as if in that night they had been born again.

C., Tegucigalpa, Honduras

September 1963

BE HONEST!

AT one of the first meetings I attended, the speaker said that staying sober required two things: being honest with one's self, and being willing to keep an open mind.

I had always taken pride in being honest with myself. Oh, sure, my job made necessary some degree of intrigue and deception, some evasiveness, but never dishonesty. One had to be clever, shrewd and have acumen in dealing with others—but to deceive oneself? Impossible.

I had always been a firm believer in the scientific approach to evaluating everything. One of my favorite sayings was, "Get the facts! Have the courage to face the facts! And then take the action the facts dictate!"

Thank God someone said I had to work the Twelve Steps. And, thank God for Step Four! I followed the recommendations in Chapter Five (took pencil and paper) and for the first time in my life took a searching and fearless inventory of my whole self, in writing. It was one of the most difficult experiences of my life. I found it's much easier to deceive one's self

than it is to deceive other people.

I discovered that my search for facts had been a diligent search for only those facts which would prove my already preconceived opinions. Intellectual pride and prejudiced beliefs had warped and stunted my spiritual growth until I was unable to see and understand even the most elementary truths.

I had not been the creature of logic I had imagined myself to be, but rather a creature of emotion, bristling with pride and prejudice, motivated primarily by vanity.

I am definitely convinced that if I had failed to make the inventory, complete and in writing as recommended by Chapter Five, I'd now be left with a very shaky and uncomfortable sobriety—if I were sober at all.

So, when I'm tempted to be positively certain about the wisdom of my own opinions, and positively certain the other fellow is wrong, I'm able to maintain a reasonable degree of "thoughtful uncertainty." when I remember to "Be honest, and keep an open mind."

Don McF., Beverly Hills, Calif.

I had just learned to control my resentments, when

THAT LOUD-MOUTH !*"#!!*!

IT wasn't what she said that burned me up," Paul confessed at lunch last week. "It was just the way she said it. So I told her off and I'm glad I did." But my friend didn't look very happy and I'm sure he wasn't. His resentment was much too obvious. It was tearing him up; he was miserable.

I know how he felt. Regretfully, I've told off too many people too many times, usually over something I can't remember. It set me thinking. Why do I react badly to some people, taking exception to the slightest breach of conduct, while usually I'm able to take a king-sized drubbing from my friends? And why do these unfortunate outbursts always happen when I'm least expecting them?

The answer, I think, lies deeply buried among my strongest aversions, frequently at sub-conscious levels. While some of these intense dislikes are instinctive, I think I've

created the deadly ones myself. But they're there, ready to go into action whenever the occasion arises.

It's humanly natural to abhor the injustice we see in others; we don't like to see a bully take advantage. And most of us can do without the arrogant loud-mouth who meddles with personal affairs.

But unwittingly, many aversions are made by association. Some years ago, a swaggering overbearing salesman used to call on me. With hat tipped back, he continually rolled a cigar in his mouth and implied that I was weak in the head if I bought his competitor's products. Frankly, I despised him. I found this revulsion spreading to salesmen who were innocent. If they wore their hats cocked, or smoked cigars, I was ready to fly at them before they spoke.

Conscious or sub-conscious, these inordinate dislikes keep me tense, ready to spring whenever anyone

so much as bats an eye at them. They are the chips I carry on my shoulder, symbols of my touchy spots. They are my hostilities, waiting to attach themselves to whoever is unlucky enough to ruffle them.

They differ from resentments because resentments, as we know them in AA, are directed against a person, a thing, an organization—against something tangible. But hostilities are of a broader nature; they are resentments that haven't yet found their victims. And ordinarily, I'm not aware of them until after the damage is done.

I don't mean to imply that all hostile action is undesirable. I think the good Lord would smile approvingly if, even in anger, I was able

to protect some little guy from getting kicked around. But at the same time, I don't think He's going to call out the National Guard every time I get my feelings hurt.

In nine years of AA, I've struggled hard against resentments, but sometimes I don't think I've made much progress. Time has removed some of them or softened others until they're harmless. Of course, they can always be rekindled. But the best way I've found to stay clear of resentments is not to let them start. In searching for their cause I had to face my hostilities.

Nature, in giving me an ego, has provided a breeding ground for them. Experience, by means of those mysterious psychological associations, has given me some more.

And in my imagination, I've deliberately created others. You're familiar with this process, "If some wise guy ever pulls that on me, you know what I'll do?" In effect, I've rehearsed the scene so well that someday, some innocent, well-meaning individual might get it broadside.

The only way to fight these ugly little quirks is to guard against them constantly. Realizing that I'm loaded with this venom, I can expect my fangs to strike at any instant.

A little meekness works miracles. Although it's hard to agree with some obnoxious show-off, even if he's right, it's much harder to get rid of the resentment, once it blazes up. Self-restraint is so rewarding,

and the dividends in serenity are all out of proportion to the effort.

"Agree with thine adversary quickly . . ." Give in a little! Most of the things we disagree about are trifles anyway; they don't involve real questions yet. The friction comes from issues we deliberately interpose in order to vent hostility. Then come nasty, cutting innuendos and direct assaults.

All this, of course, is included in Step Ten which suggests: *Continue to take personal inventory and when wrong, promptly admit it.* My inventory, drawn mostly from unpleasant experiences, indicates that if my hostility is showing, I'd better back off promptly.

Shortly after I had reviewed Step Ten with this approach, I decided

to redouble my efforts on it. And I didn't have to wait long for an opportunity.

I had gone for a walk along the beach in order to turn this over in my mind when I ran into *him*—the guy I'd least like to run into. I think every community has one of these characters: a loud, mouthy show-off, expert on everything, obnoxious. I could barely stand him when he tried to be pleasant, which wasn't often. But here he was, and to make matters worse, he had on his arm an attractive young woman to show off.

We exchanged some small talk and, during the conversation, I tapped my pipe out on a post.

"Oh, no! Don't ever do that! You'll crack the bowl!" he bawled. "Knock it out in your hand. Don't you know anything about pipes?"

It so happens that I've been smoking pipes for twenty-odd years and I've always tapped them out lightly on something besides my hand because that can get pretty messy. And I hadn't cracked one yet. Indignant, I wanted to say, "Jack, you tap your pipe out the way you want to and I'll tap my pipe out the way I want to and everyone will be much happier." I

thought that would be most deflating in the presence of his girl friend.

Then I remembered what I'd proposed to do about hostility. I handed him my pipe and asked him if he thought I had damaged it.

He didn't spare the horses. For some minutes he mouthed off with advice and general criticism and took me deep into the science of pipe smoking. And darned if he didn't find a crack in my favorite briar! There were times I could scarcely hear him for the rush of air escaping from my punctured ego. But finally he finished. I thanked him and glowing with self-satisfaction, he swaggered off with his admiring lady-friend.

Funny thing though, I believe I actually began to feel a little friendly toward this guy, although it could have been only in my imagination. Still, I think he means well; it's just that way of his. . . .

Leisurely, I strolled down the beach, savoring the tang of a fresh sea breeze. Gulls wheeled peacefully in a sky that was deep and blue and tranquil. Out in the Gulf, a sailboat plunged gracefully in the gently heaving swell. I could swear that I saw a huge pile of billowy white clouds suddenly turn to pink.

B. E. T., Siesta Key, Fla.

The Twelve Steps Revisited / Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

OFTEN, if we keep our ears open, we have a chance to learn something from someone much younger in the movement than ourselves. Such an opportunity came to me a couple of months ago. A visiting AA from the midwest, "in" a relatively short time, got to talking about difficult Twelfth Step cases. I told him about one of mine, a neighbor who had recently called to ask what he could do about his drinking "short of joining AA." I had given him my story and said that in my own case nothing but AA had worked.

"Wrong answer," the visitor said. When I asked why, he replied: "Obviously, your neighbor wasn't ready for AA. Just as obviously, he was ready for *something*. Your stand had the effect of a rebuff, and he may never come back. You should have

encouraged him to try something else, and let him find his way to AA in his own time and by his own route."

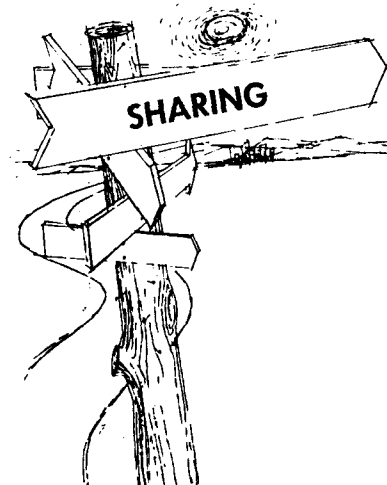
It suddenly occurred to me that the thing we were talking about, as it was being worked out in some 300,000 AA lives, had a lot to do with the continued life and success of the AA movement. It was the revelation that had come to Bill as he paced the lobby of an Akron hotel twenty-eight years ago—the sure knowledge that unless he could find a way to help some other alcoholic find sobriety he could never stay sober himself.

I suppose that every one of us who has had his life given back to him through AA is anxious—almost desperately so—to pass on his good fortune to another sick and suffering al-

coholic. We are painfully conscious of the millions who need the blessing of AA. Most of us have had to look into the anguished faces of spouses or relatives and hear the question, "Can't you *do* something?" Some of us have run our legs tired in the hope of saving a life by sheer, dogged persistence. Or, on the other tack, submitted ourselves to sharing a family's nail-biting suspense of waiting for one of its members to be "ready."

"We tried to carry this message to alcoholics." All right, how do you try, and, in trying, what methods are most successful? I must have asked these questions, both inwardly and aloud, ten thousand times since my first twenty-four-hour stretch of AA sobriety. I may, or may not, have found a few answers. Anyway, to go over the ground helps clarify the issues.

First let me list the very few things, in connection with Step



Twelve, that I am really certain about. Foremost among these is the conviction that it is no accident that we find the ideas of a "spiritual awakening" and "practicing these principles in all our affairs" very closely associated in the same Step with the idea of carrying the message.

The implication is clear: we spread the word mainly by our personal example. Note the phrasing of the Step: we *had* a spiritual awakening, and we *tried* to practice the principles and carry the message. As I read this, the one essential thing is that we "have an awakening." This, to me, means we "woke up" *as a result of* the effort to work *all* the Steps.

It seems to me that to wake up to the facts—that a life of happy and constructive sobriety is better than a life of alcoholic wretchedness, that this better life is available to us if we will accept the help of a power greater than ourselves—is ample "spiritual awakening" to keep us sober. But note that this awakening is a *requirement*. The Step reads "having had." We need to *get* the message before we can pass it on.

The other two parts of the Step, those having to do with practicing the principles and carrying the message, are not as clearly directives as the part about the awakening. We "*try*" to work the Steps and spread the good news. Infallible success is not required. In my own case, I am able to report completion, for this twenty-four-hour period, of the first

part of the Step. Right now I am fully awakened to the fact that my life in AA is better than my life as an active alcoholic, and that this better life came to me through benevolent forces acting on me from outside myself.

As for practicing the principles, I have pretty well covered my experience in the previous eleven Steps. I may report in passing that my besetting character defect, my "unresolved discontent," is with me as I write. At this moment it is taking the form of a feeling that the kind of work I do is, though socially useful, notoriously unrewarded; one's best efforts are as likely to evoke a kick in the teeth as praise, and I am not free of self-pity. But even as I confess it I see through the thing. It has not got me. Thanks to the practice of AA principles, I am on top of it. And if the truth be told, I lack for nothing that is essential and have no real grounds for complaint; only my defective character makes my squawks seem worth mentioning.

So now we have cleared the way to talk about what, by the common consent of general AA usage, the Twelfth Step is mainly about—directly carrying the message to alcoholics.

There is very little argument in AA on the point that the first act in carrying the message is staying sober oneself. The second move is, if possible, to stay *happily* sober. Obviously, sick alcoholics will not be receptive to the message if we who pur-

port to have it are not consistently sober, or seem grumpy and miserable. *We* know, of course, that our worst quality sobriety is better than our best quality drunkenness, and that the AA life is far better than the other even when the going is tough. But to help in carrying the message this inward certainty has to shine through—at least a little, and at least from time to time—so other people can see it. Only then is the message really carried.

And, of course, this is only the first hurdle. Let us return to the case of my neighbor. Apparently, despite my defect of unresolved discontent, he liked what he saw of my sobriety. His reluctance to join AA was based on his dislike of being known to himself and his family as an alcoholic—one who could not manage his own problem, who had to give up—rather than on any of the numerous flaws in the example before him.

This hazard being crossed, what was the next step? Simple, I thought. Carry the message—tell your story. I did, but the prospect went away sorrowful, and still drunk. Now I was smack in the dilemma so many thousands of AAs have worried about. Shall I chase him, or let him

“... *this means giving Spirit a chance* ...”

alone? I have tried about everything between these two extremes. The only thing I have learned is never to be too doctrinaire. I have seen almost everything work, and almost everything fail. There are people alive today only (from all I can see) because some dogged AA stuck to a pigeon, possibly even against the advice of his friends in the group, until he was finally hounded sober. The pigeon entered a durable sobriety, eternally grateful that somebody was willing to take the guff and see it through. And there are people dead today possibly because somebody tactlessly barged in to ram home the message to some sick alcoholic who had not been properly prepared to receive it. Who dares to lay down flat rules?

There are so many variables, of situation and personality interplay, it seems to me to be impossible to codify Twelfth Step work too rigidly. I believe such work to be spiritual achievement on a high level. To do this kind of work means giving Spirit a chance. That means keeping an open mind, being ready to catch the ball neatly the instant Spirit may toss it our way.

This attitude accounts for my incredible readiness (I am notoriously

opinionated by nature) to listen to my AA visitor when he gave me a hint. I had not been happy about my neighbor during the weeks since he'd brought up the subject of his drinking, and had been praying that we might be guided. When my AA visitor blew in from the midwest with such a positive opinion, I took it to be the guidance I had asked for. That night when I got home I phoned my neighbor and passed on the advice. "I've been talking over your question with a friend. He suggested you might like to try psychiatry, or hypnosis, or get advice from the State Alcoholism Clinic." He thanked me coolly and hung up.

The sequel was, to me, an awesome demonstration of the working of forces outside of, and greater than, myself. Three weeks later, my neighbor called me up, said he wanted to join AA, and asked if I'd take him to a meeting! After my previous call he had made an appointment to see a psychiatrist at an alcoholism clinic maintained by the state. The doctor was very thorough, questioning my neighbor, giving him tests, talking with members of his family. Finally, after several interviews, he made his diagnosis and his prognosis: "You're an alcoholic. If

you keep on as you are, I'll give you eight months to live." My neighbor went home and phoned me, no longer about something "short of AA," but willingly, humbly, asking for AA itself. We went to a meeting and he has remained happily sober. With wonderment I thanked God that this man had been given a fresh chance, that a family might find a new happiness, that guidance in an unexpected way had come, and most of all, that my normally thick skull had been made sufficiently permeable so that the guidance could get through and I could act on it. Which is only my roundabout way of saying that in Twelfth Step work the living Spirit usually comes ahead of rules. Not that rules and solid practice do not have their place. They do. The first one is to remember that AA does have a requirement for membership—a desire to stop drinking. Remembering this can save us much useless legwork and help us identify those cases ripe for our message. Next, I must always be mindful that it is never I, but always a Higher Power, that bestows sobriety.

There are other common and helpful practices. Most groups maintain a P. O. box, a phone listing and means for prompt follow-up on inquiries. A Twelfth Step Committee has often been found a helpful thing, particularly when it exercises discretion and imagination in matching prospect and caller. Calls, most AAs agree, should be made in pairs. They should not be made on the opposite

sex when an AA of the same sex can be found to make them. When a new member is dry three months, he is traditionally asked to speak.

If the group is "cold" by natural disposition, special Greeting Committees have been set up whose job it is to warm up the atmosphere for new members. This means shaking hands, introducing people around, involving them in conversational groups, asking about them, telling them about oneself, meeting their loneliness with the deep understanding of one who has himself been lonely, and remembers what it means. Such measures help people get the program. This statement is not just "one member's opinion" but a scientifically verified fact. Professor Harrison Trice of Cornell University, in an extensive project in alcoholism research, found that these specific acts of cordiality on the part of AA groups specifically improved the sick alcoholic's chance of achieving recovery in AA.

One of the best rules I have picked up came from one who is not an AA at all, but who has spent his life serving humanity through social work. Dr. Alan Keith-Lucas enunciated what might be called "the rule of the understanding heart." By this rule, we leave our prospect free to choose, even to choose what we consider the wrong thing. Are we tough enough to suffer with a prospect for a time, while he works through his first confrontation with what he is really up against? Do we really want to put

ourselves at the service of another, without trying to control him or take credit on ourselves? Is our understanding strong enough to stay with our prospect through his fits of stack-blowing, his negativism, his valleys of doubt and despair?

Of course, the good doctor has only restated the rule known to AAs from the beginning—that "only an alcoholic can really understand an alcoholic." Just the same, the doctor has helped remind us how really deep this understanding has to go to do its work. To remember always that we are alcoholics only temporarily recovered, to keep memory green and realistic comprehension instantly ready—these, to my way of thinking, are the guides for the understanding heart.

Looking back on my "Twelve Steps and the Older Member" series, which was concluded in the Grapevine's pages seven years ago, I find a thought worth repeating. It con-

cerns that difficult transition period of AA when one has been "in" only a short time, has become clear-headed enough really to want to help, but feels inexperienced and useless. "One time when I'd been a member only a short time," I wrote, "I passed through a spell of discouragement over my negligible contribution. An older member took pity. 'My friend,' he said, 'you're carrying the message just by being here. It shows you're with us.'" Because it helped me enormously at a hard time, I pass it on: just by being physically present at a meeting, just by staying sober this day—if that is all one can do at a given moment—one is carrying the message to suffering alcoholics everywhere.

I can think of no better way to close this second and final series of mine than the way I closed the first time round: May God see you through this next day in sobriety.

J. E., Guilford, Conn.

October 1963



"We're only supposed to carry the message, Joe!"



THE 110-YARD LINE

*What happened after a lush at a football game
ran out of Old Mocus*

IT was on a Thanksgiving afternoon a few years back, and *brother* was it cold outside! We were atop the Cincinnati Bearcats' football stadium, high enough in the stands to be flying something, though the blowing wind may have added to the sensation of soaring.

And speaking of soaring, the guy sitting next to me was way up in the clouds all by himself. He was talking loud, sitting, standing, weaving on his feet, then sitting again. His face was red and, despite the wind, you could smell his breath. What a package this guy is carrying, I thought.

"I feel sorry for his poor wife," said mine.

I felt sorrier for the drunk. He kept on rooting for the Cincy Bearcats—he had *that* part of it straight. But somehow I had a suspicion he thought we were at the Kentucky U stadium in Lexington, ninety miles away. Anyway, he was out in left field—or I should say, out somewhere on the 110-yard line. Real foggy.

Every time the Bearcats made a line play or completed a pass, Mister Wings would jump up and yell. Then he'd plump down and take a drag from a fifth of Mocus which he wasn't bothering to conceal beneath his coat. For awhile this was tolerable. I sat there nursing my jug of hot coffee and furtively studying

him out of the corner of one eye.

I was new in AA and thought I had a special knack for analyzing drunks. This guy, I decided, was the extrovert loudmouth, big shot, full-of-bluff, roaring pinball type (whereas I had been the quiet, unassuming introvert who was prone to consume, shall we say, excessive amounts of fine Scotch with which I constructed highly creative daydreams). Yes, I had Wings' alcoholism pegged to a T. And in a subtle way (saying things like "It's a *shame* he's in such condition, isn't it?") I started reminding my wife of what a good boy *I* had turned out to be. "Umm," she would say, her eyes glued to the ball game.

After a bit—along about the end of the first quarter—my wife turned to me abruptly and said, "You were *worse* than he is. You'd have been off alone in a tavern some place, probably passed out over the bar by now. At least *he* got to the football game." So suddenly I decided I'd concentrate on the game and quit watching the foggy character next to me. (What did she mean, *he* got to the game?)

But Wings kept getting louder and louder, and the fifth of Mocus lower and lower. I could barely keep my mind on the ball game whether I wanted to or not, and some of the fans in our row were starting to get that toss-the-bum-out look on their faces. Finally, during the half intermission, Wings left to

go to the men's room (he said so in a voice like one of the cheerleaders). And I thought he'd surely never make it back to his seat—and I was relieved at the idea. This guy is lushing it up too much for anybody else to relax and enjoy the game, I thought to myself, oh so self-righteously.

But then (thank goodness) a feeling of regret came over me. Why—as a member of the program—did I want to see poor Wings get lost in the stadium? Why wasn't I willing, even anxious, to try a Twelfth Step job on Wings? I mentioned this to my wife, and she said that even if he *did* come back for the second half of the game, which he probably wouldn't, I'd be wise to forget about twelfth-stepping a total stranger. "Remember," she added, "it's a program of attraction, *not* promotion. That's basic, isn't it?"

"Yea, I remember," said I. But then I thought, what about the pure, simple, warmhearted love of one poor drunk for another? Even if one of 'em is *sober*, isn't there a tie that binds? And now I found myself hoping like the devil that Wings would return.

Sure enough, about the middle of the third quarter, my boy navigated his way into our row and plunked down next to me. Wow! Wings was *really* fractured by this time. But I was glad to see him. I looked at my wife. "See, he made it back," I said. "I knew he would."

My wife told me to watch the ball game.

Then suddenly Wings surprised me by tapping me on the shoulder. And this was a switch because his voice was pitched way down low and he sounded half-way friendly. He excused himself in muted but somewhat slushy tones and right away I detected a note of pleading. He said he was asking a slight favor. He'd noticed I had a "li'l jug of somethin' there" and could he *please* have just *one* nip to ward off the cold wind which was starting to freeze his bones. Could he?

Now I noticed. His fifth of Mocus was gone. He didn't even have the empty any more. So *that* was why Wings came back; he'd seen me nipping at a jug, and to him a jug was for one purpose only!

It was cruel, but I handed it to him and said, "Go ahead, help yourself." He took a big swig of warm coffee. It sort of hit him hard, I guess. Like a shot of canned heat would hit a teetotaler.

"Whaddya, a wise guy?" said

Wings, staring at me, then at the jug.

Then a cog must have clicked just right inside my mind. I remembered what they had told me back at the group about twelfth-stepping, and telling *your own* experiences. So I looked at Wings and said no I wasn't a wise guy, I was a coffee drinker because, among other things, the last time I'd been in the Cincy stadium I was so foggy that two cops had to help my wife put me in the back seat of our car.

Maybe I imagined it, but Wings seemed to relax just a little. I think he was ready to have somebody tell him what I tried to say. We ended up drinking what was left of the coffee (he got most of it), and my wife and I drove him home.

We've drunk quite a few pots of coffee together since that frigid November day. And today Wings (I'll still call him that for luck) is just as persistent about his sobriety as he was about getting back to his seat in the stadium so he could wangle a nip from my jug.

J. W., *River Edge, N. J.*

A Twelfth Step call answered my big WHY? . . .



UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR

THE phone rang about 7:30 Christmas Eve. With visible effort, for I had been working all day and half the night during the pre-Christmas business rush, I picked up the receiver and heard the voice of the operator saying, "Mr. B? This is AA Answering Service. I have a man who feels the urge to drink."

I resisted an impulse to ask, "Who doesn't?" and asked for the name and address. My wife came into the room just as I was repeating them and, out of much experience, moaned, "Oh, no, not on Christ-

mas Eve!" Even after twenty-five years of marriage to me, and in spite of my thirty-odd months of AA, my wife has never been able fully to grasp the fact that nobody ever gets drunk at a convenient time.

As I climbed into my car I asked God to put the right words into my mouth, to let me say the right thing at the right time to help this man. It was a short prayer, simple and sincere. I suspect that most AA prayers are.

On my way home about midnight, driving along in the crisp,

dark cold, I began to experience a new and unaccustomed reverence in the strange ethereal quiet—that very special and holy quiet of the night of Christ's birth, the cathedral-like quiet that somehow I had never been aware of before sobriety. Maybe the quiet was in my soul; I don't know. I do know that, deep within me, satisfying and re-assuring, was the feeling that God *had* put the right words on my tongue, that I had been able to give this suffering alcoholic some hope and faith.

And then I became conscious of the miracle which had just taken place: the incredible fact that the left hand of God working through me, an alcoholic who had spent countless Christmastides in profane drunkenness, had been able to start a human soul on the path to sobriety. As I pondered this, I began to understand, perhaps for the first time, the full measure of the meaning of St. Paul's words to the Romans: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways!"

I began to understand, again for the first time, that possibly here was the answer to the riddle of life, the eternal question, asked by man since the birth of reason: "Why was I born?" Certainly during my drinking years there hadn't been many lucid moments, but during the brief life-span of the ones I had, this question had recurred and there had

been no answer. In my alcoholic fashion I had resented the fact that it had not been given to me to know the great satisfaction of accomplishment. The engineer who builds a great bridge, the artist who creates something beautiful, the surgeon who saves a human life through his skill—each can step back, take a look at his work and say to himself, "This thing that I have done is good." By contrast, I could look back and see only a desert, empty and endless; failures and frustrations, broken hearts and broken promises.

And then, somehow, I had my answer—that this thing that I had done, through the grace of God, was good, and that it was meant to be, and that I was meant to be an instrument of His grace. I began to see that here was meaning for my life. The riddle of my monotonous existence, the stupid work that I do to make a living, none of this had meaning. But tonight *was* important and meaningful, and I knew it. And I began to sense that I, as a recovered alcoholic, and all other recovered alcoholics who attempt to carry the message, have been given the power to take the hand of those who are blinded, as we were once blinded, and lead them on the way to the new life ahead where their vision will be restored in AA.

The question, "Why was I born, what am I here for?" no longer plagues me. I know the answer.

Don B., Baton Rouge, La.

January 1964

*“There were men like clergyman Sam Shoemaker,
whose early teachings did so much to inspire
Dr. Bob and me.”* Bill W. in *AA Comes of Age*

Those Twelve Steps as I Understand Them

Reprinted from the January 1964 Grapevine

by the Rev. Canon Samuel M. Shoemaker, D.D.

1893 — 1963

*At the time of
AA's beginning, the
Rev. Canon Samuel
M. Shoemaker was
rector of Calvary
Episcopal Church in
New York City. He
was active in the
Oxford Group movement,
from which AA derived
many of its concepts.
His friendship and
love inspired our
co-founders, and his
teaching provided most
of the principles
embodied in our
Twelve Steps.*

ONE OF MY most treasured possessions is a pair of gold discs which I carry daily in my pocket, attached to my watch chain. One is engraved “From the Manhattan Group of AA” and was given me by Bill when I left New York in 1952; the other is engraved “Honorary Member in Perpetuity of Pittsburgh AA,” given me when I left that city in 1962. They mark one of the happiest and most privileged relationships I have ever enjoyed. I watched the first beginnings of AA always with interest, sometimes with misgivings proven false by all that has happened. I thank God for AA and pray daily for all its leaders and members. One of my cherished memories is of one of the girls at St. Louis, who said to me, “Dr. Sam, you may not be an alcoholic, but by God you certainly do talk like one!”

I have always been interested, not alone in what AA is doing for the alcoholic, but in what this program can mean to anyone who wrestles with a real problem. And

who does not? A pile of wisdom and experience is packed into the Twelve Steps. I have even compared the inspired forty minutes during which those Steps were given to AA's co-founder, to the time in which the Ten Tables of the Law were given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Many skeptical folk are inclined to say, concerning Moses' inspiration, “Oh, this is a gathering together of previous experience; it didn't come all at once like that.” I have no doubt about the previous experience entering in; but I know that there are inspired hours when people have been able to gather and put down compendia of truth in a fashion that can only be called “inspiration.” It is an hour when men's powers are at high pitch and tension and when the Spirit of God hovers near, making suggestions. I doubt if the Twelve Steps that have changed the course of existence for so many thousands of lives could have been the mere product of human insight and observation. And they can and

will bless anyone, alcoholic or not, who will follow them through and be obedient to them. They are morally and spiritually and psychologically and practically as sound as can be.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable.

The reason so many people in AA give thanks that they are alcoholics is that the problems of living and of failure to meet life successfully are singled down for them to the problem of alcohol. It is definite and specific. This is exactly what Christianity has taught from the beginning, not only about a problem like alcoholism, but about the whole range of human defeat: that the old clichés like “exerting more will-power” are utterly impractical. We are just as powerless by ourselves over temper, or a bad tongue, or a moody disposition, or a habit of lust, or a hard and critical spirit. It is only pride and lack of insight into ourselves that would keep any-

one from saying, no matter what their problems or lack of them, "Our lives have become unmanageable." This is the first step, not only towards sobriety, but towards self-understanding and the knowledge of life.

2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

"Came" how? By standing in the middle of a field calling out to some nameless Power? By reading long books of philosophy or theology? No! By seeing scores, and maybe hundreds and then thousands, of individual men and women whose lives had been defeated and wretched (making thousands more wretched also) transformed into new men and women. Each one of these lives is a kind of miracle — not to be explained in purely human terms. Doctors and psychiatrists and clergy, helpful as they have been to some alcoholics, have no opportunity to report such a high percentage of victories as AA. How wise AA was not to attempt too specific a theological definition! Too finespun words were bound to offend some and put off others; nobody can fight against the rather vague term "Power greater than ourselves," forged in the crucible of laymen working it out among themselves, sharing experience with one another.

3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*

"There is no more difficult thing in the world than to face yourself..."

William James, in a classic passage of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, said that the crisis of self-surrender has always been and must always be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life. Look through the life of any saint, almost any great servant of mankind, and you will find a moment, an hour, a day when the crisis took place. You can gather materials for a decision over months and years, and you can carry out the effects of a decision over long periods of time, but a decision is sudden. It is a crisis.

This is a vivid way of saying that all spiritual experience must begin decisively if it is going to begin at all. This is the great, open, spiritual secret which so many have missed. They tried to ooze into it. You can ooze into booze, but you can't ooze out of it. You can't ooze into God. Everybody in the world needs to learn this truth. I had been a nominal Christian for ten years before anybody challenged me to surrender myself to God. This has to be done more than once, as we shall find; but it has to begin somewhere. This decision puts us in touch with God, so that He can work. It is like screwing the bulb in tight enough to touch the place where the current comes out; but this decision of the will is not the current itself. The current is the

spiritual power that flows when we cry out our need to God and He answers.

4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

There is no more difficult thing in the world than to face yourself as you really are. We flee from one sin after another as they catch up with us, making excuses all the time, and pleading that our virtues in another direction more than make up for them. What most people need, what all must have if they are to find an answer, is just the willingness to make "a searching and fearless moral inventory" of themselves.

Some sins are obvious. But when it comes to the spiritual sins — like pride, and unforgiveness, and resentment, and touchiness, and inflexibility about having our own way — they are *not* so obvious, because their damage is less easy to see quickly. The Ten Commandments will form a good guide. So will the Sermon on the Mount. We may need to sit down with someone who knows us and will be honest with us, and ask him to give us a good going-over, for most of us are terribly blind and terribly self-deceived. One can even make a "formal confession" to a priest in the church and not really get wise to oneself. Deeper of all, greatest of all, and subtlest of all will be *pride* in some

form, usually masquerading under the guise of some virtue. Alcoholism may force such an honesty about oneself; would that all the other and more respectable sins did the same thing!

5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

The practice of confession is, of course, an old one and in some churches a constant one. I suspect that its efficacy depends in part on the sincerity with which the confession is made, and on whether the person confessing really means to get out on new ground and be different thereafter. True confession not only cleans up the past with God's forgiveness, it looks to a new kind of future, else it is bogus.

Confession to other lay people has generally been discouraged by the church as being risky, but AA has proved its efficacy in the case of alcoholics, it being possible to take for granted some degree of maturity in the one who hears the story, and some discretion in the keeping of confidences. Let's face it — a certain desperation underlies this. Every minister wishes he could induce the same kind of desperation in the general run of his people, so that they would face their over-all spiritual ineffectiveness and their need to make the same kind of "admission" as alcoholics find necessary. This is

always a costly and painful process. I suspect that one reason why it is so effective is that what happens is not only the opening to another human being of "the exact nature of our wrongs," but the laying of pride in the dust by letting someone else know the depth and desperation of our need. Shams go off when you do this. You can't keep on faking. This, and not only the detail of misdoings, is what gets us where we can begin to be different.

6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

It's not hard to feel like that on a morning-after, but we know this may be remorse and not repentance, superinduced more by a heavy head than by a contrite heart. The further away we get from the last binge of alcohol (or of temper, or whatever), the better the wrongdoing looks — more innocent, more attractive. Are we ready *then* to "have God remove all these defects of character"?

It is one thing to want to put behind us the inconveniences of wrongdoing, but another to leave behind the wrongdoing itself. This requires two things, I think: (1) a real vision of how much better the new life really is than the old, fortified by what we have heard from people living in it; (2) real help from the Higher Power, for the will alone is not capable of sustaining this attitude. It is good to be pushed by the danger and hell of the old



life, but we must also be pulled by the constant vision of life integrated under God, living in and for and by Him and in and for other people. This is why fellowship is so essential, why it is so dangerous for anyone to think he can take a little spiritual inspiration or power and go off and enjoy it all by himself. Soon or late, he is back in the old groove. We need God and we need each other. God alone can give us this new mind and keep us in it. All people need it, so-called good people as well as so-called bad ones. We need to pray for this fundamental willingness to have God change us.

7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*

How often have we prayed for "things," or favoring circumstances, or a hundred and one things that were really selfish in nature! Here is where real prayer begins — not ends — in asking God to *change me*. "Lord, I'm not much. You aren't getting much of a prize. It's mostly

broken pieces I'm giving You. But I ask You to mend them. You can take the pride and the lust and the anxiousness and the fear and the resentment. Please do take them, and me with them." Something like that.

We may say it in the quiet of our own rooms, or we may say it kneeling in our church, or we may say it as we pray with another person. There must be an intended finality as we make such a prayer. We can't do it with tongue in cheek. So far as it is possible, we mean to be done with the offending thing. We find again that "willpower" only goes far enough to secure our intention; the actual praying of such a prayer already implies help from Him to whom we pray. Sins get entangled deep within us, as some roots of a tree, and do not easily come loose. We need help, grace, the lift of a kind of divine derrick. The amazing thing is that such a prayer is answered if we truly want it to be. Our

own wills are so much a needed part of this that it almost looks as if *we* had done it. But the help from God is still more a needed part of it; we are sure that without Him we could not possibly have done it. We learn great truths, long known and often discovered, as we begin a genuine spiritual awakening.

8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*

In some ways, it is easier to straighten things out with God than with other people. He fully understands everything; we can count on His forgiveness, we talk to Him, as it were, in private. But it is not enough to be right with Him; we must also be right with man. How well do I remember that, from my first moment of fresh conviction. There was a letter I had to write to someone in the family, towards whom I held a long-standing resentment. It was one of the first things I had to do after my decision.

You see, we want to get *clear*, to begin anew, to start life all over again. This Step calls for *definiteness*, and it calls for *willingness*: "Made a list" and "became willing." How many strained and broken human relationships drag on through years, unresolved, unhealed, unmended. Nobody will make the break and say the two great words of renewal, "I'm sorry." We are willing to tell God of our repentance and desire for new life; we are not willing to tell man. This can hold us

back at the first, and it can trip us way down the line.

The laws governing human relations are as ironclad as those that uphold the stars. Individualize the persons whom we have wronged and those who have wronged us. Don't forget the wise adage that "It is harder to forgive those whom we have wronged than those who have wronged us." Get willing to go to them in honesty and humility. It may be the hardest thing you ever did in your life, but it will be one of the most rewarding. We shall need to do it in the beginning of our new life; we shall have to do it, perhaps often, in the after-stages of it.

9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

We must be willing to be absolutely honest, but indiscriminate "absolute honesty" would blow the roof off many a house and destroy entirely some human relations. We must hold nothing back through deceit or pride; we may need to hold something back by discretion and consideration of others. Take a thing like infidelity in marriage. Sometimes, this must be disclosed to wife or husband in all candor. Sometimes, as in the case of someone with a bad heart, or terribly sensitive or innocent of nature, "telling all" may be almost a self-indulgence for us. The people we have hurt may be dead, in which case prayer to God to let them know our

repentance may be all we can do. Or there may be facts in the situation which would help clear the relation, but they involve telling what we know about someone else's sins. This is allowable under only the rarest circumstances; usually, it spreads the evil and does more harm than good. If, in order to clear our own souls, we must damage the reputation of another, it is an extremely dubious practice.

Those who deal much with human souls — priests, psychiatrists, lay folk like AAs — must learn the secret of a tight lip, or we shall do damage and gain the name of gossips, which will shut off people's confidence from us. Such actions are usually those of the Pharisee type, the good and righteous type. But they are sometimes those of the changed Prodigal also — and nothing is worse than the fury of a Prodigal turned Pharisee. What is made known in confidence should be kept in confidence until or unless the person involved gives us permission to speak of it.

10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

This is one of the hardest Steps in the Twelve. Many of us get steamed up to be completely honest with God, ourselves, and some other person at the outset; this points up the wisdom of continuing the attitude all the rest of the way. We like to think we have grown past this stage and are well on the road, but none



of us ever gets finally past it. We shall find that when we seek God's help and guidance on some problem, we may need to be open *first* to conviction of sin — then to direction. This is part of what keeps the whole thing fresh and contemporary and alive.

I am convinced that pride is the root-sin. It is not only, in moral theology, the first of the seven deadly sins, it is by so much the most serious of them that it is as if it stood apart from the rest as being of a different quality. Pride gets right into our spiritual victories. It insinuates itself into all our achievements, all our successes, even when we attribute them to God, unless we keep open to facing ourselves afresh and making things right where they have gone wrong.

11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

After we see daylight on the conquest of such a clear-cut problem as alcohol — or fear, or resentment, or pride — and feel we are at least

making progress, we need a great, over-all purpose and motivation upon which to center our growth. Prayer, we shall increasingly find, is not asking God for something we want; it is really asking Him for something He wants. The best of all prayers is "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" (Acts 22:10). Prayer does not seek to change God's will, but to find it.

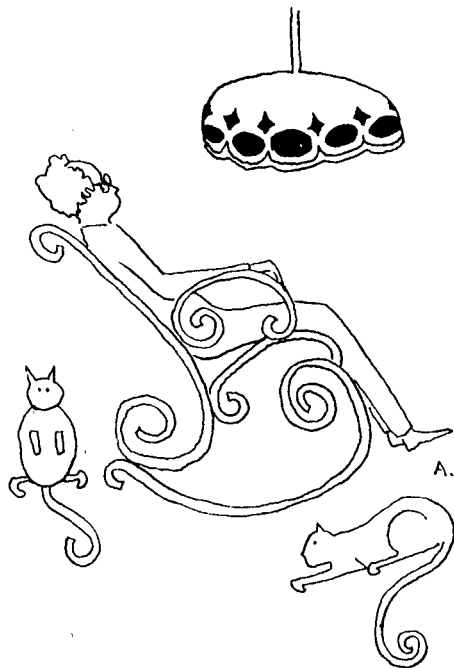
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

This principle applies to all who have known a great before-and-after experience of spiritual rebirth. Two things are involved in the Twelfth Step: the spread of the awakening to others, and the deepening and continuation, of the awakening in ourselves. This was surely the secret of the Twelve Apostles and all the early Christian disciples. J. B. Phillips says they kept to their main purpose of bringing people to God through Christ, and "were not permitted to enjoy any fascinating sidetracks." I should say unhesitatingly that the

success of AA lies in the readiness of its members to go to any trouble to help other alcoholics, and that when this readiness cools, it is a danger signal.

There was an old saying that used to be current and still contains a great germ of spiritual truth: "Out of self into God into others." Herein are spiritual wisdom and health. We have had to look deep within, probe, burrow, struggle, and in a sense this never stops. But now we must begin to look wide without, concern ourselves with individuals, causes, communities, and the wider world. Here is the secret of growth and of spread — not for alcoholics only, but for all.

I often say and shall always say that the Twelve Steps are one of the very great summaries and organic collections of spiritual truth known to history. They have an almost universal relevance (not a relevance for alcoholics alone). They will offer a way out for many a person who knows nothing personally of alcoholism. They will point up the way for those who have known it and lost it. Thank God for the Twelve Steps and for a man wise enough and open enough to God and to the observation of human experience to receive these truths, and transmit them to the world!



*"... the
Twelve Steps
are one of the
very great . . .
collections of
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known to
history."*



I TOOK THE EIGHTH

Too many fifths and a high-flying act led to a real-life courtroom scene

BUT that incident happened four years ago," I protested to my gentle sponsor, who was figuratively kneeling on my chest. "They have my deposition, they can try me in absentia, phooey on them anyhow," I gasped.

"You gotta go," he said. "When you came into AA you agreed to work the Steps, and making amends to those whom your drunken, insane behavior hurt is one of the Steps."

"But those guys are only after money," I said. "I didn't hurt them, they should drop dead, already."

"Regardless, you gotta go and try to get the airline you loused up off the hook," said he, as if connecting with a right cross to the chin.

Hollering bloody murder, but still listening to that little inner voice: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. . . ." I finally made a half-hearted decision to appear at a court trial in my honor, which was the aftermath of some high-flying shennanigans I pulled when I was practicing my avocation of drunkenness.

Now, way back in October, 1959, I was sent to Miami, Florida, by my then boss, to make four pictures of a TV series in which I played the leading character. I drank a "few" at the International Airport Bar in Los Angeles before boarding the plane. Naturally I had a jug of my own, which I consulted frequently

after we were airborne. In Dallas I bought another pint. In New Orleans I bought a fifth. Out of New Orleans, being full of elixir of flit, and feeling quite gregarious, I engaged a couple of insurance salesmen across the aisle in conversation. When I asked one of them where he came from and he replied "Germany," I observed as how he must have a well-traveled passport.

"No, I don't," he said.

"But you must *have* a passport to get into and out of the country," said I.

"And where do you come from?" I asked his companion.

"Around," said that worthy, trying to ignore me. That tore it! There was something mighty fishy about those two.

"And which part of Germany do you come from, East or West?" I asked the first man.

"Germany," he said, rattling his paper.

Now any drunken nut knows that in order to travel across the U.S. borders one must have a passport. Of course, naturally. Being compulsive by nature, I pursued my interrogation of the two, and none of their answers satisfied me. I called the stewardess and informed her I would like to speak with the captain. Instead of waiting for the summons to go forward, I followed her to the cockpit and told the captain my story of the two. Being in show business for some twenty years, I had developed much skill in drink-

ing like a gentleman. I never staggered, my speech was most articulate. People not in the know would never accuse me of being smashed. The poor pilot wasn't in the know. After finishing my tale, he asked what I wanted him to do? "When you get close enough to Miami, call your office to get hold of the _____ office, and tell the chief there to meet me at the bottom of the ramp when we land, I've got a couple of live ones here."

"I'll do it," he said.

And he did.

When the plane landed I was first off. The chief wasn't there, but a member of another government service was.

"How can we hold these two?" I asked.

"We can't hold them, don't know anything about them," he said.

"Can I put a citizen's arrest on them?"

"Sure, if you got reason."

"I've got good reason," quoth I.

So, as the two men stepped off the liner ramp, I took them each by the coat sleeve and informed them they were under arrest and to remain in place until the proper authorities arrived. The authorities arrived, lined us up, and away we went across the lobby, down into the bowels of the airport building, to an interrogation office, where I told my story of my two suspects. I didn't exactly call them spies, I just said they might be.

After finishing my beautiful (to

me) narrative, I reached under the chair, pulled out my attaché case, extracted the bottle of Old Arrester and had a couple of snorts. When I recorked and replaced the jug, the police sergeant was eyeing me closely. He discharged the two men, and suggested that I get lost.

Three days later I was served with three subpoenas. One for me, one for my boss and one for the airline. I'd hit the jackpot!

It wasn't until June 12, 1960, that I hit bottom and came into AA. The case continued to pend. Continuance after continuance was granted the plaintiffs. It bugged me increasingly as the years passed.

My own industry backed away from me; I couldn't work. Then, when work did begin to come, filmed shows went into the doldrums and I was still high and dry.

Everything had been taken out of my name and placed in my wife's name, for protection for her, and me. I still owned my watch.

Every six months I was notified that a trial date had been set, then, a week or two before that date, I was again notified that it had been postponed. That went on for four years. My despondency increased. Frankly the only thing I didn't do was drink or take pills, although I thought of it. Instead I went to more and more meetings. Finally the date was firmed.

So, on the plane going to my court trial, I continually repeated to myself two things: "Became willing

to make amends" and "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change."

During the course of the trial I was painted as a veritable Hitler, a segregationist, a despoiler of the American way of life, a monster who must be brought to heel and muzzled to keep me from intimidating citizenry. As I sat listening to the plaintiffs' attorney the thought occurred to me, "What am I doing here? He is as wild in his statements as I was while cutting my caper on the plane; oh, hell, what's the use?" At that exact moment my mouth seemed to fill with liquor. I tasted a whole ounce of vodka. It shocked me; I almost spat.

"So that's what they've been talking about, this weak moment, the onslaught of a mental blank, wherein will power and self-knowledge wouldn't help me" I said to myself, recognizing the "drink" for what it was. If I had held on to the "what's the use" thought just a little longer, it would have engulfed me, and I might have got drunk that day. Instead, I took myself to an AA clubhouse after court, and shared my experience with all those wonderful guys and gals. That encounter gave me added strength and hope.

As the trial went on, the local reporters rehashed the story, but this time the sting was gone.

"Just what will you say to the reporters?" my attorney asked me.

"We have a Tradition in Alco-

holics Anonymous that requests we remain anonymous at the level of the press, and I will ask them if they will honor it." I replied.

Not a word appeared in print or on TV regarding AA. Bless them all for the understanding they have for the program.

Members of AA came to court each day. We would share a smile, a word, or a lunch. They were there. I was among friends, they were my people, everything would be all right.

On the morning of the fourth day I was finally put on the stand, and all the stops were pulled out. I had told my attorney and the attorney representing the airline not to hesitate about asking me any question they felt they must.

Normally an attorney has his biggest job trying to protect his own client against his own lies. I didn't want to lie, just tell the truth, trusting in God and AA.

The plaintiffs' attorney tore into me.

"Did you lie when you gave a statement in 1959?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you lie when you gave a deposition in 1962?"

"That was about half lies."

"Do you mean to say that you are telling the truth now?"

"To the best of my ability."

Much about drinking, alcoholism

and AA came out, all of which I met with an almost calm detachment. It was a public purging I don't believe I could have survived if I hadn't had over three years' sobriety. This was a moment AA had prepared me for, and it worked! I was on the stand for two hours; the jury was out for two and one half hours.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"Yes, we have, your Honor. Airline absolved. For the plaintiffs — one dollar each from the defendant."

Later, in his chambers, the judge told me that the day's work was a startling thing; that it was unusual to cope with honesty.

Then he went on to say that in his many years on the bench, he had found that members of AA make the best possible witnesses or defendants. There was much respect in his eyes; I felt good.

Now why do I tell this story? I tell it because there might be another guy or gal in the throes of facing up to some wreck of the past. Because I hope the Eighth Step will have as much meaning for another as it now does for me. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

God and Alcoholics Anonymous will do the job, if I will let them.

Dick W., Van Nuys, Calif.



This Business of Getting Ahead

It turns out

that the important

thing is to know how

to stay here

THERE is a touch of the Horatio Alger hero, I think, in every alcoholic. I don't necessarily mean that we are all out to marry the boss's daughter; some of us undoubtedly do, or have, but that is beside the point. Most alcoholics I have known, including myself, wanted to be first (we usually were when it came to getting into the bar). We wanted to

get ahead, and if we didn't, well, there was nothing so rosy as the dreams of success and glory which subsequently came out of the bottle; such fantasies are the warp and woof of the alcoholic's life.

I think that one of the main differences between an active alcoholic and an arrested one can be expressed as a matter of tense. The active alcoholic tends to live in the future or in the past. The sober alcoholic, as part of the philosophy he learns in his AA experience, lives, or strives to live, in the present. The non-drinking alcoholic discovers in AA that you cannot Get Ahead until you learn to be Here. We discover from our Serenity Prayer that one of

the things we cannot change is Time. The Here and Now is the only reality, whereas in the unreal world of the drinking alcoholic there was only yesterday and tomorrow.

Therefore the grace of sobriety, it would seem, lies in accepting the fact that the past is nonexistent and the future exists only in the present.

I think of a certain morning on which I woke up and said to myself I would not take a drink that day. I had done this many times before, and each time I had failed. But on this morning, for some unaccountable reason, an Other Voice told me I was a liar; that I couldn't NOT take a drink that day. Immediately the stage was set for what was, to put it mildly, the most unusual day of my life; the day on which my compulsion for alcohol was taken from me.

The explanation is simple: when I said to myself, "You are a liar," I was thinking in the present. I didn't say, "If you go through the day and take a drink in the afternoon you *will be* a liar." I said, "You **ARE** a liar." Right then I was empowered to do something about my predicament because I recognized it as a present predicament and not a future one. So I sought AA and found the help I needed. In the very moment of acknowledging myself to be a liar I turned out not to be one — in this instance, anyhow.

Ever since I became extricated from the turmoil of alcoholic living it has interested me to muse over this business of Getting Ahead. In

the excesses of my alcoholic-inspired ambition I used to imagine that to Get Ahead I would need to be like some preternatural bulldozer, plowing its way upward and onward, plunging inexorably over the embankments of life; grinding, heaving, snorting, reckless of obstacles; impelled by the virtues of ambition and the seductions of success — the kind of success that comes effortlessly to you from a barroom bottle.

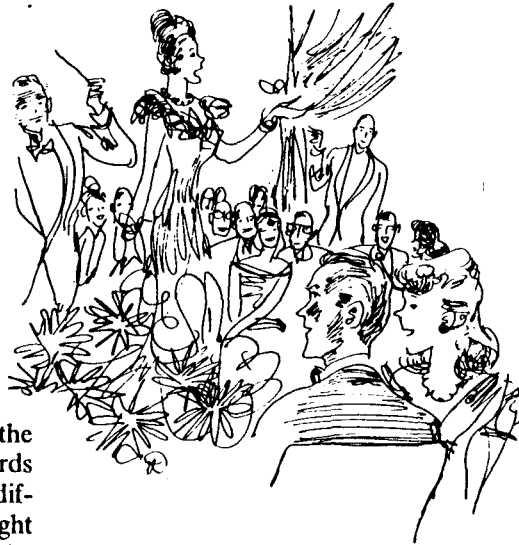
I did not know then that if you want to get ahead with any degree of peace you must first learn to Stay Here. It takes guts to Stay Here; it takes self-discipline and resolution. Anyone with sufficient energy and a one-track mind can Get Ahead; witness the robber barons, the dictators and demagogues, the Al Capones and the Mafias. But to Stay Here you must know where you are before you can know where you are going. You must seek before you can find and you must ask before you really learn to seek. It takes humility to ask, patience to wait for the answer, and faith that the answer will come. These, it strikes me, are quite removed from the bulldozer virtues exemplified in the Horatio Alger tradition.

I like to think that Staying Here provides a clue to the practice of the Eleventh Step. We don't improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, by projecting into the future. After all, even the Hereafter begins with Here.

T. D., Manchester, Mass.

On Making Simple Amends

The curious result of doing the right thing



WE are told in AA to do the right thing and the rewards will eventually come. I may be different, but I want my rewards right now. When I drop a coin in the slot of Life, the slice of pie or the package of cigarettes better pop out that instant or I'm going to start shaking the machine.

Recent events, however, indicate that a change of attitude is being forced on me. The rewards I receive may not be the same rewards I expect, or demand. It's taking me time to learn that I get a better deal if I don't try to dictate all the terms of payment.

I'm not one of these women whose "singing career was ruined by drinking." Mine never actually got under way. One night not long ago, however, I went (sober) to see a

man about a job singing in his club. I didn't get a permanent one, but he did hire me to sing that night and I earned twenty-five dollars.

The next morning I was elated thinking about the things I could spend the money on. Then something happened. I got the sudden urge to pay a bill, one among many that were long overdue.

I certainly didn't want to pay it, but I got dressed and went to the local post office, silently protesting all the way. I never did anything more reluctantly than mail that twenty-five-dollar money order. Boy!

Did I want to spend that money on fun and goodies! But an irresistible power greater than myself literally pushed me to the post office.

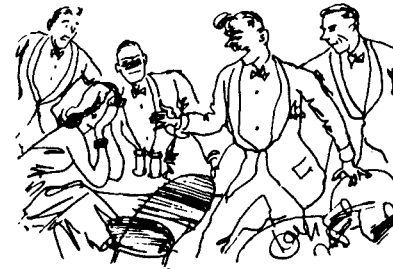
When I got back home I waited for the good feeling that should have followed doing the 'right thing.' But nothing happened. Nothing at all. I was greatly disappointed. What was the use of doing right if I didn't even feel good over it?

After contemplating the situation

for a while, I came to a surprising realization. What I felt was gratitude for the *absence* of the guilt I would otherwise have had to feel if I had frittered the money away. And frittered it away is what I would have done, automatically, a few months before.

Today I am very grateful for my Higher Power, which made me do the right thing in spite of myself.

Nan B., Hollywood, Calif.



On Making Complicated Amends

On a Spanish beach a famous writer was ready to kill

WHEN I sobered up in AA ten years ago, I felt I hadn't any amends to make since I was a lone, unattached drunk. Of course, I had a mother and father, but they were alcoholics, too, and as I hopped between construction, carnival and seafaring jobs, I had helped to support them and kept my alcoholic antics away from their doorstep.

I felt that I had only harmed my-

self, and that generally I was a congenial, if sloppy, drunk who had boozed somewhat hazily around the world. At times I was downright jolly. I must have been. For just the other day, M., a friend of mine who was on hand during the last stages of my alcoholism in southern Spain (and who recently came into the Fellowship himself) was describing a scene on the beach at Torremo-

linas in the late winter of 1954. Since he had met me the day before and I had been sober, cold and reserved, he was astounded to see me this next day, brandy-bottle-in-hand, dancing wildly up and down the beach, while singing the full repertory of Gilbert and Sullivan. Of

It wasn't until a little over three years ago (long after I found AA) that I discovered that my self-destructive drive was not only harmful to myself, but to others, too. I am in the broadcasting business, and frequently interview authors for radio. Three years ago I was in the



course, I had been in training for this fall off the wagon under the kind sponsorship of an AA loner who somehow had managed to keep me dry for two weeks. M. recalled that after the beach scene he didn't see me for several days, and then I was "bloated and blue, ragged and dirty, and unable to make any sense, much less sing."

Several weeks later I left Torremolinas via the Malaga airport for a tortuous and blind alcoholic trip back to the States by plane, train and ship. The AA loner got me on the plane, and today he admits he didn't ever think that I would make it into AA. Also, he had seen instances where I had tried deliberately to destroy myself through booze in that drunkards' paradise — Torremolinas — where the cheapest brandy was then but thirty-five cents a bottle.

studio about to start an interview with an author when he looked up and said: "I'm certain now that I've met you before. Were you ever in Torremolinas?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Now I know," he said, and his words picked up speed with a slight hint of hostility. "We met on the plane from Madrid to Malaga. We were both going on to Torremolinas and I offered you a ride."

I was about to thank him for his past courtesy, and begin the interview, as the studio time was limited. But he continued.

"When we landed at Malaga I had a chauffeured limousine waiting for me. You dashed ahead of me and plunked yourself in the back seat of the car. Before I even got in you started shouting obscenities — mainly about how I and my friends were all no-good rich bastards. I

couldn't have gotten you out without a nasty scene, and so I had to put up with your raving for the next half hour. I've never been so mad in my life."

Here was a chance, I thought, possibly to make amends. But he went on before I could interrupt him.

"I had gone to Torremolinas to see (and here he mentioned the name of a well-known author) who had just arrived from the States on his honeymoon. I was sitting with him that night at his table in the local nightclub when you came up and asked his wife to dance. Before I could say anything to her, she accepted. A few moments later she returned to the table, in tears, at the obscene things you had said to her on the dance floor. That was not enough. You then insulted my author friend, saying among other things that he was all dried up, would never write anything decent again.

"My author friend grabbed one of the bottles on the table, walked outside to the terrace and broke it off at the neck. Fortunately, some of the other people in the nightclub dragged you away before anything happened."

I interrupted the author I was to interview in Studio 8C. I told him that I had been sober in AA for nearly seven years. Then I wanted to know if his author friend ever recalled the incident. He said that his friend remembered it vividly and

had brought the episode up at dinner the night before. So I asked this author what he thought of my writing his friend and his wife a letter and making amends to them. He said he thought it would be a good thing.

Our interview followed. I was a bit shaky, the questions somewhat disconnected, and I'm afraid the tape never got aired.

After several months of procrastination I wrote the author who had been honeymooning in Torremolinas a letter. I told him that I was in AA, offered my apologies and explained that I had been in a blackout and seeking some sort of oblivion. I added that I was doubly grateful that his friend had at last told me what had happened, since in the summer we now lived in the same village.

The author replied with a short note that was both gracious and understanding. And the note once again made me thank God that I had survived to find AA. For concerning my alcoholic self-destructive wish that night in a blackout in Torremolinas, he wrote: "I am still appalled at how near to fulfillment your wish approached. That it was *not* was due to my wife's intercession."

This was, seven years later, a cold, sober shock. Not only because of my brush with death, for this is a man who measures his words carefully, but because the myth of the sloppy, jolly drunk with no amends to make was for all time exposed to me. And the author must have

sensed some of this, for he also wrote of our encounter: "But that, like other wounds, is healed and I wonder whether scars are not designed as reminders and warnings."

Since that night the author whom I attacked in the blind, hostile, alcoholic rage of a blackout as being

dried up, has been awarded the Nobel Prize. While I, through the grace of God and AA, have been dried out for ten years, and wondering now how many amends I might have been able to make if it hadn't been for those blackouts.

F. S., Manhattan, N. Y.

January 1965

The Credit Side of the Inventory

To many people, "taking a personal inventory" seems to mean only summarizing our defects. While it is vital that we should be aware of our shortcomings, it is also important that we should consider our strong points. What businessman, in taking an inventory, would consider only the debits and ignore the assets?

There are many reasons for ignoring our assets, and most of them are bad. Concentrating solely on our shortcomings can lead to hopelessness and despair; if there is so much wrong with us, how can we ever hope to straighten out our lives? It would be easy to decide that the task was hopeless, and that we might as well resume drinking. But by considering our strengths, we become aware of the instruments at our command to cope with our defects. We see what we can use to correct those things in our lives that need changing. Certainly any sweeping changes in our lives can be accomplished only by thoughtful, careful use of every resource available to us, and we can discover those resources only by an honest, penetrating analysis of our strengths and talents.

There is a danger that, under the guise of humility, we will ignore our strong points as a way of avoiding responsibility. It is easy to say, "I can't speak well," when what we mean is, "I don't want to speak at that meeting." It is easier to say, "I have no talents," rather than to discover those talents and to assume the responsibility for developing them fully and using them for worthwhile purposes.

To minimize our assets is just as dishonest as to minimize our faults; we must continue to take a fully honest personal inventory which will give us an accurate picture of ourselves — the good parts as well as the bad.

J. C., Emporia, Kan.

*In the hotel bar overlooking the blue lagoon
there was a chance to carry the message . . .*

TAHITIAN INTERLUDE

RECENTLY, during a visit to Tahiti, I was much troubled in mind and spirit. It seemed to me that I was apart from everybody. I was afraid to mix with the sociable crowd milling around the hotel bar, and I was resenting having to refuse the tiniest taste of wine at meals. In fact, I was behaving like a bear with a sore head, and blaming everything except me for it.

As I stood on the hotel patio with my back to a laughing group who were grabbing for the drinks so deftly dispensed by the Tahitian beauty behind the bar, I noticed a man standing not far away from me morosely contemplating the blue lagoon and its coral reef and the mountains of Moorea beyond. Something made me speak to him.

After a few opening remarks my fellow guest mentioned he was flying out next morning to Los Angeles,

having arrived only a day or two previously from Honolulu—a trip made on the spur of the moment. The conversation somehow or other gravitated to drinking. I mentioned that I was unable to drink at all, so consequently felt rather out of the fun to be had on the island.

“Curious you should say that,” my friend replied. “I was on Antabuse until two days before I left Honolulu, then somehow decided to give it a miss. Well, here I am. I’ve got a bottle of brandy in my room, I’ve been drinking and making the rounds since I got here and I feel like hell.”

That broke the spell, and very soon I was pouring out my side of the story—how I had found peace, happiness and a new life through AA, after fifteen years of misery and uncontrolled drinking. Even now, I added, I was having what to me was

a ‘dry drunk’ or ‘spiritual slip’ and, somehow, talking to him about it was a help to me.

We chatted for half an hour about AA and about mutual friends in the film business, after which I went back to my room, a much happier man.

My new friend—I had instinctively liked him on sight—caught his plane next morning, but as I passed his room, after his departure, I saw an empty brandy bottle in the refuse basket outside the door. I

hoped that for him it would be the last slip, and that, back in his country, he would once again find the strength to refuse a drink.

As for me, when I went down to the travel desk to cut short my visit by a week and to book an earlier plane to Los Angeles, I breathed a prayer of thanks that even in the most unlikely situations we are sent the help we need to carry on to the end of the road, without having to turn back to hopelessness and despair.

J. M., Victoria, B. C.

God as we understand Him

The Grapevine receives a number of manuscripts which go quite deeply into spiritual awakenings, often including religious conversions or reconversions, which individual AA members have experienced. Sometimes these articles contain more about religion than we expect to hear at AA meetings. On the premise that we can be helped in our own questing by hearing from others, we publish the first of a series of articles under this heading, asking readers to remember that publication does not constitute AA or Grapevine editorial endorsement of particular views — The Editors.



The Spiritual Kind of Thirst

ALCOHOLICS Anonymous suggested I choose my own concept of God. To choose a concept of God that made *sense* to me. I've since wondered why this hadn't occurred to me a long time ago. The idea made such sound, common sense. Then I realized that common sense is one of the most un-common things there is. Like a miracle, the idea of a belief in God, as *I understood Him*, set my mind free. It was impossible to have any conflict of feelings or opinions if I accepted my own idea of God.

From this point on I was able to

read books, to listen to sermons and accept those ideas which appealed to me and to reject those ideas which I could not agree with, *without* being *angry or defiant*. I was able to reject the ideas of others without feeling guilty or wrong. I was free to choose, and it's important I extend to everyone else the same privilege. In reality, AA opened a whole new wonderful world to me.

As I pursued the Eleventh Step, I came to realize that at some point in my life, years ago, long before I became alcoholic, long before I ever

drank, perhaps somewhere in my mid-teens, I reached a stalemate where the meaning of life was no longer clear to me. I had become confused about the purpose of life. My whole being, consciously and unconsciously, sensed an inferiority, which I tried to overcome.

In my earlier years I had tried to find a comfortable solution to this sense of inferiority in churches and religions. And while at church, I indulged in the sentimental fallacy of shedding a tear and feeling compassion over abstract truth, justice and beauty; I was never to know or recognize these qualities when I met them in the street because the circumstances made them vulgar. I was incapable of rationalizing the irrational concepts of organized symbolic religion and became more be-

wildered, confused and hostile at every attempt to do so.

So, unable to find a satisfactory answer to my growing sense of inferiority in any formal religious affiliation, I tried to compensate for my uneasiness and confusion by studying science and engineering. I found a lot of satisfaction in the logic and reason of scientific principles and in the laws of science, but no gratifying or conclusive answer to the mystery of what life was all about. Knowing something of the wonders of the world around me left me feeling even more inferior. Then, over a period of years, I tried to calm and pacify this growing inferiority by trying to relate myself to the people around me first; then, by working hard for positions of prestige; then by becoming involved in

the affairs of the community and, finally, by accumulating material things — by making money. All of this, over quite a long period of my life, repeatedly left me with only a growing uneasy emptiness. At times, the sense of inferiority was almost overwhelming, yet I secretly harbored feelings of superiority.

I was drawn irresistibly toward a personal goal of principle and perfection. I could not describe this goal in advance. I didn't know for sure what I was seeking. Repeated attempts to find the answer in different religions always left me feeling uncomfortable. I sought this uncertain principle in the works and books of philosophers and in psychology. I sought it in the euphoria of mild intoxication, and then, because I was or had become alcoholic, I sought this mystical goal in drunkenness — in the bottle. I don't believe I drank to get drunk, but always to seek in the next drink that peace for which a sick soul seems to thirst. As the search continued, I became more separated and overwhelmed with that awful sense of aloneness. I was led onward by a principle within myself that I could not see or understand.

The search ended for me in a rather sudden and climactic experience as I came to after my last drunk, which resulted in my asking Alcoholics Anonymous for help. Here, in AA, I'm certain I've found that which I had been seeking. Here I've found "the peace that passeth

all understanding." I believe I've learned from Alcoholics Anonymous that all this time I had been seeking a concept of God that I could understand. A concept that made sense to me. A concept with which I could be comfortable. Through Alcoholics Anonymous I've found a way to discipline myself and to experience the wonders of sobriety and spiritual growth. I've found a deep spiritual sense of purpose and I know where I'm going. I find myself in comfortable harmony with God, *as I understand Him*.

I'm no longer puzzled or confused at the conflicting concepts of God as reflected by the different organized religions, because I find that among all the many temperaments and attitudes attributed to God by the multitude of sects and denominations, they all seem to agree that God is Spirit and that God is Love.

So, I've come to believe God is the Spirit of Love. I think of Spirit as being that calm feeling of buoyancy and exultation and elation and joy we often experience. It's what we see in others when we say, "He's high-spirited," or "He's full of life." It's what we feel within when we hum a happy tune or say, "My spirit sings within me." Love has come to mean anything but the popular Hollywood or sexy-magazine concept that fooled me for a long time.

Love, to me, is fourfold: it's caring, it's feeling respect for, it's feeling responsible for, and it's un-

derstanding. When we care what happens to ourselves and to other people; when we respect the rights and the feelings of ourselves and others, whether they're rich or poor, young or old, black or white, drunk or sober; when we feel and act responsibly for ourselves and others; when we understand ourselves and others — then we love ourselves and others. Without these feelings for ourselves there can be none for others. Love is *doing* and *giving* these things with no thought of reward or personal gain.

I suppose Love is recognized most easily by all of us in watching a mother's love for a child. To the degree that I get angry or feel resentments or fear or anxiety and frustration — to that degree I've separated myself from God. To the degree I feel the Spirit of Love with-

in me — to that degree I've improved my conscious contact with God, *as I understand Him*.

In searching through all the AA books and literature, I've only found one place that indicates the kind of God we might expect to find in Alcoholics Anonymous. That's in our Second Tradition, wherein it states that our only authority is . . . *a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience*.

So, while a total concept of God confined to being a Spirit of Love might seem too simple, and unacceptable to some people, I find that the essential ingredient of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is a group of people who care, who respect, who are responsible and who understand. People who have a mature love for one another.

Don McF., Los Angeles, Calif.

Step Discussion

Here's a good start on a closed meeting discussion of Step Two, with emphasis on that word "sanity"

I NEARLY QUIT

"CAME to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

When I first encountered this Step, I took offense at the word *sanity*. If the Step had said, "power greater than ourselves could put us back on our feet," or "back on the right path," I could have understood. *Sanity*, with all that the word implies, seemed too strong.

I felt I couldn't be crazy or I wouldn't have sought help. Truthfully, I very nearly quit the program, all over the word *insanity*.

It was not until the Fourth Step (after stumbling and skipping over the Third) that I began to see the light. But it wasn't until the autopsy had gotten well underway and I found out that though I appeared normal to see and talk to, I was

extremely selfish, thoughtless, heartless, inconsiderate and resentful of the very air I breathed. Was this the moral make-up of a normal person? I decided not. I had lost all true perspective in daily living. I couldn't plan and carry out one full day without confusing my hours with a lot of unrelated side issues and off-the-track thinking. Yes, I finally agreed that I needed the restoration of my *sanity*.

Then fear set in. Cold, unreasoning fear. What to do? Where to begin? Suddenly I became angry. Angry with myself. Angry with AA. "I might have known," I thought. "I get myself involved with some off-beat outfit and here I am, more confused and upset than ever." I recall wondering, "What's wrong with these people anyway? Why can't

they handle their own affairs and let me handle my life as I see fit?" At that point I marched back to Step Two.

Another snag! I knew that somehow if I were to have any semblance of success with the program, I had to believe in a Power greater than myself. I didn't kid myself there. I knew that the answer to that was God and God alone. How to contact Him? I didn't know. I knew about prayer and the universally accepted benefits to be derived from it. I also remembered such phrases as "in God's own time" and "All things cometh to him who waits" — but I wanted my request for restoration of *sanity* to be stamped "To God for immediate action." With that thought in mind, I really believe I sat back and waited for the flash of lightning and the peal of thunder heralding a spiritual awakening.

Up to this time, my prayers had consisted of half-hearted attempts

for relief from my hangovers, from financial strain due to drinking and from marital difficulties brought on by my folly. However, I began to pray in earnest. At first, haltingly, ill-worded and selfishly, but ever so earnestly and sincerely, I laid bare my sins and misspent life. I gave vent to my fears and frustrations, my trials and tribulations, praying that if there ever was a stupid fool who needed help, I was that fool.

Still, I could see or feel no change in myself or my attitudes. I kept coming to AA. Each time I went to a meeting, I insisted to myself that this would be the last time. Later, as each "last one" went by, I finally found myself looking forward to the next "last meeting."

And so I have come to accept the Second Step, and to see that through staying in AA, *sanity* has been restored. I think I'm a better man for the struggle to understand.

J. S., Walla Walla, Wash.

The Threat of the Twelve Steps

*We went to extremes in drinking,
why not in working the program?*

THE other day I happened to be leafing through some old Grapevines and came on an article by Gerald Heard, "The Search for Ecstasy," in the May, 1958, issue. It's only three pages long, but it manages to say a lot — to me at least. I hope the Grapevine will reprint it sometime. (See page 30 of this issue — Ed.)

I — you — may not agree with everything Heard says about alco-

holism and its relationship to the over-all social malaise of our times, but I think we can take gigantic warning from his article: we ought not to settle for tepid AA, for half-measures in taking the Steps, or for too much of the stale and flat in our sober days. Not if we want to stay sober.

No, I think we have to keep looking for something better than dullness, better than average living,

better than mediocre spirituality. Heard's use of that word *ecstasy* may bother a little: is it excessive? I think not; I think it bothers because it is the simple truth. He says, "... alcoholism (like all addictions) is not at base a search for utter sedation. It is a desire for that *ecstasis*, that 'standing out' from the land-locked lagoons of conformity, out onto the uncharted high seas where the only map is the star-set heavens."

Breathes there anywhere a sober alcoholic for whom this passage is not deeply meaningful?

Once a few years ago I sat in a bar on a New York street talking to a newspaperman who had just lost another job for drinking. He was interested in my AA story. But he was lit up like a Christmas tree, and angry, and thoroughly uninterested in any gab about regenerating *him* — that day. I gave up at last. (I learned later not to try to throw the heavy AA pitch to someone who is still an active and altogether pugnacious drinker, but to save it for the sobering-up hours.) I relaxed. A thought came to me. I said, "You know, H——, I think one of the great pleasures of way-out drinking is just that feeling of being miles apart from the boobs. You're running on a different track. Different clock. Different music. Really existentialist kick. On the knife's edge of pleasure-pain, progress-disaster." And more stuff to that effect.

I saw that I had an attentive listener at last. H—— said that that

was it exactly. It was living way-out that appealed to him, disasters or no. Living like the boobs was a bore, a drag, an accursed impossibility.

I think now that this thoroughly unsuccessful Twelfth Step effort (I pray H. may be in AA somewhere by now) helped *me*. I've never since stopped being aware of the fact that as an alcoholic I had better not set my sights on being just like everybody else, just as ordinary, just as *unleavened*. As a matter of fact, I don't really know anything about being ordinary — that is, nonalcoholic — so I ought not to set up some phony idea in my mind about normal living. No, let me stick with Mr. Heard's approach for a while. His emphasis is the one for me.

If as an alcoholic I am to "stand out from the land-locked lagoons of conformity," and stay sober, how am I to do it? Join a revolutionary gang? Go Beatnik? Take up Yoga?

Ah, but I *have* an answer, Take the Twelve Steps. Dull? Have I tried it? I certainly didn't attempt much beyond the first three Steps my first couple of years in AA. My reaction to the last nine Steps was that they were put in to round out the picture; they were pious rather than practical. One hardly needed to go that far . . . and so on.

But I had, along the way, a bit of perverse luck. I got into some rather heavy weather: job, health, family, everything seemed to go soberly haywire all at once. And I was moved (I see it now as a spiri-

tual shove) to try the Fourth and Fifth Steps, inventory and confession. I didn't do a good job. I wrote some of the inventory, but not all of it. I told some of the wrongs, the pressing ones — but not all. Nonetheless, I had an exciting year of spiritual progress out of it. I was in some important way *changed*.

There came a slowdown, as evidently there always must. I began to think Steps Six and Seven needed more work. Interesting. Difficult. Existentialist. Knife-edge of disaster-progress. Strange new awareness of God, of self.

I saw that there could be no “lagoons of conformity” for the man who will face his character, confess it, become willing to change it, and ask God to change it.

Dynamite! Dare I set it off? Can't I just sort of let the whole thing go, and settle for modest, quiet, unexceptionable, not very spiritual, average living? After all, X can and Y can and Z can.

Are they alcoholics?

Well, no.

And do you really know anything about their Spiritual life?

Well, no.

Back to me. I needed to be *other*. That's why I drank. I still need to be other. Having tried the toxic way of drugs and excess, let me try the “tonic” (in Heard's phrase) way of the Steps, the way of health and joy. The Steps are the specific medicine for the thing that's wrong (or right — it doesn't matter) with me: alcoholism. They are the way to be other, and sane into the bargain.

I've come this far: I know now that what is involved in taking the AA program entire, as the early AAs gave it to us, is not the prospect of turning into some sort of repulsive goody-good. It's the threat of being truly alive, aware, and even perhaps *ecstatic*. I'm coming to believe that if I do not accept all of what this program offers (demands?) but, instead, walk away from it as somehow more than I bargained for, I might get drunk.

Which is to say no more than that if I do not take AA's Twelve Steps seriously and in full I can not expect to be “on the program.”

Anon, Vermont

October 1965

Step Discussion

*There is more to taking the Eighth and Ninth Steps
than squaring things with other people*

Amends

A LITTLE rigorous honesty will reveal to any alcoholic that he “roared like a tornado through the lives of other people.” But when you start making a list of people you have harmed do you put your own name on the list? You are apt to be the person you most harmed. You are very likely the one in most need of repair. This is selfish you say? I think not. Remember the old lines: “To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

First things first. Make amends —but start where the trouble starts, with yourself. Learn to forgive yourself, then you can forgive others. Accept yourself, and then others will begin to accept you. Feeling accepted — or rejected — is important to us alcoholics. As drinkers we often experienced re-

jection, so often that we developed hair-trigger reflexes. Despite our present abstinence from alcohol, these reflexes are still with us. We’re quick to sense rejection, real or fancied, and this breeds resentment. AA experience, as well as the words of our Big Book, tell us that resentment is one emotion an alcoholic can not afford.

If the problems of acceptance and rejection are annoying you, if the things you try to do leave you feeling not satisfied, if your experience sober is beginning to convince you that drunk or sober you are a born loser in life, I have a suggestion to offer: try once more to embrace the Eighth and Ninth Steps of the AA program. This time though, go at it with this new frame of reference: put making amends to — accepting — yourself on top of the list.

Dr. Hal S., Hollywood, Calif.

... God as we understand Him

The Grapevine receives a number of manuscripts which go quite deeply into spiritual awakenings, often including religious conversions or reconversions, which individual AA members have experienced. Sometimes these articles contain more about religion than we expect to hear at AA meetings. On the premise that we can be helped in our own questing by hearing from others, we publish the second of a series of articles under this heading, asking readers to remember that publication does not constitute AA or Grapevine editorial endorsement of particular views — The Editors.

Finding Faith Again

A FRIEND of mine is a young Christian minister, the rector of a small-town church. He adored his wife and helpmate. They had three charming youngsters, the oldest of which now is five or six years. Another was on the way and the mother had gone to a neighboring city for a routine checkup by her doctor. Suddenly, without any warning, (as happens somewhere every hour of our modern day) a state

policeman got in touch with the father to break the news that his wife had been killed outright in a highway motor accident.

The blow was staggering beyond description, and only his faith in God gave him strength to face up to the following weeks and months of loneliness and despair. Weeks after it happened, he recalled for a group of us an incident in which his youngest daughter whom he was



readying for bed, looked up and asked "Where's Mommy?" He said that he knew *this was it*. Some kind of acceptable answer had to be forthcoming. So, after a moment, he explained that Mommy had gone to be with Jesus.

The child had been well-trained in religious belief, including the story of Jesus and His Love, and the explanation was accepted; the child went off to sleep. The story took me back a long lifetime. I had a deeply religious mother; the thought flashed through my mind that once, I, too, would have accepted such an explanation.

I have observed in AA that one doesn't have to be deeply religious in order to attain, and retain, sobriety. Many regard the strength of their AA group as their Higher Power. But I now feel that religious faith, or more willingness to grow spiritually, can be of enormous help. In my own case, it has helped me

in many ways. The study of religion itself has opened many new vistas and brought a growing sense of peace.

But when I first arrived in AA, religion had little significance for me. Many years of alcoholic excess and its consequences had taken me far from any religious interest. At one of my early AA meetings, I chanced to meet an interesting man who had been a national figure and noted scholar, until alcoholism had toppled him. I sought his advice. What should I do first? He replied matter-of-factly, "Get down on your knees and pray."

I was startled and I mumbled, "I wouldn't know how to begin."

He smiled and asked, "Do you know the words of the Lord's Prayer?"

"Of course," I replied.

"All right," he said, "begin tonight by reciting those words and continue to recite them every morn-

ing and night until boredom makes you begin to improvise a little.”

That’s exactly how I began and, except for our closing prayer at the end of each AA meeting, I prefer to keep my praying private and personal, first thing in the morning and last thing at night, or whenever the urge comes over me, and I’ve long since become convinced that when we ask God’s help in our own efforts to help ourselves, help comes and problems soon begin to fade.

This is how it seems to have been for me with respect to my effort to return to the practice of my Christian religion. There were three chief stumbling blocks, as I saw it: the difference between the biblical story of creation and the views of modern science; the idea of the Trinity; the almost humanly impossible task of living up to the Commandments. Suffice it to say I have had help over these stumbling blocks through reading: for example, the writings of the theologian Karl Barth. And I recall particularly something that Professor Rachel Henderlite said in her book, *Forgiveness and Hope*: “What God wants of man is that he shall acknowledge himself as a member of the family of God, and only this.”

To those of us who become active in Twelfth Step work, it soon be-

comes apparent that a prospect must become attracted and ask for help, and that any attempt at compulsion meets with little, if any, success. He must be “ready,” or as has been said, “so sick and tired of being sick and tired” that he will reach out for AA as a drowning man reaches for anything offering support. Then, and only then, he finds the help that AA offers, after he has admitted his helplessness and surrenders.

It is the writer’s opinion that religion must rely upon a similar approach by the soul-weary. They cannot be driven to worship but must practice of their own volition. They rarely worship because they “ought to,” but rather because they “want to.” Once they truly surrender to God as they understand Him, learning about Him becomes a fascinating and rewarding thing. Until they seek Him out, themselves, little may be accomplished.

That’s the way it has been with many; that’s the way it has been with me. The first great hurdle may be summed up in the word *acceptance*, as embodied in the first two Steps of the AA program — 1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.* 2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

S. A., Greenville, S. C.



MORE POWER TO YOU

Can we really get help in our daily living from a "Higher Power"?

ABOUT seventeen years ago, a custodian at an Idaho jail drafted me and another inmate to carry stacks of old newspapers out of an adjoining storeroom for burning.

Taken by itself, it was simply one of those trivial and irksome things that happen to drunks in jail. But it was a turning point, for square on the top of one stack was a Sunday supplement with a feature article about Alcoholics Anonymous. I read it more carefully than anything I had seen up to that time about AA.

I didn't seek out AA then and

there, but I did six months later, and by 1950 I was finally sober. I give that newspaper article a great deal of credit, and it may have been the most important single thing in pointing me to AA. That brings up an interesting multiple question: *How was it that the article happened to be where it was at that time? How did it get on the top of the stack, and why was I picked out of a dozen or so men to move the papers?*

It could have been a coincidence, or the law of averages working. Yet the same kind of thing has happened

so many times since that I don't really place too much stock in coincidence any more, and neither do many of my AA friends. I believe that such a thing happens because there is a Higher Power, God as we understand Him, working ceaselessly in our best interests. This work was going on even before we were aware that we needed it, and it still goes on if we permit it. Far more power is available to us than most AA members are willing to accept. Our difficulty is not in persuading God of the legitimacy of our needs, it is primarily in convincing ourselves that He has our needs and interests at heart and knows the way to solve every problem.

If you think not so, consider the miracle of AA itself. In the early 1930's, people everywhere were pretty much disillusioned as to the possibility of solving drinking problems. The country had abandoned the idea that drinking could be solved by legal prohibitions, and, for the most part, groups of people were reduced to petty bickering over the subject.

The people who were to start Alcoholics Anonymous were, at that time, more in the dark than anybody. They were the social outcasts, the salt that had lost its savor, stretching out their tortured lives from one binge to the next. They, least of all, knew anything of the fine work they were to do.

But Someone did, for already things were moving in their behalf.

The Oxford Group had sprung up, and was particularly successful in using spiritual principles to help defeated, unhappy people; it was unusually strong in New York City at that time. There was also a growing interest in therapeutic methods of helping alcoholics, and it's likely that Dr. Silkworth of Town's Hospital — who was to give AA's Bill W. so much valuable help and advice — had studied these systems. One effective system, for example, was the notable Peabody method of counseling, which was enjoying promising success in the early 1930's. Perhaps Dr. Silkworth had looked into Richard Peabody's work, perhaps some of the Oxford Groupers had done so also, and had added the vital spiritual element which Peabody didn't use.

In any case, all of the ideas and information necessary for AA's launching were in place by late 1934 and, in seemingly casual ways, they came together. It could have been coincidence or the law of averages, but I choose to call it the work of God. Either He is everything or He is nothing and, if everything, then those things which we call coincidence are also subject to His will.

Consider also the work of the Higher Power in bringing individuals to AA. The ceaseless work of the Mighty Hand, in some of these cases, borders on the marvelous. One man finds AA while hitchhiking — the truck driver who picks him up is an AA member. Another

drags himself to the bank to explain an overdrawn account and is led to our Fellowship by the bank manager, also an AA member. And the story of one of my AA friends is almost too incredible to relate. Deciding to die, he drove out to a lonely road and connected a hose from the exhaust pipe to the inside of his car. Shortly after he lost consciousness, a state policeman came by and rushed him to the hospital. What was the policeman doing on this deserted road? Well, he was taking a short cut from one main highway to another!

Some people may decline to accept the evidence of such examples on the grounds that God does not play favorites. They might ask: What about the people who *weren't* saved? The alcoholics who *didn't* find AA; those who died before the state policeman arrived? If God is the Father of all, why did He not spare them also? In this same vein, a columnist once noted that it was rather thoughtless for the lone survivor of a plane crash to state that God had spared him when thirty others had died.

The answer, of course, is that there is no complete answer to this question, for our knowledge of God and how He works is limited. But we do ourselves an injustice by brooding over difficult philosophical questions instead of going ahead by putting a simple faith to work in our lives. In my cups, I used to sneer, "If there's a God, why is there all

"... We should focus our attention on what we know to be good..."

this suffering in the world?" One possible answer — though it didn't occur to me then — was that much suffering was caused, not by God, but by people in their cups who sat around and knocked the universe and its Management instead of doing some work themselves.

If such a question does cause us doubt, even after we're safe and sober in AA, we should, I think, put it to rest as quickly as possible. Our duty is to absorb and radiate as much of the AA program as we can get, and we won't do that very well if we restrict the spiritual phase of the program to a small corner of our lives. One of the great teachings of the Christian religion, for example, is that man has free will, and another is that God is no respecter of persons. These are difficult ideas to digest, but in time they become more palatable and they help answer some of our most irksome questions. The idea of free will for example, keeps me from blaming my troubles on God or others, and the no-respecter-of-persons thought keeps me from imagining that I'm a member of a spiritual aristocracy of some kind.

In other words, we should focus our attention on what we know to

be good and answerable, and not on what seems to be wrong and unanswerable. I believe the important thing is that a Higher Power, a Guiding Spirit or Intelligence, caused AA to be, and led us to become part of it. With this as my premise, I have gone on to believe that the same Power Who worked through men and events to create AA *wants* to go on working in our lives. He *wants* to move and to be known in every person's life. He *wants* man to acknowledge and accept his spiritual birthright as a child of God and is, in fact, literally moving heaven and earth to help bring this about. The reason this hasn't happened yet on a broad scale is that man is slow, painfully slow, to *want* it *himself*.

Perhaps I would have arrived at this picture of God and man much sooner if I hadn't been a bachelor for so many years. But now I'm the father of two small sons, and their painful growth teaches me something about our relationship to God. I have to let my sons make mistakes and sometimes fall, so they can learn by themselves. In the same way, God apparently lets His children make painful, sometimes tragic mistakes, but the needed lessons are

slowly being learned. My two boys have insistent demands for excessive candy and dangerous playthings, and sometimes I must seem almost cruel and overbearing in my denials. Perhaps there are times when God makes similar denials in our behalf, to protect us from harm that would teach no lesson. There are also times when my boys seem unbearably wicked towards each other or a playmate, and then I have to curb my own fury. I am able to do that because I love my sons, and if we sometimes wonder why God does not sweep away the wrongdoers of this world with one mighty lightning bolt, we might reflect that His Universal Love goes out to all men, wrongdoers included.

As our own children grow older, and become responsible, we give them more responsibility and power. Does God do this for us also? I believe that He does, and that the way to avail ourselves of additional power is contained in the AA suggested Steps and other writings.

One Teacher-of-old put it this way: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and

to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

AA's founders took the same idea and others and did this with them: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Did the Teacher-of-old, and AA's founders, intend to deceive us with these guidelines, which seem quite to the point and leave little room for doubting? Do they not say here, in as many words, that we *can* make a conscious contact with God, that He does have a will (or plan) for each of us, and that the necessary power can be supplied? All that's necessary is that we *want* it ourselves and that we *seek* it through prayer and meditation. We need bring nothing but ourselves; nothing more is required.

What happens when we make “conscious contact” with God? Do we see flashes of light and hear bells? Are we swept heavenward on wings of ecstasy? Do we wonder, momentarily, if we are losing our sanity?

A careful reading of case histories of spiritual experiences convinces me that light, ecstasy and other phenomena may occur but they are hardly necessary. Bill W., our AA co-founder, had such a sudden spiritual experience, but tends to minimize its long-term importance. What really matters is the change in at-

titude that develops, and as a person's attitude changes for the better, his life also changes for the better. A “conscious contact” with God becomes, in practice, a “conscious contact” with the heart of mankind. The more conscious we are that man is our brother, the more conscious we become that God is our Father. We are forgiven, and feel forgiven, if we forgive. We find mercy if we show it. We feel that we are loved if we try to love all others. When an individual knows this and practices it in all his affairs, a quiet change comes over his life — a change, in its way, no less spectacular than the breakup of ice on a great river in the spring.

This kind of thinking is a long way to come from a stack of newspapers in an Idaho jail. My point is a simple one: Somebody up there likes you, is seeking you, and has the gates of His kingdom wide open for you. The AA program suggests total submission to God's will and, because of this, it has what it takes to direct you all the way. If anything's needed, you'll find your way to it — the right persons, places and things will show up at the right time. Just make sure it's God's will you're truly seeking, and you'll find the power to do things that were previously impossible. And this isn't as big an order as it seems. For many of us, when we were in places like the Idaho jail, it was once almost an impossibility to smile!

M. D. B., Jackson, Mich.

Whose Willpower?

WHY are you always loaded? Have you got no spine? Try to use a little willpower or you will end on skid row. Why do you drink until you pass out, when it is important to you to stay sober? Every alky knows those sentences and they are bitter to hear. Finally, the unfortunate victim of the well-meaning will-to-help comes to believe that he or she is a spineless mollusc.

Has the alcoholic no willpower? No, I don't think so.

To illustrate: You come into a dark room. You know that there is an electric lamp in the room. And as you are coming from a meeting where a lecturer claimed that man can accomplish anything by using willpower, you decide to light the lamp by *your* willpower. You concentrate all your will to get the lamp lit, but nothing happens. The room stays dark. You stop trying, because it seems hopeless. Then you use a little fraction of your willpower to lift your hand to the electric switch,

and turn it on. The room gets lit at once and your will gets free for other purposes. This happens because you use your willpower to engage another power, which is more than sufficient for keeping the room lit.

Someone may wonder what this has to do with the great problem of an alcoholic? Well, let us see. . . . If we look at our program through this telescope, we are going to see that each Step of the program suggests that we connect our wills to a power greater than ourselves. The First Step exhorts us to use humility. There is a marvelous Oriental saying that "humility compels God Himself." And to connect our wills to this universal power, we need only to accept and admit our powerlessness over the things that have become problems to us. Our own will is needed to accept the clear facts.

After having connected our will to the power which is called humility, we will be able to make other

connections too. In the Second Step we try to use our will to acquire some faith in a power greater than ourselves. It is said that faith, even if it is the size of a mustard seed, can move mountains.

The Third Step suggests that we make contact with the greatest Power in the universe, God. And we may understand Him the best we can. My own experience shows that merely thinking of God changes things in my life.

The Fourth Step brings forward a remarkable force, knowledge—knowledge of self. They say that knowledge is power.

I shall not go on Step by Step. Each one can decide for himself how the Steps, from the fourth on, tell us to use our willpower. I finish with the Twelfth Step which in essence tells us to love. I've heard people say, "God is love, and service is love in action."

H. A. S., Helsinki, Finland

Step Discussion

Humbly Asked Him

*In taking Step Seven do we leave it all
to a Higher Power?*

I AM the same person I was when I came into AA." This statement, made recently at a meeting by a member with over three years' sobriety, yielded a vigorous and quite unexpected reaction. "Whadya mean, you're the same person?" most of the comments went. "You couldn't possibly be the same person if you've been working the program, and besides, you wouldn't stay sober very long."

After things quieted down a bit, the bombshell thrower had a chance to explain what he meant. Sure, he could measure some growth, and he had learned to recognize and correct dangerous thinking. But he was basically still the *same person*. No startling personality changes had taken place, and he was still conscious of the same old shortcomings. He was able to stay sober because of a change in attitudes plus constant activity in AA.

There is some evidence from this

and other experiences, that our shortcomings are never removed completely or permanently. Does this mean that Step Seven (*Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings*) doesn't work? Certainly not, but if we stay sober a day at a time, can we expect the Steps to work for more than a day at a time? I believe it sufficient to ask Him to remove our shortcomings *for today*, and what's more, fully expect that He will. But we may also expect to be handicapped by these same shortcomings another day, at which time the Step may be renewed.

Another fairly common observation in AA is that we have a tendency to rely too heavily, and perhaps blame everything, on God's will. There are the if-you-want-potatoes-grab-a-hoe philosophers, who maintain that if things go badly, there is a tendency to say, "Oh, well, it's God's will," and do nothing about it. Likewise, they say, if we

ask God to remove our shortcomings and just sit back, nothing will happen.

I believe there is much validity in this approach, and I do not see in it a denial of Step Seven. We have already established a reliance on a Higher Power in Steps Two and Three, and Step Seven is merely a further expression of our faith. But the words are not enough — the intent must also be there. We are willing to do something about our shortcomings, but we cannot do it alone, and we humbly ask Him for help.

What about the agnostics? Is this Step out for them? I don't think so. If you have trouble with "God," try adding an "o." I believe it is possible, and even desirable, to rely on the good in other people as a Higher

Power. Certainly the spirit of love which pervades the Fellowship is sufficient to help me remove my shortcomings for today, and I am a Christian.

Finally, I do not see any "spiritual side" to this program. The whole thing is spiritual — the Steps, the Traditions, the meetings, the Twelfth Step calls, the literature — everything. There need not be a search for spirituality only in the Steps including the word "God." If a member enters into the Fellowship whole-heartedly, he is apt to find that the familiar shortcomings aren't popping up quite as often, even though he may not be conscious of having asked God to remove them recently. In *my* book, this is Step Seven at work.

J. S. C., New Hartford, N. Y.

... God as we understand Him

The Grapevine receives a number of manuscripts which go quite deeply into spiritual awakenings, often including religious conversions or reconversions, which individual AA members have experienced. Sometimes these articles contain more about religion than we expect to hear at AA meetings. On the premise that we can be helped in our own questing by hearing from others, we publish the fourth of a series of articles under this heading, asking readers to remember that publication does not constitute AA or Grapevine editorial endorsement of particular views — The Editors.

Waiting for the Will of God

THE Grapevine goes directly to the heart and mind, with its articles of love and inspiration, and the examples of the writers. It is a meeting in itself. While the articles are generally good and helpful, sooner or later, we come across an article that stands out — that seems to be specially written for us.

For seven years a shadow had stood between me and the full practice of the program. While the program was my life, and its practice meant everything to me, there was something (I called it a shadow) that was preventing me from deriving complete contentment from the program. As time went on this shadow seemed to increase, until it became imperative that I find out

what it was. So early in 1955, after completing a job, I went home to Scotland for three months, hoping that in the peace and quiet of home, I would find out what this problem or shadow was.

But the answer evaded me. And I returned to Toronto in July of that year anxious to get on a payroll again, and with all kinds of ideas of whom to see and where to go to accomplish this.

After checking in at a hotel, I went to visit the old 1170 Club, and found it closed, but the caretaker was there and after a good chat with him, I picked up the July, 1955 Grapevine, and back in my hotel room I started to skim through it. I came across an article by the

late Father Ed Dowling which was titled "Three Dimensions of AA" (see page 28). I had almost read the article through, but it was a long time before I finished it, for I stopped reading after I read an old Jesuit prayer: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will — all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it! All is Thine, dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me."

With the reading of this prayer, I realized what my problem was, and the shadow that had so long obscured the fullness of the program for me, was lifted. My problem was simply that I had been kidding myself that I had turned my will and my life over to the care of God, but I had not actually learned to do so. I would project my own desires and aspirations into things, and kid myself that this was the will of God for me. Now the burning question was: How was I to know what was my will, and what was the will of God, and how could I distinguish between the two?

I paced up and down the room trying to figure this question out. Then I realized that I had a golden opportunity. Here I was, keen to find a job, and my mind filled with ideas of how to go about this. I would scrap all these ideas, and not look for work, until some lead came into my mind, that I had not thought about previously, this lead would

then be the will of God, for me.

For six weeks I waited. I shall never forget those six weeks, and the knot of fear that was perpetually in my stomach (for I did not have too much confidence that the scheme would work) and I was further upset by seeing the helpful suggestions of my friends fade away and turn to scorn as I rejected all their suggestions. But although I sweated and wanted frantically to give in and go all out to find a job, something told me to hold on, and give it a good try. So, clinging to God (Who I was not too sure approved of this) I held on for six weeks.

Then around nine P.M. one evening my landlord suggested that I go and see the mayor of the city, that he was looking for someone to go to work on a dredge on the river. I slept very little that night, and it seemed that morning would never come, for I had never thought about the mayor, or considered the possibility that there might be a job on that dredge. That which I had long awaited had happened. I could not get to the mayor fast enough! The interview lasted about three minutes and I came away with the job.

From that time on, there has



been no shadow between me and the program. Nor is there any question in my mind now, what is my will, and what is the will of God. Now my will has no leading part in my daily affairs. From that day also all fear and worry left me, and I have found true peace of mind and contentment in the program.

I have cited this experience to show what an outstanding effect the written word can have on the expression of life. But for that article in the Grapevine, I might have

passed many dark years before I found my solution. It should be pointed out that the article itself did not produce the results — but it did provide the outline, and I took it from there.

This again bears out my saying that the Grapevine travels into the heart and the mind. Its articles, based on truth, and written in love, have the possibility of great influence in our lives, and have perhaps more affect than we realize. At least I think so.

B. P., St. John's, Newfoundland

Traffic Goes Both Ways

*If
we are
to climb up
to a spiritual
life, we need to
go back down to help
others find the way*

IN a quiet evening of conversation, a wise old clergyman had said something that lingered with me as I left him. He had said that there was a lower level of adversity beneath which all men become brothers. But likewise, he had observed that there was a higher level of attainment in life above which men become brothers. Then he suggested that the shortage of brotherly love in the world was probably due to the fact that most men for most of their lives stayed within the perimeter of the big gray area between these two levels.

As I reflected on this over a period, I recalled a talk which I had heard many years ago. A bright eyed "honeymooner" in our way of life had traced his personal journey through the Twelve Steps. Finally he reached the extreme gratification of his first sponsorship and then he said, "why, these Twelve Steps are literally a stairway to the stars." It has never been a habit of mine to challenge a speaker, even though I may differ vehemently. However, I did ponder long over this "stairway to the stars" bit. There was no intimation that we graduate in this way of life. But there was an intimation that we move up the staircase to the top and stay there, unless we fall all the way down the stairs, of course.

As I started to put these things together, the wisdom of the clergyman, who is such a devoted friend of our Fellowship, seemed to shine

through the mist. We become brothers at the lower level. Through dedication to the philosophy of our Twelve Steps we become better people and reach brotherhood at the higher level in helping each other. But we must descend again to establish brotherhood with the new man who still suffers, and then we must take those steps all over again with him.

Accordingly, it seems clear that we do not have a "stairway to the stars;" what we have is a working, utilitarian stairway of life. We climb it to show our gratitude for sobriety — to become gracious receivers of this precious gift. And we move down it too, not merely to meet the newcomer, but as we recommit ourselves in surrender to our Higher Power again and again. As we meditate, pray and seek greater conscious contact with God

as we understand Him. As we continue to make amends. And as we keep right on with those fearless inventories and the admissions of our continuing wrongs.

Our stairway of life is our bridge between the understanding and compassion we must maintain for the man who still suffers, and the higher level of attainment in life and brotherhood to which we aspire. In my early sobriety I tried to catch up on a little worthwhile reading for a change. I discovered that William James also once said there was a low level beneath which all men became brothers. I strongly suspect that my minister friend had simply added a super-structure above the water level. However you look at it, these Twelve Steps must be used over and over again. There is one thing I know from experience — they never wear out.

Anonymous

Step Discussion

IT TAKES

TIME

A little

patience

helps us

“come to believe”

At a recent closed meeting someone asked: “Do I have to believe in God to stay sober?” The question took me back abruptly to the last couple of years of my drinking and to my early months in AA.

I recalled a typical weekend before AA. Friday evening I lugged two or three fifths of vodka to my apartment. Before getting stoned, I filled a couple of half-pint bottles with the stuff and hid them. (I have been unable to understand this — I lived alone.) Saturday, when I came out of the anesthesia, the fifths were empty and the hunt for the half pints began. At the end of ten frustrating minutes I was drenched with sweat, my mouth was dry, my legs ached, a thousand needles were in my back, and I could hardly stand upright. In agony I cried out: “Oh God! Where is it?” Finally I found one of the hidden bottles; the warm liquor went down (and sometimes stayed there), and the shaking slowly subsided. But with the calming drinks came black fear — I knew that I would get more booze, be drunk by day’s end, and the whole dreary business would start again.

I saw nothing incongruous in calling out for God’s help when I wanted that drink so badly, though I had denied His power to help me stay away from booze. Now I had always had some sort of belief in a God. Church had been the most profound emotional experience in my early life. But on that Saturday morning, as drops of vodka ran

from the corners of my mouth, I denied that God could or would help me get sober. Nevertheless, I had cried out to Him for help.

I believe now that I denied God until I wanted to stop drinking. But when I wanted to stop, I was assailed with doubts. How should I ask for help? Why should He help me? And when there were no instant answers, I grew more impatient. It was then that a long-time member of our Fellowship invited my attention to the wording of the second and third Steps of our suggested program. He pointed out that Step Two said that we “came to believe” (not believed instantly) that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to health, the root meaning of the word “sanity.” And he said that restoration to health sometimes takes time, sort of a convalescent period in which we gain strength.

My friend pointed out that Step Three suggested only that we *make a decision* to turn our unmanageable lives and wills over to the care of the God or the Higher Power we understood at that time. He expressed the opinion that no one, alcoholic or otherwise, could turn his life and will over to God in an instant; that the decision to do so was implemented by the Eleventh Step, and there was a lot of work and time involved between Steps Three and Eleven. I bought what he said — but because I was and am somewhat self-willed and confused, I backed into Step Three by starting

right out with Step Eleven. Perhaps that is not a bad way in any case.

I think, too, that my denial of God’s help did not stop Him from helping me. I am sure that otherwise I would not have recovered. I am sure also that God will help me whether I ask Him or not but now — in my continuing search for serenity — I seem to get comfort by asking Him.

B. M., Englewood Cliffs, N. J.



April 1966

Principles before personalities

From Rochester, N. Y.:

Congratulations on the choice of the 1966 Conference theme, *Principles before Personalities*. It is most timely and relevant. Unfortunately it is not as simple as it sounds. Principles do not exist in a vacuum; they are carried and spread by personalities, so it is a pretty good idea if I have clean hands before I grab off a load of principles and start spreading them.

I find it most enlightening if I first take a long hard look at my own motives and try to find out who's greater glory I am trying to promote before I get off the launching pad. This saves a good deal of embarrassment later when I am not quite as loaded with talent and charm as I would like sometimes to think.

Personalities come and go but valid principles endure. "Truth was before the world was" and I expect it is going to continue that way for

a while yet. I just hope God will grant me enough wisdom and strength to seek it honestly.

Time and again I have had to knuckle under to Step Three only to find out later that it was the only course I could have chosen, but God in his wisdom *let* me choose. It is just possible that He knows what He is about and it behooves me to be most attentive to some pretty well-established principles because I have been known to get confused at times.

J. H. B.

Step Discussion

Step One:

*We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . .
that our lives had become unmanageable*

House Afire

STEP One involves two distinct though closely related admissions both of which are strong medicine for me as a person with a drinking problem. If I feel that I have accepted this Step without *any* difficulty, there is a good chance that I am self-deceived as to its depth of meaning. On the other hand, if I balk at it, I have seriously damaged my capacity to get any help from the eleven Steps which follow. In either case my life on the AA program, my ability to have a sane understanding of my alcoholic problem, and my chance for lasting sobriety are endangered. Therefore, it follows that the course of safety for me must avoid these pitfalls and must involve a coming-to-terms with the whole Step at some depth.

The first admission is that of powerlessness over alcohol; the second is that of unmanageability in the life. At once I am thrown into conflict with one of my most deeply held and dearly cherished ideas, one which seems to have the strong support of much of the secular wisdom of my society, namely, that as long as I am alive and possessed of even the smallest shred of my rational faculty, I must retain *some* control over every aspect of my conscious behavior. Am I not "the master of my fate . . . the captain of my soul" (never mind that the author of those lines died a suicide)?

That I do not have total control over my drinking is obvious. That I have less control over alcohol now

than I did a year ago I can accept — likewise that if I continue my course for another year (provided I survive the experiment) I will have less control than I do now. I will even concede a 99 per cent loss of control, for that still leaves my willpower and self-respect some little place of refuge. But the word "powerlessness" clearly implies a total and complete failure of willpower and self-help of all descriptions in the area of my relationship to alcohol. All those deeply ingrained ideas about self-reliance, pride, backbone, intelligence, gumption, etc., rebel at the thought of such an unconditional surrender.

The first answer to the emotional and intellectual objections to accepting for fact that I am completely powerless is a pragmatic one. Three hundred and fifty thousand or more people have gained freedom from the same problem through the means of the AA program which has this assertion as its starting point. The proposition that victory can begin with an admission of total defeat seems at first impossible, ridiculous. Experience has proven it to be in actuality that most effective of truths, a paradox and, most important, a paradox which is uniquely effective for people in trouble with alcohol.

As a self-styled intellectual I may need more in the way of convincing than an appeal to results. Why does this paradox work? Quite simply, Step One works because it

does not stand alone. Clearly, it would be dangerous for me to admit powerlessness if I then had no further steps to take to fill the power vacuum in myself. Such a surrender as an only or final step could, followed to its logical conclusion, lead to utter despair and the various ugly consequences which go along with that state. But Step One is not in any sense a final one. Rather, it is the gateway to the whole program of twelve interrelated and interdependent Steps which can serve to connect me in a practical, everyday way with a source of power strong enough to let me live a normal, useful existence.

As an alcoholic I am a man with life-trouble comparable to a house on fire. My self-will has proven to be about as effective a fire extinguisher as gasoline. The flames have trapped me on the ledge of a fifth-floor window. Below me on the ground stand firemen holding a net. Do I jump, or do I re-enter the house and try to put out the fire with my last, half-empty can of gasoline? Does it make sense that I can save my life by jumping out of a fifth-story window? If I believe that the net will catch me as it has caught so many before me, it makes sense. But whether or not it makes sense to my frantic remnants of understanding, the fact is that *only* by jumping from the window do I have a chance to live. The first Step is like that.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Step Discussion

Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Unlocking the Gates of Hell

IF Step One meant a jolting confrontation with the unpleasant truth about my situation as an alcoholic, Step Two, which introduces me to the way out of my trouble, is still more shock treatment. I thought I wanted a way out, but this wasn't exactly what I had in mind. Some sort of pill would have been my first choice. I could have even gone for a program of self-improvement of the pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-boot-straps variety; but this Power-greater-than-yourself stuff makes me uneasy.

Another phrase in this Step is kind of unpleasant and that is "... restore us to sanity." In other words, I'm insane. Now hold on a minute; sure I've got a drinking problem, but to describe my condition as "insanity" is overstating the case a bit, don't you think?

The simple answer to that question is "no."

The insanity is obvious in cases where alcoholism has become clini-

cal and resulted in institutionalization. The insanity may be somewhat more subtle in high-bottom cases who have never hit a private or state hospital, but for all the subtlety it is still genuine insanity. It would be a mistake to think that the word insanity covers only the extreme mental unsoundness which makes a person unfit to be at large in society. It is a far broader term, including any parts of one's behavior which cannot be described as sane. Thus I may be a man normal in most respects but having an insane appetite for sweets or an insane temper or an insane sex drive. Anyone wanting a definition of alcoholic insanity need only look at Step One in which "we admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." Powerlessness and unmanageability are forms of insanity. The peculiar danger of alcoholic insanity is that it is progressive. Starting in one facet of a man's behavior, it

spreads like a cancer contaminating more and more areas of his physical, mental and spiritual being. A man who overeats insanely may only have to worry about his weight. The unmanageable drinker is in a very different situation. Once his drinking is out of control he is on a road to total destruction — unless this downward spiral be arrested and reversed.

Countless thousands of dead alcoholics — among whom are numbered some of the world's greatest minds—are proof enough that self-will is not equal to the task of arresting alcoholism. If this is true, what power can do the job? Step Two suggests that we come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can succeed where all human power (that of ourselves and of others) has failed.

I have observed that two kinds of alcoholics may have trouble clearing this hurdle. There is the group made up of atheists and people indifferent or antagonistic toward all forms of religion and any ideas about a spiritual realm. But they can make the grade on this Step if they heed the Slogans *Easy Does It and Keep an Open Mind*. Step Two doesn't mention God — not even "God as I understand Him." Can I accept as a possibility the existence of any power greater than myself (and I am none too great a power if my alcoholism has progressed to any considerable extent)? Then can I go a step further

and, on the same tentative basis, accept the proposition that the several hundred thousand recovered alcoholics in AA have been brought by the same Power to the place where one day at a time they can say "no" to the first drink? If the "atheist" will accept these hypothesis he is home free. It takes no more to get a foothold on Step Two.

There is a second group of people who have trouble coming to grips with the "Higher Power" part of this Step for an entirely opposite reason — as a result of exposure to one or another type of religious training. Their attitude toward Step Two may be characterized as: "Never mind a lot of mumbo jumbo about a Higher Power — it's God! I know about God. I've gone to church and prayed since I was a kid. What's the next Step?" In other words these people feel that they have already taken Step Two.

I have sympathy with their difficulties because I was one of them and failed on the program because I was too arrogant to start over in spiritual kindergarten which is where the second Step starts. I couldn't or wouldn't see the obvious — that despite my religious background and my professed learnedness in matters spiritual, I was failing in some way to connect properly with God because of the life-trouble I was in through drinking. Later, when more life-trouble brought me to my knees and I mustered up enough humility to re-

evaluate my attitude toward Step Two, I found that the kindergarten approach was successful where the others had failed. The other approaches were fine for nonalcoholics, and eventually they became helpful to me too, but only after I came to Step Two with the attitude of a beginning student whose life depended on his learning the lesson — as in fact it did.

A final point about this Step. It is not one to take and forget. As my life on the program grows, my understanding of Step Two deepens. Steps Three, Six, Seven and Eleven, when worked at, help see to that. During my first weeks in AA the Higher Power was for all practical purposes the group. Today it is something much bigger, closer,

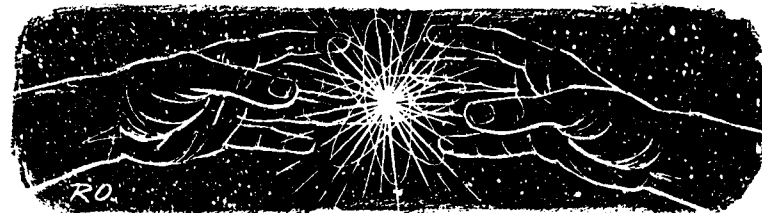
more wonderful, though it still includes the original concept. The idea of sanity has also taken on new meaning. At first I thought of it only as the absence of ruinous insanity and that was goal enough; but AA is teaching me about a more positive side of sanity — meaningful relationships with God, myself and my fellow man which I never dreamed possible.

It has been said that AA doesn't open the gate of heaven and let us in; rather, it opens the gates of hell and lets us out. If that is true, Step One puts the key in the lock and Step Two turns it. Both Steps give hope to a previously hopeless situation, and both together prepare for Step Three — the decision which actually opens the gate.

T. P. Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

... God as we understand Him

Unbeliever in AA



The Grapevine receives a number of manuscripts which go quite deeply into spiritual awakenings, often including religious conversions or reconversions, which individual AA members have experienced. Sometimes these articles contain more about religion than we expect to hear at AA meetings. On the premise that we can be helped in our own questing by hearing from others, we publish the fifth of a series of articles under this heading — the first from the point of view of the not uncommon “unbeliever.” There is appended an “Afterthought on Atheists” by another AA, illustrating one approach to the practice of tolerance in matters of belief. We ask readers to remember that publication does not constitute AA or Grapevine editorial endorsement of particular views.

The Editors

TO THE atheist or the agnostic, any solution involving spiritual elements would seem by definition absurd. Thus, at our open meetings, speakers will sometimes confess that for years they avoided AA, because they had supposed it to be a “religious” program.

Since I remain to this day an unbeliever, I too approached AA only because science (psychotherapy, medication, etc.) and the utmost

exertions of willpower had proven unavailing to an anguished desire to stop drinking.

But no matter how desperate at that time to find help in AA, I clung obstinately to one flicker of pride. This leftover scrap of self-reassurance was based on what I considered my remorselessly honest view of the religious swindle.

Therefore, the AA group whose closed meetings I first attended

struck me as appallingly promiscuous in its name-dropping — that is, in repeating the more dog-eared catch phrases of religion as if they were hot tips from God. So that instead of being open to anything further these people might say relative to the alcoholic dilemma, I could only wince at what I felt was an avalanche of vulgar pieties. Marcel or Buber I might have tolerated, because theology will always challenge me*; but not the gospel according to Saint Peale. As a consequence, I threw out the baby with the bath water.

* Paul Tillich has written: “Only those who have experienced the tragic ambiguities of our historical existence and have totally questioned the meaning of existence can understand what the symbol of the kingdom of God means.”... I think of this passage whenever I hear an AA affirm that he is “glad” he’s an alcoholic — a statement that used to confound me, because it seemed gratuitous. Now, I feel that such an AA is referring not, of course, to his past drinking but to its agonizing consequences of existential despair: to that potentially creative agony that Tillich defines as requisite for any comprehension of the Christian symbol.

I could not possibly see how my own convictions about a contingent universe could be squared with what I saw as such a YMCA level of religious yammering. Nevertheless, because there was nothing left to turn to (except instant rather than socially permissible suicide by way of the city’s less distinguished bars), I kept going back to what I dreaded as the scene of a crime. The “crime” of an unremitting flow of syrupy theism, against my own God-given powers of reason.

At the final meeting that I meant to attend — almost immobilized by funk and despair, even after two months of remaining wretchedly dry, I summoned up the nerve to put my quandary point-blank: “Would any other atheist present — surely there must be at least *one* — tell me how on earth he achieved a “happy sobriety” on this program, without mutilating his rational processes? Without violating convictions, like my own, which see the Christian and Hebrew faiths as consoling myths?”

There was a bulging silence. I was surrounded, it seemed, only by Believers. Or perhaps the bristling hostility in my voice made everyone wary.

Then, since there was no response from the floor, Jane F., invited from another group to preside over this closed meeting, undertook to deal with my question.

To this day, I have no idea at all of Jane's own persuasions in this area. Religion is doubtless a personal matter to her, as atheism wasn't to me. (My undiscerned wish, in fact, since misery *does* dote on company, was probably to proselytize.)

But Jane had impressed me, in telling her own story, as a woman of such extraordinary insights and intellectual resources, so free from any taint of cant or the sanctimonious, that I listened as if my life depended on it. It did.

She said merely — with an air of lucid good sense and absolutely no inflection of commiseration: "AA is the individual's program. Atheists and agnostics, many of these, have achieved successful sobriety in AA. The Higher Power is always the individual's notion of it, even if it amounts virtually to *the collective power of the group in proportion to the limited power of the lone alcoholic.*" Jane did not stress the last conspicuously, but I do.

Well, the eminent rationality of this was quite enough to stir in me some access of hope — of inchoate

faith. Not in a God, to be sure, but in my fellow creatures.

Because one fact stood unshaken before all my skepticism: I was surrounded, here, by human beings who were triumphantly surviving without shattering dreads and impasses in their own lives. And since disbelief in God was, for me, a distillation of my faith in nothing at all (myself prominently), faith in *something* was all I could ask. Even if it was simply a faith in the faith of these people.

But that proved all I needed. It was not imposed on me to commit myself to a Buddhist or Moslem or Judeo-Christian church. I need only acknowledge the visible reality of self-transcendence, and the vision of my own *possible* sobriety. Tangible sobriety achieved — affirmative sobriety of alcoholics like myself was everywhere around me.

I still believe, I repeat, in no God of dogma. (Though one becomes, at times, a shade skeptical of one's skepticism; conceding, without tears, that it may be some bull-headed resistance not of one's mind but ego: a sort of Oedipal reluctance, or mere peevish refusal, to share top billing with God. You can't prove to me that He exists; I, on the other hand, can't prove conclusively to myself that He doesn't.)

But how can I *disbelieve* in the year of sobriety I have just experienced? In its incalculable happiness and its demonstrable achievement in daily work and deep, human in-

volvement? To question such realities would hardly seem rational.

Nor can I any longer repeat like a parrot what had once been my own cherished platitude: that shrill insistence of the times that we are all "alienated," "estranged," "lost to one another and to God. . . ." This is no longer true in my own experience; I am strongly engaged in what I see as the most "spiritual" (existential, if you will) movement of our day, with a theory of life as

crisis (that is, each twenty-four hours, each hour, even each instant postulated as crucial) that longs to demonstrate itself in Christlike action, not Sunday lip service; in acts of faith, not abstractions of it.

In AA, to sum it up, I have found reserves of the spirit (however one defines that slippery word) which had vanished with finality — or so I believed when I abandoned seminary studies and the priesthood.

L. W., *Manhattan, N. Y.*

Step Discussion

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Don't Bet on 'Me'

STEP THREE is a pivotal point in the twelve step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. In this Step we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. Many people who have made a beginning on Steps One and Two falter here. This is a pretty big decision for most of us. It represents a drastic change of focus. What is suggested is that we put all our chips on the God theory. This involves taking at least ninety-five per cent of those chips off the "me" theory where they have been for many years. Now this whole proposition is desperately serious.

Step Three makes it clear that I am free to understand God in my own way, but whatever this understanding is, it had better be real to me because through it I will now be dealing with grievously real difficulties: compulsion, obsession, anxiety, depression and many more.

The weakness of the "me" or self-will way of handling these problems was that it didn't work. Too bad it didn't, because for a long time I had worlds of faith in it, and the fact of "me" always seemed as real to me as the problems I was fighting. The obstacles to my latching on to the God way are that my belief in it is weak and, at first, the fact of God may not seem as real as the fact of an immediate problem such as, say, a deep depressive state. Before I can make the decision called for in the third Step, I must come to terms with these obstacles.

First, let's not make the difficulties any bigger than they have to be. The Step does *not* say *turned our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him,*" it says "made a decision" to do so. Just the decision is enough here. This point was (and is) helpful to me because I'm the type of alcoholic (the arrogant type) who con-

tinues mechanically tending to turn back to self-will. It is too big an order for me to turn my life over and keep it turned over. But I can (and believe that to stay sane and sober I must) make the decision to turn it over and renew that decision at least once every twenty-four hours.

As far as the weakness in my allegiance to the God theory goes, two factors come to my rescue here. First is the fact that I have proven in my own life the bankruptcy of the "me" theory in handling my alcoholism. As long as I felt that "me" would somehow, sometime, be able to solve my drinking problem, I was not in the market for AA. Now that that has changed I have only to go a step further and take the positive action of consciously throwing my support to the Power which can do for me what "me" could not. The second saving factor is the strength of the Fellowship. Were I alone I probably could not make a real start on Step Three.

But in the AA meetings I attend I am surrounded by tens, hundreds and thousands of men and women for whom the God way is succeeding with problems just like mine. And so I trust these people, my AA friends and my sponsor, more than myself. I listen to their advice and follow it even when it goes against my own notions.

On the basis of the success of those who had gone before in AA I made the decision, and it has worked and is working as nothing else I have ever tried.

In the final analysis, the most meaningful statement for me about the third Step is that it *works*; it produces results in terms of salvaged lives. Specifically, by taking it we connect in a new way with the power one day at a time to stay away from the first drink. This power is a spiritual power. Through it our spiritual horizons begin to broaden, and we get the strength to commence the spiritual cleansing of Steps Four through Nine.

T. P. Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Step Discussion

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Breaking The Chains

THE idea behind the fourth Step is an old one. Around 2400 years ago Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." All well and good, but how does this business of self-inventory apply to me as a twentieth-century alcoholic?

In brief, it is the beginning of a program of action to back up the theoretical position I have accepted in Steps One, Two and Three. The fourth Step suggests that I take a hard look in specific detail at the places in my life where I have been at odds with the will of God as I now understand Him.

Right here let me emphasize that this Step is not a license for self-loathing or self-condemnation, both of which are themselves defects of character. The term "to inventory"

is a business expression and as such indicates a cool, detached, business-like approach. I am not helped by justifying my shortcomings, but I am not helped by resenting them or getting depressed over them either.

As to the practical question of how to go about making the inventory, I would suggest a method that has worked for me. It follows closely the section of Chapter Five in the Big Book devoted to Step Four, which is the first (and, in my opinion, still the best) written treatment of the subject. To begin, I take paper and a pen. A written job is more thorough than one done in the head only. The Step says this inventory should be searching and fearless. Writing it out, tends to make it more searching. Holding in mind the decision made in Step



Three that God's will should prevail enables it to be truly fearless, as does the recollection that I have said I was "willing to go to any lengths to gain victory over alcohol." I may well experience fear in approaching the Step, but by sticking to these principles I can win out over that fear.

Why should fear be such an enemy at this point in the program? Because right here it can block out the truth about myself if I let it. Fear is a big reason why my attempts at self-examination before AA led only to self-justification and self-deception. The difference now is that the power of God as I understand Him is greater than the power of fear. So now for the first time I can safely let the light of truth shine into every dark corner and passageway of my past as I review it. I no longer have to defend or condemn myself. A loving Creator is my judge. All I have to do is look at the thoughts, words

and actions in my past life which missed the mark and call them by their right names.

On one part of my paper I break the general heading of character defects into several categories which apply to me. Resentment, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance and sexual misbehavior head the list. Self-pity, envy, laziness and greed are included too. On another part of the paper I break my life into chunks which my memory can most carefully play over. For example age 1-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18-19, 20-21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 (my present year). Then I spend as much time as necessary in each time division remembering and writing down problems I had in each of the character defect areas.

I am careful to be specific, especially with the serious stuff. For example, not: Age 22, resentments against lots of people, but: Age 22, resentments: 1) my father — reason: his ability to cope with life which I resented because of the mess I was making of my life; 2) Sergeant So-and-So — reason: he exercised authority over me and I thought (egotistically) that I was a better, smarter person than he.

The classic argument against taking the fourth Step is that "it will depress me" or "it will upset my sobriety." I have heard this argument from many people, and, almost without exception, they are people who have never actually taken the Step. The overwhelming

consensus of those I know who have taken the Step is this: although the process involves facing some unpleasant truths about oneself, the end result is *release* from depression and *protection* of sobriety. From my own experience, I would echo this latter view.

I am not at all trying to suggest that one should enter into the fourth Step lightly. It is a serious matter. But using its seriousness as an excuse to avoid it is, I think, by far the most common and dangerous of the mistakes people make with the fourth Step.

I can easily be tipped off on the real precautions I need to take in tackling this inventory by AA members who have taken the Step. The

biggest obstacle is the frantic objections — usually hypothetical, vague and horrible — raised by the old “stinkin’ thinkin’” side of my imagination in a last-ditch attempt to prevent me from getting honest — really honest — with myself about myself.

If by leaning on God and taking advice from my friends in AA I can get through this Step, then for the first time I will begin to have live experience of the truth that in the facing of our faults is the beginning of release from bondage to them. I will understand in a new way the meaning of the saying, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

T. P. Jr., Hankins, N. Y.,

Step Discussion

Step Five Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Will I
Open
the Door
to the
Truth?

WHEN I first came into AA looking for help, after I'd been around about a month my sponsor suggested that I take the Fifth Step. The suggestion annoyed me. Of all the Steps, the fifth appealed to me least. So I told myself, "I'm doing okay with the other Steps, I'll get to the fifth — eventually." Two months later "eventually" had still not come, and I slipped. I did not plan to drink; I did not want to drink; I did not believe I would drink; but I drank. Fortunately I bounced right back to AA. I reluctantly took the Fifth Step, and by the grace of God I have been sober ever since.

I don't mean to imply that the Fifth Step *in itself* carries any guarantee of sobriety. But in my case it was a turning point. And I have since come to see it as a turning point with many newcomers and long-time slippers. The reason it is so important, I believe, is this: most of us coming up to it for the first time don't like it, are afraid of it, would very much like to avoid it. As a result we have a flat disagreement between our own way and the AA way. If we cling to our own way here, we can't help spoiling our

relationship with the rest of the Steps — especially Step Three. So there's no way we can say "no" to the Fifth Step without putting ourselves off the whole program. As chapter five of the Big Book puts it, "Many of us have tried to hold onto our old ideas, and the result was nil until we let go absolutely."

Admission is the process that Step Five is all about. Step One is about the same process. Since so much stress is placed on admission, it is useful to have a pretty solid idea of what exactly it does take to admit in the sense that the First and Fifth Steps suggest. The dictionary defines admit as: to grant entrance to, to receive, to acknowledge, to let in. Admission can be withheld, partially granted, or totally granted. For example, say I am an executive with office facilities. At the front door I have a guard stationed. In the outer office sits my secretary. I myself work in the inner office. If an undesirable character comes to the front door, the guard has instructions to keep him out. In such a case admission is withheld. If a rather unimportant client shows up he can wait in the outer office, but he may or may not get to see me in the inner office depending on my schedule. Getting into the outer office constitutes only partial admission. In a certain working sense it is no admission at all. That is to say, the client has not been satisfied unless he gets to see me. If my most important client arrives, I have

left instructions that he is to be shown directly into the inner office. In a certain philosophical sense this is not total admission because I probably would not discuss with this client my religious beliefs or the details of my sex life — but in a practical, working sense this client has gained total admission.

The Fifth Step is about total admission in this practical working sense; what is being let in is the exact nature of my wrongs — not a client I like, but one I must deal with if I am to ever come to terms with him. As long as he sat outside the front door or in the outer office his presence made my life miserable. He grew strong on my fear of him. The inner office that I let him into is the deepest, sincerest part of my consciousness. A partial or outer office admission won't do here. In other words, to say in a general way, "Oh, yes, I have some resentments" is not enough. Also the process of admission is *not* just to say, "I admit." It is to say "I admit" and then to open the door.

I am not alone when I let the exact nature of my wrongs into my inner office; I am accompanied by God as I understand Him and an understanding friend — preferably, I feel, someone in AA who has himself already taken the Fifth Step.

People often ask, "Why the third party? If I admit to God and myself, isn't that enough?" For people like us the answer is "no" for reasons that are not too hard to under-

stand. As an alcoholic I have a history of self-deception, so clearly I must have a "Third Party" present to get as clear a look at my problems as I need. The only reason that that perspective can't come from God alone is that my faith in His reality and nearness at this present moment is not deep enough. To illustrate: If I acknowledge to myself that in anger I have hit my young child in the face and hurt her, that is one thing. If I then sit alone in a room and say as sincerely as possible, "God I admit to you that I hit my child in the face while in a rage and hurt her" that has sort of the same feel. But if another

human being is listening to me say that in anger I struck and hurt the baby, I am more deeply affected. The truth about the exact nature of this particular wrong gets into the inner office only when the other human being helps me to open the door.

The purpose of admitting the exact nature of my wrongs is to get and keep enough freedom from them to let me live a sane, meaningful life. By doing it in the controlled setup provided by Step Five I get the strength to then put the problems aside and go about the daily business of functioning in society without taking one drink.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N.Y.

Step Discussion

Step Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

MAYBE UNWILLING, BUT READY

THE Sixth Step makes no sense at all except in the light of the preceding two Steps—Four and Five. Facing our load of psychic garbage and getting it out in the open is not an end in itself. It could be so only for one who enjoyed looking at his own filth. Rather, it is a means to the end of getting rid of enough of that garbage to enable us to endure sobriety in our worst moments and to derive progressively deeper joy from it at all other times.

If, as the Big Book says, "alcohol was but a symptom," and the root of the trouble is to be found in character defects such as selfishness, dishonesty and resentment, it follows that the issue is the removal of these defects. Two questions present themselves here: first, who does the removing, and, second, just how far do we have to go with the Step—obviously all sober peo-

ple in AA are not perfect people.

The answer to the first question is a shocker to some people because, according to the Sixth Step, God is to be the one who does the removing of character defects. I have heard some strong arguments against this point. A friend of mine with twenty years of sobriety insists, "God didn't remove my character defects—I did!" Naturally, this man is welcome to his opinion; if it works for him, fine. But the point is that it is *not* the opinion of the first 100 people who recovered in the Fellowship. Their opinion is clearly and strongly stated in the Sixth Step, and it is *not* that I remove my own defects alone, and it is *not* that God helps me to remove my defects. It is that *God* removes my defects.

What the Step requires of me is readiness. Readiness and willing-

ness are often confused in talking about this Step, and they are not the same. My AA sponsor often uses a comparison which I find useful in clarifying my thinking here. I may hate hospitals and be scared to death of the idea of surgery. But if my appendix is about to rupture, when the ambulance comes by, I get in and go. I don't want to go; I am unwilling to go; but I *am* ready. The Sixth Step works like that. It is possible to be ready to have these defects removed at many times when it is impossible to be willing.

Even readiness is a difficulty with some of the defects—usually the ones which are the most dangerous. For example, how many of us have had the attitude: God, you can take away all of my defects, but leave my love life to me; or, you can take away all of my defects, but I still have to lie in business to succeed. The way to handle such difficulties is not to justify them but to acknowledge them as blocks to

taking the Sixth Step and ask God for strength to become ready in these areas.

As to the question of how far do we go with the Sixth Step, in view of the fact that this is a program of spiritual growth rather than spiritual perfection, two words in the Step hold the key. They are "entirely" and "all." My experience with the Step has been that as long as I was pretty much ready to have God remove most of my defects, nothing happened. When I became *entirely* ready to have Him remove *all* of them, things changed in my life for the better. I did *not* become perfect. But I *did* get enough relief to enable me to get sober and stay sober. I think that, as much as any other single Step, the Sixth Step taken on a thoroughgoing and continuing basis makes the difference between just staying dry and getting the strength to sustain a happy and meaningful sobriety.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.



... God as we understand Him

I Hated the Thought of Surrender

Grudgingly she submitted to what couldn't be helped.

Then a curious change began in her

FOR over a year in AA I fulfilled the Third Step by submitting my life and my will to the care of God, as I understood Him.

It was a fighting year! Fears were still my most frequent companions. Doubts battered my thoughtful moments. Turmoil boiled inside the cheerful exterior.

Prayers were an uncomfortable ritual with me. I feared *not* to pray and was rebellious when I did. With clenched teeth I was saying to the strict God I feared, "OK! It's

your show anyway! You're going to make it end up your way — so — here I am. Show me what you want me to do and I'll try my damndest to do it. If I can't do what You ask of me, well, just remember I'm only human!" That was my "surrender" prayer most of the time.

But there were fleeting moments of faith and a desire to love. "Oh, God, teach me to love you. Enable me to place my life, my heart, my mind and my will, into your care. Help me to know You as You really

are; not as my fears and doubts paint you. Lord, I believe; Help Thou my unbelief!"

During that first year plus, I learned some self-control and self-discipline; something I'd never learned before. Many of my character defects grew smaller. I lost fifty pounds, and learned to laugh again. I believe I became a more interested and mature mother to my six children; a companion and understanding wife to my AA husband.

I got an outside job for the first time in eleven years. I grew emotionally and mentally. And unknown to me, I was maturing spiritually! At thirty-three I was tasting life in all its reality for the first time and I was staying sober — me, whose last drunk had lasted a year and a half; who had been hospitalized for drug addiction after six weeks in AA. It was a miracle!

Maybe He cared

Life was not all roast beef and gravy, but it was digestible. My spiritual awakening was breaking through. Maybe God had a heart after all! Maybe He did care about insignificant *me!*

But the doubts lashed over my mind and soul again and again, making me cringe and tremble, fight and rebel intermittently. Finally, at one AA discussion meeting I dropped the smiling facade and called them all a bunch of Pollyannas. I wasn't happy or peaceful inside and was sick of using self-hypnosis. I didn't want to drink but I finally had to

admit out loud that happiness was a farce. They were all just playing the part at the AA "Humble-Hour."

I'd always gone to seven or eight meetings a week, and during the next few weeks I let them all have it. I ventilated all the spiritual doubts and turmoil; the fears and resentments at God. I got *honest* in my own unusual way! And a strange thing happened.

Many of the older members knew exactly what I was going through and told me what was happening to me. They told me it was an important step in my spiritual growth for I was beginning to think for myself. I was becoming acquainted with God as I understood Him — not as my parents, pastor, brother, neighbor, husband or friends understood Him. Suddenly, I was questioning all of my childhood beliefs and faiths. Did I really believe these things for myself?

The house built on sand was crumbling and God was laying the foundation of my home on a rock.

Breaking through ritual

A few weeks later during my evening meditations, which were usually uncomfortable, I abandoned the old pattern of ritual and instead, on my knees, poured out my heart to God. I wanted to trust Him to take care of my children, my husband and myself for now and eternity. I knew there'd never be peace or freedom for me without that faith.

Sometime during that long night

I knew I'd been stubbornly submitting my life and will to God. I'd learned well the rules of my new life over the previous year, but I'd been a fearful student, terribly frightened of the Master!

Yet, strangely, I'd totally surrendered my alcoholic problem to a "different" God. The God who took my drinking problem was a loving, merciful and understanding God, for He'd given me freedom from the compulsion to drink.

Needless to say, I didn't believe in several Gods. For me there was only one God! So it had to be me who was out of focus.

What, I asked myself, was the real difference between submit and surrender? In Webster's *New World Dictionary* I found: to submit is to give in to authority or superior force (to submit to a conqueror); and, surrender commonly implies the giving up of something completely after striving to keep it.

After more than a year of sub-

mitting to a superior force, I let go of the old fears and rebellion and voluntarily surrendered myself, body, mind and soul, to a loving God.

There is one tremendous difference for me between submit and surrender: When I submitted to God I was still festering inside with ideas of how I wanted my life to be and the events that should take place. I was still first. But *I* was a prisoner of *me*.

Yes, there's still a superior force in my life, but now it is a gentle, sympathetic and loving God. He doesn't crack a whip or demand anything of me. I gratefully and lovingly give all that I am and have to Him. I've learned that if I give these gifts to Him grudgingly, then they're of no value. Only a gift given in love and gratitude is blessed to the giver and precious to the receiver.

At last, I'm acquainted with freedom and peace.

F. B., Orchard Lake, Mich.

Step Discussion

Step Seven: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

HUMILITY MAKES SENSE

PEOPLE often think that the Eleventh Step is the only one which suggests prayer; but this isn't so. The Seventh Step is a prayer Step. Although prayer is not mentioned as such in the Step, the word prayer is just a way of describing any attempt by man to converse with a Higher Power. One of the oldest forms of prayer is that in which he who prays asks something of God.

The Seventh Step is the shortest of the Twelve. Tucked away in the middle of the program, it seems to be much less demanding of time and attention than the "clean-up" Steps — Four, Five, Eight and Nine — which surround it.

Of all the Steps, perhaps the Seventh would be the easiest to pass over quickly and forget about. If you do, as I did at first, and then find yourself having trouble staying sober or dissatisfied with the quality of your sobriety — plagued by hos-

tility, fear, guilt, despondency, self-pity or the like, turn back to the Seventh Step and you may well find the channel for strength that you have been missing.

The shortness of the Step in no way implies that it lacks depth and bite. All of us alcoholics, whether we be theists, agnostics or atheists, share the common history of having either abused or failed to use this petitionary or asking type of prayer. So we are all starting from the same position — scratch.

The first word of the Step tells us how to do the asking. Humbly. Not only is humility something we have all lacked, most of us don't really know what it means or how to go about getting some of it.

First, a word about what humility is *not*, because the word is widely misunderstood and, as alcoholics, our lives may depend on changing some long-held misconceptions here.

Humility does *not* mean being servile or scraping, nor does it mean becoming a doormat.

With many of us the word "humble" conjures up images of the character Uriah Heap from Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, or some other equally spineless and loathsome fellow. Here is a strange situation. Dickens never intended to represent humility through Uriah Heap. He was trying to represent *hypocrisy* which is the very opposite of humility. There is, in reality, no conflict between humility and taking a strong stand against injustice or wrong — provided we are as quick to oppose the injustices and wrongs within ourselves as those without.

The Big Book says that "the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so." The fact that most of us when we first come to the program don't think we fit this category is the classic indication that we do fit it. *Egotism is unable to see itself*; humility, its opposite, is the ability to see one's true position in the universe. It is the ability to see one's good points without getting puffed up, and it is the blessed ability to see one's shortcomings without becoming depressed, or bugged.

Humility for the alcoholic begins with admission and acceptance of the First Step. It develops in the decision made in the Third Step that God's will is to come first in our

lives — even and especially when we don't much want it to. It bears fruit in action in the inventory and admission of wrongs in the Fourth and Fifth Steps. Why is the Fifth Step fought by those of us who come into AA with cast-iron egos? Because it is humbling in the true sense of the word.

The first six Steps of the program, worked at carefully and honestly, bring us to a point where we can do what before, as alcoholics, we could not, no matter what our religious persuasions and training — *humbly* ask God to remove our shortcomings.

This is how we begin to be relieved of dishonesty, self-will, resentment and the rest. We ask God to remove them. We don't ask once, but again and again as often as we see shortcomings in ourselves and have the grace to remember the Seventh Step.

This Step has worked in two different stages in my life on the program: first in follow-up to the Fourth and Fifth Steps and in preparation for setting out to make restitution for past wrongs, and second, as part of a regular daily program of dealing with character defects as they come up. As I have been able to remember it, it has made life easier and happier by working against my natural tendency to drift back into old patterns of thinking and acting which got me into so much trouble before.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Step Discussion

Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

NOT

UNDER

THE RUG

IN approaching Step Eight for the first time, those of us who tend to fight or question various of the Steps until we become convinced they are vital to our sobriety, need reassuring on several points. We may be tempted to tell ourselves that we have done enough house-cleaning in the Fourth and Fifth Steps. If we are truthful though, we will have to admit that the biggest obstacle to our taking this Step is that we are *afraid* to face the unpleasant aspects of our past, especially where we have been at fault.

The first part of the Eighth Step is neither difficult to understand nor hard to go through with. As a matter of fact, if we have written out

our Fourth Step inventory, we may already have the list of persons we have harmed. However, becoming willing to make amends to them all is another matter. To make amends means to mend or repair, in this case damaged relationships with people, organizations and institutions we have wronged.

This Eighth Step is to our relations with others what the Fourth was to our relations with ourselves. And obviously the Ninth and Fifth Steps are similarly related to one another. When I went through with the Fourth Step inventory for the first time, it was with the understanding that I would move on to the Fifth Step as soon as possible. Clearly, I do well to approach this "became willing" part of the Eighth Step with the idea that it feeds directly into the action in Step Nine of going out and making such amends as I can.

Here honesty becomes all important. The quickest way for me to put myself in bad relationship with the Step is to kid myself that I am willing to make an amend if I am

not really completely ready. The best method I know of for dealing with unwillingness is this: 1) face it honestly, 2) remember that I have agreed to "go to any lengths to gain victory over alcohol" and 3) ask God to make me willing. This approach works — maybe not in five minutes — but if persisted in, it does work.

Then the question arises of just what constitutes an amend. Many of us find that the old rationalization, "If I stay sober, that's amends enough to those I have hurt," just doesn't work. We have to be willing to go further. Some of the most common amends have to do with: people we owe money; wives, parents, children, relatives and friends we have mistreated; employers, employees and business associates we have harmed; people with whom we have become involved morally in an injurious manner.

This list is only a partial one, but it gives a pretty good general idea of the different types of messes we are dealing with. It is impossible to lay down general rules for handling these various situations. For me, there is no substitute for sitting down with my sponsor and thrashing out each individual case, keeping in mind the intention to do whatever turns out to be necessary to thoroughly and honestly go through with the Step.

In the case of money amends, I didn't have enough money to make them all good at once, but a willing-

ness to pay when and as I could, backed up by small monthly installments, did wonders in putting matters right. In the case of family members I had wronged, a sincere apology was often amend enough, although I sometimes found it difficult to become willing to go even this far.

My natural inclination with unpleasant life situations or soured personal relationships is to sweep them under the rug, look the other way, justify myself and hope they will resolve themselves in time. It seems to be a plausible enough approach but, unfortunately, it never worked very well. These wrongs refused to stay forgotten, didn't solve themselves, and even thrived on this treatment to the extent that they drove me back to the first drink again and again.

Facing the people I had hurt and the difficulties I had created seemed impossible, but those who had gone before me on the road to recovery in AA assured me that not only was this method possible but, if followed through, it produced freedom from the guilt, fear, self-pity, resentment and depression which these situations had produced in my life.

I gained faith in the principle which the Eighth Step is about, through experience. When I went through with the process, it did produce the results my sponsor and AA friends said it would.

I'm a guy who used to make god out of what others thought of me.

This Step helped free me from a slavish dependence on other people's opinions. It helped teach me the value of placing principles before personalities in my life. It is not a Step that I feel I *have taken*. What I have made is a beginning. As it says in Chapter Five of the Big Book, "We are not saints." I still have character defects, and I still hurt other people (though not as often or seriously as before AA). Each time I become aware of an amend I owe, there is another chance to become willing with God's help to put the principles of

the AA program before my fear of personalities (mine or anyone else's).

The wonderful thing about growth on the program is that each time I make a right decision in the area of becoming willing to make an amend it makes the next one a little easier to make. And strangely, I find that the more willing I become to admit it when I *am* wrong, the less often am I in the position of having to make such an admission. Sure I am still wrong, but only sometimes now — not all the time as I used to be.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

The Power IS

*An argument
for faith,
based on
the truth
of another
invisible,
impalpable
force*

MOST of us are able to go through life without ever giving more than a casual thought to the force of gravitation. We realize that when we tip over a ladder, gravitation is what makes us fall. We have heard that Sir Isaac Newton discovered how it works by watching an apple drop out of a tree. But it doesn't seem to us a question of any great practical interest, unless we happen to be in the business of launching rockets to the moon.

But the fact is that gravitation is probably the most important single characteristic of the physical universe that makes it possible for us to exist at all. Without gravitation, there would be no sun, and therefore no light and no warmth to generate life. Without gravitation, the Earth on which we live would not exist. And if it *did* exist, it would have no water and no air, because gravitation is what holds the sea in place, and causes water to flow down into it from the hills, and keeps the atmosphere above it so that we can breathe, and makes the

rain fall to renew the springs and rivers that refresh the sea.

Without gravitation, there would be no day, no night, no seasons, and no ground to walk on so that we could enjoy them. There would be nothing anywhere in the universe except a formless collection of elemental particles, moving aimlessly in space or simply hanging there, motionless and inert. The universe would be the way it was in the beginning, according to the Book of Genesis, when "the Earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

Now, the strange thing about gravitation is that we cannot see it, we cannot hear it, or taste it, or touch it, or experience it with any of our senses. The only way we know that gravitation exists at all is by its effects on matter, including ourselves. We know that the power which we call gravitation must exist, because otherwise we could not be sitting here with our feet on a solid floor. We feel the weight of our bodies under us, but only because gravitation holds us fixed in our chairs, drawing us downward, toward the center of the Earth.

The one thing we know for sure about the way gravitation works is that it behaves like a form of radiant energy, such as light. That is, its power diminishes with distance at a constant rate, which is in proportion to the square of the distance. But there is no point in the universe where its influence ceases.

If there were only two small particles of matter in the whole universe, separated by billions of light years, they would be drawn toward one another at a constantly increasing rate of acceleration, until eventually they would come together.

You can pass another object in front of a light, as the moon passes in front of the sun in an eclipse, and the light is cut off. But nothing interrupts the effect of gravitation. In an eclipse, the sun still attracts the Earth as if the moon were not there. No matter where you are in the universe, you are subject at all times to the attraction of the Earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, and every other material body, according to its size and its distance.

Another peculiar thing about gravitation is that it seems to act instantaneously, regardless of the distance. It takes light $8\frac{1}{3}$ minutes to travel from the sun to the Earth; but so far as we can tell, it takes no time at all for the sun and the Earth to exert their mutual attraction upon each other. The nature of gravitation is such that it does not have to be generated and has no apparent source. Every particle of matter in the universe is linked to every other particle of the same mass by the same attraction, and has been — so far as we know — since the universe began, and will be — so far as we know — until the end of time.

The point that I am trying to

make is that we really don't know anything specific about gravitation, except that it exists, that it binds everything material in the universe together, and that it is physically responsible for all of the order, the infinite variety, and the endless activity that we see within ourselves and everywhere around us. It is an all-embracing cosmic principle, above and beyond any other physical force in the universe. Yet how it works, or why, is a fact that we can only accept — we cannot explain it. A number of excellent physicists have been trying to figure out the basic mechanics of gravitation for quite a long time, and so far they haven't succeeded. On the other hand, I have never heard of a scientist, a philosopher, a theologian, or even a beatnik who

doubted that gravitation exists. I have never heard of a person who felt oppressed by it, or rebelled against it, or made light of it as an idle superstition. We have no qualms about believing that gravitation is a power greater than ourselves; we do not hesitate to trust our lives to it, imperfect as our understanding of it is. We accept the power of gravitation as a universal law of nature; we obey it because we have no choice, and we use it to augment our own influence over the elemental forces and the cosmic distances in space.

Gravitation is not the only mysterious power in the universe. Another is the unique moral force which guides human beings in their search for understanding of the world and their place in it. In one form or

another, this particular power has been recognized almost since the beginning of mankind. We know that we have it in ourselves, whether we use it or not. We know that it has brought us from a humble place among the creatures of the Earth to a position in which we can alter and control the shape of the world.

We associate this power with God, because we know that it comes from a source outside ourselves — that we did not create it anymore than we create life when we pass on our form and our vitality to another generation — that we do not even direct it as we direct so many other natural forces, but that it directs us. It is a power which we cannot see or hear or taste or touch with any of our senses. We only perceive it from its effects, as we perceive the power

of gravitation in the orderly arrangement of the stars and planets, and their predictable motions. The difference is that the force of gravitation acts only on our bodies whereas this other power acts mainly on our minds and our emotions.

There is another difference. We cannot ignore or resist the force of gravitation. But with this moral power, we have been granted the freedom to deny it; if we choose to we can refuse to admit that it exists; we can even turn against it and spend our lives in the futile effort to convince ourselves and others that this power has no influence over us.

This is the all-pervading force which the Second Step refers to, when it says we "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves

could restore us to sanity."

I have heard a great many arguments about the accuracy or the meaning of the word "sanity" in this connection. The founders of AA chose this term because they felt that the sickness which they had experienced while they were drinking had indeed been a kind of insanity, and no other word seemed to them to express the sort of mental and emotional relief that came to them when the compulsion to drink was removed.

But the choice of a word to describe the feeling of sobriety is not the important element in Step Two. The important part is the recognition that there *is* a Power greater than ourselves that influences our lives. In fact, it seems to me almost a mark of mental obstinacy — of something like insanity, if you will — when a person is unable to concede that there can be any power in the universe greater than himself, or greater than the mechanical forces which he uses. Marvelous as our intellectual gifts are, there are many processes in nature which we cannot control by our will alone, including processes within ourselves.

So it is the first sign of returning sanity — of mental clarity and health — simply to admit that there may be such a Power which we can call upon for help as we would call upon the power of gravitation for help in traveling to the moon.

What the name of the Power is doesn't matter so much. Like "san-

ity," the name is only a word which we use to identify the fact. It happens that the name which most people use to identify this Power is God. My own feeling has always been that it is simpler to call the Power God than it is to invent some complicated term to describe an agency which we cannot fully understand anyhow. Others may understand this Power better by some other name.

Of course we cannot fully understand God, anymore than we can fully understand gravitation or any other power or process which is greater than ourselves and of which we are only a limited part. People who have been in combat know that they never understand exactly what is happening around them or how the battle is going. They only understand what they have to do, and whether they are able to do it or not.

So the Third Step, when it says we "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*," does not mean that we have to know exactly what God is and how to describe His power in scientific terms, before we can place our lives in His care. We only have to understand that there *is* a Power greater than ourselves, known as God, and that this Power can help us to accomplish things which we have been unable to accomplish on our own.

The way we know that is by the evidence of what a reliance on this

Power has done for others, who had the same problem that we have. We recognize the Power by its effects, as we do in the case of gravitation. That is all the understanding we need in order to make the decision.

In fact, that is all the understanding we may ever have of God — but it is enough.

God does not ask us to understand Him fully, as we understand an intimate friend, or a husband, or a son, or a father. He only asks that we recognize and trust the purpose which He has for us. And He has already given *us* the power to recognize *His* power and purpose, if we will make the decision to follow it.

Why is it that everybody seems to take the power of gravitation for granted, but so many people — and especially alcoholics — seem to feel that it is an intolerable imposition on them to ask that they take the Power of God for granted in the same way?

In other words, why do we find it so easy to believe in gravitation — which we cannot see — and often find it so hard to believe in God, whom we cannot see either?

Because it would seem to me that the effect of God's power is at least as evident as the effect of gravitation.

G. P. W., San Antonio, Tex.

The Conniver's Prayer



*Herewith a how-to document that ought to be
of no use to anybody*

MEMO TO GOD: I've been around quite a while, as You know (that is, You know *if You exist*), and so far we haven't bothered each other. If it is true that You are willing to help people, I think we can make a deal. Frankly, I think it would be more worthwhile for You to do this than keep track of falling sparrows, but don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to tell You your business. However, if You can stand just one suggestion, why don't You come to us humans with some kind of deal, since You are supposed to hold the high cards?

According to one school of thought, You know everything that goes on. If that is so, You may skip this part. However, with all the people and organized churches clamoring for your attention, I am not banking on your being up-to-date on my affairs, so let me tell

You. Someone got me into AA several weeks ago. Physically I feel better. Mentally I am coming back.

Just yesterday I swung a pretty good deal that I don't even have to tell my partner about, so You can understand that I'm mighty grateful. As You can understand, I feel that this AA may have something.

Now I find that God is mentioned many more times than alcohol in the Twelve Steps. It came as a shock to learn this, inasmuch as the secretary always read aloud the thing that says, "Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety." Just how *You* got involved in drying out drunks is beyond me, but I was told to pray, so here I am.

I've been a successful businessman all my adult life, as *You* must well know. Nice home. Good address. Good clubs. Children in the

best schools. Eldest daughter married into real class. Plan, perfect, perform; that's how I get things done. Of course, I'm in hock up to my clavicle because of the booze, but I'm starting to click again and it won't be long before I'm out of the red. I say this simply because I can't see an omnipotent God such as Yourself (if You exist, that is) running the entire Earth without a good understanding of basic economics. Things are loused up in places like India and the Ukraine, but that's because those people don't understand the laws of economics the way You and I do.

Give and get, and get more than you give. That's the basic law if there is to be a profit, so let's not kid ourselves about getting by giving away. That lays the groundwork for what I really want to say, God, so please pay attention as I am now getting down to the action.

I promise to attend two or three AA meetings a week. In return, I expect an equal number of profit-producing business appointments. A hundred to a hundred-fifty good business deals a year will put me in clover, and I'm willing to share the green stuff. A buck in the basket at every meeting so long as You hold up your end of the bargain. That's a promise.

Second (and I hope You're paying attention) I will speak at outgoing meetings on the same basis. You send me an extra deal a week and I'll speak at a meeting a week.

No strings attached; one for one. And I further promise to give credit where credit is due—namely, to *You!* I am not a hog, no matter what my competitors say.

Third, if You stick to this bargain for three months, I will send each of my kids a framed copy of the Lord's Prayer. This is a clear bonus for You, God.

Fourth, if there are Twelfth Step calls to be made, You and I can make a real deal. If You see to it that I am tagged to call on people who are prospective customers, I will follow through and sponsor them better than anyone else ever did or could. (I say this in all modesty, because You know that when I make up my mind to do something, I really organize it and follow through like an all-star. Plan, perfect, perform—that's me, God!)

Fifth and last, God, if I have a slip, let's keep it just between us. There's no need to get a lot of people upset, and I may have a slip next Tuesday night at the Association meeting, where it would look strange if I didn't have one little drink. But remember, *that's between us.*

Well, I guess that winds up the whole ball of string for now, God. You keep your end of the bargain, and I'll keep mine.

And one thing I don't want You to forget under any circumstances, God. If You don't exist, the whole deal is off.

B. R., Anonymous

The Twelfth Step

Call That Didn't Work

"JACK, don't we know a Chris?" It sounded like one of those no-answer-required questions that my wife uses to punctuate her newspaper reading. But the name had intruded on my comic strip, and I asked, "Does it give his address?"

"Yes, here it is, it's 124 Main."

"Oh yeah, that's where I went last Monday, why?"

"He killed himself last night. . . ."

It was about midnight the week before. The bedside phone buzzed me from sleep. "Alcoholics Anonymous?" the desperate voice of a sick alcoholic shocked me wide awake. "I'd like to talk to someone," he said. "That is if it's not too much trouble, it's late, I thought maybe . . ." He made the usual feeble protests to salve his pride, then gave me his name and address.

"Come right in, Chris is in the kitchen," a shapely but somewhat shopworn blonde of about thirty, greeted me. "The house is a mess, I haven't got around . . ."

"Hate to bother you," Chris muttered as I walked into the kitchen. "Damn it, I gotta do something, I'm sick." The glass in his shaking hand added links to the chains of circles on the wet table top. "I couldn't be an alcoholic. Could I?"

I answered, "You'll have to decide that yourself. My opinion wouldn't mean anything. But if you're having trouble with your drinking, I wish you would try our

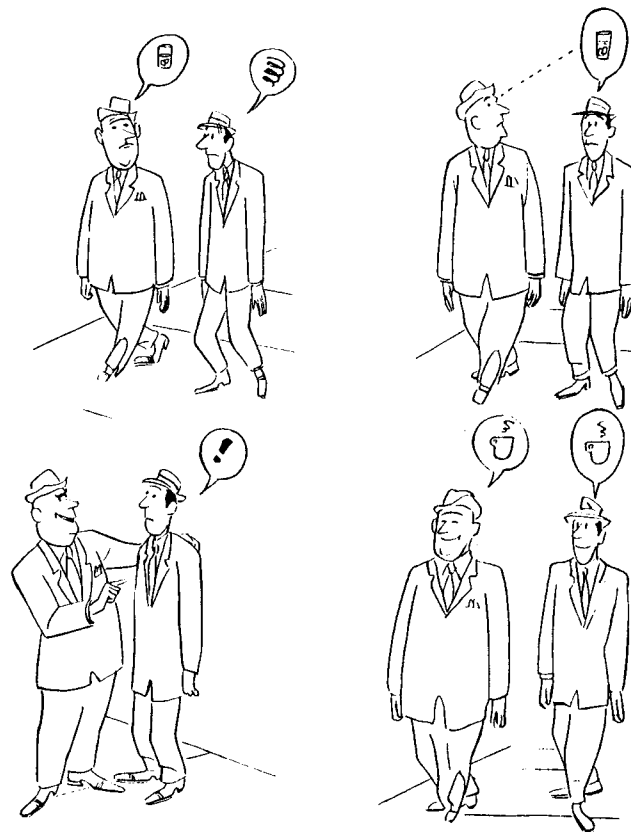
help. You see Chris, I drank for about thirty-five years and have been sober in AA for nearly seven. The length of time or the amount you drink doesn't matter, it's what drinking *does* to you that counts."

"Now, Honey," cut in Chris's wife, who had been sipping her drink while half listening to us, "if you'll just listen to me and use some of that willpower you've got. Just cut

down on your drinking like I do and everything will be just like it used to be. Honey, you don't need any help from anybody. . . ."

My attempts to contact Chris during the week had failed. As I sat wondering what I might have done and what might have been, I heard my wife's voice, reading, "while despondent over ill health."

R. G., Ft. Collins, Colo.



Step Discussion

Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Amends are rough on the ego?

Yes, indeed!

THIS is the Step in which we do our best to put right past wrongs. Before getting into any of my own ideas and experiences, I'd like to touch briefly on some points the Big Book makes about the Step, which have been useful to me. A.) We don't recover and then take the Ninth Step. We take the Step in order that we might recover. B.) There is more danger in waiting too long to take it than there is in taking it too soon. The early members of AA didn't wait ten months or three years before they started making amends. Dr. Bob spent the first day of his sobriety personally seeing his patients and making the very difficult amends an alcoholic physician would have to make. C.) The purpose of the Ninth Step is to clean our side of the street. We don't criticize or take the other man's in-

ventory. D.) The amend in the situation involving wrong on both sides is as important for us to make as the one in which we are totally wrong.

The Ninth Step is a spiritual process but, in some respects, it is a lot like getting in condition to play a sport or having an infection drained. The end result of each process is a healing or strengthening, and in each case we have to sit still for a controlled, limited amount of pain before we can enjoy the result. Before getting into serious Ninth Step work it is well to understand something of the results of this process and the difficulties. The results are these: peace of mind; the ability to look the world in the eye and weather life's storms one day at a time — and sobriety.

Now, the difficulties:

Interestingly, all that suffers in

this process is the ego, my over-sensitive little image of me — nothing else. The statement, "Boy, that Ninth Step sure is tough!" is only a half truth. It is tough on the ego, and is intended to be so. All of us as alcoholics are too wrapped up in petty self-concern. Possibly the basic purpose of the Twelve Steps is to reduce this excessive *egocentricity*. So the Ninth Step is not unique; it is just perhaps a bit more obvious than some of the others in its action of assaulting and reducing this harmful false self-absorption. When it comes to the real self, though, this Step is the opposite of rough. It releases us from the prison of our false selves and gives us the freedom to get sober, get sane, get closer to God, and get interested in trying to help someone besides ourselves.

Discretion is necessary in approaching certain touchy amend situations, but this is a razor's edge because it can so easily degenerate into an excuse for procrastination. Since there are no pat formulas, the advice of a sponsor or another experienced AA friend in the confusing situation is usually the best way to a good solution.

The help of my sponsor and other AA friends has meant more to me on the Ninth Step than any other Step. When I became willing to make amends, I had some very definite ideas as to how I should go about it. My ideas seemed quite plausible to me. In each case, I had thought them out carefully. Yet,

often my ideas were wrong. Had I stuck to them, I might still be in deep trouble. One of these amends was a money amend. Under false pretenses, I had taken several hundred dollars from an employer. My idea was to send the employer an elaborate letter of apology. I did, and he sent me a short reply indicating his willingness to accept monthly installments of eighteen dollars as an alternative to prosecuting me. My ego's tail feathers were ruffled by such a cold, unfeeling answer. He didn't *understand* the extenuating circumstances, the stringency of my present financial position. Nevertheless, I started to pay. Then and only then did relief come from the guilt, confusion and resentment this situation had given birth to.

Of all the amends I owed when I first came into the program, in only one case did I really *want* to make the amend. The people involved had been injured by my selfishness and phoniness. As soon as I started to get on my feet in the program, I wanted in the worst way to contact them somehow and explain away my actions on the basis of my "disease." When I discussed the matter with my sponsor, he made two points. First, because of the nature of the difficulty, there was no way I could re-enter these people's lives without causing them further pain and, second, the basis of my urge to get in touch with them was not so much a desire to put right past wrongs as it was that my ego was

hurting because I supposed these people (quite naturally) thought me a first-class heel for the way I had acted, and I wanted them to think well of me. What my sponsor said went down hard, but it was true. In facing this truth, though, I found relief from the pain of this situation. I also learned that even where direct amends are not in order, very effective indirect amends can be made by praying for the people involved and

remaining open to make further amends if circumstances should ever permit.

As one whose life before AA was subject to periodic depressive spells and who still has to watch this tendency in himself, I am deeply grateful for the relief, comfort and strength which have come into my life as a result of working with the Ninth Step.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Step Discussion

Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Homing Device for the Inner Man

*The author suggests taking this "continuing"
Step in three ways*

THE Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Steps are often referred to as the maintenance Steps. The first nine Steps give us a tremendous initial drive in the direction of sobriety, sanity, rebirth into a constructive, meaningful way of life. That initial drive, wonderful as it is, would be wasted if there were not available to us the means to sustain it, develop it, bring to it, one day at a time, a degree of permanence which neither any external circumstances of life nor any mood swings from within will destroy.

From the beginning of my life in AA, I have had what I now regard as a healthy fear of drifting away from or petering out on the program. One of the oldest and most deep-seated patterns in my life before AA was that of starting proj-

ects with a burst of enthusiasm, having the initial enthusiasm eroded by personality conflicts, the necessity of doing some hard work without the prospect of lots of cheers, glory or money, or just loss of interest for no particular reason that I could put my finger on.

I drifted away from or abandoned the project. I did this with my schooling, every job I ever held, the profession I was training for, several hobbies, and every close personal relationship I had. I saw from my earliest days in AA that my life and sanity depended on not repeating that pattern in my practice of the spiritual principles of this program. The question was how not to drift, and the answer for me has been a rigorous attempt to practice these maintenance Steps in all the

affairs of my life on a daily basis.

The Tenth Step has been especially helpful to me. One of my oldest friends in AA compares this Step to the homing device on a torpedo which makes necessary adjustments while the torpedo is heading for the target, to keep it on a true course. Without the aid of the homing device, the torpedo can, as a result of the most minor miscalculation, completely miss the target. Without the aid of continued personal inventory and adherence to the principle of prompt admission of my wrongs — major and minor — I can too easily drift into a state where, because I have deprived myself of the necessary spiritual protection, it becomes possible for me to pick up the first drink directly or fall into a state of anxiety, depression, hostility or moral confusion which will lead me to pick up the drink. I am not theorizing. I have been in that state, have picked up the drink, and have suffered the consequences. I am one of the lucky ones; I got back. I have many friends who didn't. I think my chances of maintaining sobriety would drop away to nothing if I were denied the privilege of practicing the Tenth Step. Fortunately, the only one who has the power to deny me that privilege is myself.

My practice of the Tenth Step falls onto three levels. First, since the Step talks about continuing to take inventory, I take that to mean:

retake the Fourth and Fifth Steps at regular intervals. This idea I picked up from my sponsor and some other AA friends. The interval they suggested was once a month. The results of repeated Fourth and Fifth Step inventories taken over a period of twenty-seven months in AA have been astounding to me. What I started out doing rather dutifully and unenthusiastically has become a trusted means to increased peace of mind and a weapon against a depressive tendency which had for years exerted a harmful control over my life.

Only recently have I tried to explain what I have well known to work for me for some months now. Explanation seems necessary because this is the only practice in the Twelve Steps I am involved in which is not specifically recommended in the Big Book. The explanation is this: approaching the Fourth and Fifth Steps on a one-shot basis would make sense if no further character defect manifestations occurred later and if this were not a program of growth in which material out of the past came into clearer focus as one continued to awaken spiritually. However, my experience has been that plenty of defects are still in the picture, and I am benefited by facing these in the presence of God and another human being on a regular basis. Also, as what I deeply believe to be the beginning of a real spiritual awakening proceeds, confusion

about my past actions clears and old faults come into clearer focus. As my life in AA goes on, it becomes increasingly important to discuss in these retakings of the Fourth and Fifth new insights which the program continues to give into old, unresolved problems and defects.

The second level on which I work the Tenth Step is in the daily making of a brief mental inventory of my shortcomings during the previous twenty-four hours. I do this during my quiet time in the morning. I don't make a big deal out of



it, and I don't bug myself about it. It takes about two minutes. Having completed it, I try to turn it over to God and go about my daily business. Over a period of time, this short, simple process, repeated faithfully, has helped me a great deal. It has tended to give me a clearer picture of my inner, psychic geography than I have ever had before.

Specifically, it keeps me far more aware of danger spots within myself such as: what people or situations tend to trigger resentment; when am I most likely to fall into self-pity, dishonesty or the like; where does my will come into conflict with

the AA way of doing things. I repeat, this knowledge and these insights do not bug me anymore than it bugs me to see a "detour" or "slow winding road ahead" sign on an unfamiliar road. To pull my car off the road and burst into tears or go into a depression at the sight of such a sign would be an insane reaction because it would not help me get where I am heading. To be thankful for the sign and proceed, heeding its warning, makes my journey much easier than it would have been had not the sign been there. The daily spot inventory provides the road signs for this twenty-four hours' journey on the program.

The third level of practice on the Tenth Step is one in which I am just a beginner and can't communicate too well, but I do want to mention it because it holds out a prospect full of hope. This is the process of, without picking or fault-finding, watching oneself from moment to moment throughout the day. Uncritical self-observation, as I am able to practice it, makes it possible to live in the present moment (the only moment I ever really have), and acts against my natural tendency to waste energy projecting into the future and daydreaming about the past.

What I have written here is only a scratch on the surface of the Tenth Step. This Step has great depth of healing power. It is a real sanity-builder.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Around AA

Items of AA information and experience

Sharing on The Long Wire: 5-way Telephone Meeting

This is a story of one man's dream to move AA communication—sharing of strength, hope and experience—up a notch by using the long-distance telephone. And it's a story of cooperation among large and small groups, in an historic U.S. first: a simultaneous meeting of five AA groups in two states by telephone hook-up.

Bob H. of the North Hollywood Group tried out his idea for intergroup telephone meetings early in 1966 when he arranged with the telephone company to connect the Jackson, Wyoming, and the Burbank, Calif. groups for an hour and forty minutes at a total cost of \$52.64 for tolls and special equipment.

Then, on October 30, a 5-group synchronized telephone meeting took place. Bob had worked out some of the bugs. A Jackson friend had contributed comments on procedures which helped clear up some difficulties with the first trial.

Frank F. of AA's San Fernando Central Office takes up the story:

Groups participating in this historic event were Van Nuys, Calif., Chino State Prison (36 miles east of Los Angeles), Jackson Hole, Lander and Evanston, Wyoming. Speakers from each group participated, moderated by Joe P. of Van Nuys.

The purpose of this meeting, according to Bob H. who had the original idea,

was to share with smaller, out-of-the-way groups where two or three, or six of ten members were the rule rather than the exception.

More Variety

Many of these smaller groups have never had an outside speaker, and this new method, it is hoped, can bring them the variety of AA that larger, metropolitan groups experience every day.

The meeting, scheduled to start at 7:00 P.M. got under way at 7:20 P.M. due to unexpected difficulties encountered with telephone equipment and lines used for this new type of intercity telephonic hook-up.

Each group opened its own meeting its own way before the telephone exchange began. Then Jackson Hole started a round robin with ten minutes of AA talk from their members, followed by ten minutes each from Lander and Evanston. Seven members from these three groups participated.

Chino Prison, a minimum-security institution, came in next with a talk about the facility, its origin, history and aims, ably given by an inmate member of their AA group.

Van Nuys, with some two hundred members in attendance, finished the "pitch" part of the program with a very newcomer who told all our stories in relating her gratitude for a new way of life after a hopeless existence some 16 months ago.

Highlight of the entire evening's pro-

gram, surely, was the singing of the "Lord's Prayer" by an all-male chorus of some fifty voices, all members of the Chino Prison AA group!

The meeting ended with an explanation of how this telephonic inter-group, inter-state communication came about, the heartbreaks in connection with the planning, the dead-ends met during meeting after meeting with sympathetic telephone officials whose hands were, nonetheless, tied with protocol and precedent.

Not Costly

"Despite what anyone might think," said Bob H., "this kind of thing can be put on at very reasonable cost. This meeting tonight will cost in the neighborhood of \$75.00, but a two-group meeting, for one hour, can be held for around \$25.00 with any group anywhere in the United States on a Sunday night after 8:00 P.M."

Bob H. warned, however, "If you are thinking of doing something like this, please, please, get in touch with me at the San Fernando Valley Central Office, 14525 Valerio Street, Van Nuys, Calif., before you go too far. I can and will gladly give any group all the shortcuts I learned after two years of trial and error. I can tell them whom to see and what to ask about and for, and how..."

All groups expressed warm praise for this, the first 5-way telephone AA meeting. We who met were indeed first-nighters.

Thus ends Frank's review of the California-Wyoming effort, but not the story of multi-group telephone hook-ups. In fact, the Westerners may have been scooped by the Mayfair, England group.

P.O. Box 4-5-9, the former *AA Exchange Bulletin* in its December, 1966 issue quoted Joseph of the Mayfair group:

"We set up a telephone conference call meeting by having eight phones hooked up in one circuit, and so far have had five marvelous meetings. The first was recorded and the tape is now on its way to G.S.O. It was as far as we know the first here; how about over there?"

This looks like the beginning of a trend, if the telephone companies of the world can bear with us. The idea of bringing "outside speakers" to smaller or isolated groups, with much of the expense born by the larger metropolitan groups—Bob H.'s idea from the start—seems an especially good way of sharing AA.

— The Editors



AA ON THE LOCAL

A Twelfth Step session in the cab of the locomotive

AFTER a late-shift workday in the city room of an English-language daily near Times Square, I boarded the 1:42 A.M. after-theater train for suburbia.

"Well," I thought wearily, "I'm sober but that's about as far as it goes." I deployed my topcoat and morning paper strategically on the mildew-green upholstery of my seat, hoping I would not be joined by a too-affable drunk homebound from "Hello, Dolly!" and a few leisurely quickies at The Stage Door.

Down the aisle strode Henry Z.,

whom I last had seen on the perimeter of an AA open meeting about two years before. I knew he was a locomotive engineer, and also that he had been kicking the program around since we both approached AA ten years ago. He was in uniform and carried a little bag; I at once realized he was headed up forward to run this train out tonight. Henry spotted me and landed a trip-hammer blow on my back.

"Johnny, of all people! Come on up to the cab and keep me company." I had never before ridden in a locomotive and so I willingly followed him to the head of the three-car train.

Henry, a gracious host, hung my coat on a peg and drew shut the anti-glare shade behind us. We lit

cigarettes. Responding to the conductor's buzz, Henry pressed down on the throttle and we were outward bound. I noticed Henry needed a shave, and was almost exaggerating his attention to his responsibilities.

As we moved along, Henry courteously sought to school me in the intricacies of tower-controlled speed and switching, and in the language of the red and amber signal lights. Conscientiously, he tested his electric and dynamic braking system, and considerably dimmed his headlights when inbound trains approached.

Light burst upon us from behind as the conductor slid aside the cab door, delivered a fresh copy of *The Daily News* to the skipper and, following routine, reminded him of the stops we were to make and of those we were to skip. Henry negotiated the first stop unimpeachably. We picked up speed and then, hesitantly and as if talking to himself, he asked, "Let's see now, what's our next stop?"

"Dunham," I murmured, as though testing my own recollection. We stopped there, and then, as we flashed past Danvers, Henry himself first touched on The Subject.

"Of course, John," he began, dutifully peering straight ahead, "I know I'm an alcoholic but, well, you see, it's like this: the dispatchers have me on this fill-in routine. I never know when I'll be assigned to a run. I can't call my time my own.

I live all alone in a room and it gets pretty lonely." He paused while we both watched a sedan trying to outdistance us on the parkway.

"I'm still paying eighty-five a week alimony," Henry went on. "My seventeen-year-old boy hadn't looked me up for a year but a while ago he called and wanted to know how much I was going to contribute to his college expenses. When unfair things like that pop up I do a slow burn. And then I go out and have a few. But it's no good, Johnny. I know I should be going to meetings but — well, *you* know how it is."

Henry made a stop at Salem. He wasn't supposed to. No one got on or off. We both pretended it hadn't happened, and moved on.

I told my friend that I *did* know how it was. It had been much that way for *me* a decade earlier. I hadn't wanted it to be that way for me any longer and so I had kept doing what the AA bleeding deacons suggested, and "things" got better.

Our pilot's reflexes, conditioned by years of repetition, compensated for his hand tremors and fuzzy thinking. Fascinated, I watched him weave us safely through mazes of switches to one stop after another and, finally, to the end of the line, as we kept up talk about alcoholism and AA.

My reflexes had similarly been conditioned by years of repetition — by the reiterations of AA — the constant hearing of experiences of

other alcoholics. These I had gladly had hammered into my thinking processes at hundreds of meetings. Now, between stops, I tried to give to Henry what had been given to me.

The conductor joined us as we

alighted at the end of the run. I said thanks and good night.

“Good night,” Henry said, “and thanks, John, for getting me back on the track.” The conductor seemed a little startled.

J. W. S., White Plains, N. Y.

Step Discussion

Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Pivot for Change

EITHER this God business in AA is nothing or it is the ultimate first thing in my life on the AA program.

If it is *nothing*, then 350,000 sane, recovered alcoholics are kidding themselves, this Fellowship is a farce, and we should all put down this magazine at once and concern ourselves with something more real.

But if my relationship with God is the pivotal point in my recovery, the Eleventh Step becomes for me an "indispensable essential."

I find it refreshing to break the question down into the foregoing clear-cut alternatives. For years my approach to the God question was so involved that it was of no use in the clutch. I absorbed, better than I knew, the attitude so commonplace today that God is included in a group of secondary values which, though good enough in their place, should never be allowed to interfere with the primary values of life —

an education, romance, fulfilling one's destiny in the professional or business world, getting some enjoyment out of life.

Not that I ever put this attitude into words, with myself or with anyone else. In fact, had anybody accused me of holding this attitude, I would have hotly denied the charge. I was a churchgoer and, in my own eyes, a "believer."

But one's theoretical philosophical and religious position is not necessarily acted out by one in critical life situations. Mine wasn't. Theoretically, I never stopped being an idealist and a Theist, but at crucial points where there was a conflict between my will and God's will, I always followed mine. And I did so in a peculiar manner (though one which, I am persuaded, is by no means unique with me). I *never* said, "Well, I know that it is God's will for me to do X, but I'm going to do Y." Rather, I set about to sell

myself that God *really* wouldn't mind too much if I did Y, justifying Y on the plea of weakness, fear, depression, righteous indignation, inheritance, fate, or just "What the hell."

Alongside this behavior pattern, the doubts of a sincere agnostic or atheist now seem awfully healthy to me.

So the basic issue in my getting with the God business in AA is not so much a matter of acknowledging that such a Power exists as it is a matter of learning how, one day at a time, to keep a certain attitude toward that Power, an attitude of submission of my self-will to His will which I will act out even (and especially) in tough life situations where I don't much want to.

In AA I have learned that this attitude cannot be acquired by any

amount of talk or thinking alone (although these do have their place). It comes as the result of action, effort, *work* on the Twelve Steps — the Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eleventh Steps in particular. The Second, Third, Fifth and Sixth are about establishing that attitude, and the Seventh and Eleventh are about sustaining it on a daily basis.

I have discovered by a slow process of trial and error (much of which would have been unnecessary had I done a better job of listening to the suggestions in the Big Book on prayer and meditation) that it is vital to my sobriety and sanity for me to practice the Eleventh Step on a regular daily basis and for me to set aside time each day for that purpose.

I find this to be the most important thing about the Eleventh Step — to *do* some of it every day. Unbelief is no obstacle to doing Eleventh Step work either. The only real barrier is a closed mind on the subject. As long as one is willing and able to entertain the possibility that there is a God, one can pray quite effectively to the God he doesn't much believe in. This type of Eleventh Step work, done sincerely, is apt to bring startling results.

Starting out as a supposed believer, my difficulties in working this Step have lain in two other areas. First, my mind tends to wander, and second, I have a hard time putting much feeling into prayer. For a long time, I used these problems to talk myself out of doing much with the Eleventh Step. Then I read some-

thing in a book on prayer which made wonderful sense. There are two aspects to prayer: quantity and quality. The quality of prayer is something which we can control only to a very limited degree. For the most part, quality in prayer is dependent on the grace of God which is largely above the scope of human comprehension. However, quantity in prayer, we *can* control, and "... for that, I am responsible." Whether my mind wanders or not, whether I feel inspired or dry, whether the reality of the Higher Power seems near to me or very far away, I darned well *can* spend X number of minutes every morning in prayer.

And the argument which I have used so often — that I just don't have time in my busy schedule —

won't wash. If I were getting paid \$700 for each minute of prayer I did each day, you can believe that I'd be at it faithfully with no mention of my busy schedule, eager to know ways and means to increase my prayer time.

The real question is what really *are* the first things in *First Things First*? Is increased contact with God as important to me in a practical way as \$10,000? We are all believers in money as a reward. The reward for doing Eleventh Step work is increased conscious contact with God as we understand Him. If I am honest about it, my question about that reward is, "What's in it for me?"

Thank God, AA has an answer to that question which satisfies me. The first thing that's in it for me is sobriety. As the Big Book says, our defense against the first drink can't come from our own minds or from any other human being; it "... must come from a Higher Power."

Eleventh Step work is to my relationship with God what air and food are to my body. If I want to live, the price I must pay is that I take the trouble to eat and breathe every day. If I want to stay sober

and sane, the price I must pay is that I take the trouble to keep a certain minimum contact with the Higher Power *every day*. Daily Eleventh Step work is the means given in the AA program for maintaining that contact. And it isn't really a bother after one gets used to it, any more than eating is. In fact it is usually a producer of joy, ease, well-being and peace of mind. But I never learned this while I was mostly just theorizing about prayer and meditation. It has started to come since I have begun working the Eleventh Step on a daily basis.

One of the things for which I am most grateful to AA, is that through it I am learning to approach God on a practical, common-sense basis. The first Step of the Twelve which mentions prayer by name is the Eleventh. The first ten Steps plus the fundamental non-Step principle of rigorous honesty get me ready for the Eleventh. The Eleventh itself not only suggests *that* I pray, it lets me know *what I ought to pray for*. What a wonderfully simple, direct, workable solution to the issue of prayer and meditation which I'd been in a fog about most of my adult life! T. P. Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

Step discussion

Step Twelve: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

AA's Steps Lead to —

Spiritual Awakening

THE Twelfth Step is, in a sense, the culmination of the whole program. It wraps up all the Steps which go before it and gives us a guide for living the whole program every day of our lives.

The Step breaks down into three parts — spiritual awakening, trying to carry the message, and trying to practice these principles in all our affairs.

I think I have heard and been a party to more disagreements, puzzles and confusion about the term “spiritual awakening” than any other in the program — including “God.” And most of my difficulty was unnecessary. It could have been avoided just by paying more attention to what the Step itself says and less attention to my “old ideas” about spiritual awakening.

First, a small point that made a big difference in my understanding. The Step does not say, “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps;” it says, “Having had a spiritual awakening as *the* result of these Steps.” So a spiritual awakening is not just one of several results of working the Steps. It is the totality of what the Steps are all about, what they are aiming at. Therefore, to define spiritual awakening for myself in AA, all I have to do is describe the results of my work on the first eleven Steps. The work has involved: letting in the truth about my situation as an alcoholic and a loser in life; becoming willing to accept help, not on my terms, but on the terms offered; facing and accepting responsibility for my shortcomings and misbehavior rather

than blaming Mums, Dads, my First Sergeant, the boss, the Twentieth Century or fate. The results of this work have been sobriety, stability and responsibility which have, in turn, produced a degree of meaning, satisfaction and joy in my life which were never there before.

I have not yet mentioned God or Higher Power in connection with waking up spiritually. This is not because I want to apologize for or leave out God. The reality of God permeates and is the essence of spiritual awakening, but in order to begin to have experience of the reality, it is *not* first necessary to come to terms with the word God or even the words Higher Power. As long as one remains open-minded and willing about the words, experience of the reality does not have to and indeed ought not to be postponed.

One of the early fathers of the Christian church said, “Do you wish to know God? Learn first to know yourself.” This is the key which opens up the opportunity for recovery in AA to so many of us. Spiritual awakening can begin in the absence of much knowledge or understanding about God. It leads to such knowledge and understanding, but it begins with knowledge and acceptance of the truth about ourselves.

So I am learning, when looking for signs of spiritual awakening in myself, to look, not for bright lights or emotional upheavals (although I'm sure there is a place for these

too), but for sobriety, stability, responsibility, meaning, satisfaction, joy. These are the marks of the beginning of spiritual awakening, and they come as *the* result of work with the Steps. If they fail to come or, after a time, begin to disappear, the answer is no mystery; it is more work with the Steps.

The “tried to carry the message to alcoholics” part of the Twelfth Step is pretty clear to most of us. The term “Twelfth Step work” refers to this part of the Step. The Big Book says, “Nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics.” This is true for me. Reasoning my way out of old selfish habits has proven impossible, but Twelfth Step work enables me to act my way out of myself by working with the problems of others (which so often turn out to be worse than my own).

I had one difficulty in doing Twelfth Step work that my sponsor helped me with. I was nervous about talking to older people or people with tough histories because I'm young and high-bottom. He said to me, “That's ego. The Step doesn't say, ‘carried a terrific message every time’; it says, ‘tried to carry the message.’ In relation to your recovery, Twelfth Step work has nothing to do with whether you sparkle or not; it has everything to do with whether you make the attempt to communicate your experience, strength and hope in this program. As long as you do your best and are

sincere, it's good Twelfth Step work."

The last part of the Twelfth Step, about practicing these principles in all my affairs, has come to mean an awful lot to me. For me it means, don't be a two-stepper, don't take the parts of the program you like and leave the rest out, don't settle for half-measures in your practice of the program. It means these principles won't work for me unless I take them out of the AA meetings and carry them over into my home, business and social life.

The first 100 members of this Fellowship, who hammered out the Twelve Steps, knew what they were doing. They could have made it two steps or ten steps or twenty-five steps, but they didn't. I don't think they put anything in they didn't think they needed. They were working the whole program, not because they were saints, but because they were drunks who wanted to get well. I have no reason to suppose I'm any less sick than they were; I have no reason to suppose I need any less of the program than they did.

I think I want to "keep it simple" as much as the next guy, but I also think my sobriety, my sanity and my very life depend on keeping all of it.

T. P., Jr., Hankins, N. Y.

August 1967

Quality of Sobriety

JUST as no one can tell a person whether or not he is an alcoholic, no one can tell you about the quality of your sobriety except yourself.

It seems lately in working with new members of the program (and some not so new), that while they recognize quality of sobriety they just will not exert themselves to make the effort to acquire it.

It seems that they are half-happy! When their attitudes and thinking get out of kilter, they admit that while vacationing for five weeks they just never did get to a meeting or make any AA contact whatsoever. Or they drag to one meeting a week (if nothing interferes) trying desperately to maintain the shaky sobriety they have, not because they want to attend, but because they seem scared not to.

If you suggest that they read a chapter a day in the Big Book, they meekly tell you they have loaned their book to someone.

At a recent closed meeting this topic was brought up for discussion, and many members didn't seem to

know what we were talking about, or were so vague as to contribute that the "quality of their sobriety was the fact that they were sober today." My sponsor and many old-timers taught me that quality was just as important as quantity.

You don't have to be half-happy! Alcoholism takes no vacation! No matter where you travel there are meetings available. At home there are meetings every night in the week — try getting to some extra ones. Cherish and read your own Big Book; buy the newcomer one of his own!

Sobriety is much more than staying dry. It is a daily living (to the best of our ability) of this program according to the principles set down to guide us. It is giving of yourself to Twelfth Step work, participating in meetings and doing all you can in gratitude.

When you see a happy, contented, sober alcoholic, one whose quality you admire, you will see an active, contributing, working member of this program. Try it!

B. B., Fort Lauderdale, Fla.



A COLD WINTER'S NINTH STEP

*Here's an infallible recipe for
bringing warmth back into one's life*

A COLD wind mixed with heavy rain slammed against my house as I nervously approached the telephone to make a call, too long delayed after two and one-half years of sobriety. I had dreaded this call, fought it, denied it, avoided it for those thirty months, but at long last the firm hand of a Power greater than myself was leading me to make a difficult amend.

The man whom I was about to call was a former client and friend, whose trust I had betrayed by withholding and misusing funds which had come into my hands on a collection basis, and which should have been forwarded to him. This had all occurred, of course, in the "wine and roses" era of my life, but it had occurred — this was the inescapable fact.

Further, to make this wrong doubly painful, I knew in my heart

that my former client undoubtedly had guessed what had happened to his money but, whether out of kindness, pity or whatever, he had never made demand for payment or even suggested that he should be repaid. Our paths had parted even before my AA life and I had had no further contact with him although we lived only a few miles apart.

While the amount involved was not so great that it could not have been repaid after the early months of sobriety (and increased solvency), much more was involved: the humiliating admission of a breach of trust to one whom I had long known, had liked, and who, I felt, reciprocated this feeling with his trust. At first I had rationalized that the money was not important to him, that he couldn't know exactly how much I had collected, that he had probably long since forgotten it.

But as the months passed I couldn't forget it, even as I went about making some of the easy amends. The knowledge that I must some day face up to this wrong grew stronger and stronger.

In just making the call at last, in asking to see him that very night at his home and in driving there, some release from torment came. Then to be received so graciously and kindly by him as I poured out my wrong, was wonderfully warming and reassuring, and the evening ended on a high note of praise for my courage and honesty. *My* courage and honesty! It seemed pointless and ungracious to reject this kindly meant

praise, but as I drove home I tried to express my thanks for this gift from a loving and understanding God.

And as I turned into our driveway, the wind seemed less angry, the rain less fierce. Once again, the beauty of the program, the certainty of the results when all of the Steps are honestly practiced, had been confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt. I knew, too, that tomorrow's path would be easier; that AA sobriety was all that I wanted or needed to make the long journey we all travel a good, safe, and happy one.

J. E. H., Kirkland, Wash.

SOLITUDE—A NEW JOY

*On the
benign uses
of being alone . . .*

"I'M LONELY—I'm lonely!" is the cry of alcoholics all over the face of the earth—in a lonely room, in a crowded bar, in the heart of a family gathering, walking down the street in the midst of hundreds of people. Then, in contradiction, people would get on our nerves and we would go off by ourselves to "get away from it all," but this didn't work either, for we could not endure for long the burden of our own dark thoughts. There is a place for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, but no place—no place for me.

Tillich said: "Man is alone because he is man. In some way every creature is alone. In majestic isolation every star travels through the darkness of endless space. Each tree

grows according to its own law, fulfilling its unique possibilities. Animals live, fight and die for themselves alone, confined to the limitations of their bodies. Certainly, they also appear as male and female, in families and in flocks. Some of them are gregarious. But all of them are alone. Being alive means being in a body—a body separated from all other bodies. And being separated means being alone. This is true of every creature. But man is not only alone; he also *knows* that he is alone."

We were alone and we knew we were alone, so we tried to assuage that loneliness. Perhaps that is why so many of us had multiple marriages. We sought to remove our aloneness by the encounter of the sexes, and for a little while we did. For moments we could forget our own self in communion with another person, but after these moments our isolation was felt even more deeply

than before, sometimes even to the point of mutual repulsion.

We tried hard to remove our aloneness with the bottle and for a little while we could, but not for long. Even in the midst of a laughing, fun-seeking crowd, we were aware, in a sudden break in our sense of the world around us, of our intense aloneness.

When we hit bottom and realized we could not go on as we were, by the Grace of God we found ourselves thrust into an unbearable aloneness and separated from everything and everybody. Thus separated, we were able to look at our life, our problem, the hopelessness of our situation. Only now could we ask questions and give answers and make decisions. Only now could we make a decision to do something about our drinking and living problem.

There are two sides of man's being alone. In our language, loneliness expresses the pain of being alone. Solitude expresses the glory of being alone.

What happens to us in AA that makes it possible for us not only to endure, but to enjoy moments of solitude? What changed our loneliness to solitude?

The love and understanding we find in AA is a protective curtain between us and the aching aloneness of our drinking days. The first few weeks some of us spend most of our time in the AA club talking with others. Then, it becomes evident

that we must go to work and somehow meet the demands and responsibilities of our daily lives. We are afraid. Will the old loneliness hit us again when we are out of the actual presence of other AA members? Sooner or later, by practicing the principles of the Twelve Steps, we find in ourselves a very precious thing, something inside that we can be comfortable with regardless of whether we are at home by ourselves or anywhere else that life takes us.

AA members are not emotional cripples who need someone to hold their hands every moment of the day and night to prevent their falling. We grow up with the help of God as we understand Him, the fellowship of the group, and by applying the Twelve Steps to our life.

We find as the sober weeks go by that we can enjoy and treasure the few moments of solitude we are able to find in the rush and hurry of life today. When we cease to fear loneliness and begin to cherish and use our solitude to advantage, we have come a long way. We realize a little solitude is necessary to think and to try to work some of the Steps. In solitude we take our inventories. In solitude we admit to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs. In solitude our spirit seeks that Power greater than we are; in solitude we seek through prayer and meditation to be aware of God's will for us.

Solitude can be sought and ex-

perienced in many ways — in the silence of nature, in reading poetry, listening to music, looking at pictures, and in sincere thoughtfulness. We are alone but not lonely. But these things cannot answer all the questions in our minds. So we return to the world of man.

Some of us long to become creative in some realm of life. But we cannot become or remain creative without solitude. One hour of *conscious* solitude will enrich our creativity far more than hours of trying to learn the creative process.

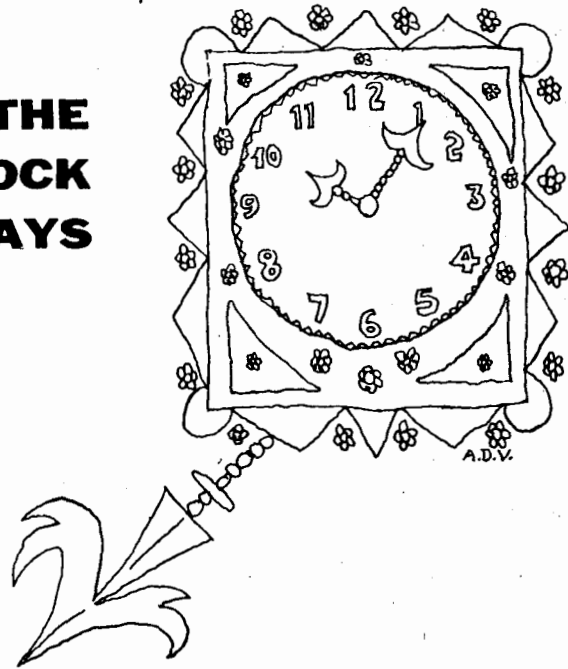
Solitude is not easy; sometimes we can find it only by remaining silent and allowing our souls to sigh without words to God. This we can do even in a crowded day and a

crowded room, even under the most difficult external conditions. No one can take these moments from us. The center of our beings, the innermost self that is the ground of our aloneness, is elevated to the divine center and taken into it. Only in a movement that rises first to God and then returns from Him to the other person can we find communion with others.

Even love is reborn in solitude, for only in solitude can those who are alone reach those from whom they are separated. One hour of solitude may bring us closer to those we love than many hours of communication. We can take them with us to the "hills of eternity."

M. C., Houston, Texas

THE CLOCK SAYS



Twelve Steps

THERE'S an idea that has intrigued me for a long time. I have not been able to put it into consistent practice, but from time to time I remember it and am rewarded: I think on the AA Step corresponding to the current hour, and apply the principle suggested by it to my affairs as of the moment.

I am generally asleep from midnight to six AM, so Steps Twelve to Five come up only once during the day. The others come up twice, once in the morning and again in the evening. What follows is a rough

idea of how I go about relating the Steps to the corresponding hours of the day.

Six to eight AM: Rising time. As Step Six deals with defects of character, Step Seven, shortcomings, and Step Eight, preparing to make amends, we can spend a profitable time aided by these Steps in getting off to a good start for the day.

Nine AM: Many of us arrive at work around this time, and the Ninth Step reminds us that we could possibly adjust some conflicts that have spilled over from yesterday.

Ten AM: Now the day is pretty well laid out for us, and we have a fair idea what we have to contend

with. A little mental survey, as the Tenth Step suggests, possibly over the morning coffee break, may well offset a negative attitude that would have made the day rough.

Eleven AM: Perhaps by this time some problems have developed in the course of our duties, or perhaps we are not feeling well physically. But, whether things are going well or not, it is good at this eleventh hour to remember that we are not alone, and the Eleventh Step helps us to realize this.

Twelve noon and one PM: The three parts of the Twelfth Step are worthy of thought during the lunch period. A spiritual awakening might well be a revised sense of moral values. Perhaps we might have lunch with a member or prospective member; or again we might give him or her a phone call. The lift from this could well be the turning point. We might also ask ourselves what sort of example we are setting. As Step One reminds us, our basic problem is alcoholism. All problems if not dealt with will eventually lead to drinking. The First Step should ever remind us of this.

Two PM: "Sanity" in the Second Step means proper equilibrium. This Step at this time helps to keep things going in proper mental balance.

Three PM: At this time of day, we may begin to sag a little.

Thoughts of the Third Step renew our strength and courage.

Four PM: This is a good hour to review our conduct during the day, with the Fourth Step in mind.

Five PM: We know how we have felt and acted during our working day. Contemplate where we may need a Fifth Step.

Six and seven PM: These are the hours when defects of character and shortcomings are put to the test. Do we take the pressures of the day out on our loved ones at home? Our domestic affairs are at the heart of living. Our attitudes will determine how well they go. Steps Six and Seven are vital in this.

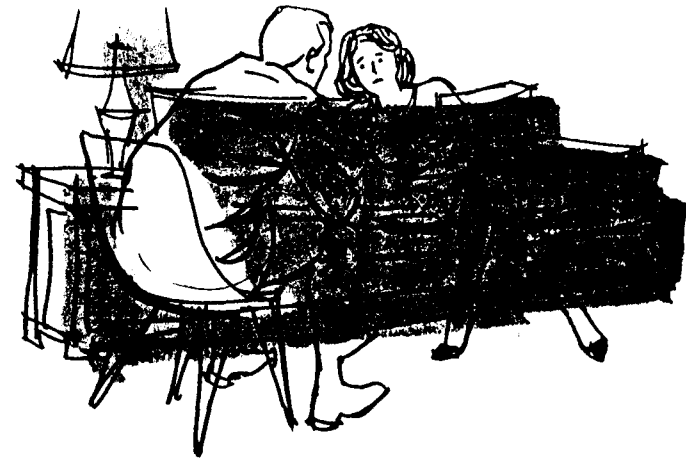
Eight to ten PM: Sometimes arguments arise over what the family wants to do for the evening. Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten help us avoid thoughts and actions it may be necessary to make amends for later.

It is quite possible to be a great guy at meetings and unconsciously a petty tyrant at home. So these Steps help greatly in getting on good terms with loved ones, friends, and others.

Eleven PM: It is good at this time of day to remember the fact of our sobriety. May we never reach the state where we take it for granted! Let us thank our Higher Power through the Eleventh Step.

May He be with us in all our hours.

B. P., St. John's, Newfoundland



Not My Weak Will but a Greater Power

The key is this: A human being "stops depending on his own will and turns his life over to some other kind of will"

RECENTLY I had to sit and endure a mournful song and dance, delivered over a glass of vodka and grapefruit juice, by a woman who had called AA for help, to the effect that: "You're so strong. But I'm not strong, like you. I'm weak."

This really bugs me; and the very fact that it does shows how weak I am. There I sat, still plagued with self-centeredness, childish attitudes, intolerance, inability to accept the ways in which life does not go my way; and this little character tells me I can stop drinking because I am

strong; but she can't stop because she is weak — thereby excusing the spiked drink in her hand.

The truth is that if she can still stomach the booze she is stronger than I was or am. Although my health has always been remarkably good, I have never been blessed with abundant energy. I can quote my doctor that, physiologically, I am "not robust." I need more rest and sleep than most people do. And psychologically, my defects are legion. Alcohol was using up what physical strength I did have to an alarming degree; and when I was

still drinking I had *no* emotional reserves. It was from weakness, not from strength, that I turned to Alcoholics Anonymous for support in establishing the habit of not drinking.

And, although my defects of character are shrinking slightly as I try to practice the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am beginning to understand that if they are ever removed completely, it will be because I allow the forces, or powers, or whatever this function is in a human being (which most people call God), to take over and

eliminate them for me. It will not be my will power or my "strength" that will do it.

So, in spite of what my friends and still-practicing alcoholics think, my problem is to try to reach a point where I will stop trying to rely on the vestiges of strength I do have, and be willing to turn myself over to the guidance and direction of whatever process it was that enabled me to stop drinking — something my own will power had never been able to accomplish for me.

To me, it makes no difference whether a person believes it is "a

God" who does this, or simply some way of functioning inherent in himself that man does not yet understand. The evidence in changes of behavior provided by the people — early AAs — who said, "These are the steps we took," shows that beneficial results ensue when a human being stops depending on his own "will" and turns his life over to some other kind of "will," which I believe exists within him but with which most of the time he seems to be unable to communicate. Most of the time this other will does not and cannot influence his reasoning powers.

I bring up this point because I have also — and it is a frustrating experience — run into people who rejected the AA program because they "didn't believe in God." I be-

lieve this is beside the point. It makes no difference what the founders of AA thought was going on, nor even what most of the membership may think. The facts of what "turning your will and your life over" to some other power does for you are incontrovertible. The problem is to become willing to do it, even if you have no clear idea about what you're turning yourself over to.

An analogy that has often occurred to me in respect to this is — the sun. Without the sun, human life on earth would cease to exist. Yet the ancient Greeks thought it was Apollo's golden chariot; the Egyptians called it God; and for centuries men thought the sun traveled around the earth — when, as a matter of fact, the reverse was true: the earth was going around the sun.

Who knows, in time to come, we may discover even more startling fallacies in our ideas about our sun. But the fact remains that at the present moment, as far as we know, without its light and heat we would soon all be dead.

There is ample evidence demonstrated in AA that men and women can be changed by allowing a "greater power" to operate in their lives. So, to go along trying to live by insisting "I can do it myself with my reason and my conscious feelings" is like shutting oneself up in a cave and refusing to have anything to do with the sun because you don't agree with the silly explanations other people have offered for what it is.

"Defects of character" mean to

me the personality traits which have made life more difficult for me than it needs to be. I was, like most people, conditioned to believe that reason and will power could cope with these handicaps of temperament. Although my thought and will must still participate in the process, I now see, through what I have learned about the way my drinking problem was eliminated, that it came about through dynamics other than my conscious processes. Reason and will can contribute mightily, but only as assistants to these other, more effective forces. My problem now is simply to allow this unknown source of strength to have its way with me, to allow it to deal with the defects which cripple me psychologically.

Anonymous, Calif.

... *God as we understand Him*

*Beginning on this page and the next —
articles on approaches to AA that work
for alcoholics who are “nonbelievers”*

Spirit of Love

IT IS interesting to see people who don't believe in God using the same spiritual approach, reciting the Steps and the Lord's Prayer, even entering into discussions pertaining to a Higher Power. I try not to be merely “tolerant” of them — tolerance smacks of superiority. I wish rather to accept their disbelief as a reality, and I do not try to convert them, partly because I recognize the futility of such a project, but mostly because I do not wish to rock the boat of their sobriety.

While words like “faith” and “spirituality” seem to lack adequate definitions, we somehow manage to share the essence of these words and recover together. Perhaps this is due to a common acceptance of the concept of a loving God expressing Himself in our group conscience. Certainly, the feeling of this pres-

ence is sufficient to establish a common understanding among members, if one can reasonably assume that the feeling is approximately the same in all — including the agnostics.

An agnostic is a person who does not know whether or not there is a God. According to this definition, I am actually an agnostic, because the existence of God has never been *proved* to me. This way, perhaps we are all agnostics, with the possible exception of the relatively few saints who have been privileged to receive some sort of divine proof. But I am still a believer — simply because I can't *not* be.

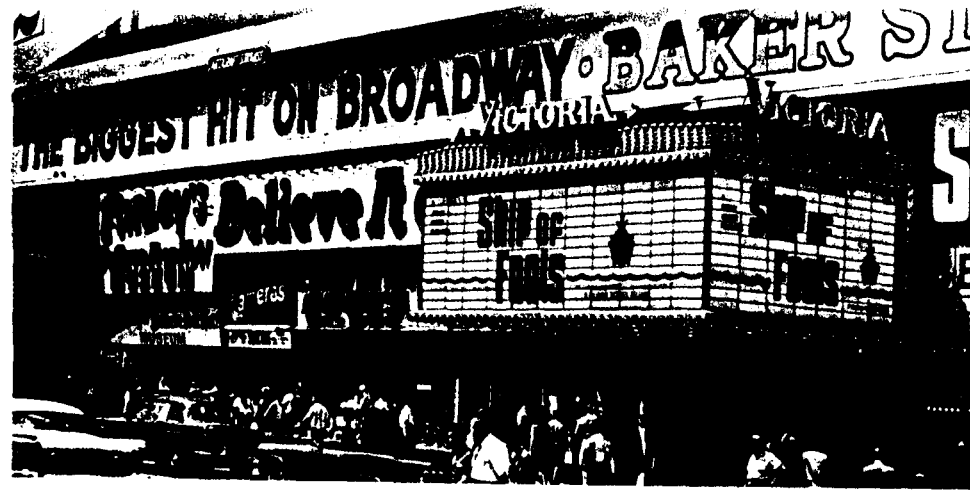
Again, it is interesting to note that the agnostic AA member admits to a feeling of well-being after a meeting. He is apt to refer to this as the result of the empathy of

group therapy. I think this is correct as far as it goes, but if this were all there was to it, AA would not have nearly the success that it has. There must be something else, something far more powerful than mere empathy, something which I call the spirit of love. Indeed, the clearest manifestation of God I have ever

perceived is this spirit of love as it is expressed in the group conscience.

So we recover, believer and non-believer alike. Consider the wisdom of one group member who stated that it doesn't matter whether or not we believe in God; what really matters is that He believes in us.

J. S. C., New Hartford, N. Y.



Episode on Broadway

EVER remember back to when you were sick and your head was in the bowl and your hands were stretched out to grab a hook that wasn't there?

Well, the other day I met a guy who didn't even make it to his own bowl, if he owned one, which I doubt.

He was puking his guts out on Manhattan's Broadway — beautiful Broadway — crossroads of a million private lies — mornings, they ought to sluice it down.

Toddling up Broadway that fine autumn morning, I was feeling a bit sorry for myself because, only the day before, I'd been offered a real plum, a much prized (by me) medical scholarship — a fringe benefit of three years of sobriety, some of it damn tough going. Only I was thinking it hadn't come fast enough —

right when I wanted it — so I was nursing a grudge.

Well, about then I spy this twisted hulk, this Eddie, head pillowed on his sweater, his lobar region exposed, and he's like curled up on the dirty pavement there. Unpretty.

Well, my first impulse is to walk right by this creepy sight. Well, maybe walk *on* him.

I just couldn't. No St. George jazz — he was no dragon, but just a brother drunk: This was me I was seeing, morning after a ball on Broadway.

Well, I went over there, accompanied by snickers from the local boulevardiers. Luckily, I'd heard a great gal named Liddie speak the night before, and she said that while in a mental hospital she'd knelt and prayed by her bed, and the other inmates had ridiculed her, but the

Man Upstairs hadn't ridiculed her — He'd made her sober since.

So I went over to Eddie, feeling for all the world like Doctor Kildare or a fool.

Well, after I looked him over and talked at the body a little bit, a couple of bystanders began trying to chivy him to his feet. He promptly lost his supper. They left in disgust. I couldn't. My disgust is not as great as my desire to stay sober.

Finally, when he said he lived on the street, and whined for Bellevue, I called a cop. They came, three of them, said he was "just a drunk," and tried to get him up, with the same success, I might add, as the previous Samaritans had had.

So anyhow they were talking over dumping him into some "hotel" while they waved ammonia in his face. (I wouldn't give an ammonia

treatment to my dog, or even a cop's dog.)

"Would you do that if he had diabetes?" I challenged them.

Two of the cops grunted. The third policeman did something. He had a human face. Young guy he was, Irish, handsome as hell, and he must have had a dad, or an uncle, who was a tippler.

This kid called an ambulance, and the attendants iced our friend — along with the booklet about the Fourth Step and my name and phone number in it. (It was all I had on me.)

"Happy Labor Day," I yelled to Eddie as the little ambulance roared away. I thanked the good cop.

Send Eddie no flowers. Send me none also. He's a drunk and I'm a drunk, and my name is Ronald.

R. P. K., Manhattan, N. Y.

... God as we understand Him ...

The Old Fear Had to Go

*"I found I must turn
to God as a child ..."*

FOR EIGHT years I was a Loner on the program, using the Twelve Steps as the tools with which to build my life. In the beginning of my search for a conscious contact with God, I found it was impossible to approach Him still holding the concept I had had of Him as a child. After twenty-one years of drinking, after finding the program and taking the Third Step, here I was still at the stage of thinking of Him as a God of vengeance. But He was the same One who had somehow, and for some purpose, wanted me sober. The inconsistency had to be resolved.

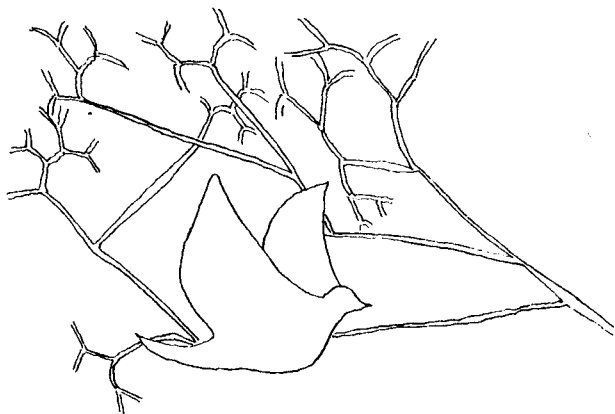
I had been aware of His power for years, while I was racked by desert heat, or as I watched a sea crash and boil in fury on grim rocks, or saw violent storms torment the sky, or stood on mountaintops and felt the loneliness. I cursed Him

with greater fury each passing year of my drinking existence.

Now it was impossible to turn to Him with devoutness, love, trust. His power seemed too vast for such gentle feelings. But there was nothing gentle within me in those days, either. I turned to Him as — simply — someone I could talk to. At times I would be angry, so I would talk in anger to Him. At times I would be grateful, and I would (grudgingly) thank Him.

As time passed, I found I had to go to work and try to conquer myself, with my many defects of character. It was then I found I must turn to God as a child, and ask to be helped. And the more I asked, the more I was given. In time, I learned to trust Him; His power and His love became very real to me.

I want never to lose this new-found conscious contact with God.



It's the anchor which holds my ship of sobriety.

I find His will for me, not in desperate search for spectacular accomplishment, but in the things which come my way to do each day.

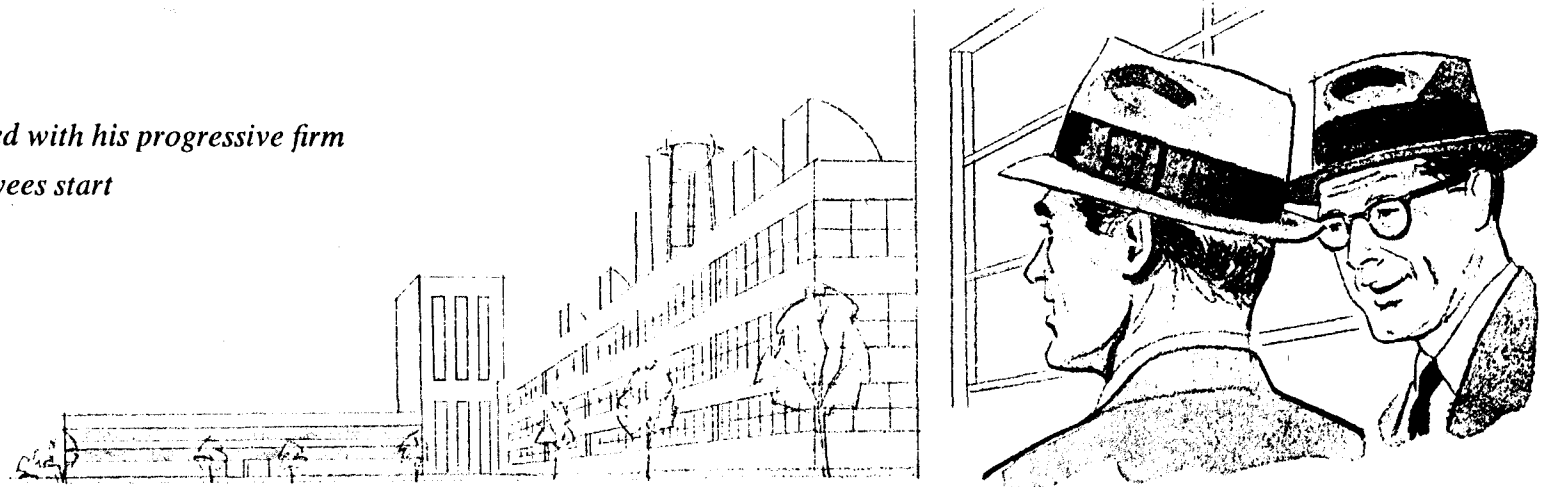
In AA's Eleventh Step I find that I build today the road I travel tomorrow.

M. M. P., Binghamton, N. Y.



April 1968

*This AA cooperated with his progressive firm
in helping fellow employees start
sober living*



You Can Carry the Message on the Job

IN A COMPANY magazine not so long ago, four men were honored in the Service Award column for having completed thirty years with the company. But for the illness of alcoholism, there would have been five.

I was fired from that company in 1941 for drunkenness. Now I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, sober for the past fifteen years, and am once again with the company. No one knows for sure just how many other employees are members of AA. Neither AA nor the firm has any records on this. I know of six or seven other employees who do belong to AA, and I estimate there

may be as many as fifteen to twenty.

If percentages established in national studies are to be believed, however, many other company employees may still be problem drinkers. These studies indicate that about two out of three American adults regularly use alcoholic beverages. Of these, about seven percent will become alcoholics. Alcoholics probably constitute at least three percent of the total work force in American industry. So about 110 of the 1,600 employees of this company who use alcohol are likely to be problem drinkers.

Who is the alcoholic employee? How do you recognize him? Once

recognized, how can he be helped?

According to one research group, the alcoholic usually is a "skilled or semiskilled person, varying in age between thirty-five and fifty, who has been at least seven years with the company, is married, owns his own home, and usually has two or more children." In short, an apparently responsible member of the community.

Harrison M. Trice, assistant professor of industrial and labor relations at Cornell University, says that the problem drinker, as far as management is concerned, "is any employee whose repeated overindulgence in alcoholic beverages

sharply reduces his or her effectiveness and dependability in carrying out a work assignment." Such persons usually are regarded as being in the earlier stages of alcoholism. The skid-row wino is in the last and most serious stage of the disease.

Authorities are in general agreement that anyone who is letting alcohol interfere in any of his life patterns — family, work, or social life — is a problem drinker. Often he's the "swell guy" who drinks a "little too much." That's where I come in.

When I came to work for the company in the mid-thirties, I was known as a two-fisted drinker and

was proud of that fact. I could drink — I thought — most of the other men under the table. There were not really any problems — bad checks now and then, perhaps, but I was always able to take care of them before they were turned over to the authorities.

By 1939, the drinking was worse, every day. When I was transferred to another department that year, it became possible to drink on the job, because I worked alone. Other persons were noticing my drinking, of course, although I thought I was getting away with it pretty well.

Finally, I was warned by my supervisor. The “two-fisted drinker” did manage to go on the wagon for six months. But then the drinking started again. By this time I was

hitting the bottle in the morning, too. It was necessary. Whiskey was the only way I could stop my hands’ shaking so I could shave.

When I was fired, it really was no surprise. I knew I was going to get fired finally. I just didn’t know when.

That was in 1941. World War II was on. I was too old for the regular service, but I did get a job as a Navy electrician in Honolulu. The drinking continued, although whiskey was rationed and I was able to work after a fashion.

In 1944 I returned to the United States and my wife and family. I knew I was going to lose my wife if I didn’t stop drinking, but I drank anyway. I even rationalized that my drinking was her fault, and if we

split up, I would be okay. Soon there was a separation, then a divorce.

Another typically alcoholic rationalization came soon after, upon my first contact with Alcoholics Anonymous. That was in a Kansas City sanitarium on the first of many trips to a sanitarium to dry out. I attended an AA meeting and thought, “What a wonderful organization — for the people who need it.”

In the next six years, life followed a familiar cycle: I worked for a time, then went on long drunks, then to treatment at a sanitarium, then brief brushes with AA, then back to work — and drunkenness again. There were the five- and six-day binges when I spent much of

my time in a hotel room drinking booze and milk shakes. I didn’t have time to go to a restaurant and eat a regular meal.

There was the day on San Francisco’s skid row when, broke and thirsty, I walked into a liquor store, stole a bottle, and started running. I hoped for time to get one drink before they caught me.

By 1950, the morning shakes were so bad that it took a half-pint right after I woke up to stop them. I was needing from one to two fifths of whiskey a day. Life had become so miserable, I knew I had to do something. So it was home, one more trip to the sanitarium — and AA.

This time it took, because I made the effort, because I really wanted to

quit drinking. This is the prerequisite.

Since 1950 I've worked steadily. In 1952 I remarried. For the past twelve or thirteen years I have had peace of mind. Oh, there have been troubles, some of them pretty bad ones, but now I don't use trouble as an excuse to get drunk.

Looking at it one way, I count three big moments in my life: (1) when I found what alcohol could do for me; (2) when I found that I could stop drinking; (3) when the company that fired me rehired me.

The company has no formal program on alcoholism. Informally, the procedure usually works like this: First, an employee's alcoholism must be recognized; the employee's supervisor must be aware of it. Then the employee is counseled, and AA is recommended to him. There are groups of the Fellowship in almost every community. If, after

a period of probation, the employee has made no effort to help himself, he is fired. Sometimes, in fact, discharge triggers membership in AA.

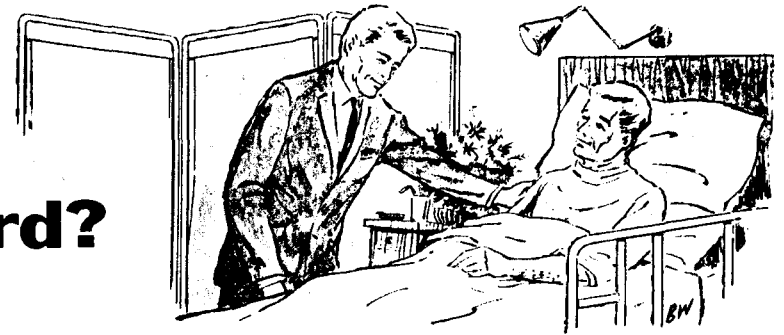
Because recovered alcoholics can work so successfully with other problem drinkers who seek help, AA is an effective resource for companies that want to help alcoholic employees. My company has used me this way for fifteen years. I especially like to remember how I was responsible for one employee's joining AA during the first six months of my own sobriety. Told that he must stop drinking or lose his job, this employee said he didn't know whether or not he could stop.

"You used to get drunk with _____," the supervisor said, naming me, "and he's been sober for six months."

"Well, if that drunken so-and-so can stop," came the reply, "so can I." And he did.

K. R., Liberal, Kans.

Is 'PROMOTION' Really a Dirty Word?



Was it 'promotion' when Bill called on Dr. Bob?

*Are we
being too
'aggressively
anonymous'
as a fellowship?*

to make many kinds of moves to bring people into AA or to expose AA to people—for fear of the dirty word “promotion.”

Sure, our policy is based on attraction rather than promotion. I'm not going to climb on a soapbox and shout, “My name is Joe Jones, and I am here to save you through AA!”

But if I'm serious about AA and my Twelfth Step commitment to carry the AA message to alcoholics who still suffer, I'm going to have to do something that is suspiciously like promotion before I get through.

The new Random House dictionary gives us two useful definitions of promotion: “furtherance or encouragement” and “material issued in behalf of some product, cause, institution, etc.”

“But that's not what I mean by promotion” is bound to be heard from an old-timer.

Okay, what *do* you mean by the word? “Well, you know, when

somebody goes out and tries to *sell* AA.”

Tell me, old-timer, aren't you “selling” AA when you make a Twelfth Step call?

“Oh, that's different.”...

The essence of our imaginary but realistic conversation seems to be that twelfth-stepping is acceptable to hard-shell members when it is on a one-to-one basis — but is unacceptable when the ratio is changed by increasing the audience.

And *that* argument does not hold water when tested. A speaker is performing a type of Twelfth Step work at a meeting — and not on a one-to-one basis. Is he therefore promoting AA? He certainly is, in the sense that he is furthering or encouraging it.

“That's regulation AA,” says our mossback old-timer. “That kind of Twelfth Step work is okay; so is the *real* kind, where you visit somebody who has called for help.”

Now wait a minute, old-timer.

Did Dr. Bob call Bill W. for help? Did the first Akronites call Dr. Bob? Did the alcoholics in Rockland State Hospital in 1939 call AA? The answer to all three questions is no.

If we judge by the dictionary definition what we know of our co-founders' early activities, it becomes clear that they did promote AA. They had to; there was no other way to attract other suffering alcoholics except through “furtherance or encouragement” of the new Fellowship.

Along came the first great piece of AA promotion, Jack Alexander's famous article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Our ranks suddenly swelled. Other magazine articles and newspaper feature stories appeared, and more membership increases followed. This was promotion; it was “material issued in behalf of” AA. And alcoholics were helped, not hurt.

Together with the growth of AA and a deepening understanding of

AA'S ELEVENTH Tradition says, “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films” (and, it should add, TV!). Let me say at the start that this article will enter into no quarrel with the second half of the Tradition. Let us all continue to maintain our personal anonymity where media of communications are involved. But I do quarrel with the interpretation that is being put, more and more, on the first half of the Tradition: that it enjoins us not

our disease came a startling discovery: An alcoholic is not necessarily someone on skid row! In the very early days of AA, he was likely to be. So AA changed to accommodate that discovery; there was an influx of new members who had not lost everything; and many of them were in a position to reach the public. "Name" writers produced articles; radio and television "personalities" furthered the cause. The Public Information Committee of AA's General Service Board began to take the initiative in suggesting printed and broadcast information about AA; so did local public-information workers.

All were promoting AA, and as a result the Fellowship sprawled out into almost every city and hamlet in the country, north to Canada, south to Latin America, across all the oceans of the world.

"Attraction" alone — just sitting passively and waiting for sick alcoholics to find us and observe our sobriety — could not have accomplished such explosive growth.

The total conscience of AA, augmented by well-motivated persons (AAs and nonalcoholics) in journalism and other forms of mass communication and in other alcoholism agencies, has snowballed our Fellowship. With growth has come further knowledge, knowledge as important as the discovery that an alcoholic is not necessarily a Bowery derelict. In respect to the present subject, the most important piece of this newfound knowledge is that vast numbers of suffering alcoholics are not receiving *any* help. No one is doing anything for them. Their families, friends, employers, and doctors are either entirely ignorant

of AA or have misconceptions concerning the Fellowship as a whole and our members as individuals. If any AA member can read that statement and not have a desire to take action, this is the day for him to burn his *I Am Responsible* wallet card!

Our Thirtieth Anniversary Convention in 1965 adopted as its theme *Whenever anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I Am Responsible.* If you accept that theme, you accept a great responsibility, because suffering alcoholics at this moment *are* reaching out for help — without knowing where to reach.

We all know of fortuitous cases where the desperate alcoholic has "just happened" to spot a meeting announcement, pick up a piece of

AA literature, or catch a few words about AA on radio or TV.

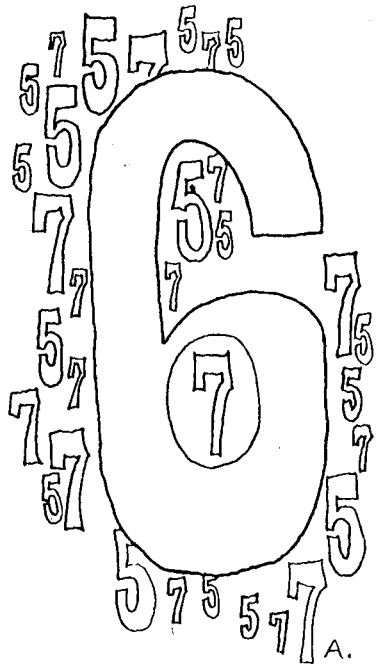
But what we will never know is how many other desperate alcoholics there are who have not been so fortunate, who might respond to our program if they knew of it. Are our promotion efforts strong enough to reach them, too?

How many potential members do we lose each year to the "incurable" wards? How many to imprisonment, asylums, and death? Must we go on losing them because AA is, as J. P. Miller* phrased it when he spoke in Toronto, too "aggressively anonymous" as a fellowship?

Promotion is *not* a dirty word. The dirty words in AA are: inactivity, self-satisfaction, do-like-me, status quo.

W. R., South Norwalk, Conn.

* J. P. Miller, author of *Days of Wine and Roses*



We Need More Than Just Sobriety

*A big resentment made his sober life unmanageable
until he faced up to what Step Six asks us to do*

MY OWN conviction, which may run counter to the thinking of many in AA, is that, while the foundation upon which we alcoholics must build is sobriety, I do not believe sobriety alone is the goal of AA — at least, not for me.

I must have something to stay sober *for*, or I might as well stay drunk. And that is why, I feel, at least nine of the Twelve Steps were formulated.

These last nine Steps have more to do with the quality of sobriety than with anything else. I may be

dead wrong, and most likely I am if I apply this next statement universally, but to refrain from drinking no longer constitutes my major problem. I have a sneaking suspicion that I can do that indefinitely, so long as I take it one day at a time and don't ever assume that I can take that first drink.

But I have discovered that my life can become just as unmanageable sober as drunk. And this is where the Sixth Step makes its great contribution to me.

The defects of character which we become ready to have removed are far and away more difficult to cope with than the drinking they may have caused. And it is possible that these defects of character can find outward behavior patterns quite as deadly as alcoholic behavior. Indeed, it is almost easy for a member to become smug on his third "birth-

day" and to believe he has arrived at the goal of sobriety simply because he does not drink any more.

For three years, I have sat in my office nourishing a hatred and resentment that, in ways other than drinking, have rendered me just as useless as alcohol ever did. I consumed, until recently, as much time devising imaginary catastrophes for the two victims of my hatred as I ever consumed in drinking. Yes, I went through the motions of my work. But what I might have accomplished if I had been liberated from the resentment is something hard to picture. It has taken two years for me to go from Step Five to Step Six. One would think that in that length of time I could never have remained sober, because hate, given free rein, mounts in intensity to the point of obsession. But, by the grace of God, I remained dry. And

it is precisely because this dryness was possible for me that I say the ultimate goal of AA has more to do with the quality than with the length of sobriety.

Step Six becomes the turning point in my AA venture. It means the end of an empty and adventureless dryness and the beginning of a life that the formulators of the Twelve Steps had in mind and, doubtless, experienced themselves.

Perhaps some of them had difficulties with these defects of character. It is significant that dealing with defects takes three entire Steps.

Step Five asks us to admit our defects of character, and in Step Seven we ask God to remove them. But how great, sometimes, is the distance between the two, for in between we must become ready for the removal.

Becoming ready for the removal

of a character defect is an excruciating ordeal, for it means the removal of another crutch. Alcoholics are fond of crutches. It means facing reality. And alcoholics are not fond of reality.

Most defects, such as resentment, are defective precisely because there is a disproportionate assignment of evil to the object of the hatred.

In my own case, the only consolation I had in life was the belief that the two individuals I had grown to despise were at the root of my problems, that they had been the cause of my drinking and were the source of all my unhappiness. Now, they *did* have a hand in my unhappiness. They are *not* totally blameless. To feel they had nothing at all to do with my difficulties would be as unrealistic as it was to make them the personification of evil. But that really isn't the issue.

All men and women are imperfect. What I *had* to come to realize was that, had I been in their shoes, I might have reacted as they did. Most people act from mixed motives. It is rare for a person not to feel some justification for his behavior.

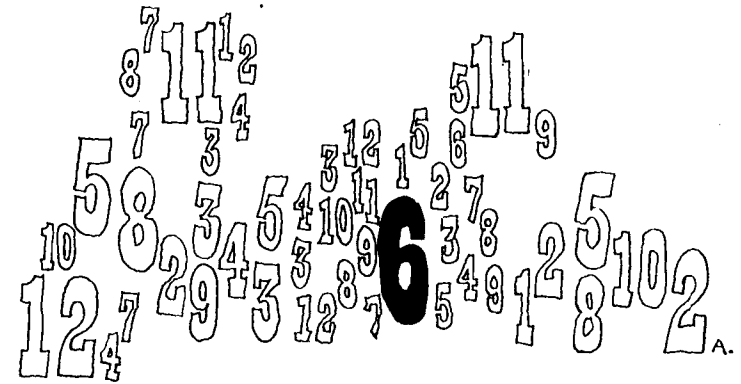
The issue, in this case, is that much of the evil intent I attributed to them was in reality a projection of my own worst self upon them. When there are qualities within us which we cannot face, we find scapegoats for them. It is much easier to hate these qualities in another than to hate them in ourselves.

Step Six assumes that God will remove the defects. This is because His way is different from mine. I go about it like a bull in a china shop. That is, I really don't get to the heart of the matter. When I tackle the defects myself, I tend to make sweeping generalizations and come to false conclusions.

For instance, I *did* try to rid myself of my resentments. But always it became necessary for me, intellectually at least, to try to believe that I really had only misunderstood the two persons whom I hated, and that they were not guilty of any wrong.

But this didn't work. God doesn't distort facts. It isn't necessary for Him to make me believe these two persons are really saints at heart, in order for me not to hate them. They *aren't* saints. And I still don't like them. But now I can admit to myself that part of my hatred was a projection of my own imperfection. I can now admit that I am guilty of that imperfection, and I can hate it in myself without falling apart. If I must dislike someone, at least I ought to be able to dislike them for their own faults and not for mine.

I pray that in time, just as I have come to accept myself, even with my own imperfection, I can accept them with theirs. But the tremendous miracle that has taken place is that I no longer spend time despising anyone. I am *free* to go about my life. It is not I who has made this possible. It is God. He is releasing



me from my resentments by enabling me to face things as they are. In other words, I can function with the knowledge that some of what I know about these two people is true, and also I can function knowing what is true about me.

It is this facing of the truth about me that causes the pain involved in Step Six. In Step Five, we don't really have to put our defects where our mouth is, to paraphrase another saying.

In Step Five, I can admit the defect of resentment. But in Step Six, I must face it head-on, and this means experiencing the insecurity of standing alone without the crutch of resentment I admitted I had in Step Five.

It is difficult to describe this insecurity one feels in throwing away the crutch of a character defect. It's rather like a little boy jumping from a high mantel into his father's arms. The height of the mantel is frightening. But it seems safer and less ter-

rifying than the prospect of falling through the air. And so the little boy begs his father to lift him off the mantel and place him safely on the floor. But the father wouldn't develop in the boy a sense of trust or faith if he made it that easy. The father stands below the mantel and gently but firmly tells the boy he must jump into waiting arms if he really wants down.

And this experience of jumping is precisely what is involved in that much-thrown-about word "faith."

If only I will jump from the false security of my defects, I can know the true security of my Father's arms. He stands there, ready to receive me, if only I will respond. And I must respond, if only to realize that I really can leave the "security" of my perch and live.

Thank God, I finally jumped from the agonizing height of my resentment. And I feel much safer now.

P. K., Oklahoma City, Okla.

*“But a little word
of one syllable . . . such
a word is*

this word **GOD** *or this word* **LOVE”**

*An AA who started his sober life as an atheist
shares notes on his continuing spiritual search*

I CAME into AA in 1955 at the age of thirty-two. I was married and had a six-year-old son. Up to that time I had been able to consider myself one of the “lucky ones” where my drinking was concerned. I had never lost a job or even come close; few beyond my wife suspected that I drank as much as I did; I had a good job and had done well enough to consider going out on my own. But at four AM one drunken morning I hit a parked truck. I was thrown in jail, without funds and so unable to pay the \$50 bail. My wife had to get our child out of bed and bring him along to the police station so she could get

me out. Within a week, I quit drinking.

Two years later I went insane — literally. I went berserk and tried to strangle an acquaintance, a man I hardly knew. A month after that, in a mental institution, I attacked another patient with equally murderous intent; it took four male nurses to wrestle me into a small, sound-proofed room, where I was tied with straps to a bed. At the end of five months, I was discharged with a clear-cut admonition: “You need professional help.” I had not taken a drink since that day in July nearly three years before, but now — after these psychotic episodes — I had

no wife, no children (we had by now two more), no business, nothing! I arrived at my father’s door with all I possessed on my back and in one suitcase.

Within a matter of weeks, I took a drink. I hated the psychiatrist I had started with. If this was sobriety, I would rather be drunk! The drink — a red-hot ingot — had not hit my stomach before I knew that I was wrong. Again, in a sense, I was lucky. After a week, I called AA and came off it. Once again came a surge of killing rage, with actual attack avoided by a hairbreadth, but it meant three more months in the booby hatch.

It is not my purpose to indulge in the debate about psychiatrists and their worth for the alcoholic. I believe I have run as long a course with psychiatry as most, alcoholic or not, and can speak only for myself: Without psychiatry I would now probably be hopelessly insane. But, I repeat, that is not the point I make here. It is germane only insofar as I thought, in the early stages, that there was an irreconcilable conflict between psychiatry — science, if you will — and the AA program. Science was secular, nonspiritual, while AA kept talking about a Higher Power.

It wasn’t till I had been under

“If God was too much, surely I could do better with Love . . .

treatment for some seven years that the word “love” really entered my consciousness; the doctor had mentioned it innumerable times, but it simply had not registered. Now, at the end of a hard nine-year pull, I know that science tries to free the neurotic from his childish self-centeredness; that it tries to help him to overcome his fear of people, to communicate, to have a social sense, to go toward others — in short, to learn how to love. I discovered that, for the human personality, love is the greatest single integrating factor that exists; that a man’s capacity for it is the infallible measure of his emotional maturity.

I can imagine an AA saying: Nine years of treatment just for this? What do you think this program is all about, anyhow? Working with others. The group. Carrying the message. Where have you been all these years? . . . All true, but I couldn’t see it; too much psychic detritus stood in the way.

Then, of course, there remains the ultimate expression of love: the love of God. Ah, yes. That! Turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand Him? Why, hell’s teeth, I don’t understand Him at all! Perhaps, even after years of sobriety, some of you, like me, have difficulty with the spiritual part? Those of us who cannot commit ourselves to this ultimate expression of love are and will remain unfulfilled — until we do.

A few months ago my doctor,

who had warned me specifically about “reading up” on psychiatry while under treatment, gave me his copy of the autobiography of Carl Jung. Here is what Dr. Jung said at the close of a life that spanned over eighty years:

“I have frequently seen people become neurotic when they content themselves with inadequate or wrong answers to the questions of life. They seek position, marriage, reputation, outward success, or money, and remain unhappy and neurotic even when they have attained what they are seeking. Such people are usually confined within too narrow a spiritual horizon. Their life has not sufficient content, sufficient meaning. If they are enabled to develop into more spacious personalities, the neurosis generally disappears. For that reason the idea of development was always of the highest importance to me.”

Excellent! But haven’t we known this almost from the first day we joined the Fellowship? Yes, we have, but being aware of something and living it are two different things. We are, willy-nilly, children of our times. Astronomers numb our minds with their galloping cosmos — quasars, billions of light years distant, rushing furiously away through a possibly limitless uni-

verse, a universe so vast that the biblical saying about the sparrow’s fall seems ridiculous. The Creator is aware of *me*? Come off it! And, anyway, isn’t God supposed to be dead? If He isn’t, how does one reach out to Him?

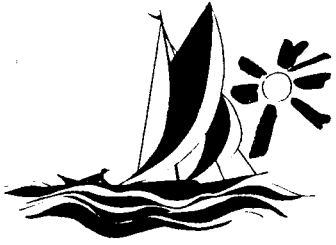
Some weeks ago, I was wrestling this problem around in my mind (indeed, I’ve thought of little else for months now) when I happened to go into a bookstore to get a certain volume and stayed on to browse a bit. My eye fell on a title: *Mysticism — A Study and an Anthology*, by F. C. Happold, an English writer. I worked my way through it for several evenings, until one night I came upon a passage that impressed me deeply. The passage comes from a small book, written in the fourteenth century by an unknown English mystic: *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

“And if thee list have this intent lapped and folden in one word, for thou shouldest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable: for so it is better than of two, for ever the shorter it is the better it accordeth with the work of the Spirit. And such a word is this word *God* or this word *Love*. Choose thee whether thou wilt or another; as thee list, which that thee likest best of one syllable.

And fasten this word to thine heart, so that it never go thence for thing that befalleth.

“This word shall be thy shield and thy spear, whether thou ridest on peace or on war. With this word, thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee. With this word, thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting. In-somuch, that if any thought press upon thee to ask thee what thou wouldest have, answer him with no more words but with this one word. And if he proffer thee of his great clergy to expound thee that word and to tell thee the conditions of that word, say him: That thou wilt have it all whole, and not broken nor undone. And if thou wilt hold thee fast on this purpose, be thou sure, he will no while abide. And why? For that thou wilt not let him feed him on such sweet meditations of God touched before.”

I read it again and again. I thought: Here at last was something that reduced the problem to more manageable proportions. Just two words of one syllable, and either one would do. I fastened my mind on the second. If God was too much, surely I could do better with Love. For all its shortness, it is also a tremendous word — but somehow



it seems more within our limited reach.

In his quaint way, using outdated language, the anonymous author of *The Cloud* is simply telling us to get off the debating team — but there's this twist: If you can't let go and let God, then let go and let Love — it amounts to the same thing!

How often we have seen the person who comes to AA and will have nothing to do with "the God stuff"! Higher Power? Not on your life! But, says he, I'll settle for the group. Then, with the passing months, the rough edges are worn away, the resistance diminishes. One day, the rebel, the erstwhile skeptic, has changed fundamentally; his eye is calm and his voice relaxed. He's got it, we think, and are filled with admiration and something that is very close to envy. He is one of those members with native spiritual insight. He is never one like me, who must intellectualize everything. Unbeknownst even to himself, the power of love has been at work, "broadening the spiritual horizon." Beginning as a two-stepper — or, to be more precise, a one-and-less-than-a-half-stepper — he has somehow achieved the serenity that can

come in only one way. How does he do it? we wonder.

Through acts of love. I say "acts" because nobody really seems to know what love is; it is like electrical energy in that no scientist on earth can tell us what it is, but even the humblest layman knows what it can do. Even a genius like Jung never found out:

"In my medical experience as well as in my own life I have again and again been faced with the mystery of love, and have never been able to explain what it is. . . . Love 'bears all things' and 'endures all things' (I Cor. 13:7). These words say all there is to be said; nothing can be added to them."

Is that, then, really all there is to it? Does love bear and endure all things? Perhaps it does—for saints. As for the rest of us, how often do we not, and by conscious choice, strike out in anger rather than reach out in fellowship? How often have even we in AA, who are vouchsafed the opportunity in larger measure than most, failed in an act of love? It is so easy to put off, to wait till tomorrow.

A man who died in 1855, a certain Stephen Grellet, about whom I know nothing more than this, had a warning for us:

"I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow-creature, let me do it now;

let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." What a gauntlet flung in the face of indifference!

But we are not indifferent — we are responsible, you will object. And we live up to that responsibility. Yes, most of us do — "total AAs," with their God-consciousness, their Higher Power, certainly do. But those of us with lesser insight, the poorer in spirit, have to struggle harder. We *are* Number Two, and consequently we have to try harder within the only frame of reference we have — the frame of reference of man.

But isn't it possible that this way is likewise blocked to us? Didn't Jesus himself say that "the great and first commandment" was to love God, and that only in second place were we to love others as ourselves (Matt. 21-30)? What of that? Does the one depend upon and follow the other? I don't know, but I did find this later on, in the First Epistle of John, right at the end of the New Testament:

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear. . . . If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

There they are — the cornerstones of my present Godless, but hopeful sobriety. When I begin to get tense with debating, I stop. Not

God, just love. What is love? Don't know — don't have to. An act of love — that's the ticket. Do something, anything. A call, a note — for somebody, anybody, in or out of AA. Do it now!

The hardest part seems to be contained in those last three words: *Do it now*. This takes discipline! What a detestable word! How I loathe it! Anthony Trollope was cutting very close to the bone when he wrote: "It's dogged as does it. It ain't thinking about it."

The first-century Roman emperor Titus, when he realized that he could not point to a single good deed on a day, exclaimed: "Friends, I have lost a day!" How many I have lost! It is rather chilling to become aware of the necessity for constant endeavor, particularly when we know that "our reach so far exceeds our grasp."

For those of you who are "total AAs," I beg you, in charity, to suppress your smiles. My constant need to present everything before the bar of intellect is a dismal state, I agree — it isn't even intelligent! But to the others, my companions in the arid valley, let me say this: Let us join hands and go up the mountain, searching in our halting, scrabbling way for the Higher Power. Let us remember what Paul told us: "So faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

*Anonymous,
Buenos Aires, Argentina*

January 1969

Twelfth Step in India

AA in Madras is still in business, with Ken B. and self having our weekly meetings. We saw some expansion of our group during August with two new members (who had already some contact with AA before), but do not see them now.

Two advertisements have been inserted in the local papers in the past two months with a simple question: "Do you wish to stop drinking?" There were only a few replies, yet I must press on and explore the possibilities of how to reach people.

I am in contact with Gerry of Calcutta, Anderson of Kanpur, and recently Pinto of Bombay. We greatly appreciate their encouraging letters. The few back issues of the Grapevine received from Gerry have been a great source of strength and guidance. I shall be thankful if anyone could find us some more.

Pinto was able to give me some addresses of people in Madras, with whom I have already made the initial contact. Unless the request comes from the sufferer himself or the alcoholic has hit bottom, there is little impact or progress. For instance, in two cases I found myself in a position to lend them money — which immediately went for liquor. However, I am able to carry the message —

and leave it to them to choose the AA way of life when they are ready for it.

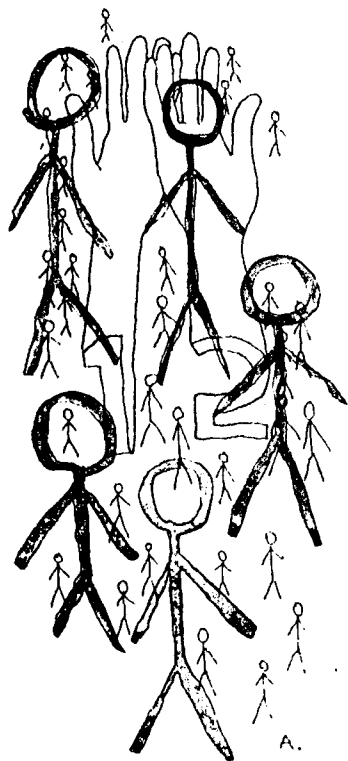
To tell you something about myself: But for Ken B., I would have never known about AA and how quickly even the worst life can progress. At a time when I was about to be separated from my wife and children, when my job was at stake due to frequent absenteeism, when my health was low and I was losing faith in everything, Ken's newspaper ads brought me into AA. That was over a year ago, and I have stopped drinking ever since. The progress I have made in AA, spiritually, astounds all who have known me as a hopeless drunkard. I know I am now divorced from alcohol in any form. To stay away from the first drink is easy, even apart from the known consequences, since I do not have any desire.

I have learned to live hour by hour, day by day, with the most beautiful thought. To this end I am in constant touch with AA friends in India and with AA literature always at hand.

—D. W. S., Madras, India

Twelfth Step Follow-Through

*How to distinguish between indifference,
intrusion and interest was a problem.
Here's one answer that may help you . . .*



MORE and more, I wonder whether my responsibility ever ends. Several years of successful sobriety in AA have led to my name being placed on the telephone-answering service's list of members willing to accept Twelfth Step calls. Out of the dozens of calls I have made, I can count my "successes" on the fingers of one hand, and that fact has led to some serious personal-inventory taking.

Just where and how have I failed so often? Is there something wrong with my approach to the still-suffering alcoholic? Perhaps I, who preach tolerance at every opportunity, have developed intolerance towards those in whom I see my former self. It is never a pleasant experience to be reminded of our own personal failings, no matter how long ago we may have changed our way of life.

As I take inventory, I recall how many Twelfth Step calls I have

considered completed by simply calling on the sufferer and making arrangements for him to attend a meeting, either with me or with others in a group closer to him. Can I honestly say that my responsibility ends there? Even if he lives miles away, at the other end of town, and I put him in touch with a group near him, is this in itself enough?

Isn't it perhaps up to me, as the man's first AA contact, to take a more *personal* interest in his progress? Like most of us, I have a living to make, and my time is limited. But how much of my valuable time would be taken up by a mere friendly phone call once a week? Just a friendly voice on the phone, saying, "Hi, Joe, how're things going?" could perhaps make all the difference. I recall that when I first came to AA, the fact that other people *cared* whether I stayed sober or not did make all the difference.

I tell myself I don't want the newcomer to get the impression that I am "checking up" on his state of sobriety or otherwise. Isn't this a pretty weak excuse for not calling him? Isn't it better for him to get the impression that I am checking up than to get the impression that

I just don't care one way or the other? I recall the last few horrible weeks before I found AA. I was so alone. Then, by simply making a phone call, I was no longer alone with my fears. Somebody cared!

I think back to my early days in AA, and remember how reluctant I was to "bother" my sponsor with phone calls, but how delighted I was when he took the trouble to phone me. I remember how *every* contact of any kind with AA helped me in those first difficult days; how my hope and faith were renewed again and again by some simple act of kindness and interest shown by the members of my group.

I have decided that my Twelfth Step responsibility does not end when I have made a house call and introduced the newcomer to a group. I must be willing to give freely of my time and to show the newcomer that I have a real desire to help *him*, that I have a real interest in *his* progress towards sobriety. Only in this way can I fulfill my responsibility, and only in this way can I repay in some small measure what AA has done for me.

T. C., Dartmouth, N.S.

*The Fifth Step was a
giant step in her progress, taking
her farther than she realized*

Release From Fear

I APPROACHED the Fifth Step reluctantly. It was like swallowing a bitter pill. I knew that it had to be done, that it was best for me. But I didn't know why.

My choice of another person with whom to take the Step would be quite different now, because I feel that I have become a better judge of maturity and mental sobriety. But the person I chose at that time was a dear friend, at least on a superficial level, and we seemed to have much in common. It is true that she made it quite easy for me.

Afterwards, I still didn't know why I had taken the Step. But I had *done* it! I felt terrific relief, knowing that it was behind me and that it was one Step I could say had been taken. It was finished, I thought.

Then the woman with whom I had taken the Fifth Step seemed to have a relapse. While she didn't drink, she became quite erratic and

frantic. All I could see, not having much maturity, was that she was not as pleasant and nice as she had been. One day she threatened me, in a veiled way, with the knowledge she had acquired when I took the Fifth Step with her. I could hardly believe it. My husband was present at the time, and all I had to do was glance at him to know that the threat wasn't in my imagination.

My first reaction was disbelief. Then a great sorrow and compassion flowed through me, that a human being could be so desperate for reassurance.

Only later did it occur to me that there was absolutely no fear within me because of what she knew about me or might possibly reveal. The mere fact of having taken the Step

had washed away the hidden fear and the secret, exaggerated guilts I had lived with. I realized that simply by taking the Fifth Step my inability to see anything outside myself had been removed. I now was able to think in terms of another person.

Then I started to understand what this Step means: release from fear, in order that we may *begin*. For until this release from fear is effected we can't possibly find the freedom that is vital for progress in our new way of life. The Fifth Step isn't, after all, an ending. It is the beginning — of truth, of reality, of living in the present, rather than in the nightmarish past or frightening future.

J. V. Malawi, Africa

March 1969

On AA and Buddhism

From Eugene, Ore.:

Another issue is already here, which reminds me I have not yet written the letter I intended to extend my greetings to our brother in Colombo, Ceylon, who wrote in the Grapevine recently. In his letter he asked for concrete suggestions from other faiths on "God as we understand Him." My own faith is a combination of the four noble truths and the eightfold path handed down by Buddha, coupled with the Twelve Steps of AA. For me each complements the other, and I, too, feel that the Twelve Steps are the very foundations upon which the Buddhist philosophy is built. There seem to me to be parallels in their development. My Christian friends, inside AA as well as outside, have been very accepting of my interest in Buddhism, and even encouraging. Until I read that letter from Ceylon, I had no opportunity to know how anyone else associated with Buddhism felt about the AA philosophy.

N. M. S.

Seeking Through Meditation

*A member who has applied himself
to improving his conscious contact
with his Higher Power spells out
the basic steps in the practice
of meditation*

*“ . . . we watch all thoughts
and all experiences flow by us.
This is the essential process beginning
the meditation: the reduction
of the ego.”*

SOMETIMES, when friends tell us how well we are doing, we know better inside. We know we aren't doing well enough. We still can't handle life, as life is. There must be a serious flaw somewhere in our spiritual practice and development.

“What then, is it?

“The chances are better than even that we shall locate our trouble in our misunderstanding or neglect of AA's Step Eleven—prayer, meditation, and the guidance of God.

“The other Steps can keep most of us sober and somehow functioning. But Step Eleven can keep us growing, if we try hard and work at it continually.”¹

When I realized that these words applied to me, I also realized that

it was meditation itself that I knew least about. I had misunderstood and neglected this Eleventh Step because I did not know what meditation is. I did not know that meditation means awareness, attention, listening. For a lifetime of drinking, I had not wanted to listen, especially to the self within.

With others in the same situation, I now belong to an Eleventh Step meditation group. The general intent of our work is to increase and enrich our understanding of meditation as described in the books *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. We have also adopted procedures from a number of other sources, some very old, but all quite standard, well-known, and simple, if not easy. We

make use of some organization and planning simply to learn to sit still and to liberate and direct our faculty of attention. Many of the great thinkers of the past and present can instruct us, particularly in the early stages of the work.

Our purpose generally is to use meditation every day, alone most of the time. But by sharing our experiences, strength, and hope at the meetings, we enrich our meditations and our methods with as many leads and as many viewpoints as we can, just as in any other AA meeting. Meditation belongs and grows with daily life and daily growth, for it is in daily life that analytical thought binds us into the dilemma of opposites and consequently into sorrow, pleasure-seeking, and loss of free-

dom. In a life which may often seem onerous, boring, and senseless, meditation can free us to its beauty, its joy beyond pleasure, its passion beyond sorrow.

Because of the vital and literally endless potential of our Eleventh Step meditation meeting, I want to emphasize that it is in no sense a religious exercise; it “is not allied with any sect, denomination . . . or institution.” It is rather a training in the continuous application of mind for those who seek “to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him.” Its methods are equally applicable for agnostic, atheist, and any believer—or for those who use AA, their AA group, health, sanity, or any other of the many understandings and

¹The AA Way of Life, page 264

manifestations of the Higher Power.

Our meditation is divided into three phases. The first is concerned with an awareness of reality. Here we meet immediately the oldest forms of resistance: "My mind is jumping all over. I can't concentrate. I should have said this. I'd like to do that. I ought to know more. I wish I had . . . Why can't I . . . ?" and so on without end. The mind is like an overactive child in its restless flight from self, from guilt and discomfort, and in its darting search for something, anything. The mind is always seeking pleasure or self-expansion and avoiding effort or danger, like an animal. When the animal rules us, thinking becomes a substitute for action, while masquerading as a plan for action.

Meditation is not an attempt to solve difficulties. Planning has its place in our mental life, and the discipline and training of meditation can help us to plan more effectively. But meditation itself is not planning or managing. And it is not day-dreaming.

Meditation is, in fact, the specific corrective for racing thoughts. This first phase is a lesson in healthy thinking. We no longer fight these thousand thoughts and fantasies—we experience them. We used to let the manipulating ego eternally touch up its precious image, busily denying, distorting, and hiding the truth. Now we simply experience what is happening within the self and outside the self. Fearlessly, calmly,

"Meditation is not an attempt to solve difficulties."

as if watching beside a stream, we watch all thoughts and all experiences flow by us. This is the essential process beginning the meditation: the reduction of the ego.

Thoughts are quietly observed; feelings are experienced; noises are heard, all just as they really are: "I hear a taxi horn outside. I feel my left foot. I feel my breathing. I remember what I should have said, not what I did say. I feel a tightness in my stomach. What is this anger? What do I really feel? I am day-dreaming. I am not paying attention. I am attached to my thoughts; I must experience them. Why do I want to be good at this? Why do I want to fail? When will this be over? I don't want to think of bad things. It ought to be different. It ought to be this way—my way."

We discover what is happening right now, within the body and outside the body, as an experience, without any attempt to enter into it, to change it, to master it. We want only to be truly aware of a new experience, the experience of the inner and outer worlds perceived with immediate, fresh contact and without memories, images, or ideologies picturing what should be. The mind will often drift away into day-dreams, but patiently we turn our attention back to the truth and the reality of existence and experience,

all as it is happening right now.

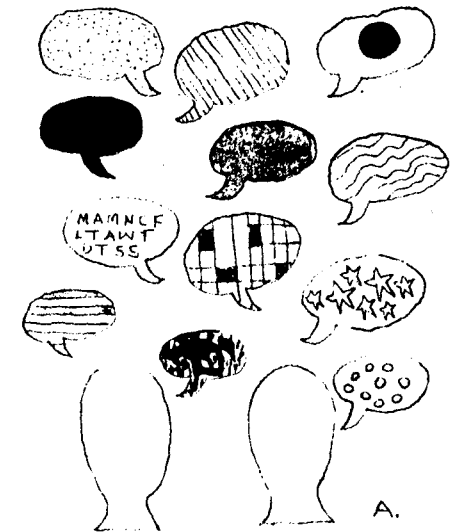
Adequate understanding of this first phase is essential: We must accept reality—all of it, the self and the world—just as it is. Only this acceptance will help us to receive sanity in place of what we have called the madness of alcoholic thinking.

It is at this point that we need help and instruction, in addition to working out problems in the group. The final purpose is to apply this process in all our affairs. "Let's always remember that meditation is in reality intensely practical. One of its first fruits is emotional balance."² It is in this first phase of our method that we begin to accept ourselves and life, to participate in reality in closer union with reality, to diminish the eternal bickering of escape, conquest, evasion, triumph, and injustice-collecting. It is here that study, reading, and practice will begin to open a new world of health and sanity.

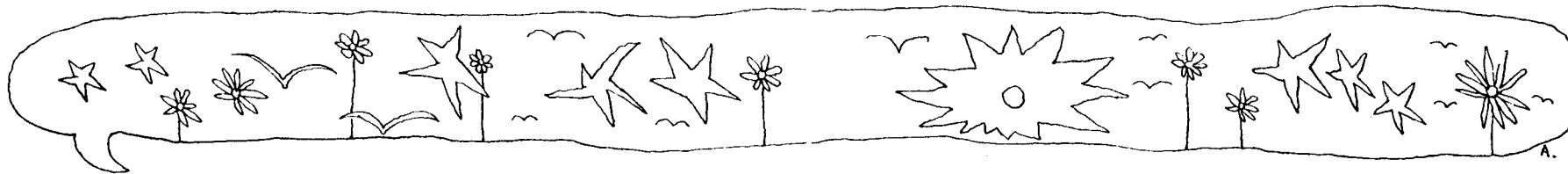
The second phase of our method depends upon the use of one-pointed attention. Some like to relax by tightening the fists for a minute and then allowing the hands to open of themselves, and so let all tension drain from the body. This little exercise is not essential; it is simply a physical reminder to experience and be aware, not to try to run

²Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 104

things, but to let them happen. It is a symbol of "letting go." As we move into the second phase, we allow the thoughts and pictures in the mind to drift or be gently led from center to side of the mental screen, often gray or dark at first before our closed or half-closed eyes.



Instead, at the center we picture an idea, an important thought, or, as in the beautiful example given in "Twelve and Twelve," a prayer. We may find one or more of the Steps or other parts of the AA program useful as a center for awareness. We can review the day to come or the day past—not analyzing, recriminating, nor gloating,



but experiencing and understanding. How often, for example, have I suddenly realized the deeper meanings of one of the Slogans! Here is where I allow new understanding to develop: Instead of focusing on *my* idea of sobriety or growth or sanity, I learn that which is *new* to me—which was not mine until now—which comes from a source beyond me, a Higher Power (no matter how I describe it or experience it). As I can do in looking at an ikon, I let ideas, experiences, and memories look back at me and teach me; I learn from them. If I try to strangle a habit or a fault, it will teach me nothing; but if I am truly aware, I can learn from it. For instance, compare controlled drinking to the First Step.

If a problem persistently comes up and will not let me alone, it is here in meditation that I learn to experience it. It is here that I learn what I truly feel, not how I analyze it. Analyzing it is only another way of blaming someone or something else. Often just the willingness to see a problem clearly is the beginning of its resolution. Facing something and experiencing it fully means the

end of escape maneuvers and ego domination, and these are the real sources of anxiety and resentment. "As we have seen, self-searching is the means by which we bring new vision, action, and grace to bear upon the dark and negative side of our natures. It is a step in the development of that kind of humility that makes it possible for us to receive God's help."³ Here in this phase I learn the meanings, for me, of many kinds of wisdom and many parts of the program. I allow the depth and impact of these meanings to grow within and to teach me to grow from within. In this way I can experience the joy of discovery of my true self; such joy releases more energy for more growth and discovery of life.

Having now prepared ourselves in awareness and attention, in totally experiencing reality, and in willingness to learn, we are ready to move into the third and last phase of our meditation. This is the Eleventh Step proper. We are not managing anything. We are not teaching anyone. We are not mentally repairing the past or gilding the future. We are allowing all the contents of the mind to drift to the side of the

³Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 100

mental screen. We practice readiness to learn—humility—teachability—the state of seeking and receptivity. And that is all we do. All the rest is up to the Higher Power.

New understandings may come now or at any time later. Our practice here is to be ready and to trust, openly and without ego or pride, as much as we can. Our contact may be in the form of healthier understanding; it may be very simple; it may be beyond anything we can imagine. There is no end to the kinds of individual experiences possible in the practice of the Eleventh Step or in the effects flowing from it.

Here in the third phase of our meditation we offer our preparation, imperfect as it may be, for whatever within or beyond us leads to new growth of the true self. From here on, each person follows and develops his own beliefs, outside the limits of this discussion. The meditation can then be ended with a brief review of the experience. Sometimes it is all hard, even painful work; just as often, perhaps, there is a pure and unexpected joy. Both feelings are valid and ought not to surprise or mislead us. There is only this: Awareness is all.

An AA doctor, Manhattan, N.Y.

April 1969



"What Step is 'Ego-Satisfaction'?"

Young People and AA

*In AA at twenty-one, he had
five years of sobriety before taking
what he calls*

The First Step: Phase Two

TONIGHT I attended a discussion meeting on Step Three. It had such an impact on me that I am still shaken as I write this. As a guide toward long-term, comfortable sobriety, this meeting is probably of greater importance than the first meeting I attended. In a sense, I retook the First and Third Steps tonight, only with much greater awareness, faith, and feeling.

I am in my fifth year of sobriety, having come to AA when I was twenty-one years old. Too often, I have been treated as, and thought of myself as, the boy wonder who gets to AA early in his life, then goes on to become an inspiration and an example to the young ones who follow. My character defects have allowed me to think of myself in such a way. Had I truly been working the program, I would not have been so adversely affected

by being chosen chairman of a large group in Manhattan, having my story appear in the Grapevine, and speaking at New York Intergroup's annual dinner. I lost sight of what brought me to AA. I forgot that without gratitude and honesty it was a sure bet that I would not stay sober.

It is not easy for me to admit that in many ways I have been dying inside, while trying to maintain a confident pose on the outside. The constant, frantic activity that I have engaged in during the past three years has effectively served as a means of preventing me from having to face me. It is easier for me to be among a hundred persons at meetings than it is to be alone or with one person. It is easier for me to speak to a crowd than it is for me to write this article. But I have gotten to the point where I just can-



not run any longer. I must ask for, and be willing to accept, the help of fellow members of our beloved community, the Fellowship of AA.

Just as people were aware of my drinking problem long before I was aware of it, or was willing to admit to it, so, too, were people aware that I was not working the program, al-

though I was going through all the motions. I would constantly separate myself from the others before the meetings by standing in the back of the room or off to the side, or by coming in late. Then after the meeting I would run from person to person, stopping only long enough to say, "Hi, how are you?" A friend asked me, on a couple of occasions, if I was getting votes. I knew what he meant, but I made like I didn't. Another friend remarked that the only way I could greet more people after a meeting would be on roller skates.

Part of the reason this behavior persisted so long was that I could easily justify it as work which should be done and as a means of helping many people. Also, I seem to be a leader by nature; people expect me to be a leader, and it is a job I enjoy and feel comfortable doing.

But it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to lead, since I was always fearful that people would discover I was not what I seemed.

I have spent far too many hours and too much energy trying to satisfy every person I know, so that no one person might feel ill will toward me if I did not do what was expected of me. I was always a reflection of the group and the opinions of those I was with. I would go to any lengths to have people think I was doing well, and at the same time I resented their failure to see how poorly I was really doing. I wanted people to compliment me and express gratitude, yet I would be very upset when they did. I knew I had many good qualities, but I also knew I could not use them to advantage for fear "they" might not approve — whoever "they" were.

There has been an increasing gulf between the inner me and the outer me. This has created an isolation and an inability to feel for others. Since I no longer choose to use alcohol to escape myself, I must not only face myself, but do something about caring for others. Until now, for someone to tell me that they loved me was like pointing a dagger at me. It was not a comfort but a threat. It explains why I "fired" my sponsor last fall when I felt he was getting too close to the inner me, and why I have not called him since. It also explains why, after years in the program, not one person has ever asked me to

be his sponsor. Whenever I sensed that someone was about to ask me, I would take off. I did not want the commitment, nor did I want anyone to get to know me. I excused myself by saying that there was so much work to do with new people who were young that I could not devote to one or two individuals a greater part of my time than to the others.

For this reason, I must be grateful to a friend who persisted in treating me like a sponsor and then started talking about me as being his sponsor, although he never really asked me. Actually, *he* has been more a sponsor to *me*; his persistence was the initial thrust that produced the admission and decision of this evening. I took what might be considered the First Step, Phase Two: admitted that I was powerless over what people thought of me, and that my actions and thoughts had become unmanageable. I had to admit that I needed friends, that friendship was not a threat, and that the inner me and the outer me had to achieve a oneness, a unity.

My gratitude also extends to a woman whom I wanted to love, but felt unable to. She, too, persisted in a show of affection for me. I could accept the relationship only so long as she did not expect anything of me. I am thankful that she made it impossible for me to run away, and thereby helped me to face myself. Both of these friends are responsible for my decision to

night, the decision that I have to get well, and that I cannot afford to waste one more day in isolation.

For me, this decision means the difference between living and existing, between being dry and being sober. The degree to which I am willing to get well and care about others will be the degree to which I really live. My inner man came into being only through working the program, and the things I consider defects of character can be changed through using the teachings of AA. My inner man has standards of conduct and right thinking, a knowledge of what is goodness for *me*. I hurt and suffer to the extent that I outwardly violate those standards.

I am grateful that *only* twenty-five years of life have gone by. When I first came to AA, I felt that I had been on my way to an early death, and I thought that would have been tragic. But I soon realized that the real tragedy would have happened if I had lived and had had to endure the deterioration, disintegration, misery, and hopelessness of the active alcoholic's life.

I believe that tonight I reached a "sober" bottom in AA. I believe I can now really start to get at the very deep, basic personality defects. Having established a firm foundation in AA, I hope to start building a comfortable home within myself, a home that I can allow others to see and share. Tonight I am filled with a deep abundance of being,

of gratitude, and of faith that I am doing what is necessary. I have been alone long enough. I want to have, and to be, a friend. I want to break out from behind this self-constructed wall.

Sharing my experience and hope

Tonight I am filled
with a deep abundance
of being, of gratitude,
and of faith . . .

at tonight's meeting was important, since others soon joined in and did the same. A member with many years of sobriety admitted that he has felt the same way as I, and still does, and only in the last three weeks has realized how he has compromised his recovery, how he has denied himself the full benefit of what the program offers. How surprised I was to hear men and women much older than I, some married and with children, also telling the group that they feel this sense of isolation and of alienation. What hope it inspires to know that this problem transcends groupings and categories.

For a time, I used the rationalization that this problem was connected with my youth, relative to most in the Fellowship, that it was the period of questioning and alienation that I had skipped while a teenager. I am grateful that a young

people's group was started recently here in New York, so that I could measure myself against my contemporaries. It became apparent that other young AAs did not share this feeling to any great extent, and therefore I lost my rationalization.

Another experience contributed to my discovery that as a man I was doing very poorly. A few times I attended parties where there was moderate drinking and most of the guests were around my age. I felt uneasy and miserable. They were not impressed with my length of sobriety. They knew nothing of AA and the Grapevine, both so much a part of me that I didn't like being in places where they meant nothing. I felt that if I had to compete with any of these people I would fail,

although I am in graduate school, have traveled, and have worked.

This lack of confidence in myself was one more factor in my decision to try to change the person I am. I felt that some force, greater than myself, was at work tonight at that AA meeting, trying to show me that I did not have to be sick any longer. The leader of another meeting, a few weeks ago, said: "The long-range comfort is worth the short-range hurt."

I now believe that to be true, for "comfort" is what I want most. In deciding to get well I insure a greater awareness and appreciation of my sobriety, my sanity, and my serenity. Thank the Higher Power for AA.

A. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

July 1969

**Don't read this
if you're over thirty...**

THE COOL DOZEN

1. **COPPED OUT** that we were the least with the Lush — and, like, everything we were puttin' down was nowhere.
2. **CAME ON** that the Big Daddy-O could free us from Camarillo.
3. **MADE IT TO TURN** the whole Gig over to the Top Cat.
4. **LIKE, WE SCANNED** it all — our Cool Scenes and our Evil Riffs.
5. **COPPED OUT** to the Big Man, another Cat and to Number One just where we lost the Beat.
6. **TOLD THE TOP CAT** — “Like, Take it, Man!”
7. **WALKIN' HUMBLE**, we told the Man — “Let me cool these Evil Gigs.”
8. **MADE BOOK** on all the Cats we had cut and came on to make it groovy.
9. **MADE IT COOL** with all these Cats, but not, like, if it bugged them or some other Stud.
10. **KEPT SCANNING** the Scene, and if we came on funky — Cop-ped out.
11. **CONTINUED TO MAKE IT** with the Big Dad and tried to pick up on his Arrangement — and blow the Right Sounds.
12. **HAVING DUG OUR DHARMA** we came on with the Lush who is still turnin' on, and tried to be cool in all our Gigs.

Board Briefs

“Aggressive” Twelfth Step Work

Members of our Editorial Board are occasionally asked to answer pertinent questions in writing. As space permits, “Around AA” will publish digests of their responses.

Q.: How aggressive should we be in our Twelfth Step work?

A.: For nearly twelve years, my attitude has been one of letting the alcoholic in need of help ask for it. If he's ready for AA, all I can do is, to the best of my ability, carry the message to him, and help him with his problems *when he wants help.*

I sometimes question myself as to my motives: Am I really carrying the message as well as I should? Am I lazy, selfish? I don't really know.

Within the past year, a stranger working in the same organization where I do (among many thousands of persons) approached me because he had heard I was in AA. He was going to meetings in the suburbs, and was enthusiastic — although his wife feared that neighbors might find out about his AA attendance. I spoke to this man in my office on some occasions when he phoned me. At times, I had the feeling that he was drinking, and the last time I saw him briefly, on an elevator at our company's headquarters, he indicated he was having a tough time.

A month or so after that, he suffered severe burns when he fell asleep in his bed at home, and died a day later. He was only in his late forties. Fellow employees who worked with him said he had been taking tranquilizers, as well as drinking.

I'd been very busy at the office, sure, but there was a feeling of guilt. Would things have turned out differently if I had been more aggressive in my AA Twelfth Step work? I don't know. If he'd really wanted help, he could have phoned. Is this an excuse, or shall I continue in my Twelfth Step attitude of carrying the message only when I'm called upon?

All I know is that one needs to be available. If it helps to break one's anonymity, all right. When I was drinking, I would have recoiled from anyone who approached me aggressively before I was ready to be approached. But how can one judge another's readiness? Availability and the understanding that a rebuff is to be taken neither personally nor as a valid reflection on the program — these are the stance for us.

In the past few years, a new Slogan has been making its way onto many AA walls, and along with it I find an old question has arisen in the minds and hearts of many members. The Slogan is, of course, *I Am Responsible.*

For many of us, it is easier to read through the Twelve Steps than it is to look at these three little words. After all, there are so many ways of handling the Steps; one can give them the once-over-lightly treatment or go into them in depth; and each man has his own method of twelfth-stepping. Who's to say he's wrong? Just by staying sober, we've heard it said, a Twelfth Step is being made.

I Am Responsible isn't so easy. There is nothing ambiguous about it. Its meaning is clear, personal, and inescapable. But, strangely, there is no specific action suggested in this new Slogan. It simply states an attitude. As recovering drunks, we find that only as the attitude of the heart clears up do our actions become strong, dependable, meaningful.

There is much to be done. Far too many still live only half alive, locked in their private drunk prisons. We want to help, to find new ways to reach these prisoners. Perhaps, God willing, realizing that we *are* responsible will lead us toward new answers showing us how we may carry the message.

October 1969



"Wonderful! The Yanks have brought AA' with them!"

October 1969

Twelfth Step for Loners

"We have learned by experience that if we want to keep this program, we've got to give it away. But what is to become of the Loner? Through no fault of his own, is this member doomed to endanger his serenity, his sobriety, and even his very life, merely because he doesn't get the opportunity to carry the message? This is the question that has been plaguing me for some time, until I found another way out.

"You will note that the Twelfth Step doesn't say 'practicing alcoholics,' but states, in fact, '. . . we tried to carry this message to alcoholics.' So I've found that by twelfth-stepping a Loner, I can perhaps help him over a rough spot. On the days when I feel rejected or despondent, or perhaps when stinking thinking starts to creep in, these are surely the days when a letter will turn up from another alky, and my days are then made. I'm back on the program again, even before I read the letter!

"If this can work for me, surely it can work for others, too."

— *John T., Australia;*
letter to *AA Loners Meeting*

November 1969

New view of the Traditions

From Manhattan, N.Y.:

I think the article "Me and My Traditions" in the October issue is one of the most helpful things I've ever read in the Grapevine, for two reasons:

1. It reminded me that the Twelfth Step specifically says we should twelfth-step ourselves by



trying to practice all of the Steps in our own affairs.

2. By showing how she related each Tradition to her own life, the author demonstrated that they do apply to *me* and not just to AA as a whole.

I'm grateful to learn to see that the Traditions are literally a spiritual extension of each Step and not just "organizational" tools.

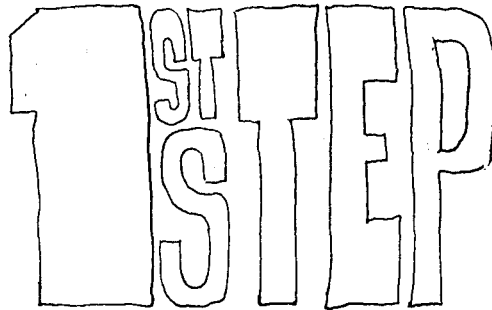
T. R.

*The Grapevine presents here
the first of a new series
on the Twelve Steps.*

*Over the years we have
published the Twelve Steps
in series form many times.
Always, however, the series
has been the work of one
author — the Twelve Steps
as he understood them.*

*This new series
has been written by
twelve members of AA,
each interpreting one of
the Steps as he sees it.*

*The Twelve Steps
from twelve different
points of view should
have the added spice
of variety and, we
hope, will demonstrate
the unity in diversity
of our Fellowship.*



BEFORE I came to AA, I took Step One slowly, over a period of years. It was not AA people who helped me with it. Instead, it was all the nonalcoholics who misunderstood and mistreated both me and my disease. In retrospect, I am grateful for their harshness. It forced me to AA, twenty-five years ago this month.

That first faltering step I took to AA recovery was not placed exactly in the First of the twelve footprints left us as a guide by the earliest AA members. But before I came to AA I had begun to realize that my

*We admitted we were powerless
over alcohol . . . that our lives
had become unmanageable.*

drinking was causing me trouble. This, of course, was hard to believe; so many other people who drank did not get into trouble. My life presented a tough sequence of problems, yes; but I argued (with myself) that drinking surely was not the cause. Fate had just handed me unfair breaks: my family, my love life, my bosses and jobs, my unsteady finances, my friends, my insomnia, my nervousness.

So I desperately kept trying to prove that drinking was not one of my problems. If I was a failure at drinking, rather than a success, it wasn't for lack of trying! Looking back, it is not so hard to understand now why it was difficult for me, as it has been for others, to

accept this inability to drink (for which pharmacological addiction provides a simple explanation). The rewards, pleasures, and gratifications of drinking were so overpoweringly great. Drinking was easy to do, and it worked almost instantaneously, anesthetizing any discomfort as if by magic. It was socially acceptable; my whole social life, all the activities I considered fun, were accompanied by drinking.

The idea of *not* drinking was so unfamiliar to me that it was frightening. If I thought of a nondrinking life at all, I thought of it as a cheerless existence devoid of grace and charm. To give up drinking would mean turning into the bluenosed, narrow-minded, Puritan type.

“Giving up drinking, then, looked like an unpleasant, unendurably long-term proposition.”

It is important now for me to remember that my entire style of life was at stake, not just the apparent benefits of alcohol. Lying to people and sinking into gloomy self-pity were habits neither unfamiliar to me nor frightening. I was thoroughly comfortable with them—even, in a way, found them enjoyable. Besides, “I was drunk at the time” was a marvelous excuse to have when I did shameful things.

Giving up drinking, then, looked like an unpleasant, unendurably long-term proposition. Anyhow, it wouldn't be necessary, would it, if other people would just change?

But they didn't. They got worse. My family, in their displeasure with me, pointed clearly to drinking as the source of my troubles. Friends who expressed concern and bosses who fired me helped drive home that truth. Kind strangers and bartenders who shook their heads while being helpful all said, in effect, “You should not drink.” A cop who jailed me for being drunk and disorderly, a doctor who scolded me for drinking too much, a grocer who wanted his money, and a bouncer who shoved me out a tavern door all reinforced the lesson.

My repeated solo failures to “do better” kept building an interior despair which finally crushed my false reasoning and false pride.

Hung there at the edge of madness, I read a newspaper story about AA.

And so, on the day I first telephoned AA, I was not struggling too hard against the mountains of undeniable proof that my life was one awful mess because of my drinking. I had also already admitted, unwillingly, that I could not handle alcohol.

Those admissions of mine are not necessarily identical to scientific diagnosis of the disease of alcoholism, of course. Any well-trained physician, alcoholism counselor, or other professional familiar with Dr. Jellinek's classic list of the symptoms of alcoholism, can correctly determine whether or not a given drinker has the symptoms.

But such diagnosis by another person is not a step toward recovery for the drinker—until he himself takes the First Step. I took it blindly at the start, and that was not the best way for me, although any beginning is better than none. In subsequent AA years, through conscientious, systematic efforts to understand and practice all the Steps, I have found that they repeatedly come to have new and surprising values.

For me, the hardest part of that First Step has been in the implications of the statement that my life had become unmanageable. With

the effects of booze a bit behind me, I could see more plainly than ever what a mess my life was, what a job lay before me. And it became clearer than ever that, in order to stay sober, I had to undertake a mammoth overhaul of myself in many aspects which, at first, seemed unrelated to drinking.

In short, stepping into the first footprint that led from the dismal swamp of alcoholism toward the sunlight of sobriety would not take me far enough. Would I muddle along on some little trail of my own in the weeds, vaguely paralleling the clearly marked AA road? Or would I choose to follow in the exact footsteps of the AAs who had preceded? The choice was up to me. I could do either, but I had to cover the whole trail if I wanted to get where the others were. Since I had already taken Step One, I could decide to stop right there. I could just dry up, period. I could survive like a raisin the rest of my life.

Going the whole route looked too hard—until someone said to me, “One step at a time.” So I looked ahead, along the path marked by the footprints of hope, commitment, and action. All around me were many happy, sober people who had walked that path. Listening intently to their stories, I heard some more

horrifying than mine, others less so. But it was plain that all these alcoholics had once *felt* the same hopelessness, fear, pain, and anger I had experienced. It was also obvious that people with drinking troubles like mine could come out of them and—unbelievable as it seemed at first—laugh at them! It was evident, too, that these people had much knowledge of alcoholism that I did not have. They knew that it was an illness, that it could deceive its victims, that the danger lay in the first drink.

They had some magic or information, secrets or power which I lacked, but which might get me out of the fix I was in. I had to believe what I saw: that some power wiser, stronger, or greater than mine could restore me to health. Next came a decision I did not even notice making at the time: to try this AA plan of theirs, even though I did not understand it. Some said it was God doing the good work, but I saw unbelievers like me being helped, too. So what had I to lose by going along?

Beginning with the First Step, I have found the following Steps out of alcoholism to be true and benevolent. I still know of no other suggestions more effective as a program of recovery.

B. L., Manhattan, N.Y.

IF THE First Step is a measure of our despair, the Second is a measure of our hope. The First Step is the admission and acceptance of our defeat — total, absolute defeat. With all our resources, we can't stay sober; with the best intentions and with the utmost determination, we still find our lives crashing down around our heads. Indeed, we are powerless over alcohol, and our lives are unmanageable.

But if we are powerless over alcohol, then who or what will keep us sober? And if we cannot manage our own lives, then who or what will guide us, help us return to some sort of rational existence?

In answer to both questions, the Second Step says: A power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

With that single, simple statement, the Second Step lays the spiritual cornerstone of AA: If we are to recover from the physical, mental, and spiritual disease called alcoholism, we must come to believe in and rely on a force *outside* ourselves.

This is not easy for most of us to do, and for many it takes time. Fortunately, the Step is very careful to use the wording "Came to believe." Some of us come to believe almost instantly; others take weeks or months; still others take years. There is no set timetable, and there is no reason to feel guilt over inability to accept the Second Step immediately, with all its ramifica-

2nd STEP

*Came to believe that a Power
greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity.*

tions. On the other hand, though, if we do not work toward an acceptance of the Step, if we ignore it or kick it under the rug and hope it goes away, we cut the spiritual heart out of the program.

So, by hook or by crook, we come to believe. But believe in what?

In three things: the existence of a force outside — and greater than — ourselves; the fact of our own insanity; the ability of the greater power to take care of that insanity.

For reasons which some day someone may explain far better than I can, many or even most alcoholics seem to have trouble with the word "insanity," though the track record of any practicing alcoholic — even the part we remember — should be proof enough that we are at this stage somewhat different from the

normal. To many, the word conjures up visions of men in white coats, or patients chasing butterflies across Happydale, or any one of a dozen forms of psychotic behavior. But a word is only a word, and "insanity" can refer to any kind of behavior that is at variance with what is generally accepted as normal.

Our obsessive, compulsive behavior in relation to alcohol can hardly be termed normal. Nor can the things we do while drinking. Nor can many of the habit patterns, mental processes, or just plain hang-ups we have after we stop drinking.

Any discussion of the Second Step will show that the word "insanity" means, to different people, that we were insane while we drank, or before we started drinking, or after we stopped, or at all three stages. These differences of opinion become unim-

portant in the light of this statement: If we were insane while we drank, the craving to return to that life must be equally insane, and if there was or is some problem that adds fuel to the craving, then the problem must be eliminated.

But the solution offered by that statement is not as easy as it looks. To put it crudely: A truly sick mind cannot repair itself; in fact, many times it can't even see what's wrong.

The human mind has a marvelous ability to protect itself from outside influences. Although the conscious portion of the mind may have a sincere desire to find out what's wrong and to fix it, the subconscious part will block any such effort by putting up a bewildering variety of misleading motivations, misinformation, and misdirections. The more important — the deeper — the par-

ticular hang-up is, the higher and thicker this wall will be. If the problem is big enough, the conscious, thinking mind will not even be aware of its existence, and the mind that does become aware will still be powerless to do much about it.

The knowledge of that helplessness in trying to cope with our own problems by ourselves is an integral part of the First and Second Steps. The Second Step states very clearly that our insanity can be taken care of, our sanity can be restored, by a power greater than ourselves. Once we have become aware of our own irrationality and our inability to cope with it singlehanded, it then becomes a question of searching out a solution that is outside — and greater than — ourselves.

It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of this search for and acceptance of a power, a force, an influence that is outside ourselves. The Step refers to a power *greater* than ourselves. Obviously, if we are unable to solve our problems alone, the power *must* be greater than we are in order to bring about anything much worthwhile. However, babies have to creep before they can walk, and walk before they can run. It is tough merely to begin to look outside ourselves for any kind of force or power, let alone a greater power. In fact, it is hard for some of us to accept the idea that there *is* anything outside ourselves.

That last statement deserves some explanation. A rational, thinking,

conscious mind has no trouble with the idea that each person, thing, and force has a separate and distinct existence. We can say (and believe), "I am. You are. He is."

However, the subconscious or unconscious mind often rejects this idea. It says, "I am, but you exist only as I think about you." Extreme? Hardly. One of the most powerful tools in AA is the process by which one alcoholic identifies with another. First, this identification consists merely of recognizing that there are other people who exist independently of our own minds. Then the process goes further: It identifies another alcoholic as a *similar* human being. But the basic identification is with another human being as a separate entity.

Once that log jam has been broken up, the rest of the process is relatively easy. Once we become aware that there are other people and things — and forces — outside ourselves, it becomes a matter of searching until a power that does some good is found. Eventually, through any one of a wide variety of spiritual experiences, the power is recognized as the basic driving force of the universe.

Disposing of the whole concept of acquiring a greater power in one or two sentences may seem abrupt, but is anything else worth saying? Those who have had a spiritual experience already know all about it, while for those who have not yet had one, an outpouring of words would have no

real meaning.

The search for a higher power and the nature of that power, when found, are very personal matters. Many of us have no trouble in accepting God as our Higher Power; many others shy away from the word "God," but have no trouble in accepting the presence of some sort of universal force; still others look upon our AA group or all of AA as a power greater than ourselves.

In all these cases, though, we have acquired a belief in some force that is external, more powerful than we are, and capable of helping us return to sanity. This implies that the external, more powerful force is a force for good, an orderly force capable of making sense out of the chaos of reality, and bringing order to our own chaotic lives.

The final stage in a full acceptance of the Second Step is to come to believe that this greater power — a good and orderly greater power — will indeed actually help us. We have already accepted the idea that this force *can* do the job. Now we must become convinced, completely convinced, that the power *will* do it.

Once again, words are hardly an adequate method of trying to express belief. Those who have thrown themselves on the mercy of the court, so to speak, know that the higher power will do exactly as the Step says. But that statement is no help at all to those who haven't.

What may help is a very brief



description of one member's struggles with the Second Step.

I came into AA as an agnostic — or, rather, I didn't believe in anything much, but I wanted to. Although I couldn't begin to accept the concept of God, I certainly liked the serenity and obvious peace of mind I saw in those who did believe.

As my time in the program grew, this desire grew. Also increasing day by day was pain — pure, unrelieved pain — not physical pain, but a longing inside my brain and my heart for something above and, most important, beyond me.

My group and the whole AA program helped, and as time went by I began to perceive some sort of order where there had been only confusion, some sense of guidance where there had been only a labyrinth of blind alleys.

Then one day (on the Garden State Parkway, unlikely as that sounds) all the pieces fell into place. Whatever barrier had blinded my vision, preventing me from seeing the true nature of things, was gone. For the first time in my life, I became aware of the all-pervading presence of an incomprehensibly vast power.

Then, too, I became aware that

I was only one infinitely small — but vitally important — part of the universe. Infinitely small because I was one tiny soul on one planet going around one sun in one galaxy of countless billions, but vitally important because the entire, immense universe would be very, very, very slightly different without me, as it would be different without any one of us.

The vision, if I may call it that, was momentarily staggering, but only momentarily. The essential rightness of my vision sustained me, and still sustains me. If I am part of the whole — even a tiny part — I belong here.

And if I belong here, all I have to do is find out exactly what I am supposed to be and do. For me as an alcoholic, part of this answer is obvious. The universe has the ability — in fact, makes it a rule — to eliminate the bad and the sick,

and since an active alcoholic is indeed a sick person, the universe — or society — will eliminate him. Therefore, to drink is for me to deny my higher power.

But that is only part of the problem, although perhaps the most important part. I personally conceive of the universe as a very orderly place; to achieve a serene and happy existence, all that is necessary is to be aware of this order and fit myself into it. This is a lot easier said than done, of course. So, in AA, after the Second Step there are ten more designed to help accomplish this.

But once we have accepted, as ineluctable fact, our powerlessness over alcohol, and once we have come to believe that a greater power will give us all the help we need, we have made two giant steps along the road to recovery.

P. S., Greenwich, Conn.

Trouble With Honesty

The first part of the First Step wasn't enough

ONCE, AT a meeting, I heard a member describe how he felt coming back to AA after having had a period of twelve years' sobriety and then drinking again. It was "like living in your own beautiful mansion for twelve years," he said, "leaving for a short period, coming back, and having to use the servants' entrance."

I am having such an experience — not with twelve years' sobriety, but with four (hardly a mansion, just a pretty little home); not with sobriety, but with honesty.

At this time, I am awaiting trial and sentence on a criminal charge of "theft by conversion" of a large sum of money from my employer, a branch of the provincial government. I will not go into all the gory details, except to say that it happened over the major period of my sobriety and started as a "borrowing" of funds for short periods, to meet obligations; progressively, the "borrowing" became taking, when I was unable to replace the funds. Of course, the thing began to snowball out of proportion; in desperation, I began to speculate insanely, trying to hit a jackpot, so that I could get out from under. Needless to say, my bubble burst.

I am not looking for sympathy nor trying to justify any of my actions. But I hope that in some way I may help someone, somewhere, by the lesson I am paying for so severely, less through what justice may do to me than through the utter humiliation and degradation I have brought to my wonderful and loyal AA wife and to our four-year-old AA baby.

You see, even after I had read aloud and tried to interpret our Chapter Five and our Twelve Steps, the only bit of understanding that I really garnered and dedicated my "contented sobriety" to was the first part of Step One: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol." The only action I took was the middle part of Step Twelve: "... we tried to carry this message to alcoholics ..."

If any one of you is doing anything even a little bit dishonest, (isn't there a *little* larceny in all of us?), I pray that you stop right now! Look in the mirror! Read and re-read Chapter Five and the beautiful Twelve Steps — the answers are all there. If your life is still unmanageable, do admit it. Do practice these principles in all your affairs.

E. B., Nanaimo, B.C.



Freedom Began in Prison

*The Fourth
and Fifth Steps
help make
beautiful
music*

THE STARLIGHT Bowl is a lovely outdoor concert auditorium, set deep between canyon walls, high above "beautiful downtown Burbank" in California. This summer night held particular significance for me. My ten-year-old daughter Cindy was with me, her silky golden hair spread over my knees as she rested her head on my lap. We were listening to the delightful strains of "Tales From the Vienna Woods," at a concert by the Burbank Symphony Orchestra.

It hadn't always been this way. . . .

Several years before this memorable night, I was released from a state prison, a stranger to my daughter and very apprehensive about how I'd behave in free society. I'd never been able to cope with freedom before.

Six years before my release, I stood at the bar in a local tavern with a pistol in my hand. I was a practicing alcoholic and desperately needed money to continue my latest drunk. Being too proud to beg, hav-

ing run out of friends and family, and feeling the fantastic courage granted by much red wine, I was attempting robbery. Fortunately for the bar owner (and, as it turned out, for me), I was captured in the midst of my bumbling crime. The police treated me fairly, even kindly. The court procedures passed swiftly, and within three months I was on the way to a state prison. I was to remain there three years.

This three-year period became the greatest, most productive time I'd spent in all my thirty years up to that point. During my confinement, I again became active in my church, relearning many basic precepts of good living. I used the library facilities intensely, reading widely on philosophy and alcoholism. Most important of all, I became

an involved, active participant in AA.

Delving deeply into the Twelve Steps under the adept guidance of the free AA members who came in twice a week, I was soon writing my Fourth Step inventory. Having completed this written confession to myself, I made arrangements with the prison staff to have an outside AA member come in to hear my Fifth Step. We were provided with a private office and coffee, and spent three hours reviewing the sordid details of my past. It was the first such occurrence in that particular institution, and it worked out so well that many men since then have been able to complete their Fourth and Fifth Steps while still incarcerated.

This inventory-taking was the

turning point of my life. An almost immediate freedom from all guilt and remorse came upon me. I was literally free from my past. It was during this time that I learned what true freedom was. It had nothing to do with walls and guards — it had to do with a feeling inside. Freedom is a state of mind.

Today, I cherish my physical and emotional freedom with all my heart and soul. In order of precedence, it stands second only to sobriety. What an education AA has given to me! Everything I am or have belongs to AA in reality. More than tangible benefits, AA has given me a way to go, a way to live and live happily and abundantly.

Many blessings have been showered upon me during my five years and nine months of sobriety — great

spiritual gifts, as well as the more ordinary supplies of money and goods. These great gifts come one after the other in spite of my own foolishness and fumbling, as I very slowly grope my way towards the light of reason and love. The good things increase in direct proportion to my willingness to become more teachable and humble in my daily affairs.

And so it is that a chronic daily drunk, discarded by free society, hating and rejecting the very society that spawned him, can come to enjoy what many “free” people may take for granted: a simple concert, a wonderful summer night filled with beautiful music, and a sweet little child who loves and trusts her daddy.

R. R., Universal City, Calif.

3rd STEP

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Wilfulness was the name of the game, and I was the dealer. I shuffled the deck, cut the cards, dealt the hand, called for the openers, and played the game by my own rules. As the chips piled up in front of me, the other players pulled out of the game, one by one, and I was left alone, master of a deck of blank cards and banker of a worthless cache of poker chips. I had become an alcoholic, and I couldn't even see what game I was playing.

I came into AA at thirty, emotionally about half that age, stumbling down the steps into the old Inter-group office on 39th Street in New York, knowing I couldn't go on drinking as I had been, knowing that the walls of my life had come tumbling down and that I needed help.

How easily the First Step came: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." I had been on a vodka and wine binge for days and was in a state of physical exhaustion and emotional near-hysteria.

Step Two, "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," took its course over the next few months, as I actually experienced the beginning of recovery and then came to believe that Something was taking me over, bringing me back, restoring me.

But oh, that Third Step! "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God —" *What* God? For years, I had been doing battle with the whole concept of God. Now I was sober, and still battling. I

was sober, and grateful to be sober, but the God hang-up was still there. It has taken nearly nine years for me to begin to apply Step Three, and I have had to turn it around and look at it in reverse to do so.

"... God *as we understood Him.*" As a timid, obedient little girl, I had understood that the God to whom I prayed in Sunday school every Sunday loved me and was watching over me. But at the age of sixteen, my understanding of God underwent a metamorphosis. Under the influence of a course in biology, I began to see God as, not a grand old man peering through the heavens, but as a non-human power behind the orderliness of human life, the source of the clean, beautiful creativity inherent in protoplasm, and the energy behind the

development of cellular structure from the ameba to mankind. Suddenly, my former personal concept of God turned me off, with a force so violent I surprised even myself. When the headmistress of the girls' school I attended asked God to "watch over us here in school," I wanted to scream out, "Why *should* He, with a whole universe to run?"

After I left school, my drinking started. At eighteen, I was hanging out in bars, drinking with older men, trying to match them drink for drink, blacking out, and having hallucinations. I was already reputed to be a hopeless drunk. I turned away from all of the values that had been taught me in Sunday school and, believing myself to be terribly evil, gave up on the idea that any God

could care for me, anyway. He, She, or It certainly seemed to have no use for me. But at the height of my drinking, slumped over a bottle of port in my apartment two blocks from the Bowery, I wrote a poem to God that began: "Dear God, if you exist at all, a sparrow is about to fall." The prayer came from my despair. My intellectual rejection of a conventional God had not removed my emotional need for a God of comfort and caring.

Then I hit my alcoholic bottom and found hope in AA. Three months after my entrance into the program, I spoke for the first time. Again I surprised myself as, completely without preparation, I heard myself say: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." AA has restored my soul to me," I said.

It was the beginning of an understanding of what God was to me. It was the recognition of a Higher Power and the role of that Power in bringing about my recovery from alcoholism. But that was as far as it went. Beyond this, I was not letting a Higher Power or any other kind of power into my life.

"... The care of God..." I was sober for the first time in my adult life. Through the power of AA, I could stay away from the first drink. I was feeling healthy again, and my self-respect was returning, and morning was a beautiful time of day. But I

still ran the show. I had no faith that a God could or did care, or would take care of me. Nor had I the humility to permit a power other than myself to manifest such caring. Although sober, I continued to make my decisions in the same way as before — haphazardly, hastily, without thought. When AA friends told me to "turn a decision over," I thought they meant "turn it upside down" — look at the other side! So I did, or thought I did; but looking at the other side (of the issue at hand) only seemed to confirm the decision I wanted to make. I had no understanding whatsoever of the process of turning anything over to a Higher Power. Talk of "the care of God" offended the intellect I thought I had. I considered such advice evangelical and would have no part of it.

"... Our lives to the care..." My life had to be cared for by someone, and, despite my newfound sobriety, wilfulness still abided. I spent the next eight years holding on tight to the reins and doing the things I wanted to do, rather than the things that greater wisdom seemed to indicate. I charged into a marriage with an active alcoholic against even my own sense of intelligence (I certainly would never have recommended such a move to anyone else), believing blindly that somewhere along the way AA would get him, even though he made little effort to get AA. My own sobriety was tested again and again as one of his periodic binges followed another and I was

forced to hospitalize, institutionalize, and even jail my husband. After every binge, I briefly considered bringing my marriage to an end, but each time fear of loneliness and fear of admitting failure motivated me to give it another try.

In another calamity of wilfulness, I embarked upon a publishing venture in a field that was considered risky, against the advice of all acquaintances with any business sense whatsoever. But the image of myself

turn my will over in order to turn my life over to the care of a God. As I had hit bottom and admitted my powerlessness over alcohol, so I now hit another kind of bottom and admitted powerlessness over wilfulness. Just as my alcoholic bottom had been accompanied by mental, physical, and spiritual pain, so also was this new bottom steeped in a suffering of its own: the loneliness of a broken marriage, the humiliation of financial collapse, the pressure of

*"... so now I hit another kind
of bottom and admitted powerlessness
over wilfulness."*

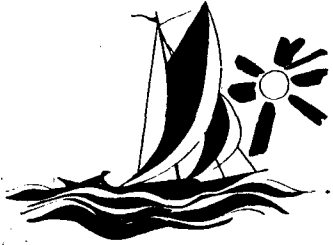
as the head of a successful publishing enterprise was attractive; the need to be considered "successful" after the multiple failures of my past life was great. I invested all my worldly goods in the dream — and lost.

I had *not* turned my life over to the care of any power. There had been no intelligence, no order in my decisions. The only criterion upon which I had based my moves was the satisfaction of my emotional needs — to be loved and to be respected. And I lost the ballgame. Eight years sober, I still hadn't been able to come to grips with that unbelievably elusive Third Step.

"... To turn our will..." I had to

resentments against the people who had warned me (I was ready to clobber the first rat who said, "I told you so"), and the inconvenience of going it alone. I took a close look at myself.

It wasn't hard to trace the suffering to its source. My whole way of life followed decisions predicated on convenience and expedience, as well as wilfulness. If I continued to bungle my decisions, there would be more suffering, and perhaps one of these days I might even forget and pick up the first drink, not caring any more, because everything was so lousy anyway. Well, I didn't want to pick up that drink. I didn't want to go back



to the binges, the blackouts, the hallucinations, the awful hangovers, and the guilt of past days. The only thing left to do was to try for the first time to turn my will over to some Intelligence, to become "willing to grow along spiritual lines." I had to accept the fact that the way would be paved with inconvenience, loneliness, discomfort, and financial hardship, but that it was the only way if I was going to survive.

And so I "made a decision" to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him. *How* I made it is not easy to put into words. It wasn't a matter of taking conscious steps, like blending the ingredients of a cake. It was an unconscious blending of thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

First, I evaluated myself and the current status of my life. What was right about it? What was wrong? Then I divided the "wrong" things into those I couldn't do anything about and therefore must accept, and those I could do something about and could change. The next step was an act of faith. For the first time in my adult life, I came to believe that I was doing "God's will" — or, in words I feel more comfortable with,

doing the intelligent thing, the thing that makes sense. This belief gave me the courage to start making the necessary changes in my life. The courage has not been consistent; there have been peaks and low points in its intensity. I take advantage of the peaks of courage by taking the more difficult steps while I am feeling strong. During the low points, I am gentle with myself — even indulge myself! — and don't require of myself anything more than staying sober and doing only what is required to get by. I live a day at a time, believing that all is going according to plan, and that there is no need for me to waste valuable energy worrying about the future.

I have to maintain absolute, unwavering faith in the validity of the steps I am taking. Without this faith, there would be no Step Three for me. The faith is continually tested by my overriding human frailties — the need for love, the desire for easy living — but so far the strength of this Higher Power has sustained my (or should I say "God's"?) will.

And I have known loneliness and hardship, while living alone, holding down three jobs, and waiting for what will be my second divorce. But, having come to believe in a Power that can and will be responsible for my life, and even in a Power that cares, I believe the strength will be there. Having seen for myself that my own navigation served only to slam my boat up against shoals, I have at last become willing to turn

the steering over to a more adept helmsman. The decision is clear.

Tomorrow I may be drunk. But today I have the tired peace that comes from doing the things you have to do when you turn the wheel over to a mariner who knows the way across, but makes you work with Him through every inch of the crossing. I am not saying that for me the Third Step has been completed. My wilfulness is still very much a part of me and may always be a stumbling block to progress in my life. So I will have to stay very close to AA, where

my strength lies. I am so full of human frailty that I think it is a miracle I am here today at all. It's only through AA.

And it's only through AA that I can now appreciate and understand a passage from Romans (5:3-5) which I once scoffed at: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." Perhaps "hope" is the real name of the game.

Anonymous, New Hampshire

*The spiritual experience in AA
is something quite apart from formal
religion, says
this priest*

Frequently around the AA program we hear a person say, "The spiritual side of the program is not for me" or "I don't go for the spiritual bit. As long as I don't drink, I'm satisfied. I leave the pie-in-the-sky stuff to other people." Any such cavalier dismissal of the spiritual side of our program makes me wince a little and feel a bit sorry for this person. This sense of pity and sorrow is the more intense and poignant the longer the person has been in the program.

In most cases, I have good reason to suspect that this man or woman is unwittingly confusing formal religion with what we call the spiritual side of the program. To my mind, he is unconsciously rebelling against the possibility of his being soft-soaped into embracing the creed, code, and cult of some particular religious denomination and then being wheedled into a kind of dogmatic straitjacket. For him, the word "spiritual" has overtones of something soft, hypocritical, less-than-virile, because it can evoke images of "church mice" with hands folded, eyes down, grim faces that seem to say, "Remember death!" And, understandably, he wants nothing to do with these creeps.

Yet I am quite sure that such a

person, like the rest of us, would be quick to deny that he came into AA primarily because he had a religious problem. I have never yet met anyone who crawled into AA because he couldn't understand the infallibility of the Pope or the source of authority in the Protestant or Jewish faith. I seriously doubt, too, that any atheist has come into our program to get a black or white answer to the question of God's existence.

When I first came into AA, the good people in the program told me that, if I was alcoholic, I had a very real sickness, that I was sick physically, mentally, and spiritually. I do not remember anyone ever telling me that I was sick religiously or that,



A Gift That Surpasses Understanding

because I was a priest, I could not be sick spiritually. And how right they were in refraining from saying that I was sick religiously! In my descent down the skids of booze and pills, I never had any serious difficulty with my religion or my priesthood. It is true that I was less than vigorous in the practice of both, but I sensed that my sickness was on a level much more basic than these.

And yet it was by no means clear to me what it meant for me to be spiritually sick and at the same time not to be religiously sick. Like many others in AA, I was uneasy with the word "spiritual" as it is used in the program. But when it dawned on me that the term "spiritual" is derived

from the word "spirit," things started to clear up. I was comfortable with the word "spirit," because I had lived with it all my life. This spirit, this soul, this principle of life, call it what you will, was given to me long before I had any knowledge or practice of a formal religion, long before I had the slightest idea what profession or vocation I might want to pursue.

This is the spirit that was infused into me at the moment of my conception, the thing that would automatically give me membership in the human race. This spirit is the rational part of me that endowed me with dignity, nobility, and a separate identity. My spirit or soul gave me the

power to think, to make judgments, to wish, to will, to love, to reach out for the infinite. This spirit of mine gave me all these wonderful powers and something more — it gave me my total personality, which in the years to come would be molded and shaped, for better or worse, by environment, education, and circumstances.

The environment, education, and circumstances of the intervening years can be briefly telescoped. I had all the advantages of a good home, a better-than-ordinary education, a life with pleasant surroundings. My priesthood, which I loved (and still love dearly!), should have enhanced all these advantages. But life does not always work according to a definite blueprint.

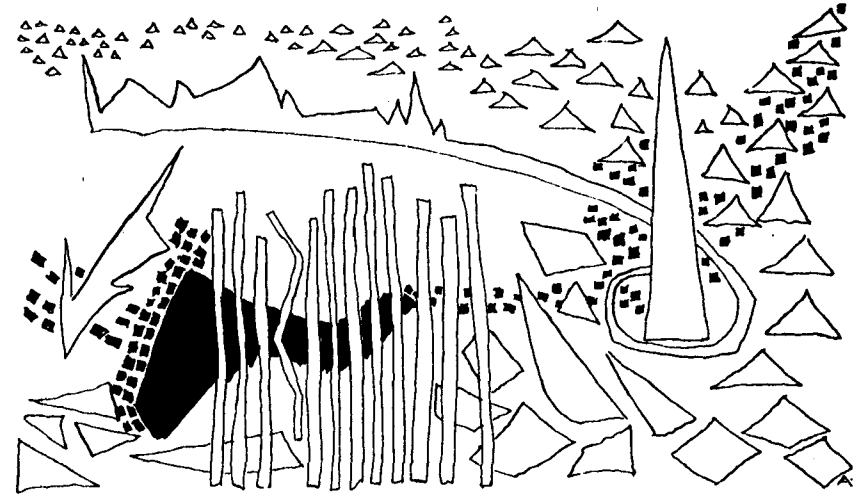
Somewhere along the line, fears, self-doubt, and a sense of inadequacy began to manifest themselves. Then I discovered those two "friends," alcohol and tranquilizers, which seemed to quiet the fears and self-doubt and restore the sense of adequacy. The classical, insidious pattern started to form and continued growing over a long period: more and deeper fears, loss of interest in work and in life, gradual withdrawal from people and activities, deep-seated loneliness, panic, near despair. In this process of slow death, there was no one to whom I could turn except my two "friends."

The climax was occasioned by an enforced withdrawal from both the alcohol and the pills during hospi-

talization for major surgery. I went into dt's for a period of eleven days. After emerging from this pleasant interlude, I was immediately shipped to a "special-type" hospital (nut factory). About six weeks after being released from this institution, I went in and out of hallucinations, a delayed withdrawal symptom, and I soon found myself in the alcoholic ward of a state mental hospital. It was here that AA came to me.

Life had taken a tremendous toll on my spirit, my soul. I came into AA broken in spirit, soul-sick. If the ray of hope that I heard had worked for so many thousands in AA was to warm up my heart and light up my life, it would have to penetrate, not into the areas of my religion and my priesthood, but into the much deeper, more basic area where I was really sick — into my human spirit. Had there been in the AA program any suggestion of theology, formal or otherwise, I would have picked up my weak carcass and broken spirit and headed back to the desert outside. Having formally studied theology for four years under good professors, I was, according to ordinary standards, something of a professional theologian. At that time, I needed more theology about as much as I needed a third thumb.

What I did need and need desperately was, not more knowledge about God, but, with God's help, a deep, penetrating knowledge about myself. How could I learn to live, not ecstatically nor even euphorically, but



with at least a modicum of peace? How could this spirit of mine find some kind of interest, enthusiasm, self-fulfillment? I was to discover that AA had the answer for this plain, ordinary, human craving of my heart.

I followed the suggestions of the AA people in the hope that I might emerge from the jungle, as they had, and enjoy a kind of resurrection. I went and still go to many meetings; I talked with many people, a newly discovered pleasure; I read a great deal of the available AA literature. These were immensely helpful and will always be necessary for me, to a certain extent. But if these techniques are to have any real meaning, body, and flavor for me, they must rest on something as substantial, vigorous, and life-giving as the Twelve Steps.

When I studied and started to live these Steps, it became clear that, at least for me, the "spiritual awakening" mentioned in the Twelfth Step had to mean "an awakening of the spirit" — i.e., no matter how swift or prolonged the process might be, I had to come awake, alive in my spirit as a human being. From that time on, I have had very few, if any, hang-ups with the word "spiritual" as used in the AA program.

I was greatly impressed with the order, the logic, and the thoroughness of the Steps. They seemed to be an all-or-nothing deal. If I had taken the First Step and settled for that, I would have been guilty of the "selective surrender" spoken of by that pioneer friend of AA, Dr. Harry M. Tiebout. In his wonderfully perceptive brochure "The Act of Sur-

render in the Therapeutic Process," he makes this comment about one of his patients: "His surrender is not to life as a person, but to alcohol as an alcoholic."

Had I merely surrendered to alcohol as an alcoholic, this would have been good, but not nearly good enough. True, it would have meant that alcohol and pills, two deadly substances for me, would have gone out of my life — no small blessing! But the trouble with me was that everything was going out of my life — friends, activities, my sense of values, the meaning of life, love, laughter, and beauty. My human spirit was indeed desert-dry, and now, with booze and pills gone, it would seem a more arid, barren wasteland. If I was to recover the wholeness, the oneness of my personality, if I truly wanted a rebirth of my human spirit, a taste of the joy of living, then, in accordance with Dr. Tiebout's formula, I had to surrender, not only to alcohol as an alcoholic, but to life as a person.

But Chapter V of the Big Book, "How It Works," assured me that this awakening of the spirit was the natural, orderly result of studying and living the Twelve Steps. "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path," it says. Here was a safe, secure, comfortable framework within which I could move forward gradually and gracefully toward a new way of life, toward something of the peace and serenity that I saw in other AA

“. . . I truly wanted a rebirth of my human spirit . . .”

people. Here was a mode of living fashioned, not from pure theory nor in the halls of academe, but from the rough, tough, raw experience in life of the first hundred members of AA, who had desperately wanted the same kind of awakening of the spirit that I was searching for.

This awakening of the spirit is set down so naturally and confidently in the Twelfth Step that it seems to carry this implicit warning: "If you are not having at least the beginnings of a spiritual awakening, it would be well to look back over the Steps and find out where you are failing." And there are no qualifying words, such as "maybe," "perhaps," or "perchance." On the other hand, there is a kind of built-in guarantee that, if you are living the Steps to the best of your ability, no matter how difficult it may be at times, you will eventually have this awakening of the spirit. What a tremendous source of encouragement!

It should not surprise us that the idea of God and our complete dependence on Him for recovery should be woven into the Steps. God has many kinds of presence. He has a general presence, by which He is present at every moment in every nook and cranny of the universe. He has many kinds of special presence, by which He is present to different groups who are trying to do some-

thing in His name. We can say that God is present with a special presence in a church congregation when its members are gathered to honor and worship Him according to the dictates of their conscience and the rites of their particular denomination. God is certainly present with a special presence to the heads of governments who are honestly seeking ways and means of promoting justice and peace. He is present by a special presence to any society, fellowship, or family that is gathered together in His name to work out some problem or achieve some worthwhile goal. Should it surprise us, then, that God is present by a special presence in AA, which is "a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism"? Indeed, since alcoholism is such a destructive, insidious, baffling disease, would it be an exaggeration to say that God is present to us in AA by a very special presence?

Yet this special presence of God in AA says nothing about our religious creed, code, or cult. It imposes no theology on anyone. It says one thing clear and loud: If you have a problem with alcohol and if you wish to do something about it within AA, then you, too, can partake of this special

presence of God in this Fellowship. "If a drunk, fallen-away Catholic comes into AA and if he works the program with God's grace to the best of his ability, he will emerge as a sober, fallen-away Catholic. But the difference is infinite." Such is the astute observation of a priest friend of mine, who is very knowledgeable both in things AA and in things theological. This observation would be as true, it seems to me, whether the person was Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, or atheist, provided that he recognized his need for a Power greater than himself.

Should a man, after attaining a length of solid sobriety, wish to return to the practice of some formal religion in a particular denomination, this would be fine with AA. But, it would seem, such a return would require another special type of God's presence, outside the ambit and concern of AA.

I feel that anyone who comes into AA wants to "get better," whatever this term may specifically mean to him. It may mean getting out of trouble, placating the family or others, retaining his sanity, etc. The reason for a person's coming into AA is not important; any reason or even excuse will suffice. But it strikes me that the reason for his or her staying in AA is immensely important. Getting out of trouble, pla-

cating the family or the superior, etc. — all of these may be good for the time being. But for the sustained, lifetime work of handling this deadly, progressive disease of alcoholism, experience has shown that such motives are inadequate, short-lived, or too fragile; they do not meet the problem head-on, and under pressure they will snap or wither. The family, the boss, the probation officer, collectively or singly, are not the problem.

The problem is me (ungrammatical and humiliating as this may be). I am truly grateful that there was a fellowship, a group of warm, understanding people, to whom I could bring this “problem of me.” Nobody lectured me; nobody gave me the moral wheeze; nor, on the other hand, did anybody stand in awe of me. The black suit and the Roman collar were merely the accidental and, therefore, unimportant attire of a sick human being. The important concern of the AAs was to reassure me that they knew what and how I was suffering and that I would “get better,” as they had.

I somehow sensed immediately that the God of my understanding was present in AA by a special presence, a presence by which I could ask for and receive graces to handle my alcoholic problem, a presence that gave me these graces with and through AA people. I am grateful that within this apparently formless AA Fellowship, where only “suggestions” are made (famous last words!), there was a structured program of recovery where I would not be on my own. The Twelve Steps were there to guide me. And just over the horizon in the Twelfth Step was the promise, almost the guarantee, of something for which I had been searching over the years — a spiritual awakening!

Whatever this spiritual awakening may mean to anyone else in AA, to me it means that the God of my understanding has given me, by His special presence in AA and through AA people and the Twelve Steps, a gift that surpasses understanding an awakening of my human spirit!

A Priest

An Agnostic's Twelve Steps

*Unable to accept the "orthodox," this
fellow AA gives a personal version of
the Steps as they work for her*

I HAVE never been able to accept orthodox religion, and my search for God, as I understand Him, has been long and persistent. It took me to many meetings and churches, where I talked with many AAs and even more clergymen. Confirmed as an Anglican, I sought out ministers of the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches. In all of the twelve years since I came to AA, I have not found God, as I understand Him, so I term myself an agnostic.

I have been accused of deliberate refusal to believe — "None so blind as those that *will* not see." In fact, my status as an agnostic has brought me much criticism. I have been termed ungrateful and stubborn, as well as blind. I do not consider myself any of these things.

Since no one is unique, there must be others like me. I feel it may be of interest to them to know how an agnostic can like our Twelve Steps. Step One presented no difficulties. I knew that I was an alcoholic and that my life was unmanageable.

Step Two: I knew I was insane when I was drinking, so if AA could help me keep sober, I had a chance to return to sanity.

Step Three I could not do. You cannot turn your will and your life over to the care of something in which you can't believe.

Step Four I did, and keep on doing. As sobriety has cleared my thinking, I have been able to do this more fully as time goes by.

Step Five: This Step I did fully and completely with another AA member. I could not direct my confession

to a God I did not know.

Steps Six and Seven I had to bypass. By doing Step Four to the best of my ability, I reasoned, I had discovered a lot of character defects and shortcomings. I keep on trying to do all I can to eradicate these.

Step Eight is quite straightforward. This I have done as fully as possible.

Steps Nine and Ten I was able to do. Both are very important to my continued sobriety, and I work at them with all the honesty at my command.

Step Eleven, like Step Three, had to be bypassed. This was not done lightly. After much time spent in searching and in conversation, I finally gave up.

Step Twelve: For the first part of this often-misunderstood Step, I try to live by the Golden Rule. For the

second, I take all Twelfth Step work that comes my way and have not been utterly unsuccessful as a sponsor.

Now, how does this imperfect program work? I can say only this: I am happier than I have ever been and have had many years of sobriety, after an uncertain beginning. My family is a very happy and stable one, and I enjoy their full respect, love, and confidence. As far as one can ever judge about oneself, I have again taken my place in society and have been elected and reelected to several local committees. My health is good, and I enjoy my work. I have peace of mind and no desire to drink. I now have enough maturity to accept life's ups and downs. If this constitutes sobriety in its fullest sense, I think I must have acquired it.

M. W., Morrinsville, New Zealand

4TH STEP

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

THE IDEA of "morals" scared hell out of me for years — the years before my drinking became unmanageable, then the alcoholic years, and even the first three or four years after I had found the shelter of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nothing could dull the edge of what I realize now was simply cold fear. I was frightened at the very mention of "morality," because it posed too big a problem for me — big because it was simple. If I accepted the challenge that the consideration of morality hurled at me, I would have to begin dividing my life — and the things I did every day — into two long columns headed "right" and "wrong."

Try this simple experiment, and you'll discover exactly why I was scared. Pop into your neighborhood gin mill or a local cocktail party. Find the drunkest lush around and start a discussion about "right and

wrong" with him (or her). What you will hear will be roughly equivalent to the confusion in which I lived for nearly a quarter of a century. Or turn back your own psychic clock to those boozy meditations, crazy distortions, and amoeboid transformations of "rights" and "wrongs" by which you lived — or tried to live — while you were on the sauce.

Like most enlightened moderns, I had come under the wing of Uncle Sigmund Freud. (My analyst's analyst had been analyzed by Freud in person, so I drunkenly thought of myself as a legitimate great-grandson of the great man himself.) Years of probing into the sexual enigmas of individual and collective living left me, like many of my generation, believing the vague dictum that bore the imprimatur of the Vienna school of psychology: "Everything has to do with sex." I knew, therefore, that

I was somehow liberated from the repellent, antique morality of Queen Victoria. I was free, morally speaking, to pursue the truth of my own nature and to rise above the tyrannies of repressed (and therefore "wrong") sex.

Accordingly, again like many of my generation, I was literally *obsessed* by sex, an obsession (but not, thank God, a compulsion) only second in importance to alcohol in my life. Drinking, for at least a dozen alcoholic years, was not a moral matter at all; that is, it seemed to have nothing to do with right or wrong. Alcohol meant survival; anything that kept me alive, I assumed, was necessary and hence, in the philosopher's words, "beyond good and evil." So I did not see alcohol as a problem, except at the moments when I dimly noticed (with frequent amusement) that the stuff was killing me. But this subtle observation

appeared almost totally irrelevant to the clear truth that booze was also keeping me alive. Such a state of affairs is too much of a puzzle (a moral puzzle, when you get right down to it) for any man's gin-soaked brain, including mine.

What I am getting to (slowly) is that morality for me centered, I thought, on matters having to do mostly with sex. Drinking unleashed a panorama of sexual fantasies within me. (These fantasies, let me add, were rarely implemented in life. The business of living was just too jammed up with wide-screen and stereophonic hangovers, the logistics of getting the next drink while battling for social survival, and the exhausting labor of achieving the maximum possible intoxication. There was just no time or energy left to turn those sex dreams into reality.)

Imagine, then, how I felt after a dry year in our Fellowship when I

ARE WE . . . "alone in the
dark of night
or with other people"?

first bruised my sensitivities upon Step Four. A *moral* inventory! "Rights" and "wrongs"! Sex! More than this, it was suggested that I commit my inventory (one way or another) to writing. I made a few scratches on a yellow pad, thought a bit about the antipornography legislation being proposed in those days, and retired in a sulk to a closed AA meeting where questions could be submitted anonymously on slips of paper.

Before the meeting even began, I wrote, "Why does the Fourth Step ask us to take a *moral* inventory? Why not just an inventory?" I folded the paper discreetly and slid it under an ashtray on the speaker's table at the front of the room.

I had never seen the leader of that meeting before, and I have not run into him since. In his qualification, he explained that he was a professional gambler, whose usual beat was in Nevada, and that "business" (having to do, I gather, with the sport of kings) had brought him to the East for the current season. His story was nothing short of inspirational. His ten years of sobriety — in the midst of the uncertainty of his particular occupation — were clearly a triumph of living a day at

a time. He seemed to have absolute confidence that his higher power cared as much about decks of cards, dice, roulette wheels, and pari-mutuel machines as it did about more sacred and cultural artifacts. To me, that was both astounding and comforting.

Eventually, he unfolded my question and looked at it as if it were a hopeless poker hand. He read it aloud and repeated, "Why do we take a *moral* inventory?" He paused and examined the ceiling. Then a weary look overcame him, a look indicating that he had indeed thought about this before. His voice was so low I could hardly hear it, as if he were reluctantly sharing a sure thing on tomorrow's daily double.

"The reason we take a *moral* inventory," he said carefully, "is because the word 'moral' forces us to divide into rights and wrongs the things we do — and have done — to ourselves and others. This forces us to make decisions — personal decisions — and asks us, in effect, where we stand as human beings, what we hold to be right and wrong, whether we're alone in the dark of night or with other people."

Quite suddenly, I realized that I was in the company of an extremely wise man, and I listened closely to the ensuing discussion. Nobody even brought up the topic of sex! Our gambling man had set the tone for the discussion; it centered mostly upon the maintenance of sobriety and upon the clear think-

ing and strength required to stand up as a man or a woman, ready to be counted, ready to affirm, "This I believe to be right — this I believe to be wrong," and ready to try to live just that way.

I spent the rest of that evening with my copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. I came to see, first, that on the analyst's couch I was able to do a lot of things, but never to take (even with the help of a skilled therapist) a true moral inventory; then, that until I did I would be adrift in the contemporary relativism of wishy-washy, vaguely "scientific" amorality. I thought of the words "right" and "wrong" as they applied to the brilliant men who invented bacteriological warfare and nuclear warheads. I thought of Ernest Hemingway's "emancipated" notion that what was moral was what *felt* good, and I tried to think about, not only what felt good *now*, but what could be counted upon to *feel good tomorrow* and the day after.

I thought about sex. Certainly, the wake of joy and sorrow we leave behind us in our pursuit of instinctual pleasure is a moral matter (and a measure of character), as Bill wrote. So are the numerous choices that the pursuit forces us to make in daily life. We must consider, not only whether we are adhering to a certain social concept of what is "right," but how we feel if we do not adhere to it, when (as sometimes happens) the spirit is

willing, but the flesh commands otherwise. Certainly, I thought then (and still do), the implication of a willingness to "stand up and be counted," the *real* moral imperative of life, takes us far beyond the simple roster of "rights" and "wrongs" concerning "genital commotion" (as psychologists often call it) and into the entire realm of human relationships.

In my solitude, I asked myself, "What *do* I believe in? What *would* I stand up and be counted for? What do I *really* consider right and wrong?" And immediately I understood that I had now begun to take a meaningful "searching and fearless moral inventory"!

That evening passed nearly five years ago. I am still trying to answer, to my own satisfaction, those three simple questions. How sorry I am to say that I do not yet know the final answers, even for myself — and certainly not for you. But I think I am on the track in pursuing them within our AA program, and I think I am pursuing them well, because I am sober. I think the answers have something to do with love, a word I do not use freely. And they cleave close to Bill's observation that, when we were drinking, "Of true brotherhood we had small comprehension." Without love and brotherhood, I think, we might each turn into the sort of walking moral-disaster area that I was before I first met the Fourth Step.

G. N. G., Queens, N.Y.

FIFTH STEP

*Admitted to God, to ourselves,
and to another human being
the exact nature of our wrongs.*

SOME AA members, in particular those of us with only a few months of sobriety, who may be seriously investigating the Twelve Steps for the first time, are especially reluctant or fearful to take the Fifth Step — to admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. I sympathize fully. But the year 1968, my first full calendar year of sober living in AA, can well be characterized as “My Year of Taking Step Five”; and I would like to pass along the fears and reservations, then actions and experiences, and subsequently freedom, self-knowledge, and joy that have accompanied my own efforts. As we continually try to practice in the program, I am not telling anyone else what to do; I am describing what I did.

I did not rush into the Fifth Step or, for that matter, into any Step

other than the First. For the beginning six or seven months, through the end of 1967 and into early 1968, I concentrated on learning how not to take the first drink today by going to a meeting a day, sometimes more, and by talking over coffee with others who had come in about when I did, as well as with many who had several years of sobriety.

In my fourth month, I happened to get a sponsor who had not had a drink for four years and had done considerable work on the Steps. I was beginning to *want* to increase the depth of my sobriety by learning what the Steps had to offer. In the following three months, with some gentle but insistent encouragement from my sponsor and with continuing attendance at Step meetings, I began to feel comfortable with Steps Two and Three, and I took two Step Four inventories in

writing, the first with my sponsor, the second alone.

The point is not the timing as I outline it here; it is that I was feeling ready to do some Step work and felt comfortable in trying to make progress. Some AA members whose sobriety today is just as good as or better than mine have not taken the Steps in One-through-Twelve order, but have jumped around to different Steps as they felt called upon to do so; in fact, I did some Twelfth Step work on occasion before beginning to involve myself in Steps Two through Eleven. Each of us takes the program as it suits him.

It was very important for me to have worked on a moral inventory (some people prefer the term self-survey) before venturing into the Fifth Step. I had built a foundation by doing some in-depth thinking and writing about my wrongs and

defects of character, so that when my sponsor asked me, in February 1968, whether I felt ready to make a beginning effort with the Fifth Step, I had no good reason to object.

That beginning effort did not produce what the Fifth Step had been cracked up to, in terms of release and freedom from guilt. I felt good after spending several hours one evening with my sponsor, but I was not the least bit elated. The fact is, as I later was to learn, that I did not really take the Fifth Step that night; I only threw out a few misdemeanors or “bones” in a rather general way. For example, I admitted that I had been “bad to my wife” and was sorry for it, now that she no longer was my wife. And I pointed out, in a rather condescending way, that I had treated several women poorly before marriage by offering them a promise of

deep adventure (with or without sex) and then reneging and doing nothing, leaving them and myself frustrated.

But it was a beginning. I saw that no horrors descended upon me when I tried, however inexplicitly and shallowly, to admit wrongs. To the contrary, I did experience a small piece of joy and release, and I was encouraged to go further when the moment seemed right.

My second Fifth Step experience, a month later, was in listening with another AA member to a third man go to far greater depths than I had plumbed. The three of us were awake through one entire night in the exercise, and I found myself joining in with some of my own wrongs, the remembrance of which was triggered by the admissions of the other two men. I had gained further confidence.

Then a movement got under way among a dozen New York members to begin a weekly Tenth Step group; as preparation for this work, they planned to attend what was then known as a forty-hour Fifth Step marathon. Would I like to join this effort?

My answer was an immediate yes, but probably for a number of wrong reasons, as well as for one right reason. One of the mainsprings of my affirmative answer was a long-held fantasy that I was a born leader. The marathon concept was then relatively new in AA, and I wanted to be in the pioneering fore-

front. (You're looking at one aspect of a prime defect of mine: towering personal pride!) Not to apply the hair shirt too closely, however, I did have at the same time a sincere desire to "really" take the Fifth Step, to get my garbage out into the cans and have it carted away.

Over the first April weekend in 1968, when I was nine months sober (remember that timing is not important and that feelings are), I attended that Fifth Step exercise, but not without excruciating fears just preceding it. On the day before, for example, I was on my way to lead a beginners meeting, and the very strong thought filled my mind: All I have to do is take one drink tonight, tell the others about it, and I will be excused from the ordeal! This was the last of the defenses I threw up against the idea — quite appalling to me at the time — of baring my soul before, not just one other person, but a dozen people, and not males only, but a mixed group. I cannot fully explain my almost overwhelming anxiety during the weeks and days preceding the experience. All I could do, and I did it fervently, was cling to a faith that the Fifth Step was in the program for a reason, that it had worked for others, that I had not been hurt, but rather helped, by my two previous skirmishes with it, and that God would see me through if I did my best.

I am not writing either to praise or to malign the marathon concept.

I am talking about my Fifth Step work. But let me make a few remarks that I consider important.

One is that, in my strong opinion, the taking of Step Five does not depend in any way whatever on the availability of a marathon meeting. In my case, I firmly believe that my progress with the Step was speeded up a little; I became able, far more quickly than I had imagined possible, to talk honestly to others about myself. But I do not believe that the *substance* of the Step, for me, was changed or improved by going at it in a group, rather than with one other individual.

Two, fifth-stepping in a group is definitely not (again, in my opinion) something to take lightly. If you feel too strong a doubt of your ability to "survive" such a meeting, or if you think that you lack sufficient faith that it can work for you, or if you have not grounded yourself, to your own satisfaction and feeling of comfort, in Steps One through Four, or if you simply feel no need, I would advise not going ahead. A few marathon participants whom I know extremely well have had subsequent difficulties (whether or not attributable to the marathon, I cannot tell, but the possibility is there). Besides, I say again that the Fifth Step can be taken, with all the meaning intended for it, as it is written: with God, ourselves, and another human being.

Three, the marathon technique,

like other techniques, is a tool only. It is not some kind of magic button that will make life easy once I push it. The work has to be done inside myself; whatever tools I use are

A sense of . . .
peace
within myself.

designed to help me get that work done, not to do it for me.

With these remarks in mind, we get back to the Fifth Step itself. In my third try, I learned what it is all about, for me. The program speaks of the "exact nature" of our wrongs, and I understand this now. It is no longer, as it was during my first brush with the Step, a matter of my having been "bad to my wife." It is, to take one example, my former practices during the martini hour or hours: making loving gestures to my wife, with implications of a warm night of lovemaking ahead; thinking, as the liquor spread its false grandeur throughout me, that I was the world's greatest lover; making preparations for a time of extreme bliss (and often, in the process, arousing the unfortunate lady to great expectations); then, with additional booze in my blood, becoming totally uninterested in, and often downright incapable of, any lovemaking at all.

Here is the "exact nature" of a

wrong. Where does it point? To my drinking as the cause of, or excuse for, my lack of action and follow-through? Not a bit. It points to my *fear* — my absolute terror of sexual inadequacy, of not having what it takes to be a man. Of course, I blamed my wife for sexual frigidity, or for taking too long with the dishes, or for preferring to meet some other obligation that night. Whether or not any or all of these allegations were true, the fact remains — I now see it through taking the Fifth Step — that *I* was the major cause of unhappy sex relations in our marriage.

To cite another example, I frequently and in most cases with very little provocation, if any, beat my firstborn son viciously and unmercifully when he acted contrary to my wishes or did something that I judged “wrong,” by whatever standards I chose to use at the time.

When this happened, of course, I praised myself for being a good disciplinarian, a stern but loving father, a provider of Truth to my boy, who would thank me for it in later years. But what do these bullying beatings really spotlight? They spotlight my *cowardice*: my abject fear of facing myself and admitting to my own failings; my sneaking need to take out my own frustrations on a little boy who was powerless to defend himself. They also outline in clear relief another aspect of my towering personal *pride*, the big “I” that knows what others should do and forces them, where possible, to do my will.

I could expand this list *ad nauseam*, and I have. I possess a large number of defects of character, the exact nature of which I have learned through getting down to the nitty-gritty and avoiding bland generalities like “I am selfish. I am

resentful. I am a glutton. I am a drunk.”

What have I gotten from this work? (It has been, I assure you, hard work!) I have gotten what others have gotten: a release from my hang-ups, not from all of them, by a long shot, but from the major ones. I have gotten a sense of freedom, tranquillity, serenity, and peace within myself. I have gotten better self-knowledge — another term, as I see it, for humility. I have gotten a deeper, surer, more grateful sense of *living in sobriety*. And this, after all, is what AA is all about.

Do I still take the Fifth Step? Yes, I do. Many of us consider the Fifth Step a once-only exercise: Get out the garbage, and that’s that. For these people, it is the Tenth Step that is a continuing means of cleaning up. I have no quarrel with this viewpoint. But

repeated Fifth Step work has been necessary for me.

I joined the weekly Tenth Step group last April after the marathon and have come to rely heavily on this Step for my continuing mental comfort. But every now and then my work with the Tenth Step recalls an experience in my long-ago (what seems, to this grateful alcoholic, long-ago) drinking past; and I feel a need to unburden myself of it. A member with twenty-one years of sobriety once said, “The Fifth Step is like an onion: We keep peeling it until all the layers are torn away and we get down to the center.”

Not that I have reached that center, or expect to soon. The Fifth and Tenth Steps — like the entire marvelous program of Alcoholics Anonymous — are for me a process, a journey, a continual arriving at new truths.

L. L., Manhattan, N.Y.



I f I name the blessings I have
 been given — then the morning
 comes very quickly.

On the morning I was to return to Los Angeles, the drive to the airport was accomplished in cold silence. I refused to talk to either my son or my husband. Once at the ticket counter, I gushed tears and ran for the escalator up to the departure gate. During the flight, I was practically motionless. One message rang in my ears: "Nobody wants a drunk."

I had left one vacuum behind and was heading toward another: My two daughters lived in the Los Angeles area, but we had little contact. My mother also resided there, in a residence for the elderly.

Of course, the mistake I had made on this trip was in expecting my family to jump with glee because I was sober. I had pushed aside the years when the bottle had been my constant companion and they had been but distant shadows. I had quickly forgotten the bills my husband had paid to doctors and hospitals; his constant anguish over my whereabouts; his total discouragement.

Once back in Los Angeles, I settled down and returned to work and to my beloved AA meetings

(the only reason for living).

During my yearly checkup the following month, the doctor discovered I had a hernia and suggested I have it taken care of at once, because there could be an emergency. On my way to the hospital, I poured out my woes to the cab driver. "I'm having an operation," I said, "and I don't even have one person to give me a lift to the hospital!"

He said, "Listen, lady. I had a double hernia. And I drove myself to the hospital and *back!*"

I was glad there weren't any AA members present to hear my complaint. Not one was around, because I had kept my prospective surgery a carefully guarded secret. I could manage very well by myself, I felt.

And so the hospital for me turned out to be a silent graveyard. My two daughters tiptoed into the room the night of my surgery, but I was heavily sedated and couldn't appreciate their visit. Except on that one evening, there were no visitors, no cards, no phone calls. The one cheery note: a good report from the doctor, saying that the operation

had gone well.

During those long days of convalescence, I could have phoned many AA members and said, "Look, I've just had an operation and I'm lonely. Please, may I talk with you for a few minutes?" But no. My false and foolish pride held me back. And, I say with a contrite heart, at that time I had been on the AA program fourteen months!

However, I was bound to have learned *some* essential principles in that length of time. So three Steps did pull me through. After I had acknowledged (Step One) back in spring 1967 that I was an alcoholic and that alcohol had complete control over my life, Steps Three and Eleven kept beckoning to me. They really have always had a strong hold on me. Prayer (even when I was feeling mean and resentful) was in my heart steadily. So, after storming my way through the miserable days to recovery, I thanked God for being beside me, for giving me the strength not to order that bottle in moments of desperation. I learned that when a night is dark and lonely and pain is near, but hope is far away, if I name the

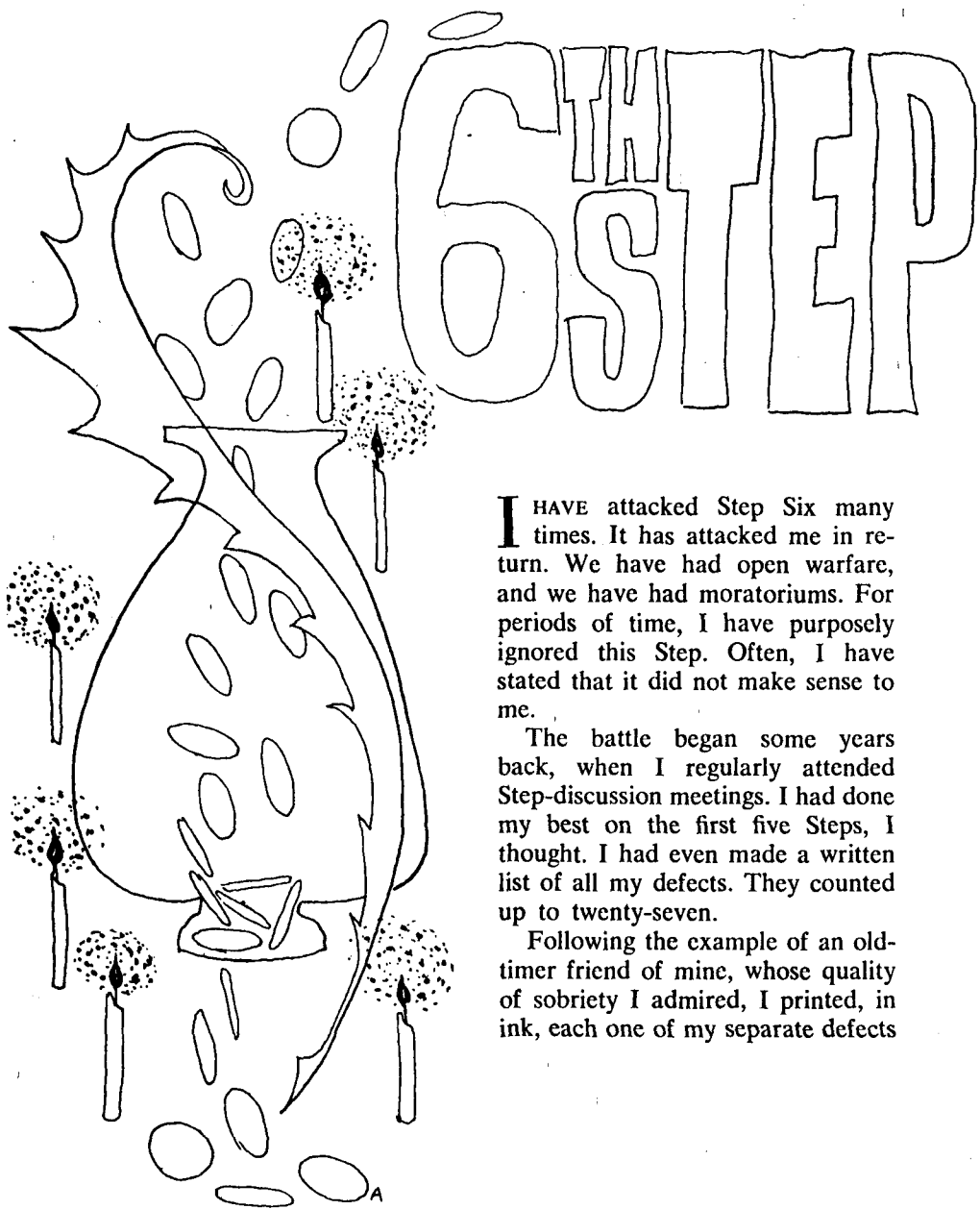
blessings I have been given — and they include my second chance at life — then the morning comes very quickly.

Back at work, I still had to conserve my strength. On week-nights, I had to go to bed at nine, and our AA meetings start at 8:30. But on holidays and weekends, I attended regularly. Now, during my absences from AA groups, I compensate by reading the Big Book or using the telephone. In other words, tired or rested, sad or cheerful, I never forget that I'm an alcoholic and but for the mercy of God and the AA Fellowship, I would not be alive.

Only through honest, struggling, and sometimes pleading prayer did I begin to meet my Creator. No wonder I wrote this sentence one morning in my diary: "Thank you, God, for the hard days." When I glanced at the page weeks later, I was amazed. It was as though someone else had written the words.

As I celebrate my second anniversary, I'm reminded how much I have gained from this second year of sobriety, truly a gift from God and AA.

E. M. K., South Pasadena, Calif.



**Were entirely ready to have God remove
all these defects of character.**

I HAVE attacked Step Six many times. It has attacked me in return. We have had open warfare, and we have had moratoriums. For periods of time, I have purposely ignored this Step. Often, I have stated that it did not make sense to me.

The battle began some years back, when I regularly attended Step-discussion meetings. I had done my best on the first five Steps, I thought. I had even made a written list of all my defects. They counted up to twenty-seven.

Following the example of an old-timer friend of mine, whose quality of sobriety I admired, I printed, in ink, each one of my separate defects

on a white poker chip. Then all twenty-seven chips went into a small, fat, yellow pitcher. Every morning on awaking, I plunged my hand into it (like picking a number from a goldfish bowl) and came up with the "chip for today." The defect might be anger, fear, pride, resentment, gossip, snobbery, self-pity, and so on, but whichever one it was had to be concentrated upon for the next 24 hours, and either reduced to a minimum or cast away.

It was a kind of game. I enjoyed wrestling with one "defect" a day. I felt I was making progress, really working the AA program. It hadn't yet occurred to me that I had gone overboard on this "defect" business. Twenty-seven indeed! How is that for the "pride" defect? Of course, most of them were not serious flaws of character, such as the inability

to be honest with oneself. Most were bad habits possessed, in some degree, by most humans.

Nevertheless, I kept up this game for two or three years, telling many AA friends about it and urging them to go and do likewise. I explained that, although the Step suggested that God would remove these defects when and if I became ready to let go of them, I was of the school that believed in the saying "Pray for potatoes, but reach for the hoe." I did ask my Higher Power to lend a hand on the day's defect I happened to confront, but I felt that He expected me to use energy on rooting it out of my character.

Still, these dozens of defects I had laid claim to kept cropping up again and again, over and over. It seemed that the harder I fought them, the harder they fought back. I became

quite discouraged. I decided I had been willing, I had tried, and I would now let Number Six, and myself, have a vacation. I put the little yellow pitcher on a shelf behind some books and only now and then dipped into it. I kept busy and active in AA; I felt comfortable being sober; I was trying to practice the AA principles in all my affairs. Then, out of nowhere, came a deep resentment toward an AA friend. I agonized over it, prayed over it, but discussed it with no one. I had insomnia, indigestion, and fatigue. (Any good doctor can tell you that negative emotions make people physically ill.)

Fortunately, just about that time our group was slated for discussion of Step Six. I opened my copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and read the Step all the way through. Although I had read it many times before, it seemed as if I saw its meaning for the first time. I gathered that, instead of fighting mightily against a defect, I had to let go of it. Just simply open up my hands, my heart, and my mind and say to my Higher Power, "Here it is, this defect. I give it to you. Please remove it from me." In this case, it was the bitter and destructive resentment that I wished to be rid of. And so it happened. It faded away and never returned.

Since then, I have followed the same procedure on other serious emotional problems, with the same result. I just have to keep in mind

that if I am not 100 percent sincere in my willingness to be rid of the problem, the procedure won't work. I have come to realize that Step Six means exactly what it says. No more, no less. When, and if, I become ready to have painful, inhibiting, or long-standing flaws removed, they will be. Not always permanently, not all of them. But if and when they return, they will be weaker and much easier to let go of. As for all those bad habits I once listed as defects, I am trying to arrest them a day at a time, as I do my alcoholism.

A little progress has been made on pride. I can now admit that most of my troubles stem from one large and glaring defect: self-centeredness. For how can I wallow in self-pity, weep over resentments, be sick with righteous anger, ache with envy, tense up with fears and anxieties unless all my thoughts are exclusively on poor me?

A long time ago, a very wise man, Marcus Aurelius, wrote: "A man's life is what his thoughts make it." Through Step Six, I have learned how true this is. I may never comprehend it fully, yet I know its value to me. It calls forth the most precious asset any recovering alcoholic can have: the willingness to get out of the driver's seat, to stop trying to run the show. I need to keep the Sixth Step message of letting go and letting God in my own thoughts at all times.

F. C., Manhattan, N.Y.



7TH STEP

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings

FOR ME, at first glance Step Seven seemed a cinch, especially in comparison to some of the preceding Steps. As is often the case, on closer examination the seemingly simple proved to be anything but! I thought this Step was only a kind of mopping-up maneuver or an interlude where I could rest on my laurels. (I was wearing them in the wrong place at the time.) Steps One through Six had shown me how inadequate my own powers and resources were — as far as my alcoholism was concerned. Besides, I

had to be entirely ready to part with my defects (Step Six), and I wasn't at all ready.

The earlier Steps, however, had removed some of the careful padding from my ego, and a remark made by an old-timer and dear friend had helped. I had heard one member complimented by another for a wonderful talk. The speaker said, "Don't thank me or give me credit. Give God the credit." I was determined that if ever anyone thanked me for my talk, I would say the same thing (humbly, of course).

Finally, my old-timer friend did compliment me on my talk one night, and I did say, "Don't thank me. God did it."

The old-timer smiled, put his arm

about me, and said, "Honey, it wasn't *that* good!" Up until that time I had thought "humble" was some kind of pie.

I knew from the beginning that my vices were 'way ahead of my virtues. That was bad. Worse, some of my vices were being classed as virtues. But, since other members seemed to be gaining on their vices, I could hope for myself. By this time, introspection had become somewhat habitual, and I realized that I would have many hang-ups in working these Steps, as I'd had hang-overs during the wet years (or should I say the monsoons?).

In Step Seven, the word "humbly" threw a monkey wrench into my sensitive emotional gears. Oh, what



it did to my poor id! It seemed I was forever searching feverishly through all the dictionaries I could lay hands on for a definition of “humble” that I could accept. Even the excellent coverage of this aspect in the “Twelve and Twelve” availed me nothing. Humble? Humbug! Hadn’t I always been the one put upon? The doormat type? Was I now to wear sackcloth and ashes or a hair shirt?

All my life, I’d been taught that I alone was responsible for my character, including my shortcomings — responsible for self-discipline and self-reliance also. That reminds me of the fellow who claimed that he was a self-made man, whereupon his friend remarked that this belief certainly relieved God of an embarrassing responsibility!

Still, I could plainly see the golden thread of true humility running

through all the Steps, and I knew how very important humility was to my continued sobriety. I became reconciled to the definition I found in a new, revised dictionary: “Humble indicates a personal realization of smallness, without loss of respect, and differs from humiliation, which implies public shame in front of others or being made to seem foolish or inferior” and “to be neither inordinately proud of our talents and assets, nor ashamed of our defects or failures, nor unduly on the defensive over them.” Also: “free from vanity.”

In other words (I quote Tryon Edwards): “True humility is not an abject, despising spirit; it is but a right estimate of ourselves as God sees us.”

My willingness to have my defects of character removed was bolstered by the realization that little, if any,

spiritual growth was possible as long as I held on to my old ideas and defects. The words in our Big Book keep appearing before me: “Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well, regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house.” This is what Step Seven is to me; it means I am going to clean house and I will have all the help I need. By taking this Step, I am not *giving up* anything; I am getting rid of whatever might lead me to drink again and whatever might prevent achieving real serenity. Now, with God’s help and my own cooperation, via Step Seven, I can become on the individual level a first-rate power, instead of the second-rate power that I was before AA. (I was truly suffering from an immense power failure — or bad wiring.)

I have a favorite reminder which

helps me keep Step Seven in view: “At moments she discovered she was grotesquely wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility.” This quote from the works of Henry James has become part of my inventory.

I believe that through the first six Steps I have gained some knowledge of my character defects and that I know (at least in part and at times) what I need to get rid of! It is certainly no problem for me to humbly ask my Higher Power to remove them, either. I never *did* know what to do with them before. Besides, my pride is the only thing I can swallow any more that is nonfattening. In fact, this diet tends to reduce the ego and eliminate fatheads — mine, anyhow.

Step Seven simple? Not on your ego!

M. U., Brighton, Colo.

'Outside' AAs needed 'inside'

From South Bend, Ind.:

The first time I went into a prison to attend an AA meeting there, an inmate asked me if he would see me again. Now, many 24 hours later, it is my pleasure to attend this group twice a week. Why AA in prison? Because eighty-five percent of the inmate population is there directly or indirectly because of booze.

One hundred and forty inmates hold weekly AA meetings at a mid-west prison, and the outside AA people very rarely attend. Why?

Why don't you go to a jail, hospital, or prison this week? They will be so glad to see you, to hear a new voice, to get a new look at AA, to see a miracle walking around sober and happy. Why, they might even *let* you get them a sponsor, tell you their story, or even cry on your shoulder. What will you gain from all this? Wonderful friends and a deep understanding and love of the alcoholics who still suffer.

A great humanitarian, the late Dr. Albert Schweitzer, once said, "If you have never wiped a tear or consoled another, you will never find real happiness, and the only thanks you will get from helping another is the privilege of doing it."

It's a duty. Why not help an alcoholic inmate to find the sober, quiet way to walk with others in this wonderful Fellowship of AA? Won't you give it a try today?

AL. S.

From South Walpole, Mass.:

If I may make a contribution to the Grapevine, I'll add to the article entitled "Inside Outside" in the July issue. I was arrested and have been confined for more than a year at a Massachusetts correctional institution. The outside speakers who come here to carry the message to us inside AA members deserve a lot of credit. We are the Andy J. Group.

C. W.

*This series on the Twelve Steps is written
by twelve members of AA, each interpreting
one of the Steps as he sees it.*

8TH STEP

I CHOSE this Step to write about because it's the toughest one for me. I've had one hell of a time with the state of willingness. For, in order to be willing to make amends to others, you must first forgive yourself and be ready to make amends to yourself. And I am just beginning to see this in broad daylight. Formerly, I was half-aware that I had not really forgiven myself. It was what I call gauze-curtain awareness; you see the problem dimly, as if through a veil, but you can't really formulate it. I think that many of us in AA have a

*Made a list of all persons
we had harmed and
became willing to make
amends to them all.*

hard time with self-acceptance. And the result is misery, whether it takes the form of repeated slips, depressions or psychosomatic illness, or failure in business or human relationships.

The other night, in our local discussion group, we batted this around a little. Somebody said that the first seven Steps lead into the Eighth. The surrender, the arrival at faith, the inventory all help us to forgive ourselves and gain enough self-respect and insight to be able to make amends and really mean it. Someone

else said that joining AA and being sober were the biggest amends we could make.

I go right along with this, of course. In the years that I have been in AA, life has indeed been more manageable. Often, it has been very good. I've made a lot of wonderful friends. I've had a lot of fun. I've been able to help new people, and the rewards for this effort are unending. But every so often I used to get back into moods of self-debasement. "It's hopeless," I'd say to myself. "I simply cannot work this program; I can't stay put."

The poet Samuel Hoffenstein said, "Wherever I go, I take me along and spoil everything." Really, during those long moods of depression, I felt that I was walking across a mountain range in a snowstorm without a handkerchief. But throughout each time, I'd keep saying to myself, "I've gotten this far, and I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to get drunk. I'm going to find out what causes it, if it's the last thing I do."

So I kept trying. From the very beginning, I made all the amends I could, all the way from sending someone a green branch sewn all

over with ripe black olives to calling an amende on the telephone in Paris, when I was over there a couple of years ago. This apology was for something that had happened thirty-one years before. It was accepted. Everything was beautiful. . . . Only it wasn't.

I now know that I was hung up on the Puritan mystique: Sin is unforgivable; you're going to be punished forever. Other people's forgiveness, their loving forgiveness, the friendship of people in AA and not in AA who loved me and whom I loved — all this was unavailing. I was making myself into a special case; down deep, I believed I was beyond redemption. It went back beyond all the sordid, unsavory, tawdry, illicit, and ridiculous behavior of my drinking days. It went 'way back into childhood. I now see that nobody was to blame. I am

learning to release this childhood conditioning and the insecurity that contributed to my alcoholism. The people who brought me up had hang-ups, too. The God of my understanding, whom I found in AA, is not a punishing, revengeful God at all. I have begun to make friends with Him and thus with myself.

Thank God, I have a mind that is capable of learning and is willing to learn. Thank God for what must be over a thousand AA meetings by now and for every word uttered by every speaker. I have always learned something. I'm lucky in my AA friends. Hundreds of evenings of talk, several reservoirs full of hot coffee, truckloads of cream, carloads of sugar, ideas enough to fill all the shelves in the Library of Congress. Love and understanding of a kind that would quickly bring peace on earth if it were generally shared.

When I look back, I can see that while I was walking across Snow Mountain, sniffing and hating myself, I never once walked alone. Thank God for professional help, too. I needed it, so I went and got it. Psychiatry is not a dirty word to me. After all, if I gashed my finger, I'd be in a doctor's office in ten minutes!

It has finally penetrated my head and my heart that I have a right to make spiritual progress. I have a right to be emotionally mature. I have a right to take pleasure in my own company, and that makes me more pleasant to be with. I have a right to become willing — deeply willing, entirely willing — to make amends to all those whom I have harmed. Because I can now accept myself the way I am, I can accept other people the way they are — not entirely, but to a much greater degree than in the past. My early amends

were efforts to reinstate myself, to win back approval. My intolerance and anger were always followed by crawling apology. I had an insatiable need for other people's approval. Now, when apology is in order, my first concern is to make the other person happy. I come second.

I deserve *not* to be as self-centered as somebody with a terrible toothache. I deserve to have the grace to laugh at myself. To me, all this is part of the amends business. I wish I could reach out to every single one of you who are having a bad time with yourselves. I wish I could put the answer right into your hands like a present in a package. I can't quite do that. But perhaps this piece has given you a clue, a signpost, a hope, and a start along the road that you want to follow.

F. M., New Canaan, Conn.



The Cab Driver and the Fat Lady

*The dispatcher's
voice called him
to a meeting
with destiny*

IT'S A HELL of a thing, what happened. A drunk fat lady. In the back seat of my taxicab. Babbling and yelling directions. Four inches of slip showing below a dress with flour-sack daisies fighting grease stains for top billing.

That was the turning point of my life. That incredible moment when life takes shape and substance. Total warmth, a gut knowledge that finally you've stood up to life and what it's handed you. You've accepted exactly who you are. You've dug it, you've adjusted, and you're going with the current at last. You've caught a glimpse of your reason for being.

That's why I say it's a hell of a

thing — a drunk fat lady. It should have been a glory moment, in Technicolor and wide screen. That moment in a man's life should be Wagnerian. A second of splendor. It sure wasn't. But it was real. And it gave me back my dignity and purpose as a human being.

You can't live to be my age, fifty-four, without having some big moments. There was the moment when I went and looked at myself in the mirror and saw a sick, dying thing that wasn't human. After fourteen years of continuous sobriety, I was drunk. After fourteen years of tailoring my life to the fact of my alcoholism and rebuilding a career, home, and family, I was drunk. Knowing

alcohol was poisonous, knowing my allergy and compulsions, I still saw the blurred, sagging face of a middle-aged, hopeless, helpless drunk in that mirror. Traced in the slack, wet-cornered mouth and red eyes was the path ahead. Down. Gutter and grave guaranteed.

That's about as big and strong a turning point as a man usually gets in one life. I'd spent fourteen years whipping my addiction into line and keeping the monkey chained up and off my back. I didn't know he had gotten loose. I'd almost forgotten the damn animal. But there he was. Riding my hump, bigger than ever.

It was the first time I had ever felt total despair. I knew the number

of alcoholics who had been sober as long as I had, then slipped, and were finally able to come back. It was small. So small I could count them on just one hand and have a few fingers left over for picking up the next shot glass. I knew the pure horror that stretched ahead for me. I'd been there before.

Then there was another turning point — the first time I stood in an unemployment compensation line to get a check, because I couldn't get work. There wasn't much demand for a former network-television performer, former producer of radio and television programs, former newspaper byline columnist, former ad-agency radio and television director, and current boozier. That was a turning point that cut deep. The scar is still there. I feel it every once in a while.

But of all the things that happened to me before the drunk fat lady, nothing was like the night and day I sat in my chair with my service revolver, trying to make a deci-

sion. Life or death.

I had been drunk for a year. Now I was alone, in a small room. Floor littered with broken glass. Underwear stained with a thousand sicknesses. No food for days. No money. No family, job, friend, or future.

I had copped out of a painful life by using booze. Now booze made living more painful than it had ever been. I couldn't hack it. I had two choices: try to get sober and start life all over again from scratch, at past fifty — or use the revolver.

It shouldn't have taken all those hours to decide. But my mind was drowned. I got only little seconds once in a while to do my thinking, moments when the fog would lift and I could reason and know I was thinking dry, not drunk.

The odds against getting sober and starting over were too big to think about. The road back from nothing, for a used-up man with a lousy rep, would be more painful and tougher than my drunken animal existence.

It was no contest. But I didn't make the decision. A higher power did. A power greater than myself that I had known back during fourteen years of productive living and contentment. That power made the decision. I watched my body crawl across the floor towards the telephone. Glass slashed knees and elbows. Every time I collapsed, glass ribboned my body. It took an hour to crawl ten feet. I called an old friend in Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Maybe my whole road back had been just for this one meeting."

Then it's a blur. There was a drying-out place. Heavy sedation to prevent convulsions. Crippling, painful alcoholic arthritis. Walking with crutches, then with a cane, to AA meetings. People glad to see me, shaking my hand and smiling. And at last the feeling that I was a member of the human race again.

Finally, I got a job driving a cab. (Now we're about up to the drunk fat lady.) I drove nights, looked for work during the day. The hack bought peanut butter and crackers and a bed. I spent long, long night hours parked on a lonely cab stand, thinking back. Wondering what was ahead. Wanting to know why the decision had been taken from me. Why I was crawling the impossible come-back road. It was as bad as I figured it would be back there in that chair, when I voted for the gun and got overruled.

But in those lonely, dark hours, I made a sort of peace with myself. Enough peace to get a kind of numb apathy that made one day at a time bearable. If God wanted me to be a sober cab driver, that was it. If that was my purpose in life, that was okay with me. I'd be a sober cab driver. I didn't think too much of God's decision. I figured it showed pretty poor judgment. But I would go with it best I could.

The dispatcher's voice called my

cab. He gave me a pickup at an address that sounded familiar. When I got there, I knew why. It was a half-way house for alcoholics, where newly sober human wrecks met day and night to talk, pray, and struggle for another hour of freedom from the jug. I pulled up. Out of the door came my turning point. My drunk, fat, slip-showing lady.

She was babbling when she hit the door and snatched it open. "Oh, my gawd, dearie, get me outa here." She wheezed a 110-proof breath with hurricane force. "Get me home, honey. I'm goin' crazy. I gotta have a drink. Ya know, them nuts in there are havin' a meeting about not drinking. And me so hung-up and needin' so bad. They were talkin' about never touchin' another drink. Oh my gawd, I need one now. Get me away from these crazies. I don't know why I went to start with."

The words were a torrent. Funny! But terror and loneliness backgrounded the plea for home and bottle. There was also a plea for help, for an end to pain, for an end to shame. It took another drunk to hear it, though.

She gave me her address, and I headed out. "Honey, don't never go to one of them meetings. Them crazies don't understand a person's got to have a little drink once in a while." She calmed down. Danger

and threat were disappearing through the rear window. She looked back to make sure. "Just get me home, and I'll have a little toddy and forget it. That meeting."

I pulled over to the curb. Cut the motor. Turned to look at her. "Ma'am, your second meeting of the evening is about to begin."

Her mouth unhinged. "Oh my gawd. You're one of them!" She sagged against the seat, resistance gone. Fate had caught up with her.

The two of us had a pretty good meeting. I drove and talked. She asked questions and raked up drunken history. An hour later, I pulled in at her front door. She got out and paid me and started to the house. I watched. Then she turned and stared at me. Suddenly, she wasn't a drunk fat lady.

"Thanks, cabby. I might skip havin' that toddy tonight. Good night."

I drove away and knew I had had it. My turning point. It was there. A purpose. A reason for struggling. I could be of help. Maybe my whole road back had been just for this one meeting. The cabby and the drunk fat lady. If so, it was worth it. I felt warm and complete. I could contribute. I had something to give. I was a total human being.

Life suddenly fit. Living was a comfortable thing. It still is.

G. C., Miami, Fla.

The Good AAs From Outside

JUNE 8, 1970, was my fifteenth AA birthday. I am an ex-convict and an alcoholic. The very first time that I ever even heard of AA was behind prison walls. I was at a point where I didn't care any more what happened to me, for I had already lost everything that was near and dear to me. I didn't have a friend left in the world. I never knew what the visiting room looked like, for I never had even one visitor, and all the mail I ever got only reminded me of the past.

Then two inmates made a Twelfth Step call on me, and, with no place else to go and nothing to lose, I went to an AA meeting. I was almost sure that I wasn't an alcoholic. I was unable to stop drinking after that first drink, and I got into trouble every time I drank, but I thought this happened to everybody who drank. But the good AAs coming in from the outside — men I had never seen before in my life — had done some of the things that I had done while drinking, and they said openly that they were alcoholics. I could never remember anybody being as nice and friendly to me as these AAs from the outside world. I just sat back and listened and took it all in, and wondered at the same time if I was one of them.

One day, after a meeting, I asked our sponsor if he thought I was an alcoholic. He said, "Only you can answer that." But then he

said, "Let me ask you something. Do you think that you would be in this place today if you had not been drinking?"

I didn't answer him. That night in my cell, for the first time in my life, I took an inventory of myself. As far back as I could remember, every time I drank I got into trouble. Then I knew the truth. I didn't know where I came from, and I didn't know where I was going, but I did know where I belonged, and that was in AA. Today, I owe my very life to AA and to those good AAs who so freely gave of themselves and their time, to show me that somebody cared, that somebody loved me.

I went to work on myself, through this AA way of life. I learned to make my time in prison work for me, by going to AA and learning what life was really all about. I made much progress in AA. When I got out on parole, I found some other wonderful AAs waiting for me with open arms. They didn't accept me as an ex-con; they accepted me

as another alcoholic who needed and wanted help. Today, I think of myself as growing into AA. After fifteen years, I am still growing and hope to keep on growing, because staying sober is a lifetime job, one day at a time.

Please let me beg you AAs everywhere to support our institutional AA. Remember, these alcoholics cannot come to us, but we can go to them. My heart will always be in institutional AA, for I know what it has done for me. What it has done for me, it can and will do for others. The alcoholic is not in prison by choice; he is there because he is alcoholic and could not handle the bottle. But he can be shown a beautiful way of life through AA if we will only take time to carry to him the AA message of love and understanding: that no alcoholic is so free as he who is bound to AA.

The head may seek AA, but only the heart will find it, and the will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us.

C. M., Miami, Fla.

*Carrying the message to those
who can't come to us*

A three-part section on AA's work in institutions

Get Involved!

ONE OF my favorite gals in AA told me her definition of sobriety is that it's a gift. A gift we keep by giving it away. I love this interpretation and have adopted it as part of my own thinking. This flow of receiving and giving can be reached only by involvement.

What is involvement? It's saying "Yes" when called upon to serve. It's cleaning ashtrays, making coffee, speaking and chairing at meetings, going on Twelfth Step calls, working with institution groups — you name it. It's carrying the message the best way we know.

Our intergroup (called the central office in some areas) has eighteen groups, and it has only five institutions to cover. Yet when institution-assignment time rolls around (almost always the final item on the agenda, for reasons shortly to become apparent), the chairman sheepishly says, "Well, it's that time again. Now, what group would like

to volunteer for the men's prison?" Silence. "Women's prison?" Silence. Finally, after several embarrassing moments (while, ideally, each representative at the intergroup meeting examines his group conscience), a few volunteers squeak through. And it's usually the same few groups whose representatives volunteer to provide speakers.

One common excuse is: "I can't accept that institution for my group. We have our regular meeting that night." Comment: So what if you or some other member misses the home-group meeting one night? What's to lose? It's a winner's game, with you on the winning side. We always get back much more than we give by going to these people who can't come to us.

Another alibi is: "People in institutions aren't interested; they don't listen." Comment: How do we know? Last night, tonight, or tomorrow night, a guy or a gal may

start a whole new way of life because of something said to an institution group by an "outside" AA member.

And then we hear: "Institutions aren't my cup of tea. They upset me." Comment: This is true in some instances. But before you make an arbitrary judgment, try actually going to a prison, state hospital, etc. So many people who make this statement have never been to "one of those places." Don't knock it until you've tried it.

I can't help feeling that the groups' institutions or intergroup representatives are reluctant to volunteer because of these and other excuses they hear from group members.

So many of us said, "Oh God, I'd do anything to stop drinking,

anything!" And then we were introduced to AA and this wonderful program. The physical pain began to disappear; the mental agony dissolved; our spiritual beings were uplifted. The compulsion to drink was removed. The gift of sobriety was bestowed upon us, and we learned, by using the keys or tools of the AA program, that the longer we were sober, the better life was.

But one day we seem to hit an impasse. We think, "I'm sober. Life is good. But something is missing." Twelfth Step work, maybe? Institutions coverage is one kind of Twelfth Step work.

Talk to your group's institutions or intergroup representative. Ask him to volunteer to cover an institution, so you can go along to speak there. It can't hurt — it may even help.

J. D., Wilmington, Del.

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by twelve members of AA, each interpreting
one of the Steps as he sees it.*

NINTH STEP

ACCORDING to the Big Book, co-founder Doctor Bob was the first AA member to have a slip. Coming off a roaring bender, he saw that he would have to face his problems squarely: "One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business."

Far from bringing ruin, Doctor

Made direct amends
to such people wherever
possible, except when to
do so would injure them
or others.

Bob's bold action marked a new beginning, bringing great personal happiness and opportunities for service in the fifteen years remaining to him. He was, as the Grapevine noted after his death, a person who had truly become reconciled with his fellowman.

Doctor Bob also showed how the Ninth Step should be handled. He was a physician and often had to face hard decisions in his own work with patients, sometimes advising them of their need for risky, painful surgery. He knew that it was useless

to put such matters off or try to avoid them altogether, so he faced the self-surgery of amends-making with acceptance and determination to do the job thoroughly.

The result? As the account in the Big Book continues: "At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since. He now means a great deal to his community, and the major liabilities of thirty years of hard drinking have been repaired in four."

Additional payoffs for this AA co-founder in taking the Ninth Step were sobriety and happiness, and the experience of other AA members generally has been along the same line: If we want to enjoy sobriety *with* happiness, we ought to clear up the past. While it is undoubtedly true that some people manage to avoid drinking without making amends, it is unlikely that many attain real happiness until they do so. And without happiness, who lives well in the present or faces the future with hope?

In Doctor Bob's case, most of his initial amends-making seemed to involve contacting people in person and extending apologies or offers

to remedy certain problems. We do not know the nature of his wrongs, or whether his efforts were received graciously by everyone he visited. It is also possible that in some cases a mere verbal apology could not have repaired all the damage. The important thing is that he made amends directly and pushed aside fear and pride to get the job done. When it was finished, he had a feeling of great relief, as if a great burden had been removed.

"Direct" is the key word in this Step. There are times, I'm afraid, when many of us are hopeful that *indirect* amends will suffice, sparing us the pain and supposed humiliation of approaching people in person and telling them of our wrongs. This is evasion and will never give us a true sense of breaking with the wrongdoings of the past. It indicates that we are still trying to defend something that isn't worth defend-

ing, hanging on to conduct that we ought to abandon. And the usual reasons for sidestepping direct amends are pride and fear.

The questions arise: "What harmful actions should I have in mind when I take the Ninth Step? Which persons should I approach?" We should include here — if we have completed the Eighth Step — any action where we were wrong even in part and any persons who were harmed by this action.

Does this include bartenders whom we may have insulted? Many AA members point out that bartenders and tavern owners are well paid to accept insults, and therefore no amends-making is required. Actually, a brief apology should be extended in most of these cases, as a matter of courtesy. But barroom insults, as a rule, do not cause lasting harm. "Harmed," as it is used in the Eighth Step and implied in the

Ninth, means: caused other persons to suffer physical injury, emotional pain, financial loss, or other damage through actions or neglect on our part.

Because money is so important to many of us, financial harm should head the list. Making amends ought to include paying debts or visiting creditors whom we have been avoiding. But it is not enough to visit a creditor with only an apology and a promise to pay; these must be followed up with actual cash payments as soon as possible. Only in this way are we showing sincerity of purpose and true financial responsibility.

A more difficult problem faces the person who has been guilty of undetected crime, such as embezzlement or pilfering. Direct amends in a case like this could bring injury, such as disgrace and impoverishment to his family. The problem

should be handled through prayer and meditation, along with personal discussion with a trusted friend. Perhaps a way of making amends in an *indirect* manner — suitable, for once, in this situation — will appear. Fortunately, the member has an excellent way of determining whether the method is the correct one for his needs. It is this: If the action removes his own sense of shame and guilt, giving him a feeling of peace and relief, it has probably been the correct one.

I would hardly know how to begin advising the person whose actions resulted in more serious crimes — for example, an individual who caused a death through a still-unsolved hit-and-run accident. I think it is doubtful, however, that any lasting peace or self-forgiveness could ever come about without some kind of open admission.

I have heard much discussion

about the clause "except when to do so would injure them or others." It seems plain to me that an obvious case would be the husband who cheated on his wife, but would hurt her a second time by telling her of his escapades. There are probably other occasions when a frank disclosure would turn out to be more harmful than helpful. The AA principle to follow would always be in the direction of being hard and uncompromising in dealing with ourselves, but considerate and discreet where others are involved. There is a great deal of common sense in the AA program, despite the fact that we often seem to be swimming against the tide of general behavior in our principles and actions. We do not, merely for the sake of an obscure principle, always tell the whole truth at all costs. And the Ninth Step seems to make that plain.

Perhaps we can make up for the limitation through a more subtle method of making amends, one that seems to be accepted by a large number of AA members. This is the method of making amends by living in the right way and meeting one's own obligations and responsibilities. Quite often, this can be more important to certain people than any amount of personal apologies or expressions of regret. Such amends are actually direct, because they have a direct effect on the lives of others.

A friend of mine, for example, neglected his family for the first

few years of his marriage. It was too late to save his marriage by the time he arrived in AA, but it was not too late to give his children as much assistance as possible at critical stages in their lives. What could be more direct than this?

Another friend was in trouble with the law repeatedly, spending almost sixteen years in prison. But his parents had the joy of seeing him recover before they passed on, and their joy crased much of the pain and disgrace he had once brought them. And if his defiant course once placed a burden on society, he has more than made direct amends to society as well, through his work in helping others who have been similarly defiant.

Finally, there is always the thought of what might have been if only we had not neglected a responsibility or failed to take advantage of an opportunity. In more than a few cases, alcoholics ought to make amends to themselves, for they were the chief victims of their own harmful thoughts and actions. Even here, direct amends are often possible. I feel strongly that my own night-school education over the past few years, leading to a high-school diploma and then to graduation from our local community college, is in this category. If any alcoholic feels that sins of omission or commission denied him some supposed good in life, he should ask himself whether it really is too late to make it up to himself. The only barrier, in many

cases, is not age at all; often, it is only a mixture of fear and laziness.

By taking the Ninth Step in all its various forms, we pay off any debt we may have to the past. Alcoholics Anonymous is a program of renewal and rebirth, and we have no business hanging on to things that are going to mar today's happiness. If fear is keeping us from making amends, we should destroy fear long enough to do the job. If pride is the deterrent, we should rise above it for the occasion. If laziness is involved, we should

gather all the energy we can find and deliberately order laziness to stand aside while we do what needs to be done.

When we have paid the great price—taken "the bull by the horns," as Doctor Bob did—we will find that the action has opened up a whole new world for us, one that we could never find on the old basis. And while we make amends directly to others, the real, lasting benefits come to us. This should certainly be reason enough for facing up to the Ninth Step.

M. D. B., Jackson, Mich.

*This series on the Twelve Steps is written
by twelve members of AA, each interpreting
one of the Steps as he sees it.*

10TH STEP

OF ALL THE STEPS, Step Ten appears the least dramatic and offers to alcoholics the least stimulation to their characteristically romantic imaginations. Yet an AA member who thoroughly and constantly practices Step Ten could write a tremendously helpful and inspiring article on the AA way of life. It would illuminate the value of all the other Steps. On reading the last word, you would eagerly turn back to the first sentence, ready to apply to your own life its blueprint of how to practice with profit and happiness the AA principles in all your affairs.

Continued to take
personal inventory
and when we were
wrong promptly
admitted it.

This, needless to say, is not such an article.

In the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill W. reminds us of the observation that pain is "the touchstone of all spiritual progress." It is no coincidence that this statement occurs in the chapter on Step Ten. Step Ten is not necessarily the most painful one to work, but I find it agonizing to face the fact that, in my case, it is the most often neglected Step of the Twelve.

It would not be accurate to say that I *rarely* take personal inventory or that I *seldom* admit it when I am wrong. If I were indeed that lax and

yet still sober after thirteen years, it would suggest that my sobriety was the result of sheer chance and that the AA program had little or no causal relationship to the over-all improvement in my life. That, of course, would be a ridiculous conclusion. I do a lot of things that are right. So does any creature that remains alive.

Without the regular discipline of Step Ten, however, I am on shaky ground. The right things I do may be the result of habit or inertia, or even of the absence of the opportunity to do something very wrong. For example, there is a Los Angeles city ordinance, on the books since around 1880 unless recently expunged, making it illegal to shoot jackrabbits from the open windows of a trolley car. Even during my most rambunctious drinking, I never once violated that ordinance! My virtue stemmed more from the absence of both jackrabbits and trolley cars than from the will to resist temptation.

In Chapter Six of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we are reminded that the earlier Steps involve cleaning up the past, and that with Step Ten we have entered the world of the spirit. "It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our

laurels," the Big Book tells us. "We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities."

"Every day"?

That's what it says. And I certainly cannot claim that each day I carry the vision of God's will into each of my activities: my work life, my social life, my health life, or even my AA participation. True, I have remained sober. And despite various disappointments and frustrations and fears, I have not once had the urge to take a drink — not once in more than thirteen years. Isn't that proof I'm working the program?

Let's see. I mentioned "disappointments and frustrations and fears."

Don't those very words indicate that *my* will is involved? Otherwise, why would I be disappointed or frustrated? And why "fears"? If I am truly and consistently turning my will and my life over to the care of God, as suggested in Step Three, why should I be afraid?

If I were diligent in applying Step Ten, then I would be mindful of this admonition in Chapter Six: "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone."

Step Ten is the quality-control procedure of the Twelve Steps. It's the monitoring device. And alcoholics of my type are prone to overlook it, until things get painful.

Part of my work as a television writer involves the devising of inci-

dents where human beings face a problem or a crisis. How they solve these problems, or are defeated by them, forms the very essence of drama, comedy, and tragedy. Every AA talk contains at least one such incident, relating to one or more of the Twelve Steps. Nearly every member has a dramatic incident illustrating Step One — how he came to admit his powerlessness over alcohol. Many can tell funny or tragic incidents illustrating Step Two — how they came to believe a Power greater than themselves could restore them to sanity.

Our most moving and effective speakers enthrall local groups and convention audiences with examples of how, through Step Three, they learned to turn their wills and their lives over to the care of God as they understood Him. Some bring Step Eleven into meaningful reality by describing specific occasions when

they learned the importance of improving their conscious contact with God, and learned how prayer brought power to sustain them through a great grief or hardship.

The Step Four inventory and the Step Five admission to God, oneself, and another human being, because they include transgressions while drinking, readily provide interesting material that we can all picture and respond to, because it involves action and emotional conflict.

The amends Steps, Eight and Nine, involve descriptions illustrating human folly, violence, greed, lust, and pathos. Even the apparently passive Steps, Six and Seven, can conjure up concrete examples of our readiness to have God remove character defects. Some years ago, my wounded pride and ego were compelling me into such constant absorption with myself that I was weakening my ability to function as

a writer. Naturally, I did not see my difficulty as hurt pride; instead, I was "justifiably outraged" at what I regarded as unfair rating of my talent. While reviewing the Steps from memory in search of release from this psychic pain, I looked vainly for a prescription for an insulted TV writer.

Suddenly, I gained the insight that I was suffering from pride, and that pride is a defect of character. The Steps do contain a prescription for such defects. Employing Steps Six and Seven, I asked God to remove my pride. But I realized that I was motivated chiefly by a desire to escape the pain, rather than a spiritual yearning for humility; so I added this thought: "God, if it is necessary for me to hurt in order for the defect to be removed, *then leave the pain* and take the defect."

Instantly, I experienced complete relief. The pain was gone. The hurt pride and ego, which had withstood logic, psychology, and even self-ridicule, vanished instantly when I sincerely worked Steps Six and Seven. I do not suggest that I am now completely free from all egotism, conceit, and supersensitivity. I am still vulnerable. But the discomfort of that particular instance was removed, and so far the returning attacks of pride are shorter-lived and less crippling.

On that occasion, because I worked Step Ten (continued to take inventory and admitted that I was wrong), I was guided to the proper

Steps to apply to my problem — in this case, Six and Seven.

Because of my abiding defects, I do not continue to work Step Ten each day, but often wait till pain again forces me into action. Despite the ghastly examples around me, I risk the perils of sloth, indifference, and procrastination by letting days pass without an inventory. How fortunate I am that my AA contacts and commitments work to remind me, in spite of myself, that a Power is ready to help me, once I relinquish my self-will again, if only for an instant.

A couple of years ago, a brave Englishman named Chichester sailed a small boat around the world, all alone. In one very profound sense, however, he was not alone. He brought along the accumulated experience of generations of sailors, dating back to the Phoenicians. Chichester weathered storms and darkness and fog, and found his way back safely to England, not through his own courage and skill alone, but with the hard-earned knowledge of ancient astronomers and navigators.

If we were to meet him, we would want to hear of his narrow escapes, of the dramatic incidents, of how he coped with obvious perils and dangers. Very likely, we would become bored or impatient if he were to tell us of his daily ritual of shooting the sun with the sextant, measuring the currents and wind direction and velocity, and taking a fix on the stars at night. Yet if it had not been for

this daily inventory, the seaman's counterpart of Step Ten, Chichester could not have been sure where he was, where he was headed, or what possible emergencies might be expected.

Many alcoholics, after being subjected to a few AA meetings and exposed to the facts about the nature of their disease, frequently announce with confidence, "AA may be all right for you, but I'll do it by myself." Observation of such people often shows that they actually have no plan at all, and certainly no desire to stop drinking. For them, disregarding the accumulated experience of thousands of sober alcoholics is similar to attempting Chichester's lonely voyage by first throwing overboard the compass, charts, star maps, and all navigation instruments and mathematical tables. ("This junk may be okay for you, Chichester, but I'll do it by myself!")

Such an attitude, even in a physically strong and alert voyager, would ring more of folly than of courage. But if the voyager is shaky, run-down, and functioning badly in one or more areas of his life, as is the usual newcomer to AA, then "folly" is too mild a word.

In many respects, the Fellowship of AA is like a reasonably happy cruise ship or, in time of trouble, like a convoy. But in the long run, each of us has to chart his own course through his life.

When the seas are smooth, the sun is bright, and at night the stars

are clear, we may become careless. We drift. And we neglect the daily inventory of Step Ten. True, we have not thrown the compass or the navigation book overboard, but we have gotten out of the habit of checking our position. Eventually, clouds conceal the stars; the seas get rough; our boat starts shipping water. Sometimes, we go into such a panic of bailing in order to keep afloat that we can't check our course, and disaster may lie dead ahead.

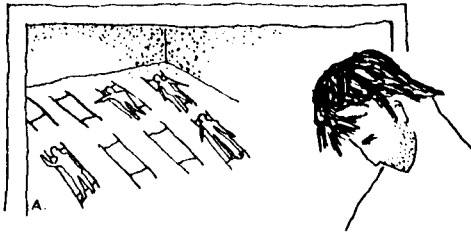
If we have been mindful of Step Ten with fair regularity, however, then we rarely go so far wrong that we can't make a few corrections and get back on course again.

In the years of my AA sobriety, I have had periods when I worked Step Ten with fair regularity, and periods when I have been lax. In many ways, it's like exercise — such as jogging. If I keep it up and don't miss a day, jogging is exhilarating, and I feel good most of the time. When I slip back into sloth and keep putting these sessions off, it becomes increasingly hard to resume the activity. Neglect of Step Ten produces creeping confusion, and life loses its zest.

At such times, I'm forced to look around at my AA acquaintances. I note that those who regularly practice Step Ten can determine with very little trouble what *other* Step is indicated to bring them again into a happier frame of mind and into serenity and comfortable sobriety.

L. H., North Hollywood, Calif.

The Low- Bottom Drunk



THE MANHATTAN BOWERY Project is located in the Men's Shelter at 8 East Third Street. To get inside, the Friday-night speaker from AA had to step over the body of a drunk lying on the sidewalk before the entrance.

Inside, other drunks and derelicts crowded the steps leading to the foyer. The speaker carefully picked his way upward through a narrow lane of legs and buttocks. In the foyer, a policeman leaned against a counter, talking to an attendant in a soiled white jacket. In an anteroom off the foyer, rows of empty stretchers covered the floor. The strong

odor of disinfectant and vomit was everywhere.

The speaker rode a steel freight elevator to the fourth floor, where there was a narrow desk. On the wall above it was a sign that gave the phone number of the AA intergroup office for the New York City metropolitan area: GR 3-6200. A young man was behind the desk. The speaker introduced himself, and, without looking up, the young man called tiredly, "John!"

John appeared from behind a nearby partition. He was a tall, thin man, prematurely aged, and he was obviously busy. He listened in a

*A vignette of life on skid row
that tells it like it is when AA
tries to carry the message*

distracted way while the speaker explained why he was there. It was impossible to tell whether John expected a Friday-night meeting or even whether he approved of AA.

"When is it supposed to begin?" he interrupted curtly. A woman in a nurse's uniform came up beside him and whispered something. "Better leave him tied there until he's sedated," John said. He turned his attention back to the speaker. "Okay," he said. "Let's see whether we can dig up some business for you."

They walked down a narrow hall which opened into a sort of lounge,

containing a long table, chairs, a TV set, and a large coffee urn. Men in bathrobes sat in chairs before the TV, nursing paper coffee cups and watching the day's news, between commercials for products guaranteed to create happiness.

"Wait here. I'll try to round up some bodies," John said. He disappeared into a ward beyond the lounge, and reappeared hurriedly to add, "I wouldn't turn off the TV set yet."

The speaker stood alone in the room, surrounded by its grubby yellow walls and the motionless figures of men riveted to the tube. The air was thick with cigarette smoke. John returned. Behind him straggled half a dozen men, most of them unshaven—the walking wounded. Their appearance served to distract the men already in the room. They woke as from a reverie, while the newscaster recited the Dow-Jones averages. John switched the set off.

"All right, everybody," he said. "AA meeting now." There was no conviction in his voice. He took off his horn-rimmed glasses and peered kindly at the speaker. "Good luck, old buddy," he said. "It's all yours." And he walked away down the hall.

Shuffling and rearranging of chairs. Coughs. Sounds from the toilet off the hall. Someone cursed, got up, and slammed the door shut. For the first time, the speaker looked at his audience, now sitting around the table. Nine faces looked back.

Four black, five white. Reopened scar tissue. Dirt-smearred cheeks. Scabs. A bandaged arm resting on the table. Skin eruptions. A pale-haired old Irishman with a mottled red face, ice-blue eyes, and a straight, drawn-in slash of a mouth: Show me.

The speaker could find nothing to address himself to. The room was windowless and stank. Water dripped from the coffee urn in the corner. The toilet flushed.

The men were obviously stoned. Nine men out of the forty or fifty on the floor. Under their sedation, what dim groping had brought them here, from the card games and dimmer dreams? They ranged before him like statues of his own conscience. He felt useless.

... And began. His name and "I am an alcoholic." The AA Preamble. The explanation that a second speaker had been unable to make it. As he talked, his feeling of inadequacy grew. He was struck by the absurdity of being there at all. He was speaking to men in transit, a five-day relay en route to death or insanity. Dried out once more, most or perhaps all of them would hit the nearest bar at the first chance.

... And told his story, making it simple, remembering beyond the words that came easily from telling it before. The fun years; the start of trouble; hangovers; blackouts; withdrawals; remorse; guilt; suspicion of insanity as the cause of drinking; anger and sorrow; resentments;



growing horror; breakdown of health; horror looming larger; helplessness; hopelessness; promises never kept; fear of death; complete alienation; years of running.

A man exploded. "To hell with AA! I don't have to take this!" He stormed out.

A black man grinned cheerfully and said, "Don't pay no attention to him. He's out of his skull. Man, he don't even know he's here."

The speaker remembered waking in a hotel bedroom, looking up at a strange landscape of cracks and a spider web, feeling horror settle over him like a shroud, and not knowing what city he was in — or even what country.

The men were waiting silently for the speaker to continue.

... The first AA meeting. The realization that alcoholism was a disease; that his insanity was a re-

sult, not a cause; that there was hope; that he was not alone. Slowly, the recovery in AA. The beauty of an ordinary day, without fear. Living one day at a time. The sensation of peace. Awareness of himself sober. The recognition of a power higher than himself. Himself responding.

The room was quiet. He spoke as though no one else was there. "I made the admission that I was powerless over alcohol, and needed help. I've learned to live with myself, finally. I can ask for help, and know I'll get it. I can help somebody else, if asked, and know we'll both be helping ourselves in the process. But I can't stay sober alone, without people. I've tried. People need people. All I need is to feel the need."

Was anything getting through? Was he making sense, even to himself? Were these men reachable?

The speaker felt exhausted, discouraged. "Any questions?"

Silence.

Slowly, a hand went up. The face belonging to it was beyond middle age — the face of a man hard on himself and others. In a surprisingly firm voice, he said, "I always began my meetings with the Serenity Prayer. I was chairman of my group in Westchester. I was sober twenty years."

"Welcome back," the speaker said. "I'm surprised," said the other, in a voice tinged with reproval, "that you didn't think to give the origins of the program. The Oxford Group. William James. Carl Jung." The man tried to roll a cigarette and failed. The speaker shoved a pack of ready-mades in his direction. The man clawed one out and managed to light it. "You sound like a Christ-er with a handout," he said. He struggled to his feet, dropped the cigarette, lurched against the wall, eyes glazed. He stumbled into the toilet. The sound of vomiting.

Seven pairs of eyes remained fixed on the speaker. He looked at his wristwatch and saw that time was running out. "Anyone else care to say anything?"

"Pride goeth before a fall," said someone. "That poor slob'd need a computer to keep up with his inventory. You got a booklet with the meetings listed? If I ever haul tail out of here, I might try the program again."

The speaker handed booklets

"I got nothin' to lose, right?" he said.

around. The meeting concluded with a recital of the Lord's Prayer, the Catholics stumbling over the Protestant wording near the end.

The man who had requested a meeting list stood swaying in front of the speaker. "I got nothin' to lose, right?" he said. It sounded like a challenge. He was afflicted with a curious little dance, and bounced off the edge of the table, ten miles high. "Right?"

The citizen from Westchester struggled from the toilet. He was talking to himself. "The dynamics of communication, that's what the damn thing's all about," he said.

The speaker received a handshake, like warm sandpaper. The old Irishman had come up to him. "Yez give a good talk, lad," he said. He patted the speaker's shoulder sympathetically.

"How about taking one of the booklets?" the speaker asked him. He felt that he was drowning.

Ice-blue eyes shifted uneasily away. "Well now, I'll tell yez. Without me glasses I can't read, you know, and they got broke."

In the hall by the elevator, John passed the speaker, stopped, and turned. "Save any souls tonight?"

"Can't win 'em all." The speaker tried to sound lighthearted, but failed.

"Well, fall's here," John said.

"Getting cold. We'll be jammed from here on out. Most of these poor devils are repeaters. They commit themselves voluntarily. I cruise around in a police car and round them up. Every day. The same faces. Most of the men you spoke to in there are old hands. I've known some of them for years. Sometimes I wonder why I do it." They said good night, and John returned to the ward.

The elevator was slow in coming. A figure approached from the direction of the lounge. An ancient Negro with tufts of gray hair, who had listened without comment during the meeting. Now he shuffled up to the speaker, and in a quiet, apologetic voice said, "Pardon me, suh. My name is Malcolm. I just want to ax. Do you think if I cleaned myself up, and tried real hard, like you say, I might . . ." He was carrying one of the booklets, and he stared down at it.

"I mean," he said, "like my family is gone, and all that. But I been thinkin' that maybe, like you say, if I really try, see. I ain't really tried, before. But something you said, back there, sorta gave me the idea that I might make it, this time. What I wanted to ax, see, is if you think I could make it. If I cleaned myself up real good and took in some of those meetings. Do you really think

I could?"

A day at a time, the speaker thought, that's the ticket. He began to get excited. "Listen!" he said.

The elevator arrived. The speaker told the operator he'd take the fire escape down, and stayed to rap with Malcolm for a while, until an attendant called the old man. "Good night," the speaker said.

Their hands touched briefly. "I want to thank you, suh," Malcolm said.

The speaker ran lightly down the stairs. "Thank *me!*" he said aloud. "Oh sweet Jesus!"

On the ground floor, the stretchers in the anteroom were all full now. The casualties had been admitted for the night, looking like corpses on a field of rags. Other men, the overflow, curled in the entranceway. Half in the street, propped across the gutter, lay the body of another man. Several figures lay in darker shadow along the wall of the shelter. The scene resembled the aftermath of a disastrous patrol action. A trail of blood led across the sidewalk.

There was a chill in the air as the speaker walked to the corner of the Bowery. Soon it would be winter, and snow would fall. But in his mind he saw the face of Malcolm, hope glistening in dark eyes. The old wreck of a man had been tuned

in, turned on, back there in the hall. The speaker had hooked a live one. The golden line grew taut, began to hum.

The speaker was struck now by a tiny, familiar miracle, and he handled and examined it like a precious stone, as if he were showing it to Malcolm here on the Bowery sidewalk. He himself had been sober another whole day.

Do you really think I could? said

Malcolm, and there was the silence of wonderment.

Yes, yes! said the speaker. A day at a time, see? He handed over the gift of himself, as he had received it years before. Here, take it, Malcolm. Again, the speaker felt Malcolm's dry, leathery fingers on his own.

Then he was tired, and turned homeward, uptown, where the lights were, and a warm room.

J. W., Manhattan, N.Y.

Essence of AA

More Than Sobriety

AA is a road to better living, with signs to guide us and friends to help us along the way

SOBRIETY, OF ITSELF, is not a goal which insures victory; it is not merely an accomplishment which we achieve on a certain date. Sobriety in AA is much more. It is like finding, after a long search, the right road — a road on which we can travel confidently, knowing that we are going properly in the right direction.

I believe all of us experienced periods of sobriety even before AA — periods when we were on the wagon because of poor health, money troubles, or all kinds of other troubles. Most of the time, such periods were quite miserable, principally because we felt deprived of something and were not at all sure of ourselves. We knew it wouldn't work, at least not for any extended time. And it didn't. We tried many other tricks and subterfuges, but each time we ended up where we had started. We were lost!

That is why many of us experience a feeling of elation when we meet AA. Then, finally, we know that this is the right road. We feel safe. We are going in the right direction.

We in AA have the soul-satisfying advantage of traveling a way that many like us have traveled successfully before. They offer us a map suggesting the best route, in Twelve Steps. They have posted signs along the way — signs of encouragement or signals of possible dangers — and are even ready to help if we stray from the road a bit.

We take the First Step along this road, of course, when we admit we are powerless over alcohol, that our lives have become unmanageable. Oh yes, we have in the past admitted secretly to ourselves, in our saner moments, that alcohol was making a mess of us and that we were making



a mess of the lives of others. But such temporary admissions only added to our guilt and forced us to seek another drink to forget it all. Our First Step, our first admission within AA, is quite different. No longer are we resentfully admitting *part-time* powerlessness or *occasional* unmanageability. We admit *total* helplessness. We ask for help.

AA tells us about the disease of alcoholism, the cause of our trouble. We learn that we are its victims. This is a good start. Now we realize that we were not always the horrible people we thought we were. In the nature of our disease, much of what we did was not entirely our choice. We learn that alcoholism is a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession. One drink set up in our bodies a compulsion which by ourselves we were totally unable to resist. In our minds, many drinks created an obsession which blinded us to reality,

giving alcohol a value which, in fact, it never had.

Now, with this knowledge and a desire to stop drinking, we are prepared to follow directions, to do what is prescribed for an alcoholic who wants to improve his position. The directions are clearly outlined. They come to us at meetings, from our new friends in AA, and from our books and pamphlets.

All of these outline the AA way of life, to be lived one day at a time, without alcohol. We learn that we cannot live haphazardly or carelessly. We cannot follow our whims nor always do just what we want to do. We don't want to live dangerously. We see other alcoholics following directions and staying sober. (Just so, we have observed that people who have arrested cases of diabetes or tuberculosis live well as long as they observe the way of life prescribed by their physicians.)

The Twelve Steps outline the AA way of life clearly. They take us, a step at a time, along a road which hundreds of thousands of recovered alcoholics have traveled before us. The Steps sum up their way of living successfully. For any anxiety or problem that might have prompted a return to alcohol, they found the solution in the Twelve Steps. We, too, can live that way.

Related to and supporting the Twelve Steps are the many other features of this new AA way of life. There are our meetings, with our home groups and wherever we

travel. There is my phone call to you, and your call back to me. You tell me a bit of your experience, and you hear some of mine. We get to know each other.

There is our literature, giving us inspiration, strength, and courage for the journey and giving us also a common language, understood throughout all of AA.

All that AA has gathered together for us results in an enrichment of our lives which we can call only "the AA way of life." This enrichment comes slowly, gradually, and continuously. It comes in addition to better mental and physical health and growth. It appears in new ideals, new ambitions, new interests, new attitudes,

new capabilities, and new accomplishments, which never were at any time a part of our drinking lives, nor could we have imagined them then, even in our wildest dreams.

The only requirements are to stop drinking and, with an open mind and as much honesty as we can command, to give serious and steady attention to all that AA is offering us.

Our new road leads to a genuine interest in others and a desire to share this way of life with them. We are no longer alone. We accept help for ourselves — then we reach out and aid those who seek our experience, our understanding, and the grace of God given us so abundantly.

— Adapted from December 1960 Grapevine

*This series on the Twelve Steps is written
by twelve members of AA, each interpreting
one of the Steps as he sees it.*

11TH STEP

WHEN I WAS SMALL, my parents sent me to several different Sunday schools, but I don't think they ever went to church themselves. My aunts and uncles were members of different sects, and when they came to visit, they took me with them to their churches. My parents made no objection, and, in fact, I believe they thought it would be good for me. As it turned out, it wasn't.

Before World War I, religious intolerance was much stronger, more prevalent, and more open than it is today. I heard hellfire-and-brimstone sermons, and usually the

damned were those people who did not attend that particular church. Since I attended a number of different churches, I heard them all ripped up and down at one time or another. To a youngster, it was very confusing.

By the time I was in high school, I had come to the conclusion that all religion was a lot of baloney. I had tried to find out more for myself and had actually read most of the Bible. I'm sure now that I understood very little, but I found enough nonsense in it to prove my case to my own satisfaction.

When I took my first drink (and

Sought through prayer
and meditation to
improve our conscious
contact with God
as we understood
Him, praying only for
knowledge of His will
for us and the power
to carry that out.

got drunk) at the age of seventeen, I was already an all-out atheist. As my alcoholism developed, my atheism got nastier. I was absolutely certain that I was right, and after a few drinks I enjoyed imparting my wisdom to anyone who would listen or, preferably, argue. I ridiculed anyone who was so stupid, ignorant, or superstitious as to believe in any sort of God or religion — or who was so hypocritical as to act as though he believed such nonsense.

Twenty years after my first drink, alcohol had me licked. I heard that a friend of mine had been sober for

four months. Since I knew that he absolutely couldn't stay sober, any more than I could, I drank enough to get my courage up and went to see him to find out how he did it. I had read a newspaper article about Alcoholics Anonymous, had sent for the Big Book (for a friend, not for me), and had read part of it; so the thought had already been in my mind that maybe that was how he had gotten sober. Sure enough, it was. He gave me a drink and talked with me from midafternoon until after midnight.

The next day, I remembered just two things he had said. (1) "Can you stay sober 24 hours?" I had answered "Yes," because I had. (2) "AA has a spiritual part to it." (My heart sank.) "But I know you, and I advise you not to pay any attention to it. Just skip the whole subject, and try to keep an open mind." (Heart went back up.) "There is no religion in AA, but there is a belief in a power greater than ourselves, and your higher power can be AA."

My sponsor kept me with him overnight and all the next day and took me to my first meeting the next night, at the Old 24th Street Clubhouse in New York City. For

the first time in my life, I felt at home. People were kind and welcomed me uncritically. I didn't know it then, but I had had my last drink.

From then on, my higher power was AA. I lived it, breathed it, became immersed in it. There was no doubt that I was powerless over alcohol and that AA had enabled me to do that which I had been unable to do myself. I took my inventory repeatedly, tried to make amends, did Twelfth Step work, went to numerous meetings, spoke, worked in the group jobs and at the intergroup office, admitted my shortcomings, and wanted them removed . . . by God, as I understood Him? I didn't understand Him at all, because He wasn't.

In group discussions, my good AA friends said things to me like "You have faith in a dollar bill, don't you? Yet it's nothing but paper." Many who had gained some faith themselves tried to pass it on to me — but it didn't work.

Then I went to a small closed meeting and listened to a real old-timer, who had preceded me in AA by six or seven years. He said that when a new member comes into AA, he naturally leans on his sponsor. After a while, he transfers his leaning to the group to which he belongs, and later on he transfers his leaning to AA as a whole. He leans on, depends on, gets his help from AA philosophy, rather than from any particular individual or

"He leans on, depends on, gets his help from AA philosophy."

group. And then, finally, if he is to stay sober for the long, long pull, he makes the final transfer and leans on God. Then he puts his reliance and dependence on God and lives by His will — and if he doesn't do this to some extent, he will not stay sober indefinitely. You have seen AA members, after some years of sobriety, get drunk. They didn't make the final transfer.

That was the gist of what he said, and it scared hell out of me, because I didn't want to get drunk, ever, and I didn't see how I could make the final transfer. So I doubled and redoubled my efforts to get some kind of faith, whatever that was. I think my mind finally may have opened, not only to the *necessity* of getting faith in God, but to the *possibility*, because I did begin to remember a few things.

Not long before coming into AA, when I was down so low that I was thinking about what a relief it would be to be dead, I remember saying out loud to myself something to the effect that I knew there was no God, but I wished there were, so I could ask Him, as other people did, to get me out of the horrible mess I was in. I began to wonder if this wish had been a prayer that had been heard and answered. But, of course, it couldn't have been. It was just a coincidence that I had

come into AA shortly thereafter.

When the Lord's Prayer was said at the end of meetings, I didn't say it because I didn't know it. But I thought I should say it, so I looked it up and memorized it. Then I read Emmet Fox's analysis of that prayer, and the empty words began to make sense for the first time.

The old-timer had convinced me that I had better start doing something constructive about acquiring some kind of faith; so I started a ten-year stretch of reading books — probably a couple hundred of them — and have read more since then.

One of them, Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*, taught me that men, almost all of them, had always believed in God (or gods) and in life after death. It seemed to have been an instinctive belief, going back at least 25,000 years. Could it be that I was wrong? It occurred to me that I had judged churches by the people who were in them, rather than by their teachings. Maybe I had been unable to accept religion merely because people didn't live up to its teachings. Could I judge AA by some drunks I knew who occasionally came to meetings, but never made any real attempt to get sober? That thought set me off on a good many years of experimental churchgoing to find out what the various religions

taught, rather than what their members did.

I was beginning, I think, to have the first glimmerings of faith, of belief in some sort of Power that created the universe — but not in a personal God. About that time, the thought came to me that I had been *personally* created; that each and every individual had been personally created — no two alike. We are not part of some mysterious cosmos as a drop of water is part of the sea; each of us is an individual, separate entity, each created individually — and, what's more, each of us is of the most supercolossal, amazing complexity. With all our knowledge of DNA and heart transplants, we haven't the faintest idea how life comes to be. One thing is certain — we didn't invent it. Some intelligence, ten thousand 'trillion times more talented than we are, did. And that intelligence invented us, not as a general class of undifferentiated creatures, but each specifically. I could now see that whatever Power could do this could be called God. Since God could, and did, invent each of us individually, why could He not look after us individually? It began to seem illogical that He wouldn't.

I read a book by LeComte de Nouy called *Human Destiny*, which reinforced and solidified my grow-

ing belief. DeNouy was a biologist, whose science had convinced him of God. One of his arguments was this:

There are various kinds of protein molecules, and in any particular protein there are billions of identical molecules. Each molecule contains several million atoms of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, etc. The thing that makes them proteins, rather than some other kind of substance, is the structure of the molecule. The position of each atom has to be the same in every one. Since there are several million atoms in each molecule, the probability of even two identical protein molecules occurring by chance is about as close to zero as you can get. Then, of course, the probability of a thousand or a million or a billion identical protein molecules being generated by chance becomes infinite nonsense. They must be generated, not only by intelligence, but by

infinite intelligence.

DeNouy's book has much more than this example. Its general thesis is that man's brain is getting to the point where he will more and more control his own destiny. It is in this sense, I take it, that man is created in God's image and likeness. Man can think, and, through God's evolution, he gets better at it as aeons pass. Thought (I reasoned) must be the basis of all life.

What I was trying to do, as you no doubt have observed by now, was to work the Eleventh Step: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him . . .*" That means we think about it, consciously. *Thought*. Everything springs from thought. Action must be preceded by thought. Maybe thought is the ultimate power, the final energy of creation. We know that matter isn't really what it seems to our senses — it is

a form of energy. We know from elementary physics that chemical energy can be turned into electrical energy, which can be converted into heat, which can be converted into motion, which can be converted back into electrical energy, which can be converted into light, etc. So what is energy?

Rhine's experiments proved to my satisfaction that *thought* can be transmitted through space from one person to another (ESP, extrasensory perception). Something must be going on that we know very little about. One thing seems certain: Energy is transmitted by waves — light, heat, electrical, sound. The living brain produces waves which medical men and researchers record on machines. Or is the brain a receiving station, like a radio? Does it receive waves that bring information from some cosmic source?

Pick out any particular point in space, the size of a pinhead.

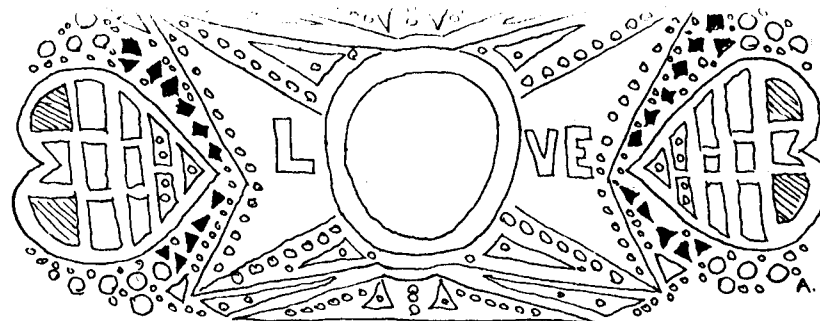
Through that point pass thousands of light waves, radio waves, TV waves, electrical waves, and all the waves from the distant stars and suns, and undoubtedly billions of thought waves, and all the kinds of waves we know nothing about — all at the same time. They are passing through us right now, and all the time. Ten thousand telephone conversations could be put on one high-frequency wavelength. Then could not all the information, data, processes, remembrances, thoughts of the entire universe be put on *all* the wavelengths? That would mean that all the infinite knowledge of the universe could be available at any one point, anywhere in space. Could that be how an Infinite Being would know everything about everything, everywhere? Is that how He would know every thought of every one of His creatures? Wouldn't He know every one of *my* thoughts, just as religion says He would?

Some of my thoughts were good and some were bad; most were in between. If, as religion teaches, God is all good, He would "hear" the good thoughts and aspirations. Would He ignore the bad ones? Or would He set events in motion to teach me better? The latter seemed more logical, if God is love and if God is our Father. A loving parent would teach his children so that they would live happy, productive lives. At any rate, this speculation satisfied me, so that I didn't have to believe in a God of wrath and punishment and vengeance.

How about guidance? How do we get knowledge of His will for us? I remember, when I was in college, one of my fraternity brothers was a premed student, nicknamed "Judge," who was interested in hypnotism and could sometimes be prevailed upon to hypnotize volunteers, usually freshmen. Before he awakened them, he would give them posthypnotic suggestions. He would say, for instance, "When you wake up, you are going to be very, very thirsty. You are going to get hot under the collar and itch, until you go and get a glass of water and bring it in here and drink it." After coming to, the subject would stand in the group talking nervously, running his finger around the back of his collar, and shortly he would excuse himself and bring back a glass of water and drink it before the gathering. He hadn't the faintest idea why he had done it.

So thoughts *can* be put into people's minds without their being aware of it. Certainly, the Creator of my mind could easily insert in it thoughts that would lead to my growth, without in any way interfering with the free will that He apparently wished to build into humans. My pea-sized intelligence can only speculate that He wanted to create a race of free-thinking beings, rather than a race of automatons—and, within limits, He has given us the ability to be just that. God could control human events by controlling thoughts. When I pray and do not "pray amiss," the prayer could be answered by putting the proper thoughts into my mind, or into the minds of others who would act as agents to carry out any necessary actions. I have never been aware of receiving any guidance, but I now believe it is entirely unnecessary for me to be aware of it. I can still receive it just the same.

People do get original thoughts. From where? There is such a thing as inspiration, and most of the time it cannot be traced to any source. Two people often get the same idea at the same time. Thought is prayer, and thought is power. But there are two kinds, good and bad. Energy is divided into two kinds: for instance, positive and negative electricity. If thought is the basic energy of creation, is it surprising that there are positive and negative thoughts? We know that we have to learn to use energy wisely and care-



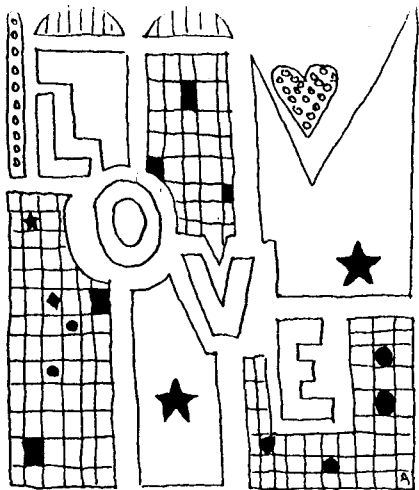
fully. Wrongly used, electricity can kill, fire can burn, sound can shatter, light can blind. Wrong thoughts either are full of negative energy or *are* negative energy—and they can kill and cause destruction and misery. Right thoughts can soothe and heal, bring knowledge and happiness. "As a man thinketh, so is he" is literally true, because a person's whole life is lived in his mind and nowhere else. His thoughts make up his identity. Paul said a man's whole life is a prayer.

Speculations and meditations like these have done something to me, I'm very glad to say. Thanks to the Eleventh Step, I have had to discard from my mind all the thoughts and beliefs that were once there. I gave them up reluctantly. I liked my old thoughts, even was proud of them. I didn't want to believe in God, but through AA I got to a point where I had to. I didn't want to believe in prayer, but finally I had to. Now I believe it to be the strongest force on earth—if the quietest. You don't have to be aware of power. It doesn't have to be loud, like a hurricane. In one day,

sunshine delivers to the earth's surface more energy, more horsepower than the total amount delivered by all the power we have ever developed artificially. And we are not aware that the force of the sun is power at all. Gravity acts on every cell of our body, every second, and we are not conscious of it.

Before AA, I wanted more than anything else to get sober. That was a positive thought, and it was a prayer that was answered. Once my closed mind was pried open, once I consciously tried to meditate and increase my conscious contact with God, my life started to straighten out, and it has continued to improve ever since. I can look back and see where I received guidance and where I made right decisions without ever knowing that I was doing so, or why.

When I came into AA, if anyone had told me that I would some day believe what I now believe, I think I would have shot him. How did the change happen? After joining AA, I had complete faith in everything AA said or stood for. I could see the results all around me, and, as



time went on, I could see what AA was doing for me. Now, as I look back, I realize that AA was teaching me spiritual values without using religious words. For example:

AA tells us to try to help other people, and the people it tells us to help — other alcoholics — can be anything but lovely. AA tradition tells us to go to the most inconvenient lengths to help others. Religion tells us, "Love thy neighbor," and illustrates it with the parable of the good Samaritan.

AA teaches us tolerance, as we learn not to be irritated by the ideas and idiosyncrasies of others. Religion says, "Judge not . . ."

AA teaches us to get rid of resentments and to replace them with a feeling of goodwill toward everyone. Religion tells us to love our enemies.

AA says that we must be absolutely honest with ourselves. Reli-

gion says that to know the truth will set us free.

AA suggests to us the advisability of getting rid of pride and replacing it with humility. Religion says that pride is the deadliest of sins and that it "goeth before . . . a fall."

AA says it is necessary to get rid of our irrational fears, to live the kind of life that makes fears largely unnecessary. Religion says that "perfect love casteth out fear." If we could reach such an unearthly state of perfection, it would mean that our minds would be 100% concerned for the welfare of others, and then, since we would have no concern for ourselves, we would have no fear. Couldn't we say that the concern and fellowship existing among so many AA members, much deeper than friendship, can be called love? Not perfect, perhaps, but love just the same. The more of our minds we fill with concern for others, the less room is left to be concerned for ourselves. Thus, in AA, we slowly learn to stop stewing in our own juice and to start loving other people. (Certainly, we are not talking about romantic love, any more than Jesus was when He talked about loving your enemies, or your neighbor as yourself.)

In spite of my original bias, AA was teaching me spiritual values — love and kindness and consideration and humility, attitudes opposite to the resentments, pride, self-centeredness, and fear that had previously all but consumed my mind. And it

was not until AA had taught me these values, to some extent at least, that my mind was ready for faith to enter.

How much faith? I don't know how to measure it. But now I have faith in the teachings of both AA and religion, because I find them much the same, though expressed in different words. Faith is a matter of degree. I am grateful for whatever faith I have now, even though it is little more than a seedling — far, so very far, from the kind of faith that moves mountains. There is so much more to know, and no limit to the growth of faith. So I

shall continue trying to work the Eleventh Step, trying to improve my conscious contact with God as I understand Him.

As I look back, I am aware that I now live in a comparatively happy and serene world, entirely different from the world of self-centered misery of not too long ago. Yet, whatever progress and happiness God has given me through AA, they are only a beginning. I feel sure that, if I keep trying to practice these principles in all my affairs, I will slowly but surely reach an even more splendid world some day.

R. A. S., Tucson, Ariz.

August 1971

In the Striped Sunshine...

*Presenting
a 9-page section
on AA's work in
prisons*

**Come
With Me
to an AA Meeting
Behind the Walls**

MANY PEOPLE have asked, "You mean you go into a *prison* to talk at AA meetings? What's it like? Do you ever get threatened? Aren't you afraid, being around all those criminals?"

Come with me to an AA meeting behind the walls. Discover what it is like to spend an hour in prison.

The maximum-security prison is located on a main city street, and it is surrounded by a gray stone wall about sixty feet high. Three of us approach the front door and ring the highly polished brass bell. A peep slot opens, and we are checked. Then the heavy wooden door swings open, and we state our business. A door of heavy steel bars still sepa-

rates us from the guard. When this door is opened, we walk inside.

Now we are in the area that all visitors, whether on foot or in vehicles, must enter. The driveway is wide enough to accommodate a large truck or bus. A massive oak door, reinforced with steel straps, must be opened to allow entry of vehicle traffic, and then this door must be closed before the next door, which gives access to the prison itself, is opened. The locks securing these doors must be released with a key and with an electric switch that is activated by a guard in a bulletproof glass and brick room, high above ground level.

We sign in and are given badges,

which must be worn at all times while in the institution. We talk to the guard as we wait to be released from this area. He is courteous, like the rest of the staff, but we must be frisked before we are allowed to go farther. Carrying contraband into, or out of, a prison is a serious offense.

We walk across an open area and through an unlocked door into the visitors' section. It is just as depicted in the movies: short, squat stools; a heavy wire screen to separate the visitor from the inmate. We walk through this area and through two more sets of locked doors before we reach Center, the control area of the institution's activities.

We are logged in at Center and taken through another locked door to the meeting room.

We wait, sitting at a table, and watch the members of the group drift into the meeting. Some of the faces are familiar, but there are a few new ones, as always. Some we know from other prisons where they have served time, and others are first offenders. We have a good cross section at this meeting. There are the cynical, the wise, the scared, and the scarred — and, we hope, a few of the winners.

The meeting is opened, and we conduct it just as we do any AA meeting on the outside. Some members of the group will ask questions; others will not even look up while the meeting progresses.

A member sitting in the back of

the room seems inattentive until one of us says something that, to him, is a contradiction. His hand shoots up, and he questions the visitor closely on the point. If we really have goofed in a case like this, we practice the Tenth Step and admit it; if not, we explain exactly what we meant. If we don't know the answer to a question, we say so; later, we get the answer and bring it back when we come again. Many of these men think we're "playing an angle," and if we are to win their confidence, we must be completely honest in our dealings with them.

The toughest part of prison AA work is gaining the confidence of the men. There aren't many people in the world that these guys trust — if anybody at all has their confidence. A few will open up, and we get to know them, and we may even correspond with them. There are those who may never trust us, but we

don't give up — there are no hopeless cases. When we break through their reserve and finally gain their trust, it is a satisfying and deeply rewarding experience.

There are a few questions about our personal stories, and these points are discussed around the room. There is some lively give-and-take on our part and by the members of the group. This has been a good meeting, because most of those attending have participated. So it is with genuine regret that we see the group secretary point to his watch, signifying the end of the meeting.

We say the Lord's Prayer and talk for a few minutes with the guys who stop to thank us for coming to the prison. They are grateful that we have taken the time to come in and bring them a meeting. The AA people are the only outsiders that some of these men see; often, their families have given them up, and a

few have no families. To them, we are a kind of foster family, their link to the outside world.

Last goodbyes are said, and we retrace our steps through the prison and the yard and out to the reception area. The last two doors are unlocked, and we are outside the high gray walls once again. The weather has become damp, and the air is a conglomerate of big-city smells. We don't really mind — it's *free* air. There are no more locked doors now, only the sweet taste, feel, and smell of freedom.

While driving home, I think of all the things I have done that could have put me behind those same walls. How very fortunate I am, not only that I am not in prison, but that I have the opportunity to rebuild my life through Alcoholics Anonymous. It is a way of living that is worth sharing.

F. S., Philadelphia, Pa.

12TH STEP

This series on the Twelve Steps is written by twelve members of AA, each interpreting one of the Steps as he sees it.

FOR THIS ARTICLE, my AA library remains untouched. It would be an easy matter to refresh my mind with the writings of other members, to freshly assimilate their thoughts and present a rich pudding packed with stolen plums. That's called research. But the Twelfth Step is too important a part of my life for me to let this article contain any thoughts except my own. That means, of course, that it will carry the thoughts of others, but only those thoughts and ideas that have become a part of me and my way of sobriety.

The Twelfth Step is the capstone of the AA program. It announces itself as being such with its opening phrases, "Having had a spiritual awakening *as the result of these Steps...*" Whatever is to follow those words is the result of all that went before. But first let's examine the opening words.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Few of us experience the "wind ... of spirit" described by Bill W. Indeed, very few of us experience a sudden, startling spiritual experience of any kind. Usually, the change is gradual. Yet it is no less a spiritual awakening. Whether we awaken with a bound or after much stretching, we awaken. When there is a spiritual awakening, self-centeredness, fear, and frustration are supplanted by helpful friendliness, happiness (perhaps even a touch of serenity), and fulfillment.

I joined AA a few weeks before Vinny F. did, and it was remarkable to me to watch the changes that transformed him within a few months. Why couldn't it be happening to me? I said as much to an old-timer. "Oh, you've changed just as much as Vinny," he told me with a broad smile. I couldn't believe it!

But indeed I had changed, and if

my search for spiritual guidance was unsuccessful in its church-oriented aspect, the search itself continued. It went on and on, at regular meetings and at one-to-one meetings with individual members.

Incidentally, during those first, wonder-filled months, I concocted a description of my feeling about most open and closed meetings. I said that the total effect was greater than the sum of its individual parts. To put it another way, a list of the people at a given meeting and a recap of everything said were not enough to account for the height of my elation. The human element alone could not have lifted me so high. There was a mysterious, indefinable "x" factor, which I choose to call spiritual.

That there was nothing sudden about this, no bolt of lightning, no rumble of thunder, is evident from

the fact that for several years I could not bring myself to go and speak in a prison. One day, as though a veil were torn away, I realized that I *could* speak in jails and prisons. I would not be going beyond the locked gates in order to identify with the men as prisoners. Perhaps some of them would consider me an amateur for not having lost my liberty, but that would be their hang-up, not mine. Since then, I've had good AA conversations with a number of prisoners — as fellow alcoholics.

That leads right into the next phase of the capstone Step: “. . . we tried to carry this message to alcoholics.” What message? Hope. Example. The way out. The way back. A handful of simple principles to unravel most of our snarled-up problems. A touch of humor — not taking ourselves so damned seriously. Meetings. Availability. Talk, talk, talk. The willingness to listen with

understanding as the still-suffering alcoholic thrashes his way out of his mental mire. Tolerance. Guilelessness. The honesty to face situations and people, not go around them by the old, familiar route of sneakiness and subverted honesty. “Carrying the message” is all these things.

And the list could go on and on. There are the specifics of baby-sitting, housecleaning, and other chores that so many AA women have performed for shaky newcomers. There are the specifics of slogging through a snowstorm to answer a call for help, or driving a guy to a state hospital to keep him from winding up in jail. Practicing the Twelfth Step does not allow for questioning the merits of, or probable “returns” on, these actions. They are the philosophy of the Twelfth Step made manifest. When we do these things, we are carrying the message with a sense of responsibility.

It is precisely at this point in the AA program that a member's depth of understanding is plumbed. “We tried to carry the message” is a saying so battered out of shape by steady use that the deep humility of its intent is frequently lost from sight. This single saying is the basis for calling a visit to an active alcoholic a “Twelfth Step call.” We know that speaking at meetings is a form of Twelfth Step work. Occasionally, we learn that we have fortuitously performed a Twelfth Step activity — helped someone without being aware of it at the time. It is the Twelfth Step in action which, to a large degree, keeps AA self-regenerative. Every meeting is an experience in sharing, but Twelfth Step activity is a more personal — and can therefore be a more deeply felt — form of sharing.

Being more personal, Twelfth Step work can become ego-oriented. Like

the missionary who believes he is saving the pagans rather than himself, the egocentric member believes he is saving the other person rather than fortifying his own sobriety. Nonsense! The member is merely being given an opportunity to exercise his grasp of the program. Anyone who would take the credit for sobering up another person must also take the blame for failing to salvage those who don't sober up promptly, by the numbers and according to the book. Bunk! Let's remember that a Twelfth Step call is a visit, not a visitation.

Speaking of calling on the suffering alcoholic, it is frequently stated that “When a person wants sobriety badly enough, he'll come to AA.” (The statement is often fortified with the remark “That's what *I* did,” which makes it the word of God, of course.) *That* is carrying the message? I don't believe it. I didn't know

enough to look for AA. Someone brought the message to me. Over seventeen years ago.

You and I know members who, having "caught" the program themselves, find the repeating drunk someone to avoid. I have heard from more than one repeater that some member has told him he cannot return to AA. Imagine one lush excommunicating another! *That* is carrying the message?

You and I have called on drunks whose remorse and frustration were founded principally on their not having done what the self-righteous member had told them to do. They felt beyond the pale.

The last two examples are spoiled fruit of the ego tree. The poor drunk who can't immediately catch fire from Ardent Member's magic words is discarded as unworthy. "He isn't *trying*," says Ardent Member. On what profound knowledge does he base his opinion? So far as I know, there was only One with the power to say, "Go and sin no more."

We have seen old-timers founder. And we have seen old experimenters finally succeed — because someone held the door open. When we close the door, we are really saying, "You have tested my tolerance and won. Your ability to go on drinking and living threatens my sobriety." So, if

we can't give someone the hope implicit in the capstone Step, let's not blame the sick alcoholic. Let's admit that the case is beyond our personal ability to translate the message of AA into terms he can understand. Trying to find new translations is a great way to strengthen our own sobriety. Closing the door to the constant repeater, on the other hand, is an admission of our own lack of tolerance or self-belief.

The last clause of the last Step advises us "to practice these principles in all our affairs." What "these principles" are is contained in the eleven Step articles that preceded this one and in numerous other AA sources.

To me, the last four words have shed one of the most penetrating lights of all AA's illuminating suggestions and ideas for living. I interpret "in all our affairs" to mean that we can have a sane, sober, rewarding life outside our AA meetings. We do not have to be introverted AAs, safe from the lurking horrors only when among fellow alcoholics.

AA is our serum, our antitoxin. The last part of our last suggested Step tells us that AA will guard us through meetingless days. It even tells us that sobriety, like all good news, is communicable.

W. S. R., South Norwalk, Conn.

'Eleventh Step' — con and pro
From Oakland, Calif.:

I have enjoyed every issue of the Grapevine ever since I have been in AA — three years. But one article in the August issue can't have been chosen by your usual board which selects the articles.

How can our beautiful Eleventh Step be so mutilated? It doesn't sound like the same Step after R. A. S. of Tucson, Ariz., gets through dissecting it and performing an autopsy. I thought our foremost creed was "Keep it simple." What is he talking about?

I have only one degree from college, so perhaps my comprehension is not adequate. He says on page 31, "We know from elementary physics . . ." I have never had chemistry or physics, so don't know what he is referring to. He also talks about light waves, radio waves, TV waves, electrical waves, and on and on and on.

On pages 34 and 35, he even compares AA principles to certain

religious passages — and AA has spent thirty-five years teaching us that AA is not a religion.

Have I missed your reason for choosing this article?

Thank you for your many fine issues of the Grapevine. v. j.

From Great Barrington, Mass.:

Thank you and R. A. S. so much for the article on the Eleventh Step. In my opinion, it is really outstanding in that it penetrates a seeming vacuum in our philosophy, as it is exemplified in the spoken and written words of members. I found it a really intelligent and thought-provoking article.

To look at the stars and the spaces between and to think is to pray, yet I find so few members who seem conscious of anything beyond the utterly mundane. Or perhaps they hesitate to express such thoughts, for reasons I can understand from my own experience. More articles which would tend to fill this intellectual vacuum in our

Society would be greatly appreciated.

The author's direct connection of thought and faith, too often forcibly divorced — mistakenly, though perhaps of necessity — I found particularly interesting, no doubt simply because I so completely agree with his approach.

w. b.



Take Your Works on Faith

*We can
give of ourselves
in many ways,
and never know
what good
we do*

STANLEY, a veteran AA friend, confided to me recently at a meeting, "I'm discouraged. I've taken all the Steps as well as I could—except the Twelfth. To stay sober, I feel I ought to work them all, but I doubt if I could make a good Twelfth Step call. And I don't think I'll ever be able to help a drunk get into the program."

"You shouldn't be discouraged," I said. "I've heard you speak up in a good many meetings. I'm willing to bet your words have helped a bunch of people stay sober."

Stan shook his head. "I can't real-

ly believe that. I guess I'd have to see the results first."

I had faith in Stan's influence, but I understood how he felt about it. The lightning flash that automatically shows us the results of our efforts doesn't happen often. Then I remembered that the lightning *had* struck me once, in my profession, years ago, and I thought my experience might give Stan an insight. So I told him this story. . . .

I had been a teacher of English for some years. I chose that career because it was the thing I wanted most to do with my life, and for a while I was happy in it. I liked to think I could hold my classes spellbound. Parents and students seldom complained. And I seemed to be satisfying my employers.

But after a while I began to question my criteria for success. Perhaps it was not enough to motivate a degree of literate writing by some of my students. What about the ones who never could write a very good sentence? Was I leaving them anything? Was I leaving anything of

value to *any* of my students?

The main thing was what happened to these boys and girls after they had moved on. I doubted whether I stood for anything more permanent in their lives than punctuating a theme or organizing a paragraph. I began to doubt myself more and more, to think in a depressed way about perhaps getting into some other kind of work.

One day, I learned that a girl in one of my classes had entered my name in a "Best Teacher" contest conducted annually in those years by a national television series. Each student who competed on behalf of a teacher had to write a letter about him (or her), and the letter this girl had written about me was a winner.

I had instructed my students to learn a good deal about careers that might interest them. This girl wrote that she had previously been torn between being a journalist and being a nutritionist, that I had encouraged the kids to think about new and creative ways of combining their interests, and that, as a result, she had made an exciting discovery: She did not have to choose between the two careers; she could become a nutrition columnist! (Subsequently, she did.)

Reading a copy of this letter, I was flooded by a wave of grateful reassurance. If my teaching meant so much to this girl, perhaps it meant something similar to other, less articulate students.

More exciting events followed. Af-

ter a visit from one of the contest officials, the machinery went into gear and ultimately ground me out as runner-up for that year. An airline contributed an all-expense-paid tour to South America. (The student who started all this received a fifty-dollar award, which I thought was hardly commensurate with her work.)

Many thousands of American teachers deserved this honor as much as I—or more. I was lucky. But it was also borne in on me that most of the others *had* to take the results of their efforts on faith. I felt a little guilty that I had not been more willing to do so myself.

"It's the same way with us recovering alcoholics," I said to Stan, as I finished the story. "We see some men and women who can bring one desperate drunk after another into the program. That's one kind of Twelfth Step work—dramatic and visible—and it's good. But the rest of us can go to meetings and speak up, and who knows the results?"

"You'll never be named Alcoholic of the Year. Not even runner-up! But your words may help some sufferer to gain a new insight and get on the road to recovery. It happens all the time, Stan. And believe me, you speak well."

Stan nodded. It seemed a real possibility to pursue in the midst of daily life. The results, he'd have to accept on faith. And faith is a big word in AA.

N. E. H., Westport, Conn.

Tool of AA

That crummy Grapevine helped a lot of people

WHEN I WORKED in East Hartford, Conn., almost twenty years ago, a certain grossly unloved Swedish alcoholic worked beside me. He was in AA and not drinking, but absolutely stinko on various pills and in everyone's way, including his own. After eighteen months, he finally dug down in his pocket and presented me with a dirty old AA Grapevine. I took it home and forgot about it. After two months, I opened it up. I read two pages and I knew it was for me, so I subscribed for two years (ordered airmail).

During that time, I read the Grapevine and distributed it to my drinking pals. About ten of them got sober in AA before I even saw my first meeting. I have never forgotten how many people that crummy AA Grapevine got to AA who might have instead gone to jail, the nut-house, or the grave.

I finally got to my first AA meeting because a big-hearted Swede had taken a chance on people laughing at him for reaching out to another victim of booze. When I made that meeting, I had been on pills fourteen and a half years and hooked on alcohol thirty-five years. It took AA four and a half years to debrainwash me before I had my last drink. A tape of co-founder Bill W.'s talk

on recovery taught me how to pray for the first time in my life. It happened like this.

One night, after I had attended an AA meeting, my car just wouldn't turn into my street, but took me straight to an all-night bar, where I ordered a Coke. As inevitably happens, three old friends walked in and put six bottles of beer in front of me. Of course, being a peaceful member of AA, I could not insult my old friends whom I hadn't seen in twenty years.

Around 3:00 AM, I decided to go home and try to sleep. Well, that bottle of Coke cost me \$1,100.

The next day, I found I'd left my car on the sidewalk in front of my house, instead of in the yard. On the way home, I had sideswiped a telephone pole. Must have been ice on the streets, I decided. Luckily, no cops were awake when it happened, or the Coke would have cost much more.

As I was driving my still-operable Chevy to trade in the following day, a still, small voice suggested I do what Bill W. did — call on God, if there was a God, to make me whole. This was on January 4, 1963, and I have not had a drop of alcohol since, nor a single desire for one.

Dom B., Pawtucket, R.I.

The Twelve Steps and the Mind of Man

C. L., New Brighton, Cheshire, England

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol
... that our lives had become unmanageable.

"No terms except an unconditional and immediate sur-
render can be accepted."

Ulysses S. Grant, 1822-1885

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than
ourselves could restore us to sanity.

"My heart leaps up when I behold
"A rainbow in the sky."

William Wordsworth, 1770-1850

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our
lives over to the care of God as we under-
stood Him.

"God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose
circumference is nowhere."

Empedocles, fifth century B.C.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inven-
tory of ourselves.

"Almost all our misfortunes in life come from the wrong
notions we have about the things that happen to us."

de Stendhal, 1783-1842

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to an-
other human being the exact nature of our
wrongs.

"One often calms one's grief by recounting it."

Pierre Corneille, 1606-1684

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all
these defects of character.

"A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Be-
fore him, I may think aloud."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our short-
comings.

"O wad some power the giftie gie us
"To see oursels as others see us!"

Robert Burns, 1759-1796

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed
and became willing to make amends to
them all.

"What bloody man is that?"

William Shakespeare, 1564-1616

9. Made direct amends to such people wher-
ever possible, except when to do so would
injure them or others.

"Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care
of themselves."

Lewis Carroll, 1832-1898

10. Continued to take personal inventory and
when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

"The pursuit of the perfect, then, is the pursuit of
sweetness and light."

Matthew Arnold, 1822-1888

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to
improve our conscious contact with God
as we understood Him, praying only for
knowledge of His will for us and the power
to carry that out.

"The inevitability of gradualness."

Sidney Webb, 1859-1947

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the
result of these Steps, we tried to carry
this message to alcoholics, and to practice
these principles in all our affairs.

"The seed ye sow, another reaps;
"The wealth ye find, another keeps . . ."

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792-1822



Adventure Into the Unknown

*Meditation
opens us
to an
awareness
of something
ever
new*

IN MY EIGHT YEARS in AA, I have slowly become aware that the losses and harm due to drinking were, though more obvious, not equal to those from alcoholic thinking. Slowly, against vicious, insidious resistance within me, I began about five years ago to find my way through Eleventh Step meditation. My early attempts, particularly when working alone, forced me to realize how “cunning, baffling, powerful” are the many disguises of Ego and its components: fear, anger, craving. Every kind of justification and demand rose up to clamor relentlessly for “an easier, softer way.” I might have thought myself willing to go to any lengths for sobriety, but I was forced to admit that I would not sit still for even a half-hour.

Thanks greatly to AA and its members, I have begun to experience some of the endless treasures the Eleventh Step can bring. I have also had to realize the penalty and loss caused by past evasion. Still, my experience has been generally of growing hope and strength. Much more than that, I have learned that the Eleventh Step does for alcoholic thinking what the First Step does for alcohol.

An earlier article (April 1969 Grapevine) described a three-part method of meditation for groups starting the practice of Step Eleven. Group work is less difficult, particularly in the beginning; but after some progress we realize, as Bill reminds us in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (page 104), that “Meditation

is something which can always be further developed. It has no boundaries, either of width or height. Aided by such instruction and example as we can find, it is essentially an individual adventure, something which each one of us works out in his own way.”

Sharing in the great adventure through this article, I hope we may deepen our understanding of meditation. It is from understanding that our method evolves, more simple and more profound with each day’s development. Indeed, it is daily practice of the Eleventh Step that teaches us to go beyond reliance on a group and to face the self alone.

With recovery begins the long process of overcoming the habits of mind ruled by Ego — fear and anger and craving — what we call alcoholic thinking. Here is the source of the teeming thoughts and impulses, so much like diluted dt’s and so dangerous to the alcoholic. A mind enslaved by alcoholic thinking is enslaved by ceaseless pleasure-seeking, by denial of reality, by evasion of truth and discomfort and effort, and, most tragically, by grasping after sovereignty, power, dependence, and

domination and the empty symbolic victories of self-justification and "being right."

When conscious awareness weakens under this onslaught, racing thoughts take control as impulses. The acting-out of these impulses can be, as we all know, disastrous. It first brings remorse and fear, then more anger, then a further cyclic increase of the whole disturbance, which must end in insanity or death.

Awareness dies in another way when the mind is deadened in a battle to deny and repress this raging turmoil. Such a tense, fragile sobriety can be destroyed at any moment in a dry drunk, which is nothing but the painful reappearance, in an acute attack, of the very thoughts and impulses so hypocritically hidden.

The Eleventh Step moves directly into this morass of alcoholic thinking. No doubt much can be accomplished without meditation—we can be dry or sober without it—but once having experienced what meditation can do, we can understand better what Bill says in the June 1958 Grapevine: "If we expend even five percent of the time on Step Eleven that we habitually (and rightly) lavish on Step Twelve, the results can be wonderfully far-reaching. That is an almost uniform experience of those who constantly practice Step Eleven."

To be useful to all AA members, a method of meditation must conform to the AA texts; it must be understandable and practicable for

all; it must be entirely free from any "sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution"; and it must "improve our conscious contact with God" as we understand Him or—for those who prefer a different concept—with our Higher Power, with AA or its individual groups and members, with life, with the unknown, with the unconscious mind, with our true nature, or perhaps simply with health and sanity.

To see how these specifications may be met, we can review the basic meditation process known in endless variations the world around. Developing mental and spiritual health through meditation, we learn, is not only a matter of technique, of simply being calm while sitting, although this is a beginning. We must know that there is no "good" or "bad" meditation in the sense of "results." One teacher helped me immeasurably with the simple reminder "Be prepared to make innumerable mistakes."

The purpose *and* the method are to give up clinging and grasping; our watchword is "Nothing special" or "Let go, let go." Without a thorough understanding of this process of release from attachments, we will never be able to go beyond the first phases and will remain enslaved and numbed by our thoughts, never really free, never truly on the road to growth and joy.

"...we must all choose eventually between suicide and Egocide."

Let us look at the Ego at work. One can think of the Ego feeding, perhaps during a daydream, as a monkey grabs at bits of food while he roams his cage. The mind endlessly produces scraps of fantasy and thoughts, and the Ego—insatiable and restless as the monkey—seeks more and more of these bits of psychic food every minute. The fat, rotten sweets of thought and fantasy inevitably bring guilt and resentment, immobilization and frustration. And still the Ego clamors for more. There is no lasting peace, only fleeting satiety. And the more the Ego feeds, the greater and the less selective the craving. In the end, everything is used: Love and hate, every appetite, function, satisfaction, and emotion are all used as food for the Ego. Finally, the self is destroyed to preserve what we should have known was an illusion from the beginning.

As alcoholics, we must all choose eventually between suicide and Egocide. We must find a way to deal with Ego, with its fear and anger and craving. To meet this need, we have all of AA—and most especially the Eleventh Step. Once again: The Eleventh Step does for alcoholic thinking what the First Step does for alcohol.

Let us develop our understanding of the method in practice by further clarifying what, for our purpose,

meditation is and is not. It is not daydreaming; it is not reading; it is not concentrated problem-solving; it is not a devotional or sectarian exercise. Most of all, it is not the working-up of the racing thoughts. This last error, an exact opposite of the truth, is so widely used as evasion that we must be more explicit.

To avoid meditation because it confronts us with the discomfort of the racing thoughts is precisely like avoiding mountain-climbing because it requires us to go up—or, worse and even more precisely, it is like avoiding AA because it gets us sober. The whole point of meditation is to deal with these racing thoughts in a healthy way and so to develop clearness of mind—sanity. Then, in just the proportion that Ego leaves the mind, our Higher Power enters. We must learn that the primary function of mind is not thinking but attention. As sanity increases, so also does our awareness of something ever new: the "conscious contact" which is as unknown and misunderstood without meditation as is sobriety before AA.

As we proceed, it should become clear that understanding and method grow together, becoming one way of life as well as of thought. We begin by sitting still, freely aware of all perceptions—feelings and sensations and thoughts. The next phase is concentration on a prayer, a Step, or

even a single word, mentally repeated and intently followed into mental silence. Then we may simply sit in meditation, the mind wholly quiet and alert. These three phases may be done in separate sittings or in sequence. We may begin with five to fifteen minutes once a day, building slowly to longer periods — a varying individual matter. An hour a day or more is a good and richly rewarding routine; this should be doubled when possible or needed.

As we progress, our technique becomes ever simpler, yet ever more demanding. The essentials are stillness of mind and body, ever more watchful and attentive. It is a grave error to think that we are seeking to still thoughts; as long as the mind is alive, it will produce thoughts. We are practicing nonattachment to thoughts as a pattern for a life of nonattachment — not the lack of relationships (a wholly different matter), but nonattachment. The alcoholic Ego seeks to cling to everything, in dominance or dependence; it grows monstrous when these attachments are threatened or satisfied. (We must remember that aversion or hatred is an attachment.)

In our early attempts to meditate, thoughts and problems spring up and clutch us, trying to blackmail us into working them up even more. If we bear the discomfort of the racing thoughts, we will eventually find ourselves face to face with the adversary — Ego, in all the fury of its fear, anger, craving, and myriad, decep-

tive attachments. An indescribable restlessness drives us to stop our meditation. But if we stay, gather all our strength and courage, and go on, then sooner or later the enemy weakens.

As health returns, as Ego and its attachments diminish, the true self can now become one with all that happens — every event, every relationship, every feeling. This does not mean passivity — but realistic acceptance, without inner division, reproach, and manipulations. Preferences and demands are dropped; the Third Step has much to tell us here.

One way to describe it is this: We become wholly one when we can sit and observe the contents of the mind without attachment; we treat thoughts and impulses like so many drinks on a tray or bottles in a liquor store — they no longer concern us, and yet our freedom depends on that awareness which will not permit a thought or an impulse to deceive, cling, and enslave. Each time we start to wander after an image or thought, we cut the connection, drop it, and return to our Step or prayer or word.

With growing experience, we draw closer and closer to the crystalline clarity of unattached awareness, the highest form of practice. The divided mind heals; spontaneity replaces self-conscious slavery; our Higher Power (in any of its hundred thousand forms and names) pours in like sunlight.

D. B. D., MD, Manhattan, N.Y.

July 1972

The I's Don't Have It!

Study of the Twelve Steps reveals not a single "I" among them. The fact that the Steps were formulated and written in the first person *plural* is a powerful suggestion — one that tells us, "I cannot, but we can."

Our Big Book tells us it is dangerous to go it alone in spiritual matters. So, after having amply tasted the results of experience, strength, and hope, generous portions of which are served by various members at AA meetings everywhere — why try to go it alone?

The life-sustaining food for thought offered at round-table discussions leads to growth of new spiritual values. Growth, in turn, leads to sobriety in action. Action results in Recovery, Unity, and Service. V. W.

July 1972

Step meetings

From Lakeland, Fla.:

The March Grapevine has some goodies in it which seem to be just for me. Part of the magic of this program is our ability to take a spoken or written suggestion or idea and say, "That was just for me," and apply it.

We have recently started a Step meeting here in our town. Having heard about them at the Miami Convention, then later being a part of one in another area, I think they are the greatest. For sharing experience and really getting to the nitty-gritty of the Steps, they can't be beat. We use the Twelve and Twelve, and hearing Bill's words read once again shows the way to a simple, uncomplicated, happy, and sober life. Never once does Bill say, "It's a soft, easy way you 'have chosen.'" Rather, he points out the perils of not practicing the self-discipline and the spiritual searching. For now, for this day, I choose the hard, but happier way.

H. M.

To Creep Before I Walk

*The second time around she went with
only one goal in sight: to take the First Step*

WHO ME? Need AA? You've gotta be kidding! Not me. No way. No way!

True, I had been asked by my family doctor if I was drinking excessively. Well, I guess I was. My doctor gave me a referral to the Addiction Research Foundation.

With the appointment set up — well, I may as well go. The therapist's first advice was to consider going to AA meetings — but I wasn't an alcoholic. Didn't sound too bad to go to the breakfast meeting, though. Then I wouldn't have to cook Sunday breakfast. I'd give it a try.

Greeted with handshake. Had a delicious breakfast. I'd given up the booze, so why worry any further? May as well stay for the meeting.

The Preamble, Twelve Traditions, Twelve Steps, and Slogans were explained. All the members started with "I'm an alcoholic. My name is such-and-such." All of them — the member who introduced the speaker, the speaker himself, and the one

who thanked the speaker. This was ridiculous! Maybe they were alcoholic, but not me. No way!

I continued to go to the foundation weekly and attended one more AA meeting, but wasn't too impressed. Thought everything was going great. Sure, my nerves were shot, but it was menopausal problems as far as I was concerned, and no way was I going back on the booze. That's what I thought!

Then the bottom fell out of everything. Confronted with problems, I was back to a drink first thing in the morning, drank secretly through the day, hid bottles under the mattress, went back to the cocktail bar in the evening. When I ran out of liquor, I succeeded in removing the hasp from a locked chest in the basement, because I couldn't find the key. My husband had put some liquor there in case of company. I could replace the booze in time, as he was out of town for two weeks.

Still, I continued to go to my therapist. He didn't make an issue

of it when he realized I was tipping again. His psychology, I figured, would bring me round to a natural state when he got to the basis of my emotional turmoil — just nerves, menopause, despondency, and boredom.

Then one evening, all hell broke loose. I almost lost everything that was my life, and would have without an understanding husband and the loyal support of a woman I had met through going to the foundation and AA.

I ran to her by means of my telephone to plead for help. I was desperate. My life was crumbling with no reasoning power left in my alcoholic brain. She spoke to me and my husband and indeed saved the day. Her most precious advice was to sober up, stay sober for 24 hours each day, and return to AA.

The following evening there was an AA meeting. My husband took me by car and left me in front of my AA friend's apartment. So he thought. It was three apartment complexes away. My left foot is lame, but I scrambled over lawns and along the road to reach her place, hoping she had not left for the meeting without me. I arrived in time, and we were picked up by car by two other AA members. Come hell or high water, I was determined to go to the AA meeting that night, after one day off the booze.

I went with a different attitude — an open mind and a determination to try to piece together my unman-

ageable life.

The meeting was an open discussion, and I took in every word. Sunday morning saw me at the breakfast meeting, and this time not just for a breakfast treat. Monday evening, I was at another AA meeting, and the warmth of AA fellowship was touching me. Tuesday evening, another meeting, this time with the decision to creep before I walked, and then just one step at a time.

One goal only in sight: to take the First Step, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable."

I had a real shaking-up, but I am doing something this time that will take quite a while. I'll try to have the faith and patience to see it through. When tempted, I say to myself, "Remember how unmanageable your life became."

I'm not making rash promises of no more setbacks. However, with the daily phone calls to my AA friend, the help of my therapist, and the frequent AA meetings, I'm hoping for better results in the future.

The Serenity Prayer is my daily morning prayer, bearing in mind that I will remain sober for that 24 hours. God willing, and with the support of AA acquaintances, I hope once more to make my life manageable and worthwhile, living in sobriety, a day at a time.

Yes! I am an alcoholic, and my name is Thelma.

Thelma S., London, Ont.

The Third Step

The Leap Into Strange Waters

*Surrender
is a
mystery
we solve
by faith*

I'VE HEARD the Third Step referred to as the "Here come the tambourines" Step. To me, the first time I met it did seem to recall days of the missions, and saintly soup. But my jaundiced eye is seeing more brightly, and my mind has improved with the added light.

Still, this great commitment to letting some power outside of me take over my life and will is a jump into strange waters.

How wise the founders were to put this Step in third place. But even

after the First and Second Steps, I found the words of the Third Step too hard on ears that had stopped hearing or "understanding" and too soft on a heart that had stopped hoping.

Then came a revelation — Step meetings. To me, this was the teaching of the skill needed to use the tools that the Third and all of the other Steps have become. On my own, they were like a calibrator given to a child with no instructions on the box.

The Third Step became more than the word "God." It became my first decision, or at least my first try at making one.

I listened to many. I tried this way and that, but no one else's understanding seemed to fit into my own newfound honesty efforts.

I looked at the words, trying "hope" instead of "understood," "group" instead of "God," "surrender" instead of "decision." And, while none of these quite fit, I sud-

denly realized that all this work had taken time. Although the fit was not right, the trying was, and the life and will I now had to turn over were different. So different, in fact, that one day someone said to me that something I had done was a good thing. What it was or who said it, I don't recall, but the word "good" was understood as turning a familiar corner, a landmark when I thought I was lost. "Good" was "God" with only another "o." I could be good-like. I had tools, I had the ability to be honest, to feel in my guts what was good or bad. I had a measure or scale inside of me, something so simple I could follow it without reason or plan.

Some time has passed, and my understanding of God has not much improved, but my understanding of myself has. I know now the measure of good in men is God. With enough sober time, enough effort at honesty, the Third Step is taking me.

C. W. O'D., Ardmore, Pa.

The Third Step



Good Is in the Trying

*If we make an effort to grow,
we grow by the effort*

A YOUNG MAN who led our meeting recently said something that struck me so forcibly, I cannot put it out of my mind. He said, "The accomplishment is in the trying."

He was speaking of his years as a failure in life, in school, and in business, in and out of AA. He said his only achievements were really the *efforts* he had made to practice the program. What he said lit a light in my mind, and I saw even more than that. I have tried ever since to express to others what this means to me.

In most of my life goals, I have failed, partly — only partly — because I was an active alcoholic for twenty-five of my fifty-five years. But do we, any of us, really reach our goals?

If a man wants money, does he ever have enough? If a man wants success, is he ever successful enough? If we crave affection, can we ever get enough? Though we strive for the highest goal, that of peace on earth, it has not yet come.

During his time here, the man who

chases money becomes skilled only in money-making. If he follows success, he merely learns a great deal about the façade of success. If he works for peace and the brotherhood of man, he becomes a person to whom peace or brotherhood is important.

Consider the Third Step, a most difficult one. If a man tries every day to turn his life and his will over to God, and fails . . . well, he becomes a man who, every day, tries to turn his will over to God. That is something.

If you pray when in need, then you become a person who turns to God in necessity. Whether or not your prayers are answered, that is something you have accomplished.

Another way it works is like this:

For years, I have been unable to put complete trust in anyone. Whenever I went to an AA friend or my sponsor, to discuss a problem I had or just to talk, I would pull back and shade the truth a bit so as to appear more likable in their eyes, and thus not lose their respect. But

while I was projecting *their* reaction, I was failing in being honest with myself. I never got to find out who I really was, and what their feeling was for the real me.

If I had *tried* to be honest, I would have accomplished, for sure, one thing: I would have had the satisfaction *inside me* of being as honest as I could be. And after a while I would have had the accomplishment of being a person who tries to be honest with other people. Not a bad thing to be. Better than being well-liked, respected, a big man. Strangely enough, the chances are really very favorable that my friends would like and respect me much more for my honesty than for any image composed of mythical virtues, however great.

If I try to be myself, I may never reach the point of complete success, since that goal is indefinable. But I *can* be a man who *tries* to be himself.

There is that in the program which says, "You cannot fail if you try." It seems to me that the Twelve Steps of AA are so designed that the will to try *is* success. When I grasped that, through the young man's words, some doors opened.

I no longer think of a *successful* inventory, but rather of *trying* innumerable times to dig deeper and deeper to new levels of self-honesty.

I have become a person who tries — *tries* — to take an honest and fearless self-inventory.

W. G., West Nyack, N.Y.

Prison AA

A Con's Twelve Steps

*With negative thinking and self-will running riot,
these are the steps we took*

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable.

I admitted that alcohol had quite a hold on me — the same way that food and sex did. I loved all three. But if people would just let me alone, stop meddling, I could manage my life.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power

greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Since I was really all right, just a victim of circumstances, the only power that could help me was the parole board, which could restore me to freedom.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

In prison, I saw a lot of convicts

going to church, but I knew they were no better than anyone else, so I took a dim view of religion. Also, in one joint, the resident preacher was a parolee from another joint and was a homosexual. Oddly enough, this detracted not one whit from his ability as a good fire-and-brimstone preacher. Then, in another joint, in the therapy classes conducted by the psychiatrist, it was made known to me that religion was just a stopgap. It would do until the real reasons for antisocial behavior could be found. Then religion could be done away with. Needless to say, we stayed away from church in droves, because we had it from an expert that religion was phony.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

What did this have to do with drinking? Anyway, I knew people who never drank and were rotten to the core.

Step Five

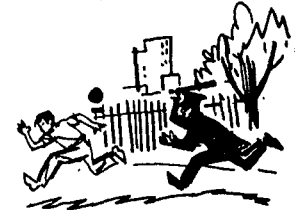
Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Since God was dead (the so-called experts told us), "wrongs" was only a six-letter word with no meaning. If it was not a moral universe, then our rule would be "Do what you will — just don't get caught." If there was no reward and no punishment, the world's most perfect human being and the world's worst scoundrel would eventually lie side by side in oblivion.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Since we didn't really believe in a Higher Power, our only defect was not having gone out for track in



high school so that we could outrun the gendarmes.

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Our only shortcoming was that we had a rat-fink partner on that last caper.

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

If the square johns couldn't watch their stuff, they deserved to lose it. Besides, a lot of them had stolen to get what they had. Every one of us was just a modern Robin Hood (no pun intended), with a .38 instead of a bow and arrows.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

"To thine own self be true." We translated that as "Never squeal on yourself."

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

"Donate to a Korean orphanage," we told ourselves. "That way, the parole board will see that you have a heart. Meanwhile, stay with your on-the-job training. It takes special skills to open some safes."

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of

His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Since God didn't punish evildoers, we concluded: "Forget Him, and get yourself a good lawyer."

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

"'Spiritual awakening' is baloney. Preaching, however, is good. Billy Graham makes \$20,000,000 a year."

B. K., Independence, Iowa

Running Scared

*Memories of the past
are relived in a Twelfth Step call*

WHEN I WAS drinking, I was “running scared” from one bar to another until I reached the bottom, eight years ago. Three days ago, I heard the expression “running scared” from a suffering alcoholic woman, and the pangs of her suffering are still a part of me. I sat with her five hours. Sometimes we talked — mostly not. She felt a little safe sitting alone with me in a quiet place. But I watched her. It had been about five hours since her last drink. The alcohol was wearing off, and the shakes were starting. We suffered together, silently.

All Twelfth Step work is the reliving of a drunk and a sobering-up. Yet I lost the compulsion to drink when I took and accepted the First Step at my second meeting.

For me, this type of experience is good — not pleasant, but good. Through some strange “coincidence,” the three meetings I had been to before this afternoon I spoke

of were all about the Twelfth Step and how we each worked it. Some of the ideas expressed were amazing — about talking with the old man on skid row who was “hopeless,” about taking the alcoholic everywhere, about living every moment with the alcoholic.

My thoughts went back to all the things I had heard, but in nothing could I find the answers for this woman — and for myself — as we sat in the quiet room, suffering! Occasionally, she would say that all men were so-and-sos. I would agree. There was no need to tell her about AA — she knew AA.

Finally, the miracle of what I had learned did provide an answer — or, probably, the Man Upstairs saw that we had sweated long enough. The thought came to me: We need help, another head. My call was to the right person. Thank God for this. Our Higher Power shows us the way. Everything happened so right

and so suddenly that it was as if we became puppets and our Higher Power was doing the work.

The woman decided she wanted to get sober and wanted *right now* to do something about it. The other AA who came made arrangements for the right place for her. When this man entered the house and we all began moving around getting ready to *do something*, the feeling I had was indescribable. It was as if there was another Presence with us.

Very few words were said — just “I’m ready,” “Let’s go,” and “Thank you.” There were a few tears. But

no one of us had seemed to make the decision to do these things. *We knew.*

Deny a Higher Power? Not me! Three days have passed, and I am still suffering with her and feeling this power that is stronger than any of us — if we will just keep still long enough to let it work. It will and it does.

I will not sign my name or initials. I could shout this incident from the housetops, but I want to protect the one who was still the suffering alcoholic and but for the grace of God could have been me.

Anonymous, New Orleans, La.

My Very Own Twelve Steps

*How one enthusiastic
member works
our suggested program*

AS MY FOURTH year in AA approaches its end, I sit and reflect on how the program principles have worked for me. Right from the beginning, the program worked in reverse for me. AA promised me one thing — *sobriety!* — if I worked the program to the best of my ability. Sobriety I've got. . . .

The principles are called Steps. Let us commence to ascend these simple, steep Steps, *my way!*

One: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable." I took the Step in complete acceptance and surrender. Before AA, I couldn't do anything without a few snorts or beers (coupled with tranquilizers and barbiturates in the last three years of boozing). And then I could do less than anything, so I just drank and complained about the cruelties of life and all the stupid people in it.

Now for most beginners, that first step of acceptance is difficult. I gave myself a gold star. It was a snap!

Two: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Well! In reviewing my one continuous drunk of nine years, twenty-four hours a day, for however many days that is, I had to admit I certainly had done some weird, dumb, crazy things that the

average person wouldn't dream of. Take the time I decided to be judge, jury, and hangman.

I had it in for a former brother-in-law, a very slimy individual indeed. Sam must be punished. I received fast instructions on the use of a .22 target pistol, loaded it and myself. Then, behind the wheel of that big old Lincoln, I braved the pouring rain to drive the 100 miles to his house. I took the throughway, driving as any drunk would — fast. Even when the wipers quit and I had to put my head out the window to see that I couldn't see, I sped on. Justice will be done! The plan wasn't to kill him, just to damage him enough to teach him a lesson.

The rain stopped shortly before I did, in front of Sam's house, under the streetlight, at 2:00 AM. Gun in hand, I went to the door and leaned on the bell, being too drunk to stand up without aid. The bell binged and

bonged. The neighbors had to hear it, too. Lordy, it did make a racket in the still hour. I seemed to have waited ages. No response.

One of two things had to be going on in that house: Either he and the little woman were passed out drunk or they had looked out and seen the car and wouldn't open the door, thank God! For I know what the end result could have been: (1) I would have missed my aim, and killed him; (2) everybody would have been missed, and he would have beaten the daylights out of me; (3) worst of all, I would have shot myself in the foot and been beaten up, too.

That is one example of zillions of insane happenings. No, I couldn't return to sanity alone. All those happy people in AA had recovered. AA was the chosen power to help me. Most of us had been to shrinks and psychiatric wards, and they couldn't help. AA could. Another

gold star on Step Two.

Three: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*" I'm a maverick, belonging to no organized religion. I had my concept of God. We had a very personal relationship.

Openly surrendering, as sincerely as I knew how, I embraced the God of my understanding. I spoke to Him daily, hours at a time. I entered into an evangelistic stage. I was ready to get up into the pulpit and announce I was the Virgin Mary returned (me with three children and not even a Catholic!), when I received a surprise letter from J. C., saying he was walking on the water, embracing the AA program. J. C. was a former husband. If *he* was going to be J. C., I wanted no part of being his mother. Having once been his wife was enough for me.

Again I returned to sanity and to

“From materialism to spirituality—was that His plan?”

embracing the God of my understanding. Let me tell you what happened. First, after almost four years, He hasn't acknowledged or heard one damn word! Not one word of love, “Thank you,” “Hi,” request for guidance, or “Cool it” has He heard. Not one word. Second, He is a lousy business partner.

With fourteen months' sobriety behind me, it was time to leave the heart area of AA (Cleveland-Akron, Ohio) and head for the climate of the great Southwest. He (God) selected the place, one I had never heard of before and later wished I hadn't at all. His choice should have told me something. Alas, it didn't. I charged on, in blind faith. People told me how brave I was.

Packed into my big, new, expensive, beautiful car were myself and odds and ends. My household goods of value were shipped ahead. Releasing my one dependent child to her own chosen path, off I went to the land of enchantment, where everything was going to be beautiful, I thought.

Housekeeping was set up. A business venture was in the planning. And I let myself be conned into marriage. This was my error. I take responsibility here. It was a marriage to another evangelistic type, J. C. the second. My strong belief made me feel all would be well. After six weeks of wedded hell, half of my serenity and money were gone. The other half of my money was sunk into walls and merchandise.

Money was borrowed for him to go, too. He did. Fifty dollars was borrowed for the cashbox to open my lovely little shop. Immediately, the town had a big work shutdown. Money wasn't being spent. Still, I felt secure. Didn't I have the best Business Partner?

The car was sold. I borrowed on my insurance. The furniture was being sold, a piece at a time. I learned to walk and enjoy that which one doesn't see from a car. I couldn't get a loan. Fifteen months later, I liquidated. Materially, I became a has-been. From materialism to spirituality — was that His plan? (After lengthy prayer and meditation, this *has* been accepted as His plan. Accepted as fully as I am able.)

But how much could one tolerate? I rebelled. No job, no money, miles from everywhere, miles from nowhere. I shouted, “Enough!” and stopped talking to God, to anyone. A total shutout, a full blank. Then a message came through, so distinct, I would have sworn someone was in the same room. No one was there. The message was “Keep quiet and wait.” I'm waiting. There isn't another thing I can do. Everyone else in the program, after taking the Third Step, now has bills paid, a car, home, money. What happened to me?

Four: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Inadvertently, I did an immoral inventory. It was very, very long and very, very time-consuming. The Fourth Step was reread. This time, a very short list was written, and it still took a very, very long time. After collecting garbage for nine years, one has to really hoe out that stuff in order to find the jewels of self. Would you believe it? I found a couple! I barely passed Step Four.

Five: “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” Since I was still speaking to Him at that time, the first part was easy. The last wasn't. I had no human confidant. I had a problem. But I had chosen to work the Steps because I was interested, willing, curious to find self.

For the Fifth Step, I decided to drop bits and pieces here and there till it was all hanging out. The elated feeling afterward was like just having taken a long, luxurious bath. Wow, what a great feeling!

Six: “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.” I was ready. I forgave myself and everyone I felt had hurt me. Had we known any better? Had I expected that which I hadn't any right to? Had I wanted you to alter yourself to suit me when I should have altered myself?

Yes, the defects were seen, removed, amended, but did God hear

me, too? No, He doesn't even listen to me. Mull that one over. In AA, they shout, “God is loving. He is forgiving. Look at that which He has given to me,” blah, blah, blah! To you, brother, not to me.

Seven: “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.” Recall “God helps those who help themselves”? Well, I do feel the Old Boy is truly there. He just hasn't gotten around to me yet. But I tackled the Seventh Step anyhow. “Take my temper.” *Someone* had to — it was terrible! Only through concentrated effort and awareness was I able to master the ugly monster. In truth, if you get your head together, it's quite easy to be without temper and all those other “good” things.

However, some new shortcomings are developing that I never had before. I have laid them out on an AA table, selecting the elders and the wise of the group to dissect them. After much deliberation, they say such things as “You are working the program right,” “There isn't anything wrong,” “Give it time,” and “This, too, shall pass.” They can't understand why it has worked as it has for me. Neither can I. On to . . .

Eight: “Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.” Oi!

It said “became willing,” that's all. In the early months of sobriety, the list was made, short but necessary.

I had done some really rotten things. The list was set aside. I was just willing — not ready.

Nine: "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Much thought needs to be applied here, and I did do a great deal of thinking. After two years, some of the direct amends were made. Today, not a one of those people speaks or writes to me. I am injured. Everyone else in the program is forgiven, told they don't owe any apology, embraced, and returned to the fold. What goes? Let's try Ten. . . .

Ten: "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." Whenever this is done, I feel I'm all right. Before coming into AA, I was never wrong. Right or wrong, I was right! Once this fact was understood, I got along fine with anybody. Maybe I should return to my old attitude on that and command attention.

Eleven: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." A real gas!

That one I absolutely work to death — and conclude that I have *no* contact with God. He ignores my very existence. And it is very clear that my understanding of Him is total misunderstanding. Or is it that He has no will for me to carry out? Who knows? And last but not least. . .

Twelve: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Man! I had a spiritual awakening. I was gung-ho to help every drunk that yelled "Help!" Even the very faintest call, and I was there, taking them to hospitals, visiting the alcoholic wards, carrying them to meetings, listening to their tales of woe, sharing my own story. I lost sleep, didn't eat properly or rest properly. Know what? I got sick.

Then I got well again and did more work with my sister drunks. I took them into my home, shared my bed, board, purse, heart, soul, compassion, and empathy. And do you know what happened? Most of them returned to the bottle! The few that remained sober became aloof, discussed *my* failings while exchanging gossip, or just plain ole ignored me totally. That's okay. Whatever it takes to keep them sober, let them do it.

Is it that I'm a jinx? Recently, I married one of the finest people to enter my life, also in AA. There isn't a dishonest or mean molecule in his entire being. Before marriage, his home life was miserably lonely; his business, great. Now, he says, "My home life is great, and business is lousy." And it is! We are living so badly that if we had a dog, he would leave home, and we would understand. I shop at the supermarket most frugally. Our main diet is

hog jowls and red beans, corn bread and mustard greens, and I'm a Yankee!

Just between us, I know God is there. I hope He comes forth soon and reveals His will for us before I dissolve into a grease spot in our uncooled garret.

Well, there it is — the summation of almost four years of practicing

the AA principles, as I understand them. You know, the longer I'm sober, the dumber I get!

But AA *has* kept its promise of sobriety. It has given me a way of life I *love*. I love the members of the group, too. Until someone can show me a better way, I'm hanging in there.

N. P., Grand Prairie, Tex.

THE TWELVE STEPS

If Sobriety Is Not Enough

MY BEGINNING in AA came after eighteen years of drinking whatever was available, on a daily basis. It also followed six trips to a hospital, where I heard about AA mostly from other inmates. I did attend a couple of meetings, but AA wasn't for me — I had no problem with booze. I lost jobs; there were wife-beatings; the family went; the house was lost; there was trouble with the police. The local prosecutor aimed me at AA; the judge agreed; my sister was happy.

The next night, a near derelict named Fred, full of fears and resentments, came to the local meeting asking for help. The hands and smiles came out. I was accepted "as is." I was taken to nightly meetings by various members for the first month and a half, and later started going on my own. I had seen hope and developed friendships. I was al-

ready following personalities and not principles.

When told I should speak after four or five months, I shared my experiences. Someone told me that speaking was Twelfth Step work. You often hear this at meetings. Today, I don't buy it. How could I have given away something I didn't understand? I didn't know the AA principles, and I didn't know Fred, so how could I carry a message? Today, I believe newcomers should regard speaking, not as twelfth-stepping, but as sharing their experiences according to our Preamble.

In trying to find Fred, I spent eleven months with Veterans Administration psychiatrists, to no avail. They did what they could and recommended custodial care. The AA personalities I had been clinging to failed me, mostly through loss of contact. That is, Fred failed himself.

*This member found
answers when he began
to really work the Steps*

I got drunk after nineteen months of miserable dryness. After six or seven weeks of near-total blackouts, there was another trip to the hospital, followed by a remorseful return to AA.

I started over. The only thing different this time was that I started going to Step meetings after the fog had cleared. My higher power had to be directing me, for most of the time I went alone. Even though others didn't care for this type of meeting, I stayed at it. Over and over, I repeated the Steps as set down by our founders, and I found out how different personalities worked these principles. I was able to get rid of a lot of moral defects and fears that had crippled me. My spiritual being came awake. No longer did I have lasting resentments, self-pity, fears, or self-centeredness. Now, I found these being replaced with consideration, kindness, humility, and a

love of "thy neighbor." I started to help others at long last. Today, thanks to using all the Steps, I have found Fred and have a contented sobriety. This second time around, I also use the Traditions, as I know they protect my welfare.

I am grateful; I have been able to find a good job; my son now lives with me; and it all happened, I feel, because I now try to practice these principles (Steps One through Eleven) in all my affairs. It's difficult at times, but the past two and a half years have been wonderful. My growth goes on and my faith increases. I need personalities, too, like a co-sponsor's nonalcoholic wife. She often punctures my balloon by reminding me of the sick and sorry mess that I was when I came to AA. All people help add to my growth in one direction or another.

So often we hear and read about members with three, four, six, or eight years around AA who are not satisfied with themselves and are wondering what's wrong. Then we usually hear that they are beginning to make an honest effort at the Steps, and wow! The sun starts shining and the whole world comes alive for them. It's amazing and wonderful.

A contented sobriety the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions way — or a maladjusted sobriety by the hop-skip-jump method, with possible failure. The choice is yours.

Freddie N., Shelton, Conn.

I've Done the Twelve Steps — Now What?

*There are no endings in AA,
only new beginnings*

IT WASN'T until sixteen years after I sobered up on the AA program that I discovered the benefits of working *all* the Steps, again and again. Until that time, I had rocking-chair sobriety: a great deal of motion, without going anywhere; a lot of activity, but not much action.

I can't expect to live on the food I ate ten years ago, or on last year's water or last month's air. I need to eat, drink water, and breathe regularly in order to live. The exercise I took five years ago doesn't make me healthy today. The same holds true for the Steps.

The Twelve Steps are a direct route to increasing freedom, sanity, and usefulness. Essentially, I drank to be free — free from the painful constrictions and limitations of my ego. I work the AA program for the same reason. The Steps give me the freedom legitimately that booze provided spuriously.

If I continue to work *all* the Steps, they continue to change me. This

looks simple today, even though it took me years to arrive at this realization. In the area where I entered AA, the feeling was that you worked the first nine Steps once and from there on used only the last three Steps for the rest of your life.

I sobered up and entered AA in August 1947 and spent the first sixteen years of my AA life suffering from this unfortunate misconception. In the first two or three years, I did as thorough a job as possible with One through Nine and then attempted to subsist on Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. In 1963, I ran into the view that there was continuing benefit in persistent work with all the Twelve Steps. On the theory that it couldn't hurt to try, I went back to the first Steps and started over. I wrote out a new Fourth Step and followed it with another Fifth Step.

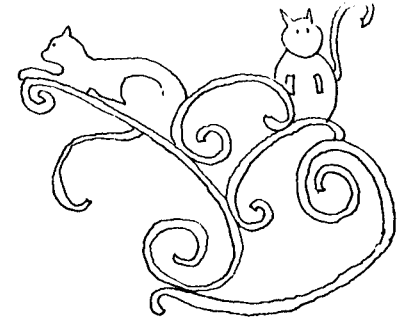
It turned out that there was a vast difference between a periodic written inventory and a Tenth Step spot check. While the results of a renewed

Fifth Step were not as dramatic as those of the first one, years before, it swiftly became apparent that it was extremely helpful to keep opening up completely with other human beings. In my experience, the most helpful Fifth Steps have always been those taken with another AA who's working hard at this part of the program. He's helpful because he speaks from fresh, growing experience.

Our late friend Dr. Harry Tiebout, with his unique talent for clearly delineating the problem of the ego, emphasized that a reduced ego had marvelous recuperative powers and that surrender was an essential disciplinary function and experience. Tiebout pointed out that it took persistent work to keep the ego checked and that part of this lay in "repeated inventories, not just one."

I wrote out a new Eighth Step and found a number of names that belonged on it. Some had been added since my joining AA; some just had not occurred to me the first time around. I made amends to these people and found increasing freedom within myself. It gradually became clear that the Twelve Steps, *all of them*, will speak to my condition wherever I am in sobriety. Whether I've been sober a year, ten years, twenty years, or longer, they'll provide a springboard for change and growth.

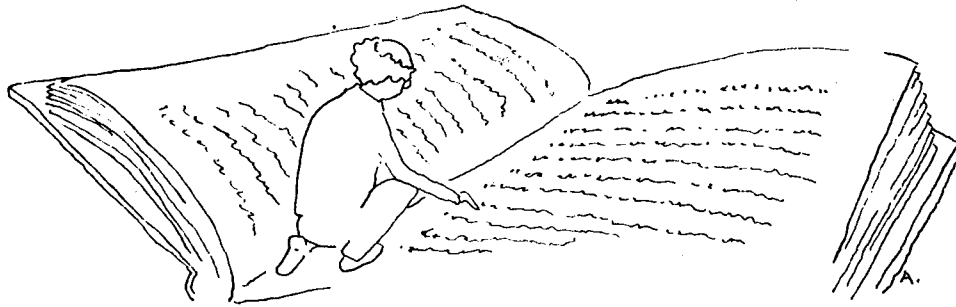
Today, I work regularly and frequently with thorough written inven-



tories and Fifth Steps. The Fourth and Fifth, along with the other Steps, open a door to growing awareness of truth. It begins, I believe, with knowing the truth about myself. Someone has defined the ego as "the sum total of false ideas about myself." Persistent reworking of the Steps gradually strips away my false ideas of myself. This permits gradual, nearly imperceptible growth in my understanding of the truth about myself, and this, in turn, leads to growing understanding of God and other human beings.

The late Father Edward J. Dowling was one of AA's earliest friends among the clergy. A man of compassion and vision, the St. Louis Jesuit was impressed by what he felt were striking similarities between the Twelve Steps and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. While some might see differences in content and structure between the two, few could quarrel with the view that spiritual growth, like good physical condition, requires continuing work. It doesn't just happen. It demands unremitting effort.

I've read the Big Book many times and am constantly amazed at discov-



ering something in there I have never seen before. Not until eight years ago did I notice the paragraph on page 63 that suggests taking Step Three aloud with another person, and I noticed it only because someone else pointed it out to me. Since then, I've tried this a number of times and find it a compelling and effective way of trying to turn my will and life over to God. There's evidently a stronger commitment when we make it aloud in the presence of another.

A few years ago, I read the story of Chicago's first AA, Earl T., for what had to be the thirtieth or fortieth time, and that's no exaggeration. He sobered up in Akron under the guidance of Dr. Bob and took the equivalent of the first eight Steps in his first few weeks. When they got to what are now Steps Six and Seven, Earl took Step Seven aloud with the help of Dr. Bob. I've tried taking Step Seven aloud with friends of mine after completing a Fifth Step and invariably found it helpful. For anyone who's interested: Earl's experience is on page 292, and the second paragraph on page 76 suggests a prayer to use when asking

God to remove our defects.

It's sometimes said, and not simply in jest, that if you want to hide something from an AA member, the best place to put it is in the Big Book. Why is it that we'll carefully read everything else, searching for answers, and overlook the transforming truths in the Big Book? What's the powerful attraction in these other books and ideas? Possibly it's because we can discuss them and sound witty, intelligent, and excruciatingly smart. Perhaps we sometimes sell our program short because it's hard to believe that anything that simple can have complete answers. I've tried the full range of "expanded approaches" and today realize that, time after time, my search for spiritual answers in these other areas has been nothing but an egotistical blind alley.

The last half of the last paragraph of the last story in the Big Book tells it straight. It's on page 562. "I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous — everything I need I get — and when I get what I need I invariably find that it was just *what I wanted all the time.*"

Apparently, the mind is "the

slayer of the real." We don't find God through reading, discussing, thinking, studying, arguing, and philosophizing. We find Him through specific actions which free us from the ignorance created by our self-will. We can't do it alone. Our actions are met by God's grace, but certainly we can work as hard as we're able with the program He has given us. I find that these Steps are circular and provide fresh understanding and benefits each time around. They give me room within myself to live as a free human being.

A substantial percentage of the alcoholics I work with today have been sober for ten or fifteen years or more. They are in misery and struggling with painful conditions within themselves despite their long periods of sobriety. Just about 100 percent of the time, it turns out that these AAs either have not continued working all the Steps or never worked them to begin with. Either they have gone through the Steps once and then tried to get by on just Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, or they have managed to stay sober for years without ever thoroughly following the directions in Chapters Five and Six.

Invariably, when they start back at Step One and carefully work each of the succeeding Steps, they report dramatic improvements in themselves. They begin to experience the freedom and joy that are integral parts of our spiritual awakening promised in Step Twelve. It happens

consistently. The only members I've ever heard question this approach have never tried it enough to understand it.

Among the many benefits emerging from my reuse of all the Steps is a heightened ability to practice prayer and meditation. Persistent removal of the debris blocking me from God opens up a better contact with Him. It becomes increasingly evident, too, that prayer is not a device for getting my own way, but rather a means to become what I should be.

Continuing, fresh, growing experience in periodically working all Twelve Steps is quickly translated into specific help for others. It's axiomatic that I can help another only to the degree that I've been helped myself. The more work I do on myself, the more I have to pass on to another. Today, I'm not talking about the Fourth Step I took in 1948 or the amends I made in 1949. I'm sharing the work I'm doing right now in our recovery program.

Another benefit has been a noticeable increase in vitality. I came into AA at the age of twenty-five. In 1972, I celebrated my fiftieth birthday and twenty-fifth year of sobriety. Although this is older than I intended to be, I've noticed that I'm now able to work better and function better as a result of using all the Steps regularly.

If there are events in my past which haven't been dealt with or relationships that haven't been repaired, it takes energy to keep this

material tamped down so I don't have to look at it. When I can deal with such a condition consciously and clear it out, I don't have to spend the rest of my life reacting to it unconsciously, with a consequent reduction in energy and effectiveness.

The program is a road, not a resting place. Before AA, and many times after, I looked for answers to my living problems in fields where you'd expect to find them: religion, philosophy, psychology, self-help groups. These disciplines invariably described a goal that was precisely what I wanted. It was a place of freedom, calm, confidence, and joy. There was one major problem: They never gave me a workable method of

getting there. They never told me how to get from where I was to where I was supposed to be.

That's the big difference I find in our program. It takes me toward the goal: "a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps." It doesn't take me there as fast as I'd like to go, because God's timetable is always slower than mine. However, as I follow the directions and work my way from Step One to Step Twelve regularly, my spiritual awakening deepens and strengthens. I find everything I need and really want through these Twelve Steps. They provide the goal and the way to reach it. It's all here and it always was, from the beginning of my AA life.

Paul M., Riverside, Ill.

The Search for Spiritual Experience

The Grace of God

*We can
choose
to let go
and let it
happen*

ALTHOUGH some people have flashes of light, it was my sweating palms that told me I had just had a neat idea. The chairman for the afternoon meeting proposed the subject "But for the grace of God" in what I thought was a fit of dim-wittedness. Still, I felt I had to say something, and I started thinking about it.

For a long time, the idea of God's

grace had irritated the hell out of me. Twenty years ago, when I was twenty, it occurred to me that if God gave His grace or special love to people who were good, as I understood "good," I didn't have a chance. I figured that the only way to avoid the temptations I was learning to enjoy would be to enter a cloistered convent, though I was a Protestant. But when I heard that thoughts could get me into the same spot as actions, I decided there wouldn't be a chance even there! So I quit the game of grace — God's giving it or taking it away according to whether I shaped up or not. I decided that there *was* no God. And so it went — into my cups in time, trying to live without God.

A year ago, I needed to quit drinking. I did not, of course, think that I needed to believe in a higher power, and, fortunately, that had not been one of the requirements for joining AA. But at meetings I heard a lot about God and so-called miracles and a lot about the things that I thought *I really needed to know*. I wasn't drinking, through the grace of AA and through the grace of me, because it was I who wasn't drinking alcohol, which had made me sick and weird. AA might not be a convent, but I certainly needed something to help me understand alcohol and my relationship to it. If going to AA meetings and listening to people talk from time to time about themselves and their relationship to God-as-they-understood-Him were part of that help, okay.

After several months, I got curious. Was there a relationship between all living things and this God-or-whatever? Where *was* God, actually? Since it did no particular harm to look around, I looked — in the trees and bushes at first. Soon, I remembered that some people thought God was in all of life. That meant in people, and it might just as well mean in me, too, hard as it was to believe. That was a nice idea, because if God was in me, then we were sort of a team; it had been difficult going it alone. Maybe I didn't have to be afraid of the power I sometimes felt in myself. If God was in some way in each of us, then it was easier to have confidence that

one was, after all, doing the "right" thing. Maybe I wouldn't ruin everything I tried, or be afraid even to try.

They said, "Just 'Let go and let God.'" "Let go," I supposed, meant stop trying to do everything myself. "Let God" . . . do what? First, I had to stop doing what *I* thought was right, and then I had to let God decide. *And* in His own time! If God was omniscient and omnipresent, He had a decided advantage when it came to making decisions.

But what if I weren't one of His buddies? Here was God's grace again! I just couldn't believe that He had graced *me* especially with sobriety. And then it occurred to me that *God* wasn't making any choices. *I* was. God's grace was there whether or not I chose to believe in it or take advantage of it. God just graces everyone indiscriminately. Grace simply *exists*. And I don't have to *do* anything. I don't even have to believe; it will be there anyway. I don't have to struggle to "let go" — just relax and be quiet. God's help has been there all along, but first I was too busy trying to figure out everything alone, and then I was too busy drinking and recovering to give much thought to truth. Certainly, the truth as I saw it was getting more and more awry.

But if I am quiet, I can hear. And if I am quiet, I can receive — even grace. And if I am quiet, I can even give — love.

Laura L., Sonoma, Calif.

The Search for Spiritual Experience

Three Valleys

*Was this vision a split fraction of
all the time in eternity?*

MY HUSBAND was sound asleep last night before I took a long, hot shower, then crept in beside him, deeply content, at peace with myself, happy to my depths. He saw me through the hell of an entire decade of full-blown alcoholism, and now I have been sober in AA for eight months.

I thanked my Higher Power and was just beginning to drift off to sleep when an image — a sensation? — jolted me wide awake. It was a flash-picture in the mind, brilliantly clear, its duration no more than a few seconds.

I, microscopically small, was on a great, beige-colored plain, light and sunny, the source of light unknown. No other shape — human, animal, or vegetable — was visible. There was no horizon; the plain filled the entire picture. An enormous sense of peace pervaded me. Also, wonder. I looked around in some puzzlement, for this was geography like none I had ever seen. I noticed then three great, rounded valleys curving

away and out of sight. I knew that one couldn't see to the bottom of those vast, smooth crevasses; their beginnings and ends were not in the flash scene. And suddenly, I *knew*.

The three valleys were the head, heart, and life lines on the palm of the hand of God.

I curled up then on this "terrain" and felt the deepest sense of security I have ever known as an adult.

I have no explanation. I swear that I was completely sober and had been for those eight months. I was fully awake. If the vision can be explained away "scientifically" as the work of a happy subconscious, that's all right with me. But I have no intention of trying to dissect it with an agnostic's scalpel. For one brief, indeterminable amount of time, I believe He held me, as a father would indeed reassure his child that his protection is certified.

I dread that self-aggrandizement will be suspected. The experience did not come across that way at all. He gave me, I believe, just one split

fraction of all the time in eternity, and I know that I am not special. It was not a matter of special selection that I was there alone. I *knew* that. It apparently fit His purpose to arrange it so, but the whole of humanity and all the still-unknown creatures of the universe could just as well have been included on that "terrain of beige."

I know full well that without AA and all its compassionate members

who have responded by mail to me as a Loner, I could never have been receptive enough to have been reached in this manner. I have always been most skeptical, even contemptuous, of "spiritual" happenings. But there is no other category into which "my three valleys" will fit. I accept humbly and with all the gladness and thankfulness within me that moment of clarity.

M. O., São Paulo, Brazil

The Search for Spiritual Experience

An Agnostic's Higher Power

*Take
away his
bottle and
there is an
awesome
vacuum
to be
filled*

I TRIED the spiritual approach from the beginning, because I was afraid not to try it. I didn't think anything could help me to stop drinking, so I simply decided to *try* to do what the majority had done. I had no great spiritual awakening with a flash of light. It has been a very gradual wake-up, with many backslides in my spiritual health. I still consider myself lucky in having been able to try the God approach. Some have a lot more difficulty.

Now, I'm going to ask a question that is very touchy. Why are agnostics able to stay sober in AA?

I think it all goes back to how the Twelve Steps of AA were written in the first place. Bill W. admitted that agnostics and atheists played a great part in the wording and formation of the Twelve Steps. Such words as "suggested" Steps, "Power greater than ourselves," God "*as we understood Him*" were all directly due to the opinions and feelings of the agnostics. Thank God for their presence at the meetings held to formulate the AA program. Those members kept the gate open for all alcoholics, who could then come to AA for a way to stop drinking, and not because they thought they were going to find God. They could have gone to church for that.

Again, why are agnostics able to stay sober in AA? In order to do this, I believe, the agnostic has to have a certain amount of self-honesty and intelligence. If he admits that he is an alcoholic, and still says that he cannot believe in a power greater than himself, then he is stating a contradiction. He admits that a liquid is a power greater than himself when he says he is an alcoholic. Now, when this particular alcoholic denies himself this greater power — the bottle — he feels very helpless and alone, because he no longer has his ruler to depend upon. There is a tremendous vacuum in his mind, and unless he fills the vacuum very quickly with something large enough, he will sooner or later go back to the stronger ruler, alcohol.

I believe that the bigger the hold of alcohol on the alcoholic, the larger the vacuum there is to fill. With some of us, it is a major undertaking. Sometimes, we try to fill it with a love affair, with an obsession for material gain, with compulsive gambling, or with any number of things. Sooner or later, these things will fail. The other person in a love affair is only a fellow human being; we tire of material striving;

and compulsions toward gambling, sex, food, or anything else just get us into trouble. We go back to his majesty, the bottle.

If an alcoholic wants to live successfully in society, he must replace the power of alcohol over his life with the power of something else, preferably positive, at least neutral, but not negative. This is why we say to the agnostic newcomer: If you cannot believe in a God, find a positive power that is as great as the power of the bottle, and give it the faith and dependence you gave to alcohol. In AA, the agnostic is left free to find his own Higher Power, and he can use the principles of the program and the group therapy of meetings to aid him in rebuilding his life.

B. E., Memphis, Tenn.

The Search for Spiritual Experience

God as I Understand Him

*To grow beyond a vague abstraction,
turn to the reality of today*

FOR MANY PEOPLE, I suspect, the words "God as we understood Him" seem as substantial as a granite mountain from a distance, but prove as amorphous and insubstantial as a cumulus cloud when reached. When we attempt to take the Third Step — to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this conceptualized Being — we find that the vague abstractions to which we have given lip service are no longer of use. And for many of us, this Step, which should be the gateway to a new and better way of life, becomes instead an insurmountable barrier before which we quail and retreat.

I do not presume to suggest that I can offer an answer. I can only recount the direction my own search has taken during my years in AA, and hope that my experience may suggest an area of exploration in the personal search each of us must make for himself.

In taking the Eleventh Step, we

pray for knowledge of God's will for us. If we actually understood God, would His will be as mysterious as we often find it? I think not. The problem for many of us lies in the fact that we don't understand God at all, or, if we think we do, our understanding is so vague and fuzzy that it is valueless. Perhaps my personal relationships — plural, not singular — with God will help to illustrate my meaning.

First, I have occasional "peak" experiences of God. These have nothing to do with intellectual conclusions. They come as what I consider God's grace, unplanned, unexpected, suffusing heart and mind with a conviction of oneness and goodness and love and beauty. Sometimes, the sunset brings them. Sometimes, it is the salt-heavy breeze stroking my body to a tingling awareness of being alive, filling my ears with the whispered song of immensity. Sometimes, it is music, a symphony so filled with harmony

and peace and majesty that I have a vision of mankind forever moving through the ages in unrealized brotherhood and love, marching shoulder to shoulder toward the light, the mysterious, beloved Source of everything that is.

These experiences are rare and wonderful. Though I long to know them more often, they have nothing at all to do with an effort of will, nor do I have the remotest "understanding" of them. They are pure feeling — an opening, an expanding of some part of my being which seldom enters my awareness. And they neither contribute to my rational "understanding" of God nor help me to live my day-to-day life in improved obedience to His wishes. Indeed, I cannot envision a Being of such unimaginable immensity and creativity having such a purely human thing as a "wish."

So, to come closer to a concept of God as I understand Him, I must return to the reality of today — to the typewriter, the dog barking, the red hibiscus blowing in the sea-cleansed wind. I must remember that God is not only out there, weaving a tapestry of transcendent glory on the pegs of stars, but in here with me, where the brush of a thought will reach Him.

In the beginning, while I was still

drinking, not truly out of the child's world of fairy tales and happy endings, God as I *mis*understood Him was the indulgent father whose eye was on the sparrow. He was the God of green pastures whose goodness and mercy would follow me all the days of my life — a God, in my immature comprehension, better named Santa Claus!

I worshiped this God with growing disenchantment. We had, it seemed, a communications problem. Although I was delighted to turn my will and my life over to Him, He didn't seem to want them! At least, He wasn't rushing to keep me out of trouble, nor was He patching up my mistakes and removing my shortcomings while I watched. Not only that, but He was ignoring my fervent prayers for certain material benefits.

Even in the arrogance of my early sobriety, the thought was bound to occur to me that perhaps I wasn't quite doing my part (whatever that was). Perhaps, if I gave up a few resentments, forgave a few debts...? Perhaps, if I tried a bit harder, gave God another chance...? But, I noted cynically, some of the truly good people seemed to be having a rougher time than I was. Gradually, my first sober rapprochement with God ground to a halt.

I know that many people have

“Truth... is the light that illumines reality.”

great faith in this protective God. But until such faith is tested, it remains a concept, rather than an actuality, and a test often produces bitter disillusionment. As long as things go well, there is no problem. But when tragedy or disappointment or injustice occur — as they do all too frequently in life — many retreat forever into the emptiness of unbelief. Only the fortunate few are able to bow their heads and say sincerely, “It is the will of God.” They are *accepting* the mystery of God’s will, not trying to understand it. That may be the answer, but for me and, I suspect, many others, it is not possible.

So I began to read. The Western God having been unattainable (at least on my terms), I sought an Eastern one. I could accept the concept of a Universal Harmony, of a vastness so vast, so impersonal that pain and evil were merely the blacks and browns in a cosmic design, necessary to the glory of the whole. I didn’t have to be perfect, I concluded. I had to be only what I was — one of those ugly, muddy spots that made the bright colors glow more brightly. Needless to say, this wasn’t much comfort. I didn’t *want* to be drab brown. I wanted to be radiant gold! Also, though pain and evil might be necessary to the cosmic pattern, when I was the one afflicted with them, I hurt!

So I resumed my search. I had attempted to accept traditional religious concepts, and they hadn’t fit.

Perhaps I should follow Polonius’ advice to his son in *Hamlet* — “This above all: to thine own self be true . . .” Perhaps, instead of trying to fit external concepts into my thinking, I should look within for the God of my understanding — one that I could fully accept. Paul Tillich, the noted theologian, has defined God as “what you take seriously without any reservation,” and this seemed a reasonable starting point.

First, I believe in the law of growth. This conviction that the purpose of life is growing toward an unknown goal is based partly on faith and partly on observation. In a personal philosophy, there is room for faith. Beyond faith, I could see evidence of growth all around me — seeds germinating and thrusting slender greenness through the damp, heavy earth, pushing stones aside and cracking concrete, if necessary, to reach the light. Would God want less for man? I believe we are *impelled* to grow. We grow — or we die. Plants grow because their survival depends on getting a sufficiency of sunlight. Man grows, I believe, because his survival, both individually and collectively, depends on his achieving an ever-greater measure of the peace that passeth understanding.

We can measure the growth of plants. We can measure the growth of animals and children. But how

does one measure the growth of a man? Isn’t it through his development of wisdom, of courage, of compassion, of endurance, of selflessness? Isn’t it by his growing capacity to surmount obstacles? And if this is true, aren’t pain and evil necessary?

At that point, it was easy to think, “Well, I’d be glad to do without them.” But, I wondered, would I be equally willing to give up the joy of having met a challenge successfully, the satisfaction of having done an unpleasant job well and responsibly, the heartwarming feeling of having done something just a bit better than I did it a year ago? For that matter, would I truly like a world in which nothing had to be sought or aspired to, because everything was already provided? Without the goad of pain and evil, would I ever have glimpsed the world of goodness and bliss?

The second value I “take seriously without any reservation” is truth. Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” I was deeply convinced that this was so. Truth — ever-beautiful, ever-healing truth — is the light that illumines reality. It is as essential to the worth of a personal philosophy as sunlight is to the growth of a seedling. Truth is the moment’s reality. What was true yesterday may no longer be true today, and what may be true tomorrow does not yet exist. To me, this means that any philos-

ophy I evolve must live and grow in the continual light of *this moment’s* truth. Never must I set the stamp of my approval on it and lock it away in the darkness of my mind to rot or become twisted or die. It must live in the light and be continually verified.

So, to me, God included growth and truth. What else did I “take seriously without any reservation”? Somewhat to my embarrassment, I discovered that I had few reservations about the traditional virtues. Certainly, “my” God included honor, courage, love, joy, compassion, generosity, wisdom, selflessness, beauty, and many other virtues.

I took another look at the Third Step. Suppose I substituted these concepts for the words “God as we understood Him.” Could I make a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of these qualities? And if I did, what would it mean?

Gradually, my insight deepened. When I had initially practiced the Third Step, I had expected to receive everything and had found nothing, not even a whisper of God’s mysterious intention for me. When I sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God as I first tried to understand Him, silence was my answer. I was attempting the impossible task of turning my life over to the care of something I neither un-

derstood nor believed in fully.

Now that I had defined it, however, there *was* a God as real as the world around me. I could see the evidence of goodness and love and courage and all the other virtues shining everywhere. True, that light frequently flickered and dimmed, but always, when I looked, I would find it shining again, transcending the darkness of human failure, growing ever brighter and more beautiful with the spiritual growth of those who harbored it.

This God was no myth! This was no imaginary Superman who might or might not exist — or know that I existed! Superman might or might not know or care if I conquered selfishness with a moment's generosity, but I would know and rejoice and be grateful to my God of generosity. Goodness and love and compassion and wisdom and joy were no fantasy or wishful thinking. They were real, a gleam with beauty, *here* to be seen, touched, listened to, loved. Turn my will and my life over to them? Oh yes, and with what joy!

Whatever more God may be, in the infinite reaches of the universe, I do not know or need to know. I have found a vision of the kingdom and the power and the glory here, in the room with the typewriter, the barking dog, and the red hibiscus blowing in the sea-cleansed wind.

J. W., Key West, Fla.

th Step

Not Yet at Peace

IT IS a beautiful, tropical Sunday morning here in Panama. I am sitting at the dining-room table, working on lesson plans for our AA group's regular Wednesday-night study session.

Looking through the window, I see the parked cars of those who are attending services at a neighborhood church. I often think that maybe I should be in that church, too. As time marches on and my period of sobriety lengthens, I feel more and more the spiritual stirrings in my heart. Little by little I am awakened, as alcohol loses its grasp over my soul. The thinking is becoming a bit less stinking, and I find that I am maturing and growing with each sober day.

I am restless, so I pick up a stack of Grapevines and thumb through them searching for a new article, but I have read them all. I look for notices of new AA literature, but there are none; I have already ordered all that is currently available. I pick up the Big Book and thumb again its dog-eared pages, with un-

derlined passages and myriads of marginal notes. The same with the "Twelve and Twelve." I pick up a folder containing some Grapevines from 1946 and 1947 that I have been fortunate enough to acquire. I treasure these scraps of AA history and handle them with great care.

I am still restless and dissatisfied. Something is missing.

I think back to last Wednesday night's study session. There lies the cause of my restlessness. I conducted the meeting, reading from the "Twelve and Twelve" and sagely fielding questions from the floor. It was a good meeting. It ran twenty minutes past the usual hour. Everybody was excited and went home happy and content. Everybody but

me. The subject of the discussion had been the Fifth Step, and, in my heart and soul, I knew that I had not yet admitted to God, to myself, or to another human being "the exact nature" of my wrongs.

Yes, that is the source of my discontent. I am not yet at peace with myself or with my God.

I think these inner stirrings and the "spiritual awakening" I have been feeling must be God at work, oiling the rusty hinges of the floodgates. If this is the signal that He is ready to listen, then I think that soon I must have the "courage to change the things I can."

Let us pray that the time has come.

T. R. T., Panama



st Step

Here Are Two Trains of Thought

*One deals with alcohol . . . but
the second opens the door to a new way of life*

IT'S BEEN about seven or eight months now since I accepted membership in AA, and I finally came to understand the First Step just this afternoon, although I have heard it daily and have repeated it many times to myself.

The AA way and my way had been poles apart all my life. I did manage to maintain a five-year period of being *dry*, until I came to think that, because of my five years of being *dry*, I was cured of my drunken drinking and could again enter the world of social drinkers.

Little did I know what was ahead of me once I renewed my friendship with alcohol. It was straight downhill. Maybe it didn't seem like that on the first day or the first drink, but in a few short months I lost the respect of my friends, the family, the business, the car, all the things it had taken five years to build up. True to the AA saying, I didn't pick up a drink as a person does who hasn't got this disease — I picked up a drunk.

If it had ended there, it would have been bad enough. But it didn't. I had to go through the drunken-driver-charge bit, the jail bit, the

totaling-the-car bit, the park-bench bit, the panhandling bit, the Bowery bit, the convulsion bit, the hospital bit, the . . . you name it. All the experiences of a previous ten-year drunk were rolled into those few short months. Is alcoholism a progressive illness? You won't get any argument from me on that score.

Now back to the First Step and my acceptance of it as I understand it today. For the past seven months, I've been accepting it at face value, on blind faith, simply because I needed a weapon in my private war on alcohol.

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol *and* that our lives had become unmanageable." Right?

Wrong. If that is the First Step, then there is no need for the rest of the Steps, for the program itself. Today, with the use of Antabuse and a desire to stop drinking, anybody can stay dry.

The First Step does not go as I have been reading it. Unwittingly, I have been inserting the conjunction

"and." It reads: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable."

Notice the space between the words "alcohol" and "that." A printing error? Hardly. To me, it denotes two trains of thought: one — the obvious — that I'm powerless over alcohol; the other, that my life had become unmanageable.

If I continue to accept my first interpretation of the Step, I no longer need the program in its entirety. I can use the AA advice of staying away from one drink one day at a time, and start taking Antabuse as my insurance.

If I accept my second interpretation, I must recognize that I have a twofold problem, and the second train of thought then becomes an automatic introduction to the Second Step if I so choose.

Anyone interested in joining me in tackling that Second Step? It looks like a real mind-blower.

Gil, Queens, N.Y.

*Practice the
principles and
make a great
discovery*



How It Works in All Our Affairs

NOT LONG AGO, when I was visiting friends, a rug slipped and I went boom. I hit that beautiful, polished floor with my left hip. My daughter came on the double, looked at the huge drops on my brow, and offered me smelling salts. Then, at a loss, she said, "Dear, I know you don't want bourbon, but would a whiff of it help?" I lay there in agony and *laughter*.

Then came the next move: *Easy Does It*. With those words in my heart, I moved the body bit by bit and got my rump on the edge of the couch.

From there on, it was "*Let go and let God*." My son came to help; the doctor, the ambulance, X-rays, and hip-pinning all followed in their proper place and order.

Then came *acceptance*. Plans were knocked into cocked hats; there were expenses not planned for; the family had the worry and extra loads to bear. All these had to be accepted, plus my immobility, the slow, slow process of recovery, and my seeming, uselessness. Acceptance of alcoholism had been a tough one for me; this seemed very similar. So *the 24-hour plan* went into action. One day at a time, that's all.

Then began a series of unexpected events that left me in awe. People came to me. Here I was in a hospital bed, and people came to me for help for loved ones or

friends or themselves — help for those unable to live without alcohol and yet unable to live with it.

I was asked to explain the workings of AA to a class of student nurses.

Once, at 4:00 AM, I was told by the night nurse about an alcoholic down the hall, unruly and unmanageable at the time of admission, but at present out cold with paraldehyde and a hypo. The next day, I was wheeled to him, and found he was a man I hadn't seen in sixteen years. He remembered me. He listened and said he would accept help. I got it for him. Was that his day to surrender? I left the next morning, so I may never know. But perhaps, just perhaps, I may have been of use. That in itself was action. So I was not immobile after all. I had shared my experience and hope.

The most astounding part of this whole accident of mine took place in physiotherapy one day. I was learning the use of crutches for plain walking, obstacle courses, going up

and down stairs with railings, and going up and down a step without a railing, like a curb or front-door step. The first day's lesson worked okay. The next day, I had another go at it. I swung myself down the room toward that one-step platform, got to it, and froze. I could not balance on those crutches enough to pick up my good foot and place it on that slab of wood. I could not do it. I sweated and shook. My teacher said, "You're working too hard at it."

So I sat in a chair while he attended someone else, and I had a session with me.

For many, many years I had come, time and again, to that unsurmountable First Step and couldn't make it "home" into AA. This was much the same. For me to go home, that one step was of paramount importance. I would not be able to get into our house unless I mastered it. One step, just like that platform, was in front of our door, then a flat space and another step beyond it

that would take me inside. So I sat there. "*Easy Does It*," I told myself. "Others have done it — so can you. Faith is the absence of fear. Have faith in your teacher. You did it yesterday — you can do it today. There is a right way and a wrong way. Learn the right way, and each step will be easier. *Easy Does It*, old girl."

"Ready now?" said the teacher.

"Yes," said I. I swung to the step, up the step, and down the other side! Ten more times I did it. Weary, worn, but victorious, I said, "Thank you, God."

I flew home the next day. I crutched across the lawn, down the walk, up the first step, and up the next one, and stood in my hall and cried. These were my first tears since the accident, but they were happy, joyous tears.

"... In all our affairs." What a small phrase to carry such a wealth of meaning for the living of each today.

J. C. W., Greenwich, Conn.

...In Mysterious Ways

*What
power
opened the way
for this prisoner
who needed so
desperately
to make
amends?*

IN JUNE of 1969, I was sentenced to life imprisonment for second-degree murder. I had killed a man in a blackout. I shared this experience in the February 1971 Grapevine, in an article entitled "Peace of Mind in Prison."

After a year, while using the AA program to the best of my ability, I tried to work Step Nine by writing a letter to the widow of the man I was accused of killing. But the institution would not allow the letter out. I talked this over with a man whom I greatly respect, an alcoholic priest who has been sober for many 24-hours longer than I have. He said that maybe it wasn't the proper time just yet, and advised me to refer back to Step Three. I did. For another two years, the thought would cross my mind every now and then, and I would mull it over and fantasize about the way I would do this when the time came. Then I would dismiss it from my mind, for the time being.

Just recently, there was an amazing series of events. A week after I

moved from the cell I had been living in for over two years to another block, we underwent a major disturbance. A riot exploded, but thanks to calm, efficient handling by a newly appointed warden and commissioner, another Attica was avoided. Afterwards, there was a heavy blanket of fear and unrest over the whole institution. So an unheard-of move was brought into effect: Members of the Jaycees were allowed to come in and roam among the inmates and guards to ease tensions.

One night, as I was going to my cell, I noticed another inmate talking with two of these outsiders. They were still talking some two and a half hours later, when I got undressed and went to bed. After half an hour, I had the urge to get up out of bed and see if the inmate and the two civilians were still there. They were, so I invited all three into my cell for a cup of coffee. They readily agreed, as it offered them a chance to sit down and relax. The inmate, who also attends the AA meetings in this prison, told them how active I am in the program, and turned the conversation around to me, about my being a lifer and having been in for three years.

One of the civilians asked me if I minded if he asked where this incident had taken place. I said no, and named the geographical area. He responded with the name of the victim. My whole body felt numb. The fear was like that feeling you get when riding a roller coaster or

when a car takes that first plunge down the biggest hill — as if every support has been removed from under you.

It turned out that the visitor was the best friend of the victim's son. He knew the family intimately and had been like a second son to the victim. I explained some of my past history and the events that had led to the fateful evening. Before leaving, he asked me if there was anything he could do to help me, as he thought it a shame I should spend so much time in here under the circumstances. I asked him to let me first get used to the idea that he was who he was. He has been back three times since then, and each time he's asked for me. Once, he brought me a birthday card signed "From one newfound friend to another."

It would have been virtually impossible to plan anything such as the conditions under which Step Nine unfolded for me. Out of over 600 men in the institution, I had to be the one to invite him into the cell for coffee. That amend had seemed almost impossible, a huge stumbling block in my program for sobriety. By seeking the advice of someone who had been sober longer than I had, and then by turning the situation over to my Higher Power, a way I couldn't even have imagined opened up before me.

May the God of your understanding be as good to you as mine has been to me.

R. L. H., South Walpole, Mass.

July 1973



"Well, what are you waiting for? Make him sober!"

July 1973

Thoughts on Step One

From Des Moines, Wash.:

For several years before I came to AA, my drinking was an utterly horrifying experience, filled with melancholia, blackouts, guilt, remorse, suicidal fantasies. Over and over, I swore to quit forever, only to find the interval between drunks become shorter and shorter. Finally, the realization that I couldn't (still can't) drink and that I couldn't (still can't) quit drinking on my own willpower brought me to that first AA meeting.

Fortunately, our group uses study tables and always has a Step One discussion table when newcomers are present. Several older members sat with me, guided me through the forty questions, shared their personal experiences, helped me to identify, and assured me that help was available. Since then, I have deep sympathy for that newcomer who has reservations about his alcoholism, particularly that person who may never have attempted to quit drinking on his own. For me, there were no reservations, no doubts. I was able to embrace Step One — I was powerless over alcohol, and my life had become unmanageable. H. E. W.

My ALCOHOLIC Twelve Steps

*A period of self-examination reveals
the steps he lived by while drinking*

THROUGH the grace of God, by working this program, sobriety has been mine to enjoy for the past four years and ten months. However, during the first few months of dryness, I did little or no work on the Twelve Steps. Intellectually, I could see the value of them and the wisdom in other people's use of them. But at that point in time, I was unable, emotionally or spiritually, to see that the Steps could and would work in my life. Consequently, I avoided getting into this program.

But I made a fortunate mistake: I complained that I was not receiving the so-called fringe benefits (promised on pages 83-84 of the Big Book). And I was told, "Stop treating AA like a spectator sport. Get off your fanny and come on down to the field and get into the game." I was also extremely fortunate to acquire the best sponsor in AA (in my opinion, at least). He

helped me to realize that this program *could* and *would* work by helping me to take a good, hard look at myself and my problems.

During this period of self-examination (Fourth Step), it dawned on me that this program of recovery was, in one way, like the progress of my disease. I had lived by a very similar set of twelve steps during the nineteen years of my drinking. The following are my Twelve Steps of Alcoholism.

1. *I admitted that I was powerless over myself and my drinking had become unmanageable.*

I had never wanted to get sick and into trouble. I just wanted to drink and feel happy, have a good time, relieve bad feelings, etc. But once I started, I couldn't stop. Never was I able to guarantee my sobriety.

2. *Came to believe that a power greater than myself — namely, alcohol — could lead me to sanity.*

Being a very mixed-up person,



unable to live comfortably with myself or others, I had found out at an early age (fourteen) that a chemical (ethyl alcohol) would do the trick. It would remove fear and feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. It would enable me to be "normal," like other people, I thought.

3. *Made a decision — conscious or otherwise — to turn my will and my life over to the care of my god, alcohol.*

My entire life became alcohol-oriented. No meal could be eaten without being preceded by a couple of drinks. No dates with girls could be enjoyed without the benefit of alcohol. The working day was not completed without stopping for a few. No weekend could be endured without a couple of jugs in the cabinet, and if the refrigerator supply ever got below a six-pack — panicsville!

4. *Made many fearful and superficial inventories of myself.*

Although many of these were taken on my knees over an oval, white, porcelain fixture, they were nevertheless taken. Each drunk was analyzed to find out "where I made my mistake." Then the inevitable conclusion: "I'll never do it that way

again! Next time, it'll be different."

5. *Admitted to other people (bartenders or drinking buddies) the exact nature of my great wisdom, accomplishments, and conquests.*

I was willing to talk with anyone about anything as long as I could put on a big-shot front.

6. *Was entirely ready to have everyone else recognize my great lack of character defects.*

With a desperate need for other people's approval and a strong streak of perfectionism in me, I did all I could to court flattery and then was sick enough actually to believe it when I managed to get it.

7. *Boastfully acknowledged no shortcomings and asked God to remove everyone else's.*

I couldn't even face me and had to blame all my problems on someone else.

8. *Kept track of everyone who had done me harm (real or imaginary) and waited to get even.*

Since I felt that everyone else was to blame for my increasing troubles, why naturally, I had to settle these scores.

9. *Frequently reminded people that amends were due me, whether they had injured me or not.*

My entire world revolved around me (complete self-centeredness), and everybody "owed me." They owed me their attention, time, loyalty, a loan if wanted, everything. When people didn't do this (and healthy people won't), I felt that they owed me amends for their fail-

ure to oblige.

10. *Continued to keep track of everyone else's inventory, and when they were wrong, promptly let them know it.*

Oh, I just gloried in this. Inside, hating myself, but not being able to face that fact, I really worked at tearing other people down.

11. *Sought through frequent and constant meditation for means by which to improve my relationship with my god, alcohol, seeking only a better way to drink without penalties.*

Hours and hours were spent meditating (if it could really be called that) about the increasing and pyramiding consequences of my drinking. Answers were provided, too: changing drinks (only Scotch and water or no more hard liquor, only beer); going on the wagon for a few days or weeks and "getting straightened out"; moving to a new location; finding new friends; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

12. *Having found out what alcohol would do for me, I tried to carry the message to others — "Come on and have a few drinks" — and I certainly tried to practice this principle in all my affairs.*

No amplification needed for any alcoholic.

Others, I realize, may not feel that their active alcoholism paralleled these steps. But if they do, and if they have had any of the difficulties that I once experienced in *really believing* that the Twelve Steps of

AA were possible for me, let me share one final thought.

When I came into the AA program, I hated the way I was living and feeling. And yet I could not picture any other way. I also thought I was so far down, had so little feeling of self-growth as a human being, that this program was an impossibility for me. When I realized that it called only for redirection of my existing life and for reliance on the proper Power, then the Steps really opened up for me. In the early stage of my sobriety, I had been unwilling to place reliance on a Power greater than myself. But I finally understood that I had been doing exactly that for nineteen of my thirty-three years. Now, it was not so much a question of being *able* to rely on a power outside myself. The question was simply this: Would I continue to misplace my reliance with the wrong power?

I have had a wonderful life the last four-plus years — certainly not trouble-free, but truly wonderful. I am able at last to say that I am fortunate to be an alcoholic in AA. The marvelous Al-Anon to whom I'm married agrees with me and considers herself fortunate, too. I do not regret a single drink I took or drunk I was on. If that amount of grief, misery, and hell was necessary to make possible what I have today, then it was worth it. Today's rewards far outweigh yesterday's penalties.

J. E., Charlotte, N.C.



Hurting?

*The longer you work the Steps,
and the more you practice them, the sooner
you can be happy again*

A NEW MEMBER burst into the meeting room and, as soon as he got his coffee, said, "I've been more upset today than I have been any time since I came into the program, a few months ago. In fact, I'm more upset than I was when I was drinking. People tear me up in my office. I lose my temper. I don't even like people! Man, I didn't know I had so many emotions. Why isn't AA working for me any more?"

An older man, in khaki work clothes, came over and sat down by the well-dressed newcomer. He said, "I'm sure glad you came here tonight and said how it is with you. I felt the same way about fifteen times today."

"But you're not hurting like I am, are you?" the new man blurted.

"No," said the older man, "but

sometimes I still hurt, all right. I just get over it quicker than you do."

"But I don't want to get over it temporarily! I don't want to have emotions like I had today, not at all, ever again," protested the newcomer. "I'm afraid if I do, I'll get drunk."

"Well, those kind of emotions did get me drunk a few times," the older member admitted. "It's human nature to have them — but if we keep them, instead of getting rid of them, we are sure to get drunk."

"You mean I'm heading for a drunk right now?"

"Not necessarily. There's always God, you know. He did create us all to be happy, I believe. If we're upset, He can make us happy again, and that's what the Twelve Steps are all about. I'm human, so I get

loused up emotionally. But I know humans can work the Twelve Steps any time, anywhere, and find God. The longer you work the Steps and the more you practice them, the sooner you get over these upsets. You've made a pretty good running start on the Steps by coming down to the meeting to admit your upset to us. *Now all you have to do is ask God to remove the destructive emotions*, be willing to make amends to anybody you harmed today, and you can be happy and free with life again," concluded the older member.

"You mean I'll still get upset even though I'm in AA, but the trick is, not whether I'm upset or not, but how fast I get over it?" the newcomer asked.

"Well, we aren't saints — that's

what it says in the Big Book — and it's important for new members to tell older members how it is with them. We identify with you, and we remember it was God — not our human nature and our egos — that made us happy and sober today. Thanks for coming tonight."

The meeting went even better than usual, and there was a happy glow in the room that night. The new member left about as noisily as he had entered, but with enthusiastic laughter and handshaking. As he walked out, he slapped the older member on the back and said, "Pops, I'm so darned happy I could burst."

The older member just smiled and nodded.

H. M. K. Jr., Amarillo, Tex.

If You Want to Help

Be ready when the call comes

I WAS CONVINCED from the beginning that AA would work for decent folks. But for the likes of me? I was just not sure. At the end of my first year, I knew that it really would work for me and for people like me. I was overjoyed!

I sought out a man I used to work for and drink with. He was in an Air Force hospital. I loved this guy like a brother and wanted to share this wonderful thing with him. He really jumped at it, and for months we were together. We attended meetings all over the Gulf Coast, from New Orleans to Mobile. One time during this period, my depression was so bad I almost drank, and he helped me. We really worked the program together.

Then one day he took a drink and disappeared. It almost threw me. I was frantic for a few days, and finally, out of desperation, I went to my sponsor. What could I do for my friend Cliff? How could I locate him? How could I help him? Where was he and why didn't he call?

My sponsor, Woody, sat me down and asked me if I really wanted to help this man. Naturally, my reply was "Yes."

Then Woody gave me one of the



best bits of advice I have ever received. He said, "If you ever want to do something for Cliff or anyone else who may call you, then stay sober and be sober when they call you."

Fourteen years went by, and Cliff did not call.

Last week at midnight, my phone rang—a long-distance call, from five states away. The caller said, "I thought I better call you and let you know—I watched you get sober in AA, so I knew, when I started having trouble, I better call AA."

No, Cliff still has not called. But I'm glad I talked to Woody. I'm glad and grateful that I stayed sober waiting for calls. The man who called last week is my youngest brother, and I'm glad I was sober when he called.

L. R., Irvine, Ky.

Around the Tables

Spiritual Awakening and the Message

AROUND THE TABLES, we recite Step Twelve so often that sometimes we overlook what that divinely inspired statement says in clear language. The only "message" that it can be talking about is the "spiritual awakening." No other interpretation makes any sense.

Either we have a message to carry or we haven't. If we have, then we must have had a spiritual awakening. The unequivocal fact is that if we have truly worked on Steps One through Eleven, we will have experienced a change — no matter what we call it — that will cause others to want to be what we are demonstrating. Having had a spiritual awakening, we will stand out like a bright beacon atop the highest building of a city on a hill, as it is seen from desolate flatlands.

Of course, if we don't practice in our daily lives the principles recog-

nized through our awakening, there is little opportunity for anyone to observe the change in us.

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path" would have little meaning if there wasn't some good reason to follow the path. The reason is that we who have taken that path are leading a happy life independent of the bottle. Contrary to old ideas, sobriety doesn't mean giving up happiness; it is exactly the opposite. Sobriety means giving up sickness, loneliness, fears.

The Big Book says "thoroughly." As we change in the day-to-day living of AA, our standards get higher and happiness gets better and better. We can't just give lip service to AA; we must get into action. As we do, we find what real happiness is, and we have a real message to carry to the still-suffering alcoholic.

November 1973

Thanks to AA literature

From Monterey, Calif.:

Recently hospitalized, I came prepared with all my AA tools — the Big Book, *As Bill Sees It*, and so on. All these were stacked on my nightstand, and the backs clearly indicated their contents. Everybody could see what was close to my heart and mind.

After a few days, a young man became my roommate, and I introduced myself. A little later, I pointed out my books on the nightstand and said, "I am an alcoholic, but I have not found it necessary in the last twenty-one months to take a drink."

Having a few pamphlets at hand (you never know), I handed him "This Is AA" and "Alcoholism the Illness." Surprisingly, he started to read both pamphlets, not only once, but over and over again. Nothing more was said until the day of his release, when he hobbled over on his crutches, took my hand, and, in saying goodbye, added, "Thank you for handing me those two pamphlets when I first came here. Because now I can understand my father's illness."

Do you know?—my Higher Power works in many, many unexpected ways.

J. Y. F.

The Eleventh Step...

It's One of the Twelve



*When worked in combination with the other Steps,
Step Eleven can teach us to live by God's will*

WILL THE MEEK really inherit the earth? Probably not, say a number of scholars, who feel this familiar quote is the product of an incorrect translation. In their view, the Greek word *praos*, which was translated "meek," should have been rendered as "trained" or "disciplined," which gives a totally different meaning to the sentence. This fits in with my experience in working the AA program, which brings disciplined direction to my life, resulting in greater simplicity and the ability to live each day more effectively.

I came into AA with no belief in anything, but battered so badly that the arguing and fighting had been knocked completely out of me. The members told me about "God as we understood Him" and emphasized that it was my privilege to approach God on the basis of my own understanding. A friend summed it up for

me a few years ago when he said, "I was grateful to learn that no one in AA argued about whose Higher Power was higher."

After blundering around sober for a couple of years, I finally worked the first nine Steps, which, it turned out, are the prerequisite for effective use of Step Eleven. Before this, I was able to pray and had made sporadic efforts at meditation, but could never spend enough time quietly to get anything from it. Now, however, after working Steps One through Nine as thoroughly as possible, I was able to sit quietly and spend fifteen or twenty minutes in meditation.

Today, it seems clearly evident that we can pray wherever we are in the Steps, but we aren't able to meditate effectively until we have first cleaned out the debris of the past. This can be done only by carefully working One through Nine. Con-

tinuing, regular meditation on this foundation began to improve my life, which started to move in a more positive direction. I began to get results.

This, naturally, led to experiments in using prayer to get what I wanted. There's unlimited literature on such prayers. As I read widely, God began to take on the benevolent aspect of a Cosmic Candy Machine that would grant all my requests if I simply fed in the right combination of prayers and concentrated thoughts. My prayers became filled with requests for others, and I worked tirelessly — hand in hand with the Higher Power, of course — to help all these people straighten out their lives the way I thought they should. At the same time, these prayers included specific requests for what seemed necessary for me to grow into my destined spiritual stat-

ure. It was hard work, but worth the sacrifice, because it put me in a position of spiritual counselor, aiding the Higher Power in handling His myriad tasks.

Long after this period, I ran across a story about Beau Jack, the former lightweight champion of the world, whose slashing fists and relentless attack carried him from a job shining shoes at the Augusta Country Club to the title. A man of profound faith, he used to pray before each bout. One day in the dressing room, sportswriter Bill Heinz asked, "What do you pray for?"

"I pray that it be a good fight and nobody get hurt," replied Beau Jack.

"Don't you pray to win?"

"No," was the answer. "If I pray to win and the other boy pray to win, then what God gonna do?"

That was a remarkably simple and clear description of "praying

only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." Beau Jack was way ahead of me, although he certainly hadn't read all the books on prayer that I had and undoubtedly couldn't speak as articulately about subjects that, finally, can be understood only through experience, never through discussion or reading.

As considerable time passed, I learned that when we stop struggling for what we think we want, then and then only, we begin to get what we *really* want. To me, this does not mean praying for specifics; it simply means spending time each day using a phrase or a word that helps keep my thoughts turned to God. In my experience, there is a definite correlation between the amount of time spent in meditation and the degree of change. The quantity of meditation *does* influence the quality. If I double the amount of time spent in meditation, it seems to me that the results are not twice as good, but four times as good. It all comes from consistent practice and has nothing to do with talking, reading, or studying.

It takes some steady work with prayer and meditation to understand what they will do, and then it takes a substantial amount of additional work to begin to understand what they will *not* do. Step Eleven is only one Step of our Twelve Steps program, and it works most effectively as an integrated part of all the Steps. Continuing work with all the Steps

"The mind has . . . limited usefulness as a tool for experiencing reality."

enables me to change in ways that would be impossible through prayer alone.

Is Step Eleven an important tool in changing? Absolutely!

Is it more important than some of the other Steps? Absolutely not!

For a number of years, I read everything available on prayer, mysticism, Vedanta, Buddhism—all the literature that can be loosely classified under the heading of "spiritual." The ideas were interesting, but eventually it became increasingly apparent that none of this provided the sharply outlined blueprint for continuing change to be found in our Steps. This was where it was at, I realized. And this is where it remains. By "our Steps," I mean *all* of them, not just the last three.

For several years, I belonged to an Eleventh Step group that met once a month. We talked about what we were reading and what was happening with our prayer and then said the Lord's Prayer and had refreshments. As time passed, everything but the refreshments became stale, and it finally became evident why. There just isn't that much to talk about. There's a great deal of steady effort required, but conversation and reading are not what does it. The reading and the talking are particularly attractive for anyone who has, as I have, a strong tendency to wor-

ship at the shrine of his own intelligence.

Thomas Aquinas provided an illuminating commentary on the role of the intellect in the spiritual life. Probably the most gifted of Christianity's theologians, he studied and wrote and researched for several decades. Then he had an experience of God that was so moving, so transforming, that he closed his books and never opened them again, saying, "What I have seen makes all of this as straw." Certainly, he spoke from living knowledge on the uselessness of trying to read or talk or reason our way into divine awareness. The mind has extremely limited usefulness as a tool for experiencing reality.

It's been helpful for me to use the Twelve Steps as a base for meditation by going from One through Twelve and briefly checking where I am with each one at the beginning of my meditation. From there, I try to concentrate on a phrase or a sentence such as "Thy will be done" or "God is love," and simply keep turning my thoughts back to this. When the mind wanders, bring it back. Gradually, the mind slows. With this slowing, the vagrant thoughts are replaced by quiet, calm, and direction.

Another method that has worked for me is to sit quietly and watch my

thoughts—not battle them, not try to control them, but just sit and watch them drift by. The result? The process of watching causes them to become slower. Finally, the result from this, too, is growing calm, peace, and direction. One of Lao-tzu's sayings sums it up: "Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear."

Along with aiming for regular periods of meditation, it's necessary for me to do other things like exercising regularly and eating properly. It's supremely important for me to get to bed early enough that I will have time to start the next day by freeing my mind from distractions and that everlasting internal dialogue.

After years of working consistently with Step Eleven, I can point to some specific benefits from the practice. These don't stem from specific requests, but come from regular work with this Step, "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." The benefits include greater stability, improved memory, better health, increased energy, absence of hurry, and ability to work more effectively.

Memory is largely a matter of cataloguing and knowing where to go in the mind to retrieve information. Regular practice with Step Eleven, combined with all the other Steps, improves my inner integration, which, in turn, enables me to find

facts and information when needed. This improved integration is also reflected in greater order in all areas of my life.

For example, in 1956 and 1957, I worked at the airport in Pt. Barrow, Alaska, during the construction of the Distant Early Warning Line. We had a small airport with a 5,000-foot landing strip and extremely limited facilities for parking and servicing aircraft. About ninety percent of our air traffic arrived between 10:30 AM and 2:30 PM, and it seemed there was no way in the world I could get passengers on and off, cargo unloaded and loaded, planes gassed and turned around without my being constantly harried and behind schedule.

There *was* no way, I found — unless I was careful to get a sizable slice of prayer and meditation each morning before going to work at the airport. With this as a foundation, I was busy, but not hurried. Everything got done, and it was done without rushing and without strain. My life is a reflection of my inner

condition, which is determined by the degree of my persistence in working the AA program. This has proved to be true again and again.

Men and women who have gotten somewhere in the spiritual life are invariably adamant when they speak of the trap of seeking special gifts and special powers. They point to these as egotistical blind alleys, ending in danger for the seeker. Today, in my view, the spiritual life has nothing to do with these “specials” and everything to do with a growing ability to work consistently and effectively where God has put me.

There's no cheap grace. Reality is not given; it's mined, like gold. The basic lesson today seems to be that I'm free only when I'm willingly doing God's will — that the finest prayer is simply “Thy will be done.” The ability to pray this with wholehearted commitment is markedly increased through persistent work with Step Eleven in combination with all the other Steps. Each one is equally important.

Paul M., Riverside, Ill.

Me? The Best Pal I Ever Had?

*She was scared of that Fourth Step inventory —
it might mean making some changes*

ONE OF THE most frightening periods in my AA life came just before my Fourth Step inventory. I considered suggesting to my sponsor that it might be immoral to write a fearless moral inventory if one was scared. There was something in her eyes that discouraged that maneuver. And I entertained myself for a while wondering whether some people could be afraid to be fearless and whether I was one of them.

Finally, I had to admit that for some reason I simply *was* scared to sit down and write the thing. After all, what would I find? Did I really want to spend a couple of hours writing about my ratlike tendencies, even if I didn't intend to show the result to anyone? Life was hard enough! What if I looked at myself and saw a formless thing that oozed into spaces left by others, with no direction and no control? Could a sweet, sensitive person live forty years and be a nothing? Others

could, maybe. Why not me? What had happened to the best football player on the block, the idealistic student? I had drunk a lot in the past year trying to figure that out.

But this was now. Even though *now* slipped back or forth a lot, I managed to figure out that this no-good inventory should probably be written at a desk. So I sat at mine, looking passively at the mimeographed guide my sponsor had given me. There were suggestions of what to write about, taken from *Alcoholics Anonymous*. There was even a list of fears to discuss. And there was my sponsor's own touch — the seven virtues and seven "sins."

It felt good to express "officially" (written right *there*) what I believed and felt about these things. I wrote for *more* than a couple of hours and stopped only a few times, for private compliments on the fact that I was *doing* it, and it wasn't bad at all. Though the process itself was en-

joyable, it wasn't until I was nearly finished and was writing about my fear of God that I became aware of a pattern in my attitude toward authority and my way of dealing with it — passively negative, spiced with active negativity. That was enlightening.

And I was happy, too, to discover that there were, after all, some good things to say about myself. There were also obvious improvements that had taken place during my six months in AA. And I *was* something, neither so bad and hopeless as I sometimes feared, nor so wonderful in that special way that only I, apparently, understood. This discovery was both a relief and a disappointment. Before my progressively fearless moral inventory, there had always been just a *chance* that I was, possibly because of unusual sensitivity, quite special, waiting for discovery. Instead, I was — somewhere in the middle.

In our Fifth Step discussion, my sponsor helped me understand more about the nature of the problems I had become aware of through the Fourth. It took some effort to put aside my pride and listen to someone suggest that I might have too much pride and that I could, if I wanted to, do something about it. This involved trust and faith both in my sponsor and in God as I had come to understand Him. This faith had worked for my own good in the past six months, but still it was frightening to think that I actually

had to change. Me, the best pal I ever had . . . most of the time. The Sixth Step was difficult, because my pride had got me through a lot in life, I thought. I had just kept going, right on through. No-Moss-Mary, I called myself — inaccurately, since my name wasn't Mary.

Now I had to ask my Higher Power to remove a shortcoming that was really closer than the alcohol problem had been. It took a few days to get ready for that, even though the common sense of it was evident. I had a newly developed understanding of God. I knew He had helped with my drinking problem and could help with some fears if asked; but overabundant pride is a complex problem, and asking for the removal of a shortcoming that I didn't clearly understand myself seemed risky. There were times when I thought of God as an *equal* power or even as a slightly lesser power with special talents. I was comfortable with the idea of God Jr. Still, I had experienced good from His special talents; if I took the Seventh Step, there was a fair possibility that no harm would come to me, and very likely some further good. I gave Him a try.

We've been partners in the two years since. Every now and then, I find a "new" problem has come; every now and then, I find an old one has gone. There is little question these days of who is junior. Mostly, I just take it easy.

L. E. L., Sonoma, Calif.

Around the Tables

Inventory

AROUND THE TABLES, a relative newcomer was leading, and he said, "I don't know how to take the Fourth Step. I'd like to discuss it."

A number of thoughts were expressed about what the Step means, and how each speaker had or had not taken it. A reference was made to the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve," and it was strange how few had done their eye exercises with these two marvelous tools of AA. On reflection, it wasn't so strange. Some were too busy fighting the early tremors to seek the cleansing power of these books. Others, with more time in the program, had read both long ago, had left them buried in the past — and had buried their own inventories back there, too.

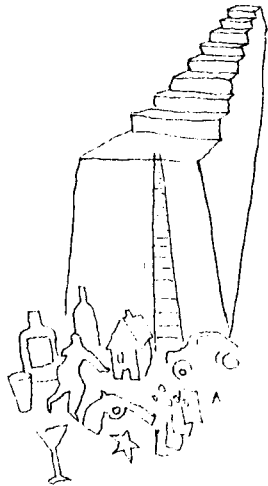
This discussion was very profitable for me. After listening to it, I said that today the Fourth Step made sense to me only when coupled with the thought of the Tenth Step. Since I am living one day at a time, the only inventory I can take is today's. I regard my inventory as the summing-up of what I have on hand, as business enterprises do. Or you might say this daily checkup is an inventory control.

At first, the words of the Fourth Step were way beyond me. "Made a searching and fearless moral inven-

tory of ourselves." "Searching"? In the chaos of a life in transition, I certainly couldn't handle that. "Fearless"? Whoaie, I was racked by fear! "Moral"? I was hardly aware of any standards. The inventory I took then is now meaningless — except as a historical record of how sick I was to think that I *had* taken the Fourth Step.

Only as the wonders of the Eleventh Step worked did divine love begin to drive the devil of fear out of my mind. Only as this alcoholic mind shuddered through one sober day after another did my soul start to spark. So I took my inventory again, and it was different. And it has gone on changing from day to day. Truly, I can take a fearless look at myself now. But in today's look, I am compelled to go back and examine all the prior looks. I think I am beginning to make some progress — only because of each of you.

I can't tell you how to take an inventory. But I do know that it's an excellent thing to look at it each day, as the Tenth Step says: "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." Thanks to you, I can admit today that I was wrong about a lot of items included in yesterday's inventory.



Long Crawl to the First Step

*Surrender is terribly difficult
but reaching that point is even harder*

AT DOZENS of AA meetings, I've heard members say the First Step was the hardest. For them, perhaps it was; but I wonder whether they've considered that the long crawl to that First Step might have been even rougher. It was for me.

I'm thirty-six. And behind me I had about nineteen years of hard, excessive drinking, generally only the "best" stuff. About four years ago, I *knew* I was an alcoholic. There was no doubt about it! My marriage had been wrecked with the aid of booze; the company of my little girls, successful jobs with news-

papers, and sales positions all had been sacrificed for fancy-named drinks and the rosy glow of escapism booze gave me. I was never fired, but changed jobs regularly — for what reasons I've given up trying to figure out.

Finally, using my fall-back trade of structural ironworker, which had put me through college, I was working in Los Angeles. I was making better than average money, but living in a fifth-rate hotel, because I still had a taste for spending my checks sporting in the fancy places out on Wilshire Boulevard in Bev-

erly Hills. And there were some awful bus rides back at night, after I had tipped the waitress with my last bill.

To me, there's a time when we alcoholics admit we are powerless over alcohol — and yet still doubt our inability to manage our own lives. So we really haven't taken or even *reached* that important First Step.

One night in my L.A. hotel — as best I can write it here — all life was walking before me. I suppose I was crying out silently in some sort of dream. Whose life? It wasn't my life. I didn't know these things. Two hands cupped, holding a cross. Mother's hands? There was no body! Just hands. I took the chain from the imaginary cross to hit the cockroaches. That was what it was for. To hit cockroaches!

My sweat finally glued me to my bed, and I rested. Thoughts, broken dreams — everything the human mind is capable of sensing and feeling — were tearing my imagination apart. Surely there are more thoughts and feelings than words can express.

Why had all my actions and words been juggled around to bring me to this pit? I'd always tried to be fair and kind to everyone. Yet here I was. I could go no further down, morally or spiritually. If there was a hole meant for me, it couldn't be this miserable pit. I hadn't been created for this. Or had I? Could this turmoil, this pain and agony be part of a scheme? Or would this time, this

place, be my sepulcher?

"There must be someone to help me!" I cried out. "There must be someone to guide me. There is a way out — there must be."

I remembered the pride my mother had spoken of and given me. There, in all my degradation, I took stock of what remained of me. I could bring my body back to full health if it would only heed my mind. I still had that — after the initial hallucinations subsided. (I preferred to call them a bad dream, rather than the DTs.) I'd lost everything else — my friends, my loves, my time, my integrity, my self-respect — yet my power to reason, when I wasn't fogged with alcohol, was still alive. Life *had* been unkind to me. Still, I had to face up to my problems. I felt new vibrations within me. I wouldn't give up. I was unique, meant to obtain something better from life. God (or whatever) had not created me for this. But first I had to pick myself up out of the mire of my present existence.

I knew something had to be done at that very moment. (I might note that it had taken about thirty hours in that sweat-soaked bed to get to that moment.)

After a short, fervent, shaky prayer, which I doubted was heard, I pulled myself out of the filthy bed, sprang to my feet, and began to pull

my shorts off. The pains of weakness went rushing to my head, from both booze and a slightly bleeding ulcer. I fell back onto the bed with the shorts clinging around my ankles. I looked at the cracking paint on the ceiling and cursed it. I closed my eyes tightly, gritted my teeth, and mumbled beneath my foul breath, "This is not my time to go, this is not my place."

Then, with what energies I could retrieve from my emaciated shell of a body, with a strength borrowed from a future time, I stood up again. The shorts fell to the grimy carpet, and I walked across the small room to the shower, turned both spigots on full-power. Water came against the nerves of my skin in alternating flashes of hot and cold. I smelled the dirty steam. I coughed several times, but I was beginning to live again.

I sat on the shower floor, not from weakness now, but from satisfaction and relief. The water was washing clean more than my body. It was washing away the crust of misspent years, alcoholic years, juke-box and hangover years, have-one-on-me years, years of waiting for a fate that had already arrived.

A baptism of fire had melted my soul's agitation and shaped it into a new, mysterious determination to find an unknown something.

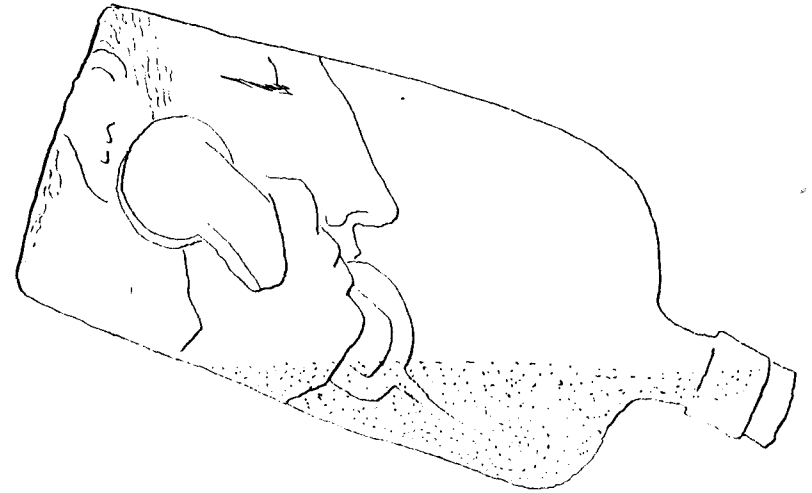
After this personal hell, I was on the wagon for a few months. For the time — that is, four years ago — I was sure I could control my drinking, at least turn it on and off.

I was wrong!

Between then and the near present, I was arrested five times in my hometown, twice for passing out in a cab and three times for "walking recklessly," as I still like to put it. I generally was bailed out or kicked out the next morning, except for one time when I happened to appear before a judge who used to frequent my old home. He had been my personal attorney and also lawyer for a short-lived business I blew. Two days later, I was drinking with him, getting a "fatherly" lecture.

I went to work in Vietnam, trying to hide from myself. On one rest period, in Honolulu, I was arrested for sleeping in a park — with over \$8,000 in traveler's checks in my pocket. A Higher Power was surely looking after this drunk then.

During a sober period, I wrote to the AA General Service Office and the National Council on Alcoholism. I became an expert on alcoholism and AA. I learned about the treatments, the Traditions, the Steps, addiction, the disease, the psychological and pharmacological approaches to therapy. But I also knew the guilt and remorse and pain of alcoholism,



for I was still drinking, just as heavily as ever. Not as frequently, perhaps, but just as heavily.

Several months ago, I talked to my local AA office on the telephone. "No, I don't want anyone to come to my house. No, I don't have a phone number. This is a public phone. When is the next beginners meeting?" This nonsense went on for two months, and I was drinking all the while.

But I was at least crawling toward the First Step. And I reached it.

Finally, there I was, with my non-alcoholic girl friend beside me, sitting at a square of tables, listening to a jocund, joking Irish cop and an attractive, sedate brunette. They were telling *me*, the expert, about drinking. He was talking about

"blackouts," about not remembering whether he'd been with "Harry or Harriet," and she was telling of lushing it up with vanilla extract.

I believe in benevolent coincidences. And that night bears out my belief. For I don't believe any other combination of speakers could have kept me at that meeting. The new members were friendly; the old members, kindly and understanding; the two "teachers" at the head of the tables, most adroit and compelling in their talks. To this day, I'm still grateful to them both.

Yet none of this was new to me. I knew it all. I'd done it all. To the cop, I could say that I had blacked out, too; I was jailed and bailed out, and didn't remember a thing until I found myself getting the bondsman

lushed, directly across from the jail. And I could tell the brunette that certain mouthwashes were higher-proof and better than vanilla when you were short or the liquor stores were closed.

I began to wonder whether I was hallucinating again, attending a séance, or simply visiting the neighborhood funny farm. The cop had me in stitches — he must have traced my calls and pulled my record, I thought. And the two of them must have lured me to this meeting. They were telling *my* story!

The facts of alcoholism were laid flat-out before me. I wasn't unique, I wasn't the expert — in drinking, anyway. We were all pretty much the same. Our stories were set in different times and places, but the plots were the same. We weren't all simply fools, except maybe at the beginning; we were sick people, diseased with alcohol — "cunning, baffling, powerful!" And AA was our hospital, our hope for recovery. Alcohol was our germ — the number one drug in the world, the most abused and most misunderstood.

So there I was at my first meeting, my body tired, my mind struggling and confused about something I had sought to control.

A reverie swam about me. I was hearing my story in different forms, reminding me of my dumb arrests; flights to cities for no logical reason; getting drunk on the very day I left the hospital after spending thirty-four days there for an operation for

bleeding ulcers and borrowing twenty-two pints of other people's blood; waking up in strangers' houses, my soul and my pride sinking lower and lower.

Around me, from both old and new members, I heard their "reasons" for becoming alcoholics: resentment, loneliness, depression, moodiness, escapism, responsibilities, lack of faith, self-consciousness, shyness. . . . But all their problems now boiled down to one — alcohol. And the answer was to take and realize fully Step One.

I did. And it's working, a day at a time. I crawled to the First Step, slowly, painfully. But I got there. And day by day, I try to add another Step, at least a little part of it. AA works. The evidence is in.

It's a tough one-man game in the beginning, but soon the aura, the spirit, and the roaring happiness of other members join in, and the game becomes easier and easier to master.

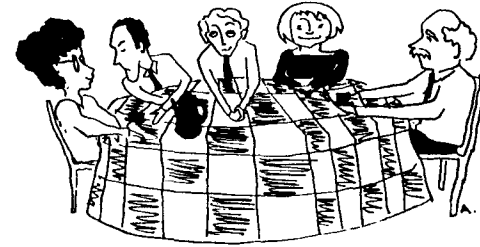
T. H. M., Oakland, Calif.

The Mystical Experience

The most beautiful and the most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the basis of all true science. He who can no longer stand rapt in awe is as good as dead. This deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in this incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.

Albert Einstein

Around the Tables



Where the Sick Visit the Sick

AROUND THE TABLES, the gentle leader brought forth a discussion of Twelfth Step calls. In true pioneering fashion, we each undoubtedly discussed points that have been reinforced countless times at numberless tables. That's one of the chief purposes of meetings — to reaffirm the truths of this simple program.

A veteran "slipper" recounted how his most recent testimonial to the effect of the first drink had been brought about by his "Twelfth Step" call in a bar to show the boys he could have just a ginger ale. One of the veteran nomads of skid row neatly ticked this excuse off for what it really was: "Going into a bar for a ginger ale? [Profanity]!"

The topic of twelfth-stepping stirred memories of my childhood days, when a homeroom nun would suggest as penance or as a sacrifice for Lent that our class should "visit the sick." In later years, this charitable effort was described in other ways, but through the years, "visiting the sick" has been regarded as a method

of improving one's lot through good deeds.

I began recasting into AA terms the idea of "visiting the sick." As a recovering alcoholic, to generate continuing sobriety, I make Twelfth Step calls on sick alcoholics. But they are unlike the visits of childhood days in one important way. I recognize that these acts of charity have two purposes: first, to help me; second, to help the person on whom I am calling. Since I am only recovering, I recognize that I am still suffering from an illness. For me, at least, a Twelfth Step call can be described as "the sick visiting the sick." Thus, as long as the call results in my remaining sober, it is successful.

Lost in this accomplishment, quite often, is the good that the "twelfth-steppee" has done for me. Certainly, he has done an act of charity. Perhaps it would help if we kept in mind the good being done to and for AAs by the suffering alcoholics. Think of the inordinate amount of pain they endure to remind us what we were like and what we could be

like again, so quickly. It may be well for us to reexamine Twelfth Step calls and give more credit to the twelfth-steppee. In a sense, we have been doing this all along through our admiration for Dr. Bob, who was Bill W.'s first truly successful twelfth-steppee.

In the same vein, we twelfth-step-

pers are clearly helping sick alcoholics by carrying the message to them. And truly the "slippers" are twelfth-stepping a meeting when they return to give us further insight on what lies out there after the first drink. In a number of ways, "the sick visiting the sick" are carrying the message of AA.

The Long Climb

*Step by step up the stairway
that leads inevitably to today*

I KNOW THAT everyone has, at one time or another, had a desire to do something he has never done or to be someone he isn't. I had this desire in the past, and I used alcohol to make me feel as though I was someone I really wasn't or could do something I really couldn't do. Yes, I was the "great pretender," and I thought that my life really was what I wanted it to be. Only now do I finally realize that I lived in a self-made nightmare for many years. When I was found by the AA people, I was offered hope where there had been no hope. I was given a chance for a new life.

I like to think of my recovery as a long climb up a staircase — the Twelve Steps of AA.

Not too long ago, I was a remnant of a man, lying in the gutter of alcoholism, held down by the many bottles of alcoholic beverages I had consumed over the years. Subconsciously, I was crying out for help,

but no one could hear me. My family and friends couldn't hear me, because they had long ago given me up as a liar and faker. Finally, my need for help was understood by people keenly aware of the call of the alcoholic. Before long, I was being lifted out of the gutter by thousands of hands from all over the world — the hands of AA. I was assured by these AA people, "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, the hand of AA will always be there."

Guided by the thousands before me, I traveled along the path they had traveled. Through their experience, I was led to the meeting rooms of AA and shown the stairway to life — the Twelve Steps, very much worn by the many alcoholics who had successfully climbed them in the past. I put my foot on the First Step and shouted in words born of desperation, "I am powerless over alcohol and my life has become unmanageable!" Immediately, I felt the

encouraging support of those thousands before me as I teetered back and forth on that Step.

Finally, with a lot of effort, I proceeded up to the Second Step. Standing there, I saw a great pillar before me. It was a pillar of strength, placed there to take the burden of my struggle in the upward climb. This pillar was strong enough to support me all the way to the top of the Twelve Steps. After some deliberation, I decided that, since I was powerless and had already admitted it, I must now take advantage of this pillar of strength — a *Power greater than myself that could restore me to sanity.*

Having made this decision, I then concentrated on reaching the next Step. I heard my nine-year-old daughter's encouraging remark: "I love you, Daddy, and I like you more the way you are now. You're not mean and nasty any more."

These words gave me an inner boost and I was able to go on to the Third Step of my climb. I stood there supported by a Power greater than myself, and I felt an irrepressible need for something or someone to take my will and my life out of my own mental control. I finally realized that I needed some type of God in my life. I knew that there was a God of all things, and I decided to accept Him and to *turn my will and my life over to His care as I understood Him.*

It seemed to me that after I had made this commitment my upward climb became much easier. I rose more quickly to the Fourth Step, where I paused to think about all of my faults. I searched my own conscience, supported by the Power greater than myself, and I was unafraid. My life was in the hands of God as I understood Him.

I went on up to the Fifth Step.

No Human Power

IT'S VERY natural to feel a sense of achievement, of pride, when I carry the message to a drunk and he proceeds to sober up and blossom forth as an enthusiastic new member of AA. It's equally natural to feel a sense of personal defeat, to ask myself what I did wrong, when the message falls on deaf ears.

Just who is responsible for the success or failure of a Twelfth Step call? Is it the member who carries the message? Or is it the drunk who called for help? I got my answer some time back, in a striking way I shall never forget.

My wife was sent to talk with a woman I shall call Betty, and asked me to come along. We had had only limited experience with Twelfth Step calls and had no great track record, but this was a case where others had tried without success and it was just our turn.

When we got there, our prospect was well saturated with wine, although her speech was not excessively slurred. She seemed neither hostile nor greatly interested in our

arrival. Before we had proceeded very far in our message, she changed the subject. When she learned that I had taught at the same university her nephew was attending, she brightened up, and interest dawned. From then on, it was just a game. We would bring the conversation back to our message of life and death, and she would just as quickly return it to the university or other worldly matters. Conversationally, she proved "cunning, baffling, and powerful," despite her handicap.

After some forty-five minutes, we had to concede defeat. It was obvious that Betty tuned us out whenever we started talking about our drinking problem and hers, and so she heard nothing we said except about the university. No wonder so

*Just who
is responsible for
the success of
a Twelfth Step
call?*



many had given up on her! Reluctantly and sadly, we left her to her bottle.

We never saw or heard about Betty again that year. We told each other we had tried, and that was what was important. We may not have really believed that, but in any case, we dismissed her from our thoughts.

A year after our attempt, one of our friends came up and said, "You should have been at our meeting last night. Betty celebrated her first birthday, and she told us she had been looking all over for you — her sponsors. She hasn't had a drink since the day you called on her."

Wow, what a surge of emotions! There was delight, of course. But what about that sense of personal

achievement? How could we feel proud under the circumstances? It would make as much sense to feel proud in a bowling game if I sent a wild ball careening out of control and watched it jump over into the next lane and knock down all ten pins. Could you call that a strike? I couldn't.

I am a slow thinker, and the message took a long time to sink in. Very slowly, it got through to me just who *is* responsible for the success of a Twelfth Step call. There's a big difference between what my brain tells me and what I truly believe. It's that process of believing that two and two make four which can take so long to jell. Still slower was the process of using that experience with Betty to let me realize just

how little my own efforts, my “wisdom,” my applied psychology contribute to the success of carrying the message—and to let me understand dimly what it means to be an instrument of my Higher Power.

That’s how I got my answer. And, as is almost always the case, it had been right under my nose since I came to AA. The opening part of Chapter Five in the Big Book is read at every meeting in these parts, so I had heard it literally thousands of times. “Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas.” As plain as ABC. “A. That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives. B. That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism. C. That God could and would if He were sought.” Those ideas were clear enough. But for me, it took a very special per-

sonal adventure (“after”) to do the job.

The principle has finally been learned. There remains the matter of practicing it. Knowing that I am going on a Twelfth Step call to do *myself* a favor, knowing that my business is to carry the message, and knowing that the results are *entirely* in God’s hands, I still can’t say that I don’t feel any pride if I get through to the suffering alcoholic. I can’t say I release all sense of failure when my message-carrying doesn’t take. But I am grateful that I now understand why these reactions are wrong. And, I guess, really I’m glad that I have these “wrong” reactions, being very human. Most particularly, I’m glad for everything about AA — the good and the bad, the glory and the sorrow that are a part of being wonderfully alive after a long period of imitation living.

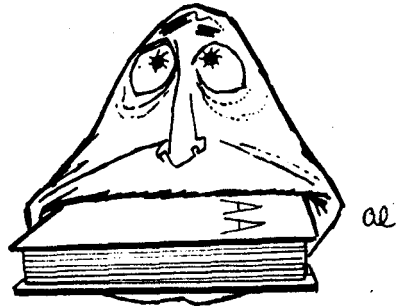
E. C. S., California

Dry Drunk

I SPENT my first three months of AA in sheer heaven, as I find many of us do. I was way up on top of a mountain, high on the exhilaration of it all. But, as one very wise person told me, at the base of every high mountain is a very deep valley. I fell—hard! Just at the point where all should have been going well, I experienced my first dry drunk and was demolished.

How I could feel so bad, both emotionally and physically, I just could not understand. After all, I had not touched a drop. Why had this thing happened to me?

The Big Book tells us to practice the Twelve Steps in all our affairs, and then we shall know serenity. Well, I had stopped my daily work at staying close to my AA program. Oh, don't get me wrong—I went to meetings without fail. As a matter of fact, I had increased the number of them. And I could *talk* great AA. But I had forgotten to put the Steps into practice. I had gotten away from the peace of communion with God. *I* was in the driver's seat; *I* was running the show once more. No longer did the Slogans help—*Easy Does It, Live and Let Live, Think*. Because I did not do those things, just said them, I got back all my self-pity, resentments, and doubts.



Lord knows, I *thought* I was trying. In reality, I was just giving a useless, phony pitch to everyone—most important, to myself.

Thank God and my sponsors, I have got back on the right track again. But now I have learned a vital lesson. I was so sure of my AA, so positive I had it made. I pray I never get that feeling again. Being a “baby” in AA can be the greatest part of a person's life, *if* that baby has the knowledge of his or her ignorance and disabilities. No longer will I shy away from phoning other members for fear of bothering them or seeming stupid. I have heard time and time again that I should call for help if I need help, and I now realize the value of that advice. I pass it on. I am here and I am responsible and I can love. With the grace of God, I shall always be so.

E. D., Sedona, Ariz.

Around the Tables

...If We Have Surrendered

*It is
impossible
to fail if we
truly take the
Third Step*

AROUND THE TABLES, I have talked of my alcoholism and heard countless others describe theirs, but never have I heard as definitive and concise a statement on alcoholism as in the Book of Proverbs, 20:1: "Wine is arrogant, strong drink is riotous; none who goes astray for it is wise."

If you regard the early years of drinking as the wine period, certainly mine could be described as "arrogant." I was in charge of all; I set the pace; alcohol could be left alone whenever I wanted to. The latter period, and by far the longer one, was that of "strong drink." Certainly, it was riotous, and obviously, I was unwise and really went astray.

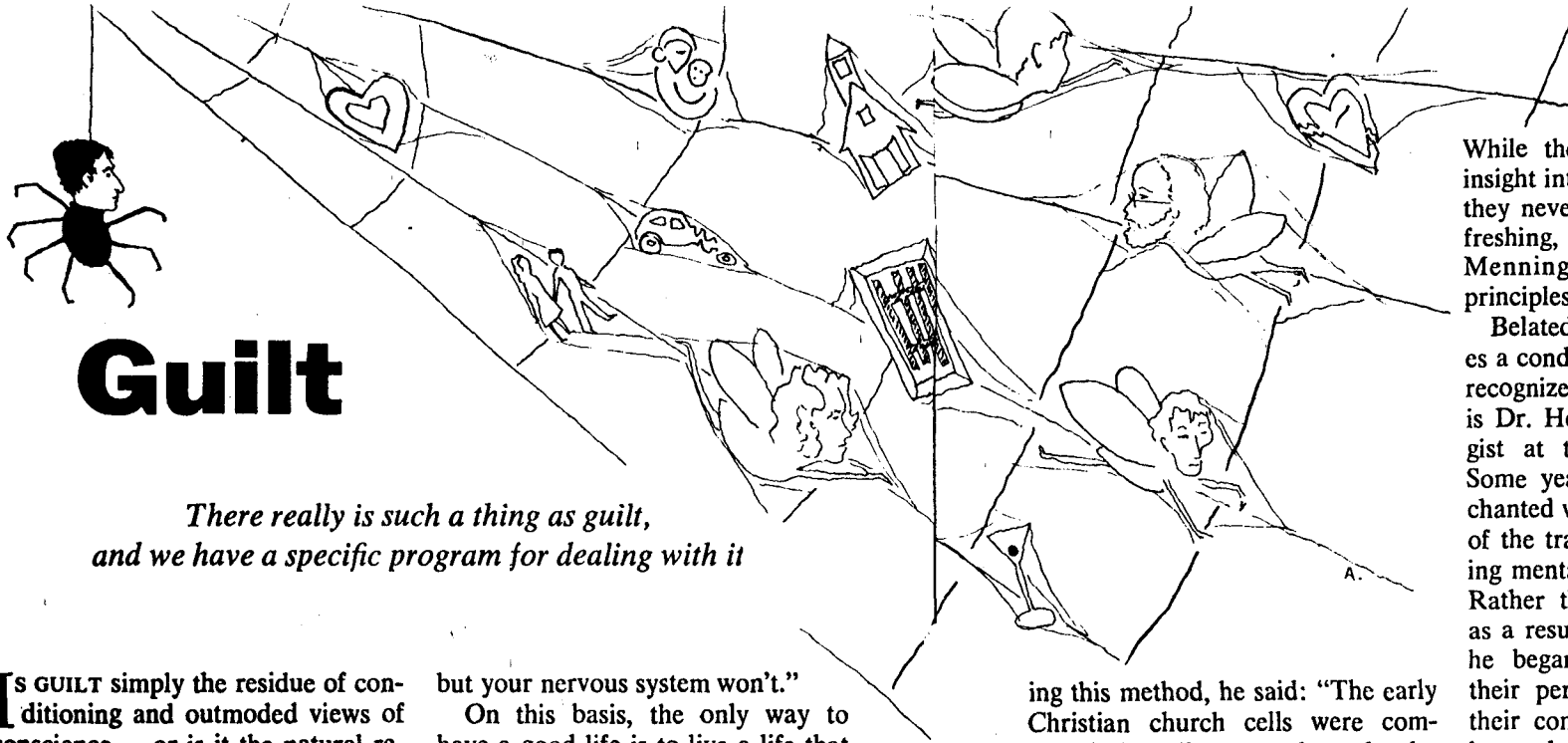
A second quotation, from the Bhagavad Gita, is a beautiful de-

scription of Alcoholics Anonymous: "Arise therefore! And with the help of thy Spirit lift up thy soul: allow not thy soul to fall."

"Arise therefore!" As in the New Testament, some action has to be taken in connection with a miracle. First, I had to do something, and that something was merely not to take the first drink.

"Allow not thy soul to fall." If we depend on our Spirit, we are turning our will and our lives over to the care of God (Step Three). We won't fall, because it is truly impossible to do so if we have surrendered and want only to live correctly.

Under the riotous conditions of my abnormal drinking, I had no concept of prayer or a higher power. Whatever spark inspired my picking up the phone had to be struck through the prayers of others. And so prayer changed things — namely, me. I arose. As the nightmares receded, I could pray and ask God for help. And my soul was lifted up. Now, each day I pray to keep this magnificent gift of sobriety, for I don't want my soul to fall.



Guilt

*There really is such a thing as guilt,
and we have a specific program for dealing with it*

IS GUILT simply the residue of conditioning and outmoded views of conscience — or is it the natural result of irresponsible, dishonest living?

A growing measure of responsible opinion provides compelling answers to that question. This group argues convincingly that if religion had been doing the job it should have done, psychiatry never would have arisen as a profession. Proponents of this view say that the problem is generally not a guilt complex. The problem is guilt. Lying, stealing, cheating, and other forms of irresponsible behavior exact their inevitable price in depression, fear, tension, anxiety, and other "diseases of the conscience." As writer-scientist Paul Korzybski put it, "God may forgive your sins,

but your nervous system won't."

On this basis, the only way to have a good life is to live a life that is good. Misbehavior generates guilt, which, in turn, creates painful inner states. The answer is not to hide behind a pill or deny the voice of the conscience, but to clean up and shape up. Our traditional religious legacies provide specific, powerful tools designed to restore the person who uses them to health and community. Unfortunately, the religions themselves have pretty much misplaced the method and abdicated their responsibilities to psychiatry.

Just recently, the dean of the U.S. psychiatric establishment, Dr. Karl Menninger, wrote a book called *Whatever Became of Sin?* Describ-

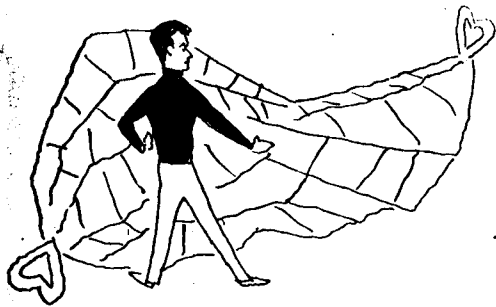
ing this method, he said: "The early Christian church cells were comprised of small groups of people who met regularly — often secretly. The order of worship was, first of all, self-disclosure and confession of sin, called *exomologesis*. This was followed by appropriate announcement of penance, pleas for forgiveness, and plans for making restitution. A final period of friendly fellowship (*koinonia*) closed the meeting."

A staunch Freudian for years, Dr. Menninger has done a 180-degree turn and now concludes that mental health and moral health are inseparable. The pointed probing of psychiatry's verbal scalpel has been the subject of extensive theorizing, philosophizing, and, finally, satirizing.

While the patients gain increasing insight into why they feel as they do, they never seem to get well. It's refreshing, indeed, to see a man of Menninger's reputation embrace principles that *will* bring recovery.

Belatedly, Menninger acknowledges a condition that others in his field recognized years ago. Among them is Dr. Hobart Mowrer, a psychologist at the University of Illinois. Some years ago, he became disenchanted with the poor clinical results of the traditional approach in treating mental and emotional disorders. Rather than viewing the problems as a result of too strict consciences, he began helping people improve their performances and live *up* to their consciences. The results have been dramatic. Again and again, honest, responsible living has improved mental and emotional health. As Mowrer pointed out, "integration" and "integrity" come from the same root word. There can be no integration within a human being unless he aims for a life of integrity.

Honesty, openness, restitution, and willingness to help others are keystones in this approach. Openness means letting "significant others" know us as we really are. It means taking literally the injunction in James 5:16 to "Confess your faults one to another." On the same subject, the authors of the Old Testament wrote in Proverbs 28:13, "He



that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." This powerfully simple prescription is found in both Judaism and Christianity . . . but how often is it used?

Invariably, someone asks, "Is there *really* help in telling others the entire truth about ourselves, including those things we're most ashamed of?"

"Absolutely," reply those who have tried it.

"If secret confession, to priests and psychiatrists, had a really good record of accomplishment," says Dr. Mowrer, "we should be spared the embarrassment of having the 'ordinary' people in our lives know who we are. But the record is *not* good; and, reluctantly, many people are today experimenting with open confession of one kind or another. When you stop to think of it, *secret* confession is a contradiction in terms — secrecy is what makes confession necessary. And it is not surprising that the attempt to cope with unresolved personal guilt by means of continued furtiveness does not work very well."

A longtime admirer of AA, Mowrer stresses the need for restitution

for harm done to others. Again, we find specific tools that have been largely discarded by our society. For example, the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses of the fifth chapter of Matthew outline the way with precise clarity: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." As these verses beautifully illustrate, my relationships with other human beings provide an accurate measuring stick for the state of my relationship with God. Here, as in James 5:16 and Proverbs 28:13, the prescription is simple and powerful. The Jewish Day of Atonement, too, is a time to make amends to those who have been harmed.

Sin — that old-fashioned word — thrusts the sinner out of community. Alone, alienated, afraid, he can still find an answer: to let others know him as he really is and then to make amends for harm he has caused. This approach has been dramatically successful. It rejects deterministic theories that make man a victim of heredity or environment. Instead, it declares the individual's responsibility for his own life.

This sounds familiar to us in AA, because the Twelve Steps provide the method with graphic simplicity. The therapeutic communities for drug addicts, such as Gateway House in Chicago and Daytop Village in New

York, use these principles to bring health and wholeness to desperately sick men and women. They, too, take literally the injunction to "Confess your faults one to another." *Honesty, openness, and responsibility* are the foundation stones in these facilities, which offer one of the few hopeful vistas in the nation's bleak drug picture.

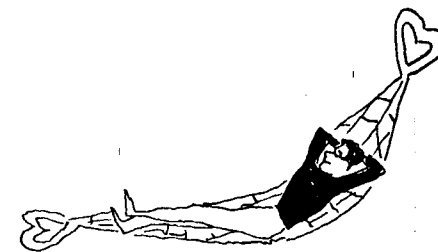
Msgr. William O'Brien is president of the board of directors of Daytop Village. A year and a half ago, he told me an impressive story of the role honesty plays in their rehabilitation program.

A father had just seen his son for the first time during the youth's nine months in Daytop. "It's amazing," the man told Msgr. O'Brien. "You've given us our boy back. When he came up the path toward me, I went to shake hands with him, and he threw his arms around me and said he loved me. He hasn't done that for years. But there's one thing that bothers me."

"What's that?" asked O'Brien.

"He says he can't work for me because I cheat," replied the man. "He said they're taught that they have to be honest or they can't survive." The father was a butcher who owned his own shop in New York City and kept his thumb on the scale because he felt this was the only way he could compete with the large supermarket chains. "I don't know what to do," he continued.

"Why don't you throw it out for discussion in the next meeting of



your parents' group?" suggested O'Brien.

As the name indicates, these groups are composed of parents of the Daytop residents and are designed to help the parents change attitudes within themselves that have been sabotaging relationships with their children. The New York butcher followed O'Brien's suggestion and told his group that he had been cheating his customers for years. He came out of that meeting with two commitments: (1) He would go out of business before he would cheat any more, and (2) for the first three days he was back in his butcher shop, he would tell every customer who entered that he had been cheating. Further, he would explain that he was through cheating and would have to raise prices to stay in business.

Two weeks after that meeting, Msgr. O'Brien saw the man again and asked, "How did you make out when you told the truth to your customers?"

"Let me tell you what happened!" exclaimed the butcher. "They threw their arms around me. They cried with me. They said such an honest

man in New York they had never seen. Today, my business is better than ever."

It's a stunning example of the primary role of honesty in enabling desperately sick drug addicts to break loose from their destructive habits. It provides an arresting insight into the way this strength is reflected in an ever-widening circle in the lives of others. Extensive experience shows with compelling clarity that these principles of honesty, openness, responsibility, and integrity are equally effective with men and women whose mental and emotional symptoms have not taken the form of addiction to alcohol or hard drugs.

I was brought up in one of the traditional Christian religions. It stressed the importance of faith, but failed to give me a method for living. There were no tools to keep me on the track or to straighten me out when I got off the track. With becoming humility, its adherents declared that they had the only *true* way to God. At the time of my entrance into AA, I believed in nothing. Looking back, it seems to me now that the problem was not an unwillingness to believe in God. I was simply unable to believe in that totally unworkable concept of God and didn't know any other way to find Him.

When AA members first began to talk to me about "God as we understood Him," the bewilderment and antagonisms of years started to melt,

thawed by their sincere and *obviously real* faith. This was faith that was different, however. It included a specific, potent program to follow for personal change.

If I'm drowning, I want a life preserver, not a serving of cotton-candy philosophy, theology, or positive thinking. These AAs gave me a life preserver in the Twelve Steps. They spoke to me from experience, not theory, and said, "Do these things and your life will change." That is precisely what happened.

They gave me a way to deal with guilt in Steps Four, Five, Eight, and Nine. The first attempt with the Fifth Step gave me considerable *relief* from character defects. Continuing work with it by opening up with more and more people in ever-widening circles of personal transparency showed that this was the route to *release* from these defects. (To me, there is a major distinction between relief and release.) Making amends cleared out more sick spots within me. Daily work with Steps Ten and Eleven keeps me aware of the state of my life and alert to trouble areas. Regular reworking of all the Steps helps me become flexible and responsive to God's will and is the key to growing freedom.

The religion of my youth spoke frequently about God's forgiveness, but provided no method to make me *feel* forgiven by excising guilt. Be-

"... we find freedom from the nagging fear of being found out."

ing told that God had forgiven me didn't do it. It has long seemed significant to me that nowhere do the Steps say anything about forgiveness, either divine or human. Instead, they show us how to *experience* forgiveness. The program says: Use these principles and wake up spiritually; then, you'll be able to live freely, joyously, and usefully, because these are the qualities of an awakened soul. This is the message we can carry to other alcoholics.

Guilt burns up energy and lowers vitality. It will not go away by our wishing or by our blaming others; specific actions are demanded for its removal. As more and more persons know all about us, we find freedom from the nagging fear of being found out. We can either change the past by dealing with it consciously in the present, or spend the rest of our lives reacting to it unconsciously. Positive work on the Steps removes guilt and releases a noticeable amount of energy as a result. With the present no longer a hostage of the past, we begin to live effectively in the moment.

Reality is *never* ethically neutral. Kick at the universe, and it kicks back. If a man jumps out of a tenth-story window, he doesn't break the law of gravity; he just proves that it exists. A guilt complex has never caused me a single problem in my life. Guilt, on the other hand, has

created substantial difficulties on those too-frequent occasions when I've failed to live up to the requirements of my conscience. While it may be true that "morality is a matter of geography," we're bound by the ethic of our societies and will inevitably feel guilty unless we honestly observe that ethic. For me, the restoration to sanity described in Step Two is contingent on honesty; any time I'm dishonest, it's a direct route to insanity and disintegration.

Today, I believe in God, the AA program, and the AA community. I could not separate any one of these from the others, because it's you men and women who have taught me the truths that transformed my life. Each time self-will gets me off the track, you put me back on course by showing me what needs to be done in the Steps. It's obvious to me today that the only way to feel right is to do right; but that knowledge alone would be insufficient if I did not have your continuing help in *living* what I have learned.

With limitless power and deceptive simplicity, the Twelve Steps outline the course to follow for freedom from guilt and release from the actions that create guilt. In the process, the program brings a life of wholeness, balance, and meaning. It gives me those things I always wanted, but could never find anywhere else.

Paul M., Riverside, Ill.

Making Amends

*Freedom comes with
facing problems fearlessly*

IN THE PROGRAM of Alcoholics Anonymous, Steps Eight and Nine suggest that, to attain peace, I must make a list of persons I have harmed and make amends to them. For some time, I neatly sidestepped the tough amends, saying, "The Step says, 'except when to do so would injure them or others.' Well, I'm 'others, aren't I? And some of the 'amends' would clearly hurt me, right?"

That is precisely the kind of thinking that prevented me from giving myself completely to this simple program. Angle-shooting and "cool" thinking kept me drunk for six years and, worse yet, let peace of mind elude me for over five sober years. Self-righteousness was blocking me from God's light.

After tenaciously holding on to my self-will until it about drove me insane, I faced the tough amends one by one. I owned up to stealing money via a padded expense account; I admitted character assassination that bordered on libel; I faced the Internal Revenue Service and other

creditors. The most difficult part was doing all these things while sober.

Today, I'm learning the freedom that comes with facing my problems fearlessly and without resistance. They are not all resolved, but I've done my part. God will take it from here.

There was one more act of amends — the hardest of all. After a few attempts at sitting down with my father, I was convinced I'd never be able to *honestly* complete this one. Each time I'd about get to the point of admitting I'd stolen from him, slandered him, hated him, and venomously resented him, my insides would go into knots, and unbelievable hostility would well up. My mind would flash to the years I spent fearing him, the bad things I *thought* he'd done to me, the ways he'd let me down as a father, and the unforgivable things he'd done to my mother while he was drunk. I simply was still hating him and didn't know how to deal with it.

A few months before my seventh AA birthday, I was alone, praying.

Somehow, the words "Our Father" clicked in my head. I'd been saying that prayer since I was five years old, without hearing it. "Our Father" means God to me, not my natal father. If God is our Father, He is then my father's Father, too, and we therefore are brothers. All of a sudden, I saw my worldly father as my spiritual brother, doing the best job he can with what he's got. It has been as hard for him as it has been for me. He's attempting to find happiness, just as I am.

I am very grateful I have found the program of Alcoholics Anonymous as a guideline to living. It has allowed me to learn that God, my

spiritual Father, is guiding me through today. With each living experience, I find that happiness and security come as a result of *working* this simple program.

The next time my dad and I were together, all the hatred and fear were removed. I reached out to him with love — without strings or reservations. It was like an inside shower. Today, we're very good friends. We don't need to either approve or disapprove of each other. Why do we have to put our parents in some un-failing, Godlike role? I'm so glad I've finally seen that we are both God's kids, doing our best each day.

Tom A., Laguna Beach, Calif.

*Others had something to teach us
but we just couldn't be bothered to learn*



Why Did We Stop With the Two-Step?

I REMEMBER how some of us learned to dance, in my early teens, before the onset of the drinking that was to dominate my life for some twenty years. That was back in the late 1940's, when we could still dance to Harry James, Guy Lombardo, Glenn Miller, and others who knew how to break our hearts while we suffered through puppy love.

No matter how awkward or backward we may have been around girls, there was one way we could get near them, close enough to feel them and smell their perfume: Without going through the agonies of asking that girl for a hug, we could ask her to dance ("touch dancing," of course, as the young people call it now).

First, though, we had to learn how to dance well enough to ven-

ture onto the floor at the local high-school gymnasium. We just knew that every eye in the place would be upon us. We just knew that if we didn't come across like Fred Astaire, our social lives would be smashed forever.

So we learned how to two-step. Remember? Two steps sideways, then one step back; two steps sideways and one step back . . . and you just kept it up while the crowd on the floor slowly revolved in a clockwise direction. For a while, this simple method was the panacea for all our social ills. Anybody could learn it! I did, in less than an hour, and it was all I knew about dancing until I dropped out in the third year of high school.

Some didn't stop there, however. A number of our classmates went on to learn more complex steps, more

fluid rhythms, fancier turns. More and more, the two-steppers were relegated (usually through our own resentment) to the sidelines, while the others got the dances . . . and the girls . . . and the enjoyment.

Two-stepping worked for a while, but then something went wrong. The dance turned sour; the music was no longer soothing; and we were left out. We began to turn bitter, to bad-mouth the dances and the dancers. Once in a rare while, someone would come to us to learn how to two-step. Usually, though, those who wanted to learn to dance would find people with something to teach, people who were able to demonstrate their knowledge when the PA system cut loose with "Serenade in Blue."

Looking back, I don't know why we didn't simply learn the other steps along with our schoolmates.

Why voluntarily cut ourselves off from knowledge that was there to be learned, practiced, and mastered? Who knows? — unless the reason was that, even in those early years, the alcoholic life-style was already building. It's likely that I learned the two-step because it could be done with little effort and public exposure on my part, and that I didn't learn the other steps because they came harder, because they required a certain amount of self-discipline and would have exposed me to initial failures and the possibility that "they" would gather around to "laugh at me."

Ultimately, I abdicated the dance floor to the "sissies" and concentrated on breaking bones on the football field and beer bottles in the farm field afterward, in company with a few of the "good old boys"

who banded together because they didn't fit into society, either.

I soon forgot about my two-stepping, because there were bigger and more spectacular failures ahead. At seventeen, I became a marine, and before I was twenty-one, I was staff sergeant. This success was somewhat overshadowed by a beginning nightmare: Before I turned twenty-one, I was something else — a full-blown alcoholic.

After six years, the Marine Corps and I were both anxious for me to move on. I did a little better in civilian life. In less than a year, I made it from factory to front office by stealing a home-study course in accounting and engaging in a lot of lying, cheating, and con artistry. Five months later, I was out on the street where I belonged.

Many alcoholics can do many things well. This is one of the hallmarks of alcoholism: an abundance

of talent drowned in an ocean of ethyl hydroxide. In the years following my stint as corporate accountant, I was electronic technician, salesman, high-steel lineman, electrician, punch-press operator, founder and bankrupter of three businesses, community school director, newspaper reporter, photographer, advertising specialist, graphic arts specialist, printer, publisher, welfare recipient, good husband and father (until they divorced me), jailbird, fugitive, unpublished author, unpaid artist, construction foreman, nice guy, good companion, liar, cheater, and always — boozier.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if eyesight was as clear as hindsight? Looking back over that list, I am impressed with one common thread running through it all. I learned every way there was to stay drunk, but I never learned any of those other things beyond the first few

steps necessary to pretend I knew it all. I've been a two-stepper all my life!

After all those years, it should have been impossible to learn how to do something — anything! — step by step. The last thing I'd expected to learn, completely, was a method of staying sober. Drinking was the one thing I could do well, the one area of my life I had retained throughout all the other changes.

AA was ready for me, though, when I finally became ready for AA. This is the one organization to which I am not a baffling riddle, but just another ordinary drunk. This outfit knew I had a lifetime history of learning "A" and "Z" and then setting myself up as an expert on the alphabet. AA knew I was the kind of guy who would (honestly) learn to ride a motorcycle on Monday and own three of them by Friday!

Yes, the AA people were ready

for me. When I got excited because I saw other drunks not drinking, they'd say, "*Easy Does It!*" or "Take it easy!" When I was ready to run out and tell the whole wide world about AA, someone gently held my belt loop and let my feet shuffle while he counseled, "One step at a time." When I began facing my past honestly and the truth began to shatter my serenity, they reminded me I only had to go one day at a time.

Some new words began to creep into my vocabulary: "I'm not sure. I don't know. Maybe. I'll try. I need help. Let go and let God."

My willingness — my desperate need — helped me to finally hear as other people told me that I had a lot to learn, that there were a lot of steps and stages to sobriety, and that I had all the time I'd ever need in this world — the rest of my life.

Only the love of God and my fellow AA members kept me from

carrying my two-stepping life-style into this program. What a temptation it is to (1) admit we are powerless over alcohol and (2) try to carry this message to alcoholics.

While sitting at meetings, I often hear people "read my mail" as they talk about their own impatience and the trials and troubles it brought them. Often, I hear members say things like: "Aw, I haven't done that Fourth Step yet—I don't know what kind of inventory they mean" or maybe "Make a list of everybody I harmed? I never hurt anybody but my drinking partners — and they had it coming!"

There is something about Steps Four through Ten that people would often rather avoid. That something is called "pain." There are two old, familiar ways to deal with pain of this sort: Pretend it isn't there so it will go away; or soak it in alcohol.

Pain isn't always something we should avoid. Enduring needless pain is wrong, but sometimes pain is a means of survival. It is the ache that tells us a tooth is bad; it is the agony that rushes us to the hospital before an appendix ruptures; it is the pangs that herald a baby's birth.

In AA, the pain we encounter when we grit our teeth and dive into an honest assessment of our own character is absolutely essential to our recovery.

Healthy pain, necessary pain, no matter how severe, always has one distinguishing aspect: We can take it, because we know it is for our

own good, because we know that without the pain, our mental or physical health would be in jeopardy.

While we were sick alcoholics, we couldn't face that sort of mental pain, because we were afraid of it. That's right — once we begin to recover, we learn that pain itself is never as intolerable as the fear of pain used to be.

That fear — not the pain — is what keeps us from Steps Four through Ten. We can handle the first three and the last two, because they don't demand anything from us. We only need to give up — something we'll admit we've done all our lives if we'll only get honest about it. True, we're giving up for the right reason this time, and to the right authority: God. But we are still avoiding pain because we fear it. In Steps One, Two, and Three, we're willing to let God take over, and we're willing to seek Him in Step Eleven and honor Him in Step Twelve. What we are *not* willing to do is get painfully honest and go after the awful truth we know is waiting for us in Steps Four through Ten.

Way back, when I learned how to dance the two-step, but refused to go beyond that point, it wasn't inadequacy that kept me from learning. It wasn't lack of opportunity, lack of teachers, lack of motivation. It was fear! Instead of making an honest effort to discover how well I could dance, I turned my back on the music. I was afraid to try!

Most of my life since then has been defeated by the same principle. Instead of facing the truth — the pain — I'd quit before I got started.

Thank God for the AA people who showed me how to grow out of my two-step approach. Two steps forward and one step back is a lousy way to go anywhere, except in a slow circle clockwise. Thank God somebody taught me how to twelve-step! Oh, I'm not all that good at it — that takes practice. But I'm trying! I've learned the twelve-step well enough that others, who can't "dance" at all, are coming to me to learn how — and that's what AA is all about. If someone sees, in my

life-style, something he can believe in to escape alcoholism — then, baby, I'm dancing the twelve-step well enough to have a ball!

There's some pain connected with the twelve-step: In the initial awkwardness, you get your toes stepped on, and you step on other people's toes. Maybe you even slip and fall, which is embarrassing, but not fatal if you get up and keep on trying.

But what a reward is in store for you the first time someone asks *you* to do the twelve-step with them, to teach them how! As you step out onto the floor you'll be hearing, if Mr. Lombardo will excuse me, "the sweetest music this side of heaven."

S. P., Rogers City, Minn.

Dry Drunk

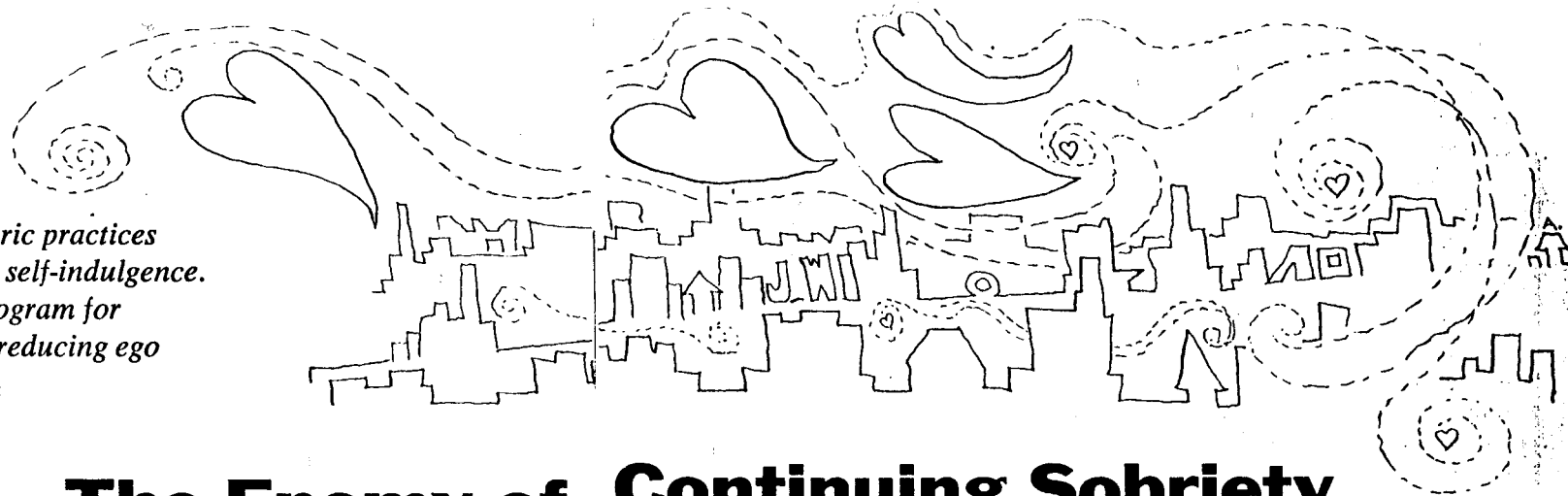
*It's a real and miserable condition, but relief
is usually only Twelve Steps away*

ON RARE occasions, one can bump into a happy drunk, but under no circumstances does one ever meet up with a happy dry drunk. A dry drunk is the alcoholic blahs. Or, as I have read somewhere, "It's a rebellion against living good by someone who is a failure at living bad."

Whatever it is or however it is described, the phenomenon known as the dry drunk can be as unpleasant for the afflicted and their families as the more easily recognizable, damp variety of drunkenness. The dry drunk can strike anyone (it's liberated) at any time. Only recovered alcoholics who refuse to take themselves too seriously are exempt. (Intense preoccupation with self and lack of concern with others seem to be the outstanding characteristics of the dry drunk.)

Sometimes, the condition disappears as mysteriously as it arrives. More often, sufferers eventually can't bear their unhappiness any longer, and look for ways to overcome it. Inventories, talking it out, and prayer are effective methods employed to sober up the dry drunk, but by far the most surefire tool appears to be working with newer members. There is a certain magic in helping these — the lifeblood of AA — realize what being an alcoholic consists of and what we can do about it. Explaining such things to others invariably brings back our perspective on our own condition and, along with it, brings a certain relief at discovering we truly belong in this Fellowship of nurturers, caretakers, and instruments of divine healing. S. K., Roseburg, Oreg.

*There are many esoteric practices
that lead us into self-indulgence.
AA is a program for
reducing ego*



The Enemy of Continuing Sobriety

SOME YEARS ago at a participation meeting, I heard a young man hold forth on “not going for this ‘Get rid of your ego’ stuff.” He was deliberately trying to build up his ego, develop more self-awareness, express himself, cultivate his own me-ness. I disagreed with and was made uneasy by this line of thinking. As I recollect, however, I felt it prudent not to take issue with the young man. We have many meetings in the area I live in, and I almost never visit the one where this heresy — as I considered it — was expressed. But a year or so later, in another group, I heard the same young man confide in a chastened manner that he had just come back to Alcoholics Anonymous after a prolonged struggle with drinking. To me, this confirmed my misgivings about

the self-developing, self-expressing course he had originally taken. Still later, I happened to be present at the meeting where he celebrated his first birthday. On that occasion, I didn’t hear a word about ego-building.

A currently fashionable phrase keeps popping up lately among the AA people I see: people-pleaser. Those who claim this designation are always “former” people-pleasers. Now they are pleasing themselves, thinking of what *they* want to do, and being “good” to themselves. One of the “former people-pleasers” blithely stated one evening at a meeting on the topic of tolerance that, since joining AA, she had learned to become *intolerant*; that is, she no longer had to tolerate anything she didn’t like.

Because I am inclined to be opinionated, always knowing best, I have restrained myself and forbore commenting too emphatically on the above-mentioned approaches to recovery from alcoholism. Occasionally, I get a dim glimpse of the possibility that I just *could* be wrong now and then. I was pretty sure, however, that the cases I have mentioned were not in tune with the basic program of recovery suggested by Alcoholics Anonymous. So I gathered up what humility I could muster and did a little research by rereading Chapter Five in *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the section on the Steps in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

This time, I found that I did happen to be right, that my recollection of the AA way was fundamentally

accurate. For, in the Big Book, self (or ego) is invariably presented as the enemy of continuing sobriety. “Selfishness — self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles.” On the same page (62), it is noted that we are cases of “self-will run riot.” On page 63, an example of how to take Step Three says, “Relieve me of the bondage of self.”

I refer the “people-pleasers” to page 61 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*: “He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. . . . The show doesn’t come off very well. He begins to think life doesn’t treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. . . . What is his basic

trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? . . . Our actor is self-centered — egocentric.” In fact, “doing for others” may be a form of domination — i.e., selfishness.

The Big Book doesn't fool around at way stations of subtle forms of ego-feeding. It goes straight to the source of our troubles: self-centeredness. In my opinion, that includes the stylish activity of “finding one's identity.” If I read our founders correctly, the message is: Don't worry about who or what you are; just seek to make contact with something greater than yourself. Most people call this “something” God, but it can be truth, beauty, love, natural forces, whatever you find in your search. Meanwhile, hold out a steadying hand to another suffering human being; and maybe, one day, you'll turn around and there you'll be — whoever or whatever you are. And by that time, you probably won't be very excited or even interested in making your own acquaintance. You'll just be somebody who's been there all the time.

When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, I didn't interpret what I read and heard from older members as advice to take a course of “finding myself,” “seeking my identity,” or being “good” to me. I'd already been doing all of that for over thirty years, a lot of the time with a thin-stem-

“What was the matter with me was simply self-centeredness.”

med glass gracefully poised in one hand as I developed my personality, expounded my convictions, and indulged my own “needs.” (Anything I wanted became a “need.”) Sure, I tried to please people — once in a while — but I knew what I was doing: Pleasing others was a way of getting them to indulge my whims and be nice to me; that, in turn, polished up my self-image of “What a charming girl I am!”

Right off, I got the message I have quoted from Chapter Five: What was the matter with me was simply self-centeredness. I don't say I understood the message thoroughly on the first reading, almost eleven years ago; and I can't say I wholeheartedly liked it; but I didn't really mind learning that the cause of my multitudinous psychological problems was so simple and so easy to comprehend.

The catch was that the personality and character defects stemming from this cause weren't so simple and easy to dispose of. I discovered the catch when I went at the task of ridding myself of them with the only methods I had previously known how to use — that is, by making up my mind to do better, by using will-power, by giving myself good talking-tos, by trying to keep sharp watch on my habits and thereby change them. Farther along in the book, however, I learned that our

forefathers in AA had found a better way: They prayed that their character defects would be removed — but first, they became *willing* to let go of the root of these defects, their self-centeredness.

Another catch is that one has to be “entirely ready” to have one's shortcomings removed; and this I've had some difficulty in achieving. I still frequently want my own way and am consequently blind to the needs of others at that moment, even though I *know* that this exercise in self-will can lead only to discomfort for myself, that only forgetfulness of self — the AA way — allows a person to function freely and happily.

Two years ago, at an AA regional conference, I dropped in at an Al-Anon workshop. The members were discussing a recent national Al-Anon conference recommendation that only literature approved by their conference should be on display or given out at Al-Anon meetings. It was not that Al-Anon has anything against other inspirational, spiritual, or therapeutic methods, but that Al-Anon has its own program of recovery, and that program is all it should try to offer the new or old member. If the discussion or the literature at Al-Anon meetings deals with other means of self-help, there are likely to be so many varying forms of therapy suggested that the new per-

son may become even more confused than he or she already is.

Here is the conclusion I took away from the workshop: Presenting the Al-Anon program is that organization's one and only modest aim. If, outside the meetings, anyone wishes to ply her (or his) friends with old or recent books, push her own religious or philosophical affiliations, or urge some particular brand of psychotherapy, she may hop to it; but during meetings, the Al-Anon program is all the group has to offer.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, I think we rather consistently do just what the Al-Anons were talking about: stick to the Twelve Steps. But occasionally one does hear remarks like those I reported at the start of this article. For example, transactional analysis is big in this area now, and we frequently hear references to the “games” people play. Existentialist philosophy was in style some years back; then Esalen-type groups were in. And the Synanon games had their day. Back in 1935, when AA started, psychoanalysis was big — if you could afford it. There were both scholarly and popular self-help books on the market, each with The Answer — by authors most people under thirty today never heard of.

I am not putting down the explanations of the human psyche presented by any of the groups or

literature I have mentioned. I am not even suggesting that many persons cannot get needed help from some or all of them — just as many may be helped by religions, whether their choice is Christianity or Hinduism. Neither am I denying that some persons may be so mentally deranged as to need crash treatment by qualified psychiatric personnel before they are able to grasp the meaning of the Twelve Steps.

Nevertheless, old Alcoholics Anonymous has gone right along, year in and year out, disregarding current fads, providing nothing but the basic and bluntly realistic message that it started out with. Let's face it — most of us, after we have been detoxified or the hangover has worn

off, are perfectly capable of taking in that message, even if we refuse, or are too weak, to act on it immediately. The AA program may seem simplistic to people who enjoy intellectualization or mechanistic "game" theories, and its diagnosis of selfish self-indulgence and "self-will run riot" as key factors in alcoholism may be distasteful. But if you want to get well *and stay well*, we have in AA an approach, a method, a therapy, that is different from and more effective than any other I have encountered in all my years of reading and studying in the field of psychology, starting long before Alcoholics Anonymous was born, and continuing ever since.

B. M., Saratoga, Calif.



Unfinished Business

*Working Steps
Eight and Nine
heals old wounds
and frees us
from guilt*

THE BIG kitchen window of the ninety-year-old house in which we live faces south, and the morning sunlight falls onto the stove and floor. A few months ago, I was standing by the window, looking at the vegetable garden, waiting for the coffee to boil, when Bill stepped out of our wine supply room, closed the door, and said, "Boy! We've used very little wine this past year."

I mentioned that when we had worked together in previous years, that was not the case. Then, I had drunk secretly but copiously from the church supplies.

Bill began recalling that, at the time of my drinking, he suspected something was wrong, but he did not know I had an alcohol problem. "The only indication I had that you were drinking was a telephone call I had one night from a widow and her daughter," he said. He gave the gist of a call he received from this confused, upset woman I had visited. Her husband had just died, and when I went to the house, I had examined bedrooms, sat with my foot on the upholstery, and asked questions about money. Later, she called Bill to check on me.

As Bill reminisced, my heart pounded, and a feeling of discomfort floated up inside me. I said to myself, "That's enough. Don't talk about it any more. Please stop. Please stop!" My cheeks burned.

For a few days after that conversation, I was aware that my feelings had been caught off guard. The memory of that particular instance of alcoholic behavior triggered

something upsetting to my spirit.

I began talking about the conversation and my disturbed emotions at discussion meetings and with sponsors. In about ten days, I started to understand that the discomfort I felt was aroused guilt. At a discussion meeting, someone said offhandedly, "Jim, here, still feels guilt and fear about what he did when he drank." Upon hearing that observation, I knew I had the problem isolated.

I was not sure what I could do about the truth that guilt was still with me, except to admit it, accept it, and continue to use the higher power in the Fellowship for guidance.

After a couple of weeks of talking to other AAs about uncovering this guilt, its makeup grew clear to me. I saw I had unfinished business with the widow and her daughter—and with many others. It was time to make a list of all the people I had harmed and realistically satisfy my-

self that I was willing to make amends to them.

Until my jarring conversation with Bill, my attitude toward past events in which I had taken advantage of, frightened, or hurt people in some way was a feeling of new goodwill toward them all, and I thought the memories did not bother me. Now, I learned that my generalized good intentions did not affect the guilt associated with specific individuals harmed by my drinking and my alcoholic behavior.

I made a list of all the people I could recall having harmed. Toward each person on that list, I set my mind to plan carefully and reasonably to make amends: to tell them I had received treatment for alcoholism and had been successfully recovering since; to tell them I wanted to straighten out my affairs; and to own up to having taken advantage of, manipulated, or hurt them in

some way. I would express my regret, apologize, ask their forgiveness, and also settle any financial claims or obligations for material damages I had caused.

It seems to me that sharing with these people the truth about my behavior and my efforts toward recovery is an offering to them that generates peace and heals old wounds.

Previously, not having specifically listed the people I had harmed, I automatically minimized the events and the emotional damage I suffered from alcoholic behavior. Now, however, my list has retrieved this ugly part of my disease from the recesses of my spirit and thrust it into the open. In the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have found courage to face it and energy to do something about it.

As I composed my list, I saw my guilt was extensive. The list has helped me become reconciled to the

reality of my alcoholic behavior. I have been able to accept the things I cannot change. Periodically, when a new entry for my list walks into my mind, I set aside time to deal with this person and get clear in my mind the amends I am going to make.

I don't feel that my growth from guilt to health is *exceptional* spiritual progress, but rather that I flat-footed my way through the problem into the solution. It was ordinary progress that thousands of us make. I knew that I was practicing the suggested AA way, and that it would pay off.

Often, during this spiritual progress, I didn't know what was happening to me. I simply hung on to and worked the program. Even though I didn't understand what I was experiencing, many in Alcoholics Anonymous understood quite well.

J. F., Ashland, Va.

Search for Spiritual Experience

As You Understand Him

I WAS TALKING to a prospective member the other day, and he objected to the religious aspects of AA. In the back of my mind, I groaned, "Oh, no—not another one." I smiled and was about to go into my routine about the difference between spirituality and religion, but decided against it. I am bored with that old song and dance.

"Tell me, are there religious people in the bars you frequent?"

"Sure."

"Not all your pub friends are religious—just some of them?"

"Yeah."

"Do you stay out of those bars because they are religious bars?"

He smiled. He had gotten the point. But it set me to thinking through this old complaint.

I am not frightened by the word "religion" any more. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives as

one definition of religion "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith." AA, along with many other modern movements or fellowships, could fit into that definition without stretching too many points. Many atheists I know are religious by that definition.

My former objections to religions were based on the need to "join" and what I saw as a tendency to exclude people. When I came to AA, I felt it was so loosely structured that the "joining" aspect was replaced by more of a "clustering" concept. And AA, with all its basic beliefs, still managed to be so all-inclusive of people, regardless of what or who they were, that before I knew it, I was inside looking out.

I feel we scare away people who want scientific approaches. Scientific approaches are based on observable, repeatable, predictable experiments. When it comes to alcoholism, AA has conducted more observable, repeatable, predictable, and successful experiments than anyone else.

Why, then, do we sometimes lose these pseudoscientists? We don't ask new people to signify that they are "ready" by changing their skin color, sexual orientation, language, or ethnic background, so why should we assume atheists and agnostics must always change their minds? This is exclusive thinking. Some of these folk come to believe in a higher power, but I venture to guess that some others come to believe *less* in mystical higher powers after years

of sobriety. Some even come to believe they were wrong all these years and there is no Higher Power, only logic. And AA is very logical.

Can we drop all prayers and references to Judeo-Christian ideas in order to become more inclusive? We could, but it would create problems. In becoming too broad and progressive, we just might be left with nothing people can relate to in society. Groups must explain their work with words and ideas that the minds of today can comprehend.

We pay much lip service to the idea that everyone can belong to AA. Some newcomers, however, get the impression that if they do not eventually conform, they will be lost or go crazy. Why does their individuality scare us? Why do we sometimes feel that this non-God minority is either unreal or not there? It is there, and perhaps it would be larger if nonbelievers knew they could comfortably belong.

I had no idea what I believed at the start. If I had been required to believe everything I read or heard, I would still be drunk. But so many people told me they felt the same way that I stayed around for another twenty-four hours. I felt comfortable after three months, because I saw the diversity possible in AA. I realize now that my own antireligious feelings were resentments, and AAs are masters at helping resentful newcomers.

But what about the newcomer who has thought it through and sim-

ply doesn't believe in God, and never will? If we slam into this person with a condescending smile, we may lose him. We wouldn't dream of telling a believer or religious person that he can be saved without all that voodoo. Why do we sometimes feel this approach is sound when we run into the free-thinker? The civil rights movement has sensitized us to the needs of many groups; why not the needs of atheists and agnostics?

I have seen some AAs sneer at agnostics or atheists and say, "Intellectuals have ruined many societies—don't be intellectual." The advice to utilize the AA program and not analyze it is sound. But I try not to come across as if I am telling the intellectuals to stop think-

ing. It infuriates them or makes them wistfully decide to go someplace else.

There is room in AA for different opinions.

I was warned not to be influenced by religious fanatics when I first came around. In twelve years, I have met one religious fanatic, and my main problem with him was that he was nice but very dull. Hardly a damaging influence. Incidentally, he had been sober a very long time, as have many agnostics and atheists. Happy sobriety, at that.

I heard somewhere that there are many paths up the mountain. I have taken one that works for me. There are certainly other paths for other people. Thank God—or whatever.

Anonymous, New York

We Made Our Own Fun

*Carrying the message
turned a vacation into
something very special*

WE FOUR couples, four AAs and four Al-Anons, had such a good time together at and after the AA International Convention in Miami in 1970 that we wanted to vacation together in September 1974. For no particular reason, we decided to go to the Caribbean and stay on Grand Cayman Island in the British West Indies. It is part of the British Commonwealth and a couple hundred miles south of Cuba.

The AA General Service Office informed us that the Grand Cayman Loner listed in the *AA World Directory* had been transferred elsewhere, and there was now no AA on the island. But, since we were an AA group and an Al-Anon group all by ourselves, we decided to go anyway.

When we arrived, we found that there wasn't much to do on Grand Cayman in the off season and that drinking was the major pastime of all the people, both the natives and the expatriates. The hotel where we were staying put on a free cocktail

party every Sunday evening, since drinking was the only social activity available on Sundays, with their blue laws. When we explained that we were members of AA and didn't drink, they had no idea what we were talking about.

No one knew about AA, except for a telephone voice at the police station, stating that "the AA" advertised in the weekly newspaper. Eventually, a trip to the station yielded an old issue of the paper with an AA advertisement and telephone number. With this number, we reached a gal who was trying to get her husband sober in AA, and she agreed to arrange an open AA meeting.

The next night, she picked us up and took us to the meeting, even though her husband, a policeman, didn't come. Of the other two alcoholics who showed up, one was "sober" six days — on pills — and the other was "sober" six hours. The spouses quite actively participated, and the result was too disorganized and filled with internal strife to become an AA meeting. Instead, we spent the time organizing an AA public information meeting for the following Friday night.

The next day, we got the local

paper, which had been publishing the AA advertisements free, to run an ad about our public meeting and invite all who might be "professionally or personally interested in the AA method of sobriety." A member of our group who was a physician went calling on some of the local doctors to obtain their cooperation and to invite them and their alcoholic patients to our meeting. We ended up with twenty-one persons in attendance, one of them being a nonalcoholic physician, and the majority being nonalcoholics concerned about the island's most common problem.

It seemed obvious that it was going to be easier to find nonalcoholics interested in spouses' or other relatives' sobriety than to find alcoholics interested in their own sobriety. So we wrote up, not only a newspaper report of our AA meeting, but an article on Al-Anon, and we announced both AA and Al-Anon meetings for the following week. The physician member wrote a separate article called "Alcoholism Is a Treatable Disease." The newspaper was happy to receive this material and published it all.

Meanwhile, we had begun to collect names of the most conspicuous drunks in town. Two of us made a "cold call" on the one with the worst reputation — Bobby, a twenty-two-year-old lad whose parents had both recently drunk themselves to death and left him a million dollars in a trust. We woke him up that morning

and three mornings thereafter. We never did get him sober, but we are sure he'll never enjoy his drinking as much again. And maybe some day...

Eventually, we were able to get to Fifi, and she came to our next meeting. She laughed a lot and told us how she had been thrown out of every bar in town. When we brought her into the hotel dining room after the meeting, the manager cringed, because he remembered how Fifi loved to hurl ashtrays in the bar. But he let her stay, and we all had an enjoyable evening.

By the time we left Grand Cayman, the policeman had decided to get sober; the man with six days had accumulated an additional two weeks; the doctors who had been great pill-prescribers were now quite aware of the dangers of giving tranquilizers to alcoholics; both AA and Al-Anon were on a weekly-meeting basis in a local church; the newspaper was anxious to publish all the information it could get on AA, Al-Anon, and alcoholism; all eight of us were still sober; and the manager of our hotel insisted on giving us free champagne on our last night there. We gave him one more lecture on AA and alcoholism and settled on free breakfasts the next morning instead. We all bet Fifi and Bobby will make it some day, and we all doubt that either we or Grand Cayman Island will ever be quite the same again.

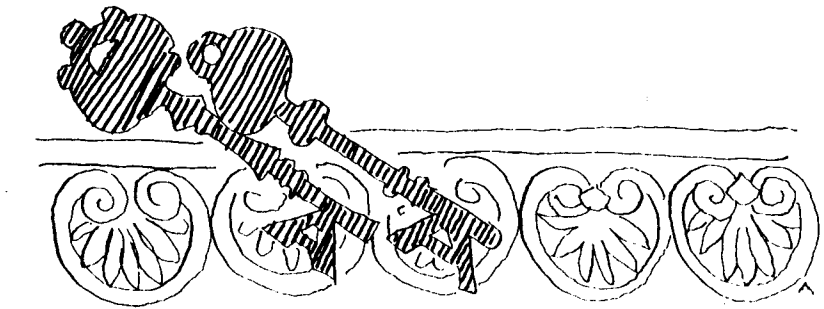
Four sober alcoholics, California

The Promise Fulfilled

THE WORDS of the Twelfth Step always used to stump me. Sometimes, I would imagine I had already had "a spiritual awakening" deep enough to change my life. But my life didn't change. My "awakening" didn't keep me steady, secure, and serene upon the AA road. What to do?

The last two years, I have actively sought to make this awakening a reality. Now I can look back and happily see that everything promised me in AA has come to pass and continues to be real, day in, day out.

The first step to continued sobriety was in gaining a true love of my Higher Power, whose name was



shortened to God. The major experience which opened my eyes to truth and gave me the grace to recognize the "cunning, baffling, powerful" enemy was in reaching a personal relationship with God.

One night in the club, I read a pamphlet that said God has ninety-nine percent of our partnership, and I've got one percent. I decided to try it, and it *worked*. It actually brought successful living. That's what I seek — the success side of the program. I've had enough of 24-hour failure. Now I'm getting 24 hours of useful living, because God uses me.

In place of insanity and instability, I now have peace of mind and deliverance from addiction. At present, I'm learning to be motivated by true values, instead of by money, prestige, or false pride. God motivates me. One of the quickest and easiest ways I've come to recognize God's will for me is by asking these three questions about any action of mine:

Does it glorify me?

Does it glorify God?

Is it true to the principles expressed in the Big Book?

If I can say "Yes" to the second and third questions, I go ahead with this assurance in my heart: If God is *for* me, who can be *against* me?

Through living by a moral code and cleaning up my thoughts, language, appearance, and *attitude*, I've come to experience the power of sanity. Good mental health has been the greatest blessing I have ever known in my whole life. It is so real, it can be seen in my smile. The greatest visual witness that AA works is the smile that's always in the corners of my mouth. Sometimes, I think my face will crack because I'm so happy! For a whole two years, I've gotten happier and happier.

The people I carry the message to can *see* the message when I laugh and my eyes sparkle. My heart sings. I'm a new person, a new creature. I'm writing a new chapter in my Book of Life. Thanks, AA!

C. B., Houston, Tex.

Self-Acceptance

*Through the Steps, we can learn to
stop putting ourselves down*

ALMOST EVERYONE I know has, in time, experienced some change in his or her thinking on the Steps. Nothing at all unusual about that. It's part of getting better. But little did I realize how very radical a change was in store for me, particularly with respect to the Fourth through Seventh "inventory" Steps.

Why take a personal inventory? Yesterday, I'd have had to grope for an answer, at least one that I found satisfactory. My uncertainty would have been understandable, since yesterday's point of view was essentially negative. It went something like this:

Step Four — "Stop kidding yourself, Buster. It's time you came to grips with reality. You're really not quite as good a person as you'd have yourself believe. So stop trying to convince yourself you are. Take an honest look at all that's basically wrong in your makeup. While you're at it, consider your assets, too — if you can find any."

Step Five — "I'm impatient, in-

tolerant, and so on. To sum it up, there's a lot that's wrong with me. And the worst of it is, I don't want to believe it."

Step Six — "I've done Four and Five as best I can, so I *am* entirely ready to have all these defects of character removed. At least, I *think* I'm ready."

Step Seven — "I'm really not sure why, but I'm awfully uncomfortable. I can't seem to do anything about it. Please, God, take it away."

At the time, I heard it said that the alcoholic doesn't put any value on himself, and I thought: Not so. I couldn't see that the truth of this statement was being demonstrated in my own self-rejection. My thinking had to change before I'd be able to do so. And that's just what happened in another encounter with Steps Four, Five, Six, and Seven. The end result was an entirely different point of view, one that's far more acceptable to me. Here's how I look at these Steps today:

Step Four — "It's time you

stopped putting yourself down. Basically, you're a *good person*. So stop trying to convince yourself otherwise. Take an honest look at the garbage you've been holding on to and recognize it for what it is — garbage, not *you*. While you're at it, consider all that's *right* in your makeup, and be grateful for it."

Step Five — "I've been denying my own worth. This is the exact nature of my wrongs."

Step Six — "I'm as ready as I can be today to value myself as a human being. But I can't overcome my negative thinking without God's help."

Step Seven — "Dear God, please help me to see me, to accept and be me."

From negative to positive think-

ing, but it didn't happen overnight. Getting there took time, effort, and some pain. It was well worth it, though. I finally had my answer to the question "Why take an inventory?" To be able to accept myself once and for all, that's why! As a result, I've little room for the old habit of self-rejection in my life today.

Of course, your own interpretation may be a far cry from either of these. That's fine. It is, after all, an individual program. The name of the game is using what helps us stay sober today. And while we readily share our views, perhaps one of the nicest things about the AA program is that we don't always have to agree with each other.

Dick C., Brooklyn, N.Y.

June 1975

Around the Tables

AROUND THE TABLES, I am learning each day to try to express in my daily living the principles which AA has given, not only to me, but to the world. I cringe when I hear references to "earth people" or "those out there," as though we AAs had some exclusive hold on sober, mature, serene concepts of living — and perhaps even more provincially, as though we were the only ones practicing such concepts. The mere reference to our fellow human beings as "them" damns the pretense.

I try, I really try, to put the Twelve Steps into practice. As sobriety matures, I find that the message can be carried in many sectors. If my sobriety is to have full meaning, I must *demonstrate* that mes-

sage, as Bill W. suggested.

This year, I started to read a page a day from *As Bill Sees It*, in addition to all the other AA material which forms a part of my daily life. On page 21, there is a portion of a letter written by Bill in 1959, and I think it is a text for the application of the AA principles:

"I just know that you are expected, at some point, to do more than carry the message of AA to other alcoholics. In AA we aim not only for sobriety — we try again to become citizens of the world that we rejected, and of the world that once rejected us. This is the ultimate demonstration toward which Twelfth Step work is the first but not the final step."

The Steps Are the Program

*Just as each of us is a totality,
and not a collection of related parts,
so each Step of the twelve
is connected to every other Step*

THE WORD "heal" means "make whole." The aim of AA is to help a shattered, fragmented human being find wholeness, direction, and freedom. This begins with release from our compulsion to drink and, through our use of the Twelve Steps, gradually moves into growing freedom from fear, depression, anxiety, and the overwhelming self-concern that characterized life before AA.

Ecologists hammer persistently at the theme that destroying the natural balance anywhere will have an effect, frequently adverse, somewhere else. Nothing stands alone. Our lives are not compartmentalized. Pollution in one segment of my life will poison another, seemingly unconnected area of my life. Failure to work *all* of the Steps will eventually create problems such as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom, and finally drunkenness.

While the scientific method has generated sweeping advances in technology, it has also created the trend toward fragmentation and re-

ductionism that continues today. Our ecological crisis is only one example of this unhappy legacy, which has resulted in a persistent inability to see the connection of one thing with another.

Dr. Barry Commoner, in his widely acclaimed book *The Closing Circle*, describes the problem this way: "There is indeed a specific fault in our system of science, and in the resultant understanding of the natural world. This fault is reductionism, the view that effective understanding of a complex system can be achieved by investigating the properties of its isolated parts." Commoner goes on to say: "[reductionism is] the dominant viewpoint of modern science as a whole. Reductionism tends to isolate scientific disciplines from each other, and all of them from the real world."

Commoner etches a disturbing picture of man's technology, which provides power without purpose, means but no meaning. Incapable of seeing the connection of one thing

with another, its hyperspecialization tries to solve problems without seeing either the real causes or the necessary solutions.

Loren Eiseley, the anthropologist who writes with a prophet's insight, carries the same unsettling message in *The Unexpected Universe*. Describing man's talent for creating difficulties for himself, Eiseley points out that each time science solves a problem, it creates two new ones. Like Commoner, he indicts reductionism and its accompanying fragmentation as the culprits.

In the 1950's, I worked on overseas construction jobs in Thule, Greenland, and Point Barrow, Alaska. I got to know some of the Eskimos in Thule and Barrow and spent some time studying their cultures. Like all nonliterate groups, they originally saw everything as a unity. Their families, friends, and work, the animals, the land, the sea, and God as they understood Him were all One. To the degree that they have been influenced by our tech-

nology and culture, that sense of unity has been shattered, and problems similar to ours have been created. As their culture fragmented, they became fragmented. Like many peoples in transition between two cultures, the Barrow Eskimos seemed to adopt the worst aspects of both.

During those years, my AA came primarily from the Big Book. Many times, I've seen in Chapter Five: "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program . . ." Is recovery simply not drinking? Not at all. Those early AAs, who understood so well the need for thoroughness, wrote on page 82: "We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough." With precise clarity, these same sober drunks defined our objective on page 77: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

In AA, we find some conven-

*"A fragmented program
will leave me
fragmented."*

tional wisdom that has flourished through the years, but, on examination, is seen to have absolutely no connection with the program. "There are no musts," for example. Despite the frequency of phrases in the Big Book such as "If we are planning to stop drinking there *must* be no reservation of any kind" and "We *must* not shrink at anything," we hear AAs declare there are no musts at all. In my experience, "There are no musts" only for those members who never bothered to find out what the program is really about.

Each Step of the twelve is connected to every other Step, and they work as a unity. With deafening consistency, we hear that these are "suggested" Steps. Again, nowhere do we read this in the Big Book. "Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery" (page 59). Totally different. What's suggested is a program of Twelve Steps. Used honestly and thoroughly, they provide precise results.

Certainly, it's my privilege to use part of them, none of them, or all of them. Regardless of my approach, I'm still a member of this Fellow-

ship. Tradition Three guarantees this. It seems to me that considerable confusion arises on this point, however. I don't have to do anything to be a member of AA. On the other hand, to follow the program and get the results it guarantees, there are a number of things I *must* do.

It's my right to use six of the Steps, three of them, or none at all, but what I have then is something other than the AA program. At that point, what I have is my own invention. It's a product of my own arrogant stupidity and my unwillingness, once again, to pay attention and follow directions. It's the kind of blindness T. S. Eliot must have meant when he observed, "Many people think they're emancipated when, in reality, they're only unbuttoned."

A fragmented program will leave me fragmented. Using part of the prescription produces inadequate results. "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program . . ." My life is a totality, and long ago it became obvious that it can't be compartmentalized. Dishonesty in one area creates problems in another area. Healing in one segment provides better health in another section. It *is* all connected. Each Step blends with another in an integrated, comprehensive program designed to transform you and me into human beings capable of willingly and joyously doing God's will.

One of the worst bits of advice I ever got was to work the first nine Steps *once* and then try to subsist on the last three for the rest of my life. That is simply another form of fragmentation. Redoing every one of the Steps provides results I never experienced with the other method. The demands of the program are simple, precise, and specific. The guarantees are equally precise and specific. Viewing each of us as a totality, rather than a collection of slightly related parts, the program speaks to our conditions wherever we are in sobriety. The Steps enable us to move from where we are within ourselves toward the place we belong.

Loren Eiseley once wrote of a Brazilian fish with a two-lensed eye. The upper lens examines the world of sunlight and air, while the lower inspects the watery depths in which the fish swims. Said Eiseley: "Now the fish, we might say, looks simultaneously into two worlds of reality, though what he makes of this divided knowledge we do not know. In the case of man, although there are degrees of seeing, we can observe that the individual has always possessed the ability to see beyond naked reality into some other dimension, some place outside the realm of what might be called 'facts.'"

Seeing my life with the "two-lensed eye" created by persistent work with the Steps, I can be at ease in the swiftly changing society where I make my living, because part of my vision is focused on the timeless

world opened to me by AA's eternal truths. AA works, but it does *not* work on my terms. A fragmented, "individual" program is destined to bring only partial recovery and leave me as bewildered and lost as my Eskimo friends in Point Barrow.

On the other hand, with lives grounded in eternal principles, "We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. . . . Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively

*"The demands
of the program
are simple, precise,
and specific."*

know how to handle situations that used to baffle us" (pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book). What happens outside me is far less important than what's happening inside. My being *does* attract my life; repeated work with each of the Twelve Steps generates changes within me that are reflected in improvements around me. Simple, but not always easy, the AA program gives me everything needed to become what I should be. Finally, there is no you or me or them. Everything *is* connected to everything else, and the salvation of each of us is linked with the salvation of all of us.

Paul M., Riverside, Ill.

The Twelve Steps

*Presenting a short, concise version
of each of the Twelve Steps as
one member experienced them*

1ST STEP

*We admitted we were powerless over alcohol —
that our lives had become unmanageable.*

ONE NIGHT, I won the raffle and, surely by the grace of God, chose the "Twelve and Twelve" book. Sober for a time, I had never given the slightest thought to the Steps. Hearing of them and seeing them on a printed card, I had sized them up as window dressing, something to give AA a good front.

Now I took the book home and at midnight started to look it over. Almost at once, the printed First Step told me that here was what I needed. AA changed in an instant from my mutual-aid notion to a thing without limit.

After I had read the First Step several times, the extent of my powerlessness began to dawn. An honest look at my years of unmanageable life was enough. It became possible to admit without reservation that

alone I was without the ability to control alcohol.

This was a gradual thing, but by the grace of God, I had two sponsors. Both were blunt and caustic at times, and I had known one of them for many years. For a while, I hated everything they told me, until at last honesty pointed out the reason for my resentment. It was this: When alcohol was the topic, they were always right and I was always wrong. Here was the beginning of wisdom.

I surrendered to the First Step. Now more than ever, I needed help and reassurance lest I sink into despair after the bleak admission, and flee into the night. There *had* to be help, and thanks be, a look at the Second Step brought a sliver of hope. I hurried to read every word.

2ND STEP

*Came to believe that a Power greater
than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

Something had to offer relief, a straw to grasp, a ray of hope. When I arrived at AA confused, weak, shaking, and far more ill than anyone could know, an old friend met me at the first meeting and at others on later dates. I believe now that the power then was love, concern, and constant encouragement from all sides. From years of heavy drinking, I was mokused, and it would be a long time before any clear thinking would be possible.

One thing I angrily resisted was the restoration "to sanity." This was offensive and insulting. Only after a lapse of time did one of my sponsors face me with the truth. By now, he felt I had cleared up enough to listen. (Later, he said he had feared that I would never be able to think

normally.) He faced me after a meeting one night and asked, "What are you resisting? Think back, then answer. Was your conduct rational when you were drinking?"

Slow in coming, the answer had to be "No." That one word opened the door.

It wasn't long before it became apparent that group and individual power actually came, *through* these two, from a still Higher Power. Now, I could turn toward the Strength, and try to deal with it.

Since my own will and life had been such a total failure, I had to find a pilot. But how? Then I looked at the Third Step, and it held out what I had to have, now, just as though a light had suddenly gone on. The light flashed "Start."

3RD STEP

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

A wide gap faced me as I moved to the Third Step. One and Two understood, now there was a vital question: how actually to turn my will and life over. Could a method be developed to change this from a pious wish to a working concept?

The answer took long searching. Never could this have been done quickly; as one friend says, "There's no instant AA." For some time, I had dreams of my Higher Power giving me impressive assignments: to head a great newspaper, run a big business, or be a top scientist. But with time (and a clearing mind) came the sure knowledge that if God had wanted me to do impressive things, He would have given me a springboard.

It was apparent that His will for me was to function by my very best striving, to do the simple things at hand one day at a time. I began to realize that I had never done this, even long before my first drink. A

4TH STEP

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Arriving at the Fourth Step, I needed time to understand what was wanted. No one suggested examination of conscience or mentioned sin. I finally realized that the goal was a

web of daydreams and conceit had prevented me from handling the tasks within my grasp and talents.

Recalling what the Rev. Sam Shoemaker had said about trying in a mature way to do what God wanted, instead of demanding outrageous gifts, I began to do better the drab duties surrounding me. In this light, the plain and homely areas of life steadily grew in meaning: to comfort a child or an adult, to scrub a burned pan or wash dishes. Boredom faded from routine tasks of my daily job and a host of similar items. At long last, serenity started to come.

I believe that doing the things at hand without any exact orders or hints from on high is turning my will and life over to Him. Tomorrow need not be tackled, yet. At peace with my Twelve Step purposes, I was ready to move on to the Fourth Step.

clear picture of my ethical condition, i.e., how I stood in relation to common standards for just and decent living. Meditation followed, and then a slow look back as far as I could re-

member, to about age five or six. Gradually came knowledge that all had not been as rosy as conceit had tinted it.

Youngest of a large and loving family, I had a natural slant toward self-will that increased with the years. There were soft spots in me that had set me up as a possible alcoholic long before the first drink. Gradually, I began to see myself in a new light, not as a golden boy, but as a stained, gray, gloomy figure.

The truth became clear — here was someone proud to a painful degree, often angry, lazy, self-indulgent, prone to daydreaming, bitter instead of thankful for great gifts, greedy, seizing anything as my right, and so on. The list was long, and the picture grew darker.

One thing kept hope going. I re-

5TH STEP

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Here I was at Step Five, carrying a burden too heavy to handle without help. Could it be made light or taken away? Or might it crush me, as spiritual weight can do? The only course was to follow the Step, and this was done in the exact order written.

First, the admission to God was done in the places I love best, where I feel most serene — at home and walking the beach nearby. The refuge of home and the music of wind

called what the Big Book said about taking inventory to find the facts about a business. So I knew that any assets should be listed, too. There were some: skills and confidence in my line of work, good education, a cheerful disposition (if I could revive it), many friends who had helped and would help again, and physical health despite the bottle years. These things were lifelines eagerly grasped.

Nonetheless, what had started in a shallow way became a well of sadness. Near a breaking point, I looked up. If ever salvation appeared when needed, there it was: the Fifth Step and hope — hope of being honest with the Higher Power and myself, and of escaping an awful burden by admitting to a fellowman the exact nature of my existence.

and waves enabled me to speak more clearly, first to God, then to myself. This was done mostly aloud, since it felt more direct and open, and was done in solitude. It prepared me to face another human being in the third stage.

The choice was made with care — an AA member of long standing, middle-aged, calm, and sensible. We sat in a room with closed doors. He half-faced me, looking directly at me only when speaking of his own or

my experience. There was no advice, no admonishing, no correcting. Most of the time, he said nothing. I tried to tell the truth. Finally, I fell silent. He asked, "Do you think that does it?"

"It's the best I can do today" was the reply.

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and said, "Let's take a walk." We passed a field, a church, houses, and then a park. It was peaceful, and we sat on a bench for a little

while. Then we shook hands and parted.

My feeling was one of utter freedom — no elation, no high, no pink cloud. Something dark and grim simply had left me — forever, I trust. At peace with myself for the first time in my life as I remembered it, and with my feet firmly set on the good earth, I was ready to make peace with my Higher Power. The Sixth and Seventh Steps were there, where and when I needed them so much. Gratefully, I moved ahead.

6TH STEP

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Vivid in my mind were the defects identified in the Fourth Step and exposed in the Fifth. Pride, greed, anger, and sloth came first to mind, maybe because these are spiritual in nature. Did my turning to them, so quickly, in itself spotlight major defects? Did sloth make it seem easier at first glance to face these five? Did pride make me want to attack things which others could not see, criticize, or, worst of all, scoff at?

How about lust and gluttony? These sensual defects, which involve strong appetites of the flesh, I tried to push to one side. Then I remembered: When Augustine was a swinger (before he became a saint), he, too, must have been facing a sort of spiritual Sixth Step when he pray-

ed, "Lord, make me chaste — but not just yet."

It wasn't easy to become "entirely ready" to work against all defects. But a detour now could have meant drunkenness; and by the grace of God, we know that AA asks progress, not perfection.

Soon, I knew that success with the Sixth would come the instant I started to do the best I could today with the seven deadly character defects, which include all possible flaws. Once this point was reached, there came a feeling of confidence and hope. Now I could stride on toward the love of God in the Seventh Step. Once more, the next Step waited exactly when and where it was needed.

7TH STEP

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

A satisfied sigh came as I faced the Seventh Step. It had taken work to get this far, and now *Easy Does It* seemed in order; after I had asked humbly, I could leave the rest to Him.

I sat back and waited for the flaws to vanish. These had been found and detailed in the Fourth Step and admitted in the Fifth to get a burden of sadness off my back. In the Sixth, there had been a struggle — slowly won — to be entirely ready to have the Higher Power remove all these flaws.

But now as I waited, relaxed in the Seventh mood, nothing happened. This continued until a question

shaped itself: "Must God do it all?" Thinking and reading followed, and I chanced on a story of St. Francis, working in a beautiful monastery garden. A passerby said, "You must have prayed very hard, to get such lovely plants to grow."

The good saint replied, "Yes, I did. But every time I started to pray, I reached for the hoe."

Here was the simple answer to the Seventh Step. As soon as my "Wait" was changed to "Dig!," progress started. Soon, a little success was sensed on what has to be a lifetime job.

Confident and steady now, my foot reached upward for the Eighth Step.

8TH STEP

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

In the first five Steps, I had begun to get square with myself; in the Sixth and Seventh, with my Higher Power. Now it was time to get square with the world about me — the world I had kicked in the face for some twenty years of drinking.

I had done this Step before, but once-over-lightly, and it called for a careful approach this time. So, just as suggested, a list was made, and

a new effort to be ready to make amends to all. It wasn't easy. No one likes to eat crow; that takes humility, a grace I am far from gaining yet. I balked.

Then words from the chapter on the Ninth Tradition came to mind: "Unless each A.A. member follows to the best of his ability our suggested Twelve Steps to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death

warrant.”

There was no space for dodging, and only one road — straight ahead. The long list was written — firmly.

9TH STEP

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

This was a Step feared in advance, like the Fifth. And like the Fifth, it proved not only simple and easy, but deeply rewarding.

As I studied my list, I saw many names of people gone from my sight and hearing. How could anyone make amends to the dead? The problem took more meditation until a clear belief was reached. It was this: that the only possible way to make amends to those out of reach by human means was to live each today as they surely would have wished — soberly, sensibly, and kindly, doing well the great or simple things that came to hand.

As for those still here, there weren't so many. They included mostly loved ones, since it was largely these I might have hurt, kinfolk or not.

10TH STEP

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

This pilgrim's progress seemed good. Much had been covered, one day at a time. Now common sense indicated that to keep all this would call for repetition, a little at a time,

I was ready, and again the next Step waited in the wonderful sequence that can guide anyone on the same journey.

Most of the others couldn't have cared less. You don't really have the capacity to hurt the fringe persons. You can anger, irritate, or annoy them, but not hurt them.

The few I had to approach didn't want detailed amends. One old friend, a businessman I had hurt to a considerable degree, brushed me off with a smile. "All anyone ever wanted was to see you sober, Bill, and getting along like other folks." So the Step I had feared was easy after all.

Happy and secure now, square with myself, my Higher Power, and the world about me, I knew it was time to pause and sum up. How could I retain on a daily basis these conclusions that had been reached? Again, the Tenth Step was exactly where needed, and I stepped ahead.

so that all knowledge gained would stay fresh in my mind until it became as natural as breathing. One great danger was plain: backsliding. It's human to forget, and quickly.

The Tenth offered a way to keep all the Steps fresh, just as a shirt must be washed and ironed regularly to be at its best.

There started what I trust will be another lifetime duty. To keep the First Step sharp, I had to keep scanning my own life record, not sadly or morbidly, but honestly and without sticky emotion. For the Second, I had to remind myself of my own total failure until the Higher Power entered my life.

For the Third, I had to ask myself whether I was demanding that God do tricks for me, or whether I was trying to do the simple things

11TH STEP

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

For some time, "conscious contact" seemed obscure. How could one see an invisible light, or touch the dawn, or feel a moonbeam? At last, my mind cleared. I had been thinking of human contact, instead of a touch of the spirit.

An AA friend had told of rising early before work, to have a time for meditation when his home was quiet and he was alone. His method became mine, and I extended it to any few minutes when silence and solitude offered a chance to reach toward God. Soon, there came brief intervals when contact seemed very real, though there was neither sound nor touch.

He obviously wished. Fourth, I had to keep the spotlight on my whole picture, allowing no shadows to hide the sweepings. Fifth, I had to admit these to God and to myself, and when necessary, to another.

Sixth and Seventh: Turn to the Light with complete trust. Eighth and Ninth: Harm no one, and be ever ready to make corrections.

If I could do all this in the Tenth, I'd be ready to look upward. And this was not merely a wish; it became a growing necessity. Once more, the next Step waited, just as had the others, and I reached out with both hands, and with my heart.

Just about this time, I suddenly recalled a beautiful old prayer, after long forgetting it. It had been told to me by my one-time pastor, a great man. The prayer said to God, in part: "Please be above me and beneath me, around me and within me, all my days and nights. Amen."

Here was a concept of God that I could understand, after a lifetime of seeking in vain — not as Someone far off, but as a Being surrounding and filling every bit of me, and ready to help the moment asked.

Now I knew that God was with me. No longer did I doubt that, if I stayed close, a knowledge of His will would come (though I had doubted

all other good things that came my way). The power to carry His will out would be there to the full degree earned. There was no need for

questioning or worry. Somehow, the invisible light could be seen, and the glorious Twelfth Step beckoned me on.

12TH STEP

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

It is as difficult to describe a spiritual awakening as it would be to tell of a lovely flower by means of a logarithm. Sometimes, there are no words, only feeling.

But suddenly, I rejoiced that I was an alcoholic and that being so had brought me to AA. Deeply sorry for the harm done, I still know that if it had not been thus, even if I had never encountered alcohol, I would have lived and died like a vegetable, with never a glimpse of the incredible world of the spirit.

Until I can say and do no more, my prayer is to be allowed to tell all

this good news to alcoholics and to others, by word, by action, by example. And this last way is the most effective of all.

In my drinking days, I was a seven-day, around-the-clock toper. Now I know that in the Twelve Steps and especially in the final phrase, "in all our affairs," I have something to fill each day of my life just as completely, around the clock.

All I need do is listen a little, read a little, do a little, and think a little.

In all history, was there ever such a bargain?

Bill C., Hull, Mass.

The Fourth Step to Self-Discovery

Inventory-taking can pay big dividends

IF I HAD to name one factor that distinguishes the AA member who is truly sober from the one who is merely dry, I would choose self-discovery.

Most of us come to the program not knowing who we are. Without booze, our grandiose self-perceptions fall flat, like bubbles in stale champagne.

Perhaps the first thing we find out is who we aren't. This is "ego deflation at depth," and whether it happens in the last stages of drinking or in the first few weeks or months of sobriety, it's an earthquake jolt! The ground you had thought was solid may crumble under you, leaving you standing naked on a barren landscape. One AA member says she "felt like a peeled onion."

My entire previous life seemed rolled out before me, and suddenly I saw right through it. I could see the seamy side of every relationship I had ever had, the shallowness of

each so-called accomplishment. The jobs I had held, the names I had dropped, the love affairs I had gloried in—all added up to the zero that was me. I wanted the earth to swallow me up.

I was ready to be reborn. But in writing off the experience of half a lifetime, I very nearly "threw out the baby with the bath water." Taking my inventory in that early, hazy sobriety, I decided I was an insignificant nothing. My outstanding character defect was a false pride that had stalked my every move since I could remember. This defect was so glaring that I could see nothing else.

Fortunately, I had—just barely—taken Step Three. So, instead of committing suicide, I turned the whole mess over to my recently discovered Higher Power, whom I wasn't at all sure about yet. It worked—and I am, at this writing, in my fourth year of contented sobriety.

*"... some of my liabilities,
with modification, could
actually become assets!"*

If I took my Step Four inventory too early, at least I learned what my major character defect was, so that I could ask God to remove it. I also learned that my first inventory did not have to be my last. Like some of the early AAs, I found I could profit by taking my inventory once a year.

To me, this makes sense. If we are growing and changing constantly in this program, it's reasonable to take a breather at intervals and set down on paper: (1) our strengths—the attributes we can use to propel us ahead; (2) our weaknesses—those stubborn qualities that are holding us back; (3) the qualities that we want to ask our Higher Power to help us acquire in some small measure.

The interesting part is that, in my second and subsequent inventories, I found strengths I had had most of my life, but had not recognized during the first inventory. I found I had been using them on the program without realizing it. And I thanked God again that I had not followed that first impulse to check out of this world. How could I have even considered it? Sober, I was worth something. I was now part of the solution,

not part of the problem.

The first AA inventory is necessarily linked with Step Five. To me, it is only the beginning. Part of our spiritual awakening takes place when, with the help of God and another human being, we face ourselves as we really are, and expose the skeletons in our closets to the light of day. Done thoroughly, this is an experience we need go through only once.

But, while some are content to let Step Ten take care of personal inventories from that point on, I have found it useful to approach mine every spring from a fresh viewpoint.

The second time I took my inventory, I made an amazing discovery. Some of my so-called assets, if carried to extremes, could turn on me and become liabilities. And some of my liabilities, with modification, could actually become assets!

For example, perfectionism, a typical alcoholic quality, surfaced on my second inventory. On reflection, I could see that this trait wasn't all bad. It needed only to be modified, not wiped out. Just a little hanging loose and letting go could make all the difference. I need not ask God to remove it completely, as I had the false pride—just to help me get a perspective on it. There's nothing harmful in wanting to do things right—only in expecting too much of oneself and others.

On the other hand, persistence, which I had listed as an asset, had worked against me rather than for

me when carried to extremes. I could see, when I got it down on paper, that I needed help with it as well. When should I persist in a particular venture, and when would it be better to give it up and turn it over? I decided to relax my hold on this trait, as I asked for guidance for the coming year.

On the third inventory, some unlovely traits surfaced that I could have sworn I didn't have. One of them was envy. At first, I denied it. Then I had to acknowledge it. Then I began to chuckle. Was this to be a never-ending process? I wanted to look at my present life as a beautiful green lawn, and there were those gol-darned toadstools — my character defects — still popping up here and there! I had to laugh at myself.

"We are not saints," I muttered, and said aloud, "Thank God!"

We are human beings who inhabit this earth for oh, such a temporary time. If we can learn to know and like ourselves — and yes, with the help of a Higher Power, to change — daily living can be an exciting adventure.

The first inventory is necessarily painful. But subsequent inventories can be fun, creative and enlightening, like putting together the pieces of a puzzle.

How can we possibly take Steps Six and Seven — ask a Higher Power to remove our defects — until we know what they are? I don't know about yours, but mine change from one year to the next, as I go on in

this program. To me, that's growth — the fact that this year I'm working on defects *different* from last year's!

The effects of an AA inventory usually will not be felt or seen immediately. True character change, or spiritual awakening, is a gradual process. Putting our positive and negative traits on paper is the start. It sharpens our awareness of reality, brings into focus our perspective of ourselves, and helps us become willing to change.

Taking Step Four more than once in a lifetime may seem like a lot of work. It needn't be. The subsequent inventories fall into place almost by themselves when one has a base from which to operate. The pain and confusion of the first inventory are not necessary ingredients of later ones.

Only when we know who we are can we move forward in this program. If we *don't* move forward, we may find ourselves slipping back into the old ways of thinking and living. We talk about lifetime maintenance of sobriety, but mere maintenance is not enough for the program itself. AA is a program of action, and the action takes place through the use of the Twelve Steps.

Inventory-taking can pay big dividends. Not only can it protect our sobriety, and indeed, our very sanity, but over a period of time it can result in that incomparable reward, the joy of self-discovery!

S. H., Bellevue, Wash.

August 1975

Wait till they come to us?

From Kirksville, Mo.:

I was told early in my AA life that, in making a Twelfth Step call, I should get my "pigeon" to talk about himself. Also, I have learned that the alcoholic may be helped before he loses all. I thought, as I had been told by many AA old-timers, that we should not try to help the alcoholic until he asks for help.

Bill W. did not wait until Dr. Bob came to him — he went to Dr. Bob,



and as they talked, the doctor became convinced that he had a problem and that there was a solution. Many people may learn early in life that they have a drinking problem if someone — an AA member or a professional — explains alcoholism to them. As Father Joe says in his film "Chalk Talk on Alcoholism," if the alcoholic doesn't know he has a problem, it is the responsibility of someone to make him realize it.

J. B. C.

A Twelfth Step Call

*"It" was upstairs in a back bedroom,
bleary-eyed and shaky*

I MADE MY first Twelfth Step call shortly after I joined the program. I had been around long enough to be riding on my own little pink cloud, and my halo was very becoming. There was a new television set in our home, and I was enjoying Milton Berle when our local AA central office called and asked me to run down a request for help in a neighboring community. The weather was miserable, so I thought some company would help. I called a fellow member, who also had not been in the program too long.

"Gee," he protested, "I'm watching Milton Berle. These drunks can always pick the wrong time! I'll stop by for you in ten minutes."

It took a little time to find the house. When we did, we noticed that it was completely dark except for one room on the first floor,

where light was trickling through a drawn shade. We tapped gently on the door, so gently that one would think we were about to attend a wake. The door was opened quickly by a large woman who had the worn look of an alcoholic's wife. She motioned us in. "*It* is upstairs," she announced in a voice that immediately conveyed who wore the pants in the family.

We followed her upstairs to a back bedroom where "*it*" lay, bleary-eyed and shaky. "Here's a couple of guys from Alcoholics Anonymous that want to talk to you!" she announced triumphantly. Now we knew who had made the telephone call to the central office.

We introduced ourselves and settled down to corner our prey. My companion fired the opening guns. In detail, he related what booze had

done to him, how he had lost his wife and his job, wrecked his car, etc., and why he was now enjoying a new life. His wife was back, and he had a good job, all because of Alcoholics Anonymous. He was telling it as it was and doing it superbly. Even I was reassured that I had made the right decision when I joined AA.

Then there was that moment of awful silence. The four of us looked

at each other. I thought it was time I contributed something to the cause. "You know, this is a voluntary program," I tossed in for "*it*" to mull over. More silence. Our prospective member didn't utter a word. He had that "Just get out of here so I can snatch a drink" look.

Suddenly, the wife pointed a menacing finger at "*it*," looked at me, and shouted, "Don't worry! I'll see that the s.o.b. volunteers!"

P. W., Clearwater, Fla.

My Name Is Frank . . .

And today I am an alcoholic

TODAY, I'M an alcoholic, but I used to be a boozehound. That's what I called my father when he drank. We had all the scenes in the house, the beating-up of the wife and kids, and I hated him. When he died, I was glad he was dead.

When I came to AA and found out what was wrong with me, I also found out what had been wrong with him, and one big hate in my life was removed immediately. Now I can see that in the worst hours of his drinking, he at least supported his family. I did not support my family. I must always remember that!

I drank when I was in high school, and I liked to get drunk. Somehow, I don't think that's quite normal. I got out of school and got a job and soon started drinking with the boys at lunch and after work.

There are those who say that the alcoholic suffers from emotional problems and that alcoholism is just a symptom of these other problems. I guess there's proof of that in my case. In 1952, the Korean War came along, and I decided to be patriotic and joined the Marine Corps. To-

day, I know this: You have to be emotional to join the Marine Corps.

Things went pretty good for me in the Marine Corps. After a couple of years, I had a little rank and responsibility. The psychiatrist tries to explain what happens to the little guy when you give him power. I don't know what you would have done, but I went berserk. I ran things strictly by the book — no mercy for anyone. I even went to the extreme of restricting my buddies so I could get their passes. The troops saw me get mine, though. With only two months to go, I drank myself out of the Marine Corps and into a chain gang in North Carolina. It was very depressing there. They made you work in the hot sun for ten hours a day.

During this time, my wife had our first baby, and I was not with her as I should have been. To this day, I have not told my twenty-one-year-old son that I was in jail when he was born.

Like any other guy getting out of jail for the first time, I said to myself, "Nothing like this will ever happen to me again. I'll settle down, get

a job, and play it cool." Looking back, I notice I made no resolutions about booze.

In 1956, at the age of twenty-six, I got into AA, by some miracle. At that time, I only did one thing right — I asked Hank to be my sponsor. I can't imagine how a guy with my ego was able to do that. Who knows what it takes for one guy to say to another, "Will you be my sponsor?" Courage? Guts? Most likely, it's the grace of God.

I've had all the outward troubles a guy can have. I don't enumerate them to prove to you that I'm a real alcoholic and you'd better listen to me. As a matter of fact, I wish these things had never happened to me. They made filling out job applications downright embarrassing. At any rate, things like car wrecks, lost jobs, being falling-down drunk in the street, getting kicked out of bars, overnight stays in county jails, and longer stays in prison all happened to me.

Yes, I can say I had all of the outward symptoms of the alcoholic. But one of the last things I was able to admit was that booze affected me the most mentally. I thought I had a brilliant intellect, but I was affected mentally, and here's proof.

I was sitting home one night with a bottle, watching TV with one eye closed, and saying something like this: "Life is lousy. Everything I try turns rotten. Nobody loves me." I decided to commit suicide, and I'd no sooner thought of it than I

grabbed a razor blade. I had intended to slash my wrists, but I knew that would be messy. So I closed my eyes and slashed my hand in a few places, and I went to the nut house for the first time. It was depressing there, too. A lot of crazy people were running around the place.

I got out of the nut house after ten days, but I hadn't learned anything. A couple of months later, I was back in the living room with the bottle, saying the same things to myself. This time, I decided to freeze to death, so I went outside in my underwear and lay down in the snow. I was saying to myself, "From all I've ever heard about freezing, there's no pain. It gets a little cold, but you fall asleep and your troubles are over forever."

The next morning, I woke up warm and cozy in my own bed, and I thought to myself, "Look at this! Things aren't so bad. She must still love me, because she came out and got me." I soon found out I had come in myself, and I went to the nut house for the second time. I ended up going there five or six times altogether, and I'm almost convinced today that it was due to booze.

My sponsor Hank must have had some faith in me. Once, I got three months of sobriety together, and

“If I really have to do these Steps, I’ll surely fail.”

Hank asked me to speak at an AA meeting at the same nut house where I had been a patient. I thought this was kind of dramatic — the ex-patient returning to carry the golden message of AA to the still sick and suffering alcoholic. I was the closing speaker — I thought that added something. I told the patients, nurses, and visitors how they should stay sober and work the program. I guess I didn’t listen so good myself, though. I got drunk that night and was a patient there myself the very next day. Wouldn’t you have been embarrassed? I sure was!

By another miracle, I got back to AA in the hospital the next week. This time, I wasn’t the big-shot speaker from the outside, all dressed up. This time, I was the patient, dressed in patient’s rags. One wise guy, who had been there the week before, came up to me and asked, “Say, don’t I know you from somewhere?” I told him what he could do.

A while after that, I’d had several months of sobriety when I got a call from a guy in Boston who was on a drunk. If only I would come and rescue him, he said, it would save his job. I had a job, too, but I didn’t think of that. I told my wife I’d be back in a couple of hours. I didn’t get back for seven months! I went prospecting for gold in Bozeman,

Mont.

I was willing to leave my family. Not one bit did I care whether they ate or had a place to stay or had any money. No, I didn’t care whether they lived or died once I picked up the first drink. I must always remember this.

I fooled around with AA for a total of four and one-half years before I surrendered. If you were to ask me what big trouble it was that brought me to my knees, I’d have to answer that I don’t know. But somewhere along the line, I did learn something.

In the beginning, I breezed through the Twelve Steps in one evening and told my sponsor Hank that I had done the Twelve Steps, and too bad that there weren’t twelve more, because I could do a nice job with them, too. But my real feelings about the Steps were more like this: “If I really have to do these Steps, I’ll surely fail. This AA is too tough an outfit for me.” When I looked at the Steps seriously, they seemed to have a steely hardness.

In the end, I knew that I didn’t have to do the Twelve Steps to perfection to get the peace and serenity that the old-timers talked about. All I had to do was try! And in the very trying, the program started to work for me.

Frank B., Norwood, Mass.

Finding a God of Our Understanding

THE FIRST time I made the feeble excuse that maybe I was having difficulties with the Twelve Steps because I was an agnostic, a member said, "You still have a choice."

"How so?" I puzzled.

"You can be either a *sober* agnostic or a *drunk* agnostic."

I learned then, as a newcomer, that I'd get all the answers I'd ever need about the Higher Power — if I listened well. I was told, "Did it ever occur to you that if God wanted man to talk more than listen, He'd have given us two mouths and one ear?"

If I was to listen, I'd have to heed the "Keep coming back" advice. That requirement, too, was emphasized. Someone said, "You know, we keep telling beginners to keep coming back so they can see for themselves what happens to members who stop coming back."

I suppose that more newcomers have trouble with "the God bit" than with any other phase of our program. It need not be, if we notorious demanders of "instant success" would only believe others when they tell us that AA works slowly, but surely. Fortunately, I've

*An agnostic
reviews the stages
by which he
came to
believe*

kept coming back, ears cocked for answers.

Once, I reported that I had come to AA as the result of a series of incredible coincidences. "Hmmm!" mused one long-time-sober friend. "Quite a fancy way to say 'Higher Power,' ain't it?"

During the height of my cobwebby-brain thinking, I mumbled something about having trouble *understanding* God. Came the answer: "If God were small enough for man to fully understand Him, He wouldn't be large enough to give us what we need."

But how does a reluctant believer find God?

They told me, all right. "First try



seeking. The (c) of the familiar 'three pertinent ideas' in the Big Book says 'That God could and would if he were sought.' Finding may be as simple as the act of seeking."

Later, there was added assurance, spoken from the podium. "The nearness of your Higher Power is no more than the fifteen or so inches from the brain to the heart. A Higher Power must be felt emotionally, as well as believed in intellectually."

One evening, a conclusion rang loud and clear to me when I realized that merely wanting, wishing, desiring a Higher Power could be strong enough. A member told how he had

fought to find and accept while all alone, far into a night. "All at once, I heard myself asking, 'Do you *want* there to be a God to whom you can go for help?' How quickly and simply came my answer. Of course, I wanted that. In really *wanting* Him, suddenly He was found."

Then there was the member who smiled his way through a story. His sponsor, twenty-five-years-sober Pete, described his God as a close personal friend, with whom he talked earnestly when problems arose. The member told me how he, too, had sat in the dark alone till 2:00 AM, strenuously searching. "Finally, I slipped to my knees and said, 'Look, God, I want to say

something. My sponsor, Pete, tells me 'You're a friend of his. Well, anyone who's a friend of Pete's, I'd like as a friend of mine.' That did it!"

According to the Eleventh Step, we in AA pray and meditate. Doesn't that take practice? Isn't prayer something that comes from experience? When I wondered how a novice like me could go about so important a project, one who knew my story replied, "You've already had a prayer answered. You said that you came to AA wanting to quit drinking more than anything on earth. A sincere wish can be a prayer."

The prayer of the sick drunk usually is desperate, while sober alcoholics pray through gratitude for guidance. I heard the contrast summed up this way: The sober alcoholic wakes up and says, "Good morning, God," but he used to pry his eyes open and greet the day with the groan "Good God, morning!"

Too often, drunks cry out for help while lying helplessly on their backs. I was advised, "Try praying while on your knees, and discover how hard it is to be arrogant in that position." So simple an attitude will bring the vital quality of humility, which makes us teachable.

An answering voice somewhere later added that the knowledge of God's will and the power to carry it out, for which we humbly pray while on our knees, will benefit nobody unless we put it into action when we get back on our feet.

Learning to pray, another AA suggested, can start with thinking good things for those whom we think we resent. "Love merely is wishing others well," a woman member said. "The greatest wish we can have in AA is continued sobriety, a day at a time. We wouldn't wish our worst enemy another drunk." So came the realization that we can *love* someone without *liking* him.

Making prayer a conversation with God has fringe benefits, they told me. It's impossible to foster resentments while talking to God; the gratitude emerging from such prayer won't permit anger any foothold in the consciousness.

And obviously, no conversation is a monologue. Hence, the one who prays takes time out from asking in order to listen for answers.

Gratitude makes it possible to thank God. If adequate thanks sometimes seem beyond our capabilities, we can repeat the familiar "Thank You, God, for what You have given me, for what You have taken away, and for what You have left me."

Yes, I got answers — as we always do in AA. And I have not mentioned atheism or agnosticism since one chap gave me an answer phrased as a question: "Did it ever occur to you that those who vehemently deny the existence of a Higher Power just might be crying out in despair of ever being able to find it?"

"Teet" C., North Hollywood, Calif.

October 1975

Out of the cocoon

From Bellevue, Wash.:

I just finished reading, for the third time, "The Steps Are the Program," by Paul M., Riverside, Ill., in the July issue. This is one of the most enlightening articles I have ever read, anywhere. I am truly grateful to the author for illuminating my canvas.

In three and a half years of sobriety, my life has become beautifully simplified and unified. Now I know why. After a tremendous setback in the beginning, Step Three saved my life, my sobriety, and my sanity. Then I truly accepted the AA program as a way of life, and began to work all the Steps, one at a time. I am very fortunate that, in my neck of the woods, all our closed meetings divide up into Step study tables.

I can see, after reading this article, that the main difference between my "before" and my "now" is that I was a fragmented person and now am a whole person. In my first year of recovery in AA, I hugged sobriety very closely, shutting out disturbing elements, as though I were in a cocoon. Gradually, the layers are unwrapping, and I am allowing myself to emerge more and more into the outside world. But always, sobriety is at the core of my being, as I continue to work all the Steps of the AA program. As Paul M. says, "The demands of the program are simple, precise, and specific." S. H.

*From AA Today, published in 1960
by The AA Grapevine, Inc.*

'Those Marvelous 12 Steps'

by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick

*An interpretation of the Steps by an eminent scholar
who was not one of us — but was always one with us*

IT WAS NO theologian, spinning theories about God, who wrote AA's Twelve Steps. They were hammered out of the hard rock of experience by men in desperate need. But, speaking as a clergyman who never was an alcoholic, I read those Twelve Steps with profound intellectual admiration. They state with amazing clarity and conciseness the essential truths, both psychological and theological, which underlie the possibility of transformed character.

It is not the alcoholic alone who comes to the place where he has to admit that he is powerless to manage his life. A nervous breakdown brought me there. Completely knocked out, in a sanitarium, my willpower so far gone that the harder I tried the worse off I was, I had to admit that my life had become unmanageable. It was then, when I was powerless to save myself, that I desperately welcomed a Power from beyond myself. When I read Step Two — "Came to believe that a Power

greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" — that hits my target in dead center.

The Twelve Steps of AA are not true for alcoholics only; they are basic and universal truths. So it was when Robert Louis Stevenson was transformed from aimless, feckless, irresponsible living into a vigorous, purposeful life, and ascribed the change to "that unknown steersman whom we call God."

There are two techniques indispensable for a sane and healthy life. The first is willpower — putting our backs into it and trying hard. The second is intake — hospitality to power from beyond ourselves, what Paul called being "strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man." The first is like a tree's fruit; the second is like a tree's roots. After many years of personal counseling, I am sure that, soon or late, every life runs into some experience where the first technique peters out and the second technique becomes critically

necessary.

Here again, the Twelve Steps state a universal truth. Of course, we must try hard, but even physical output is not the whole story; intake — air, food, sunlight — is essential. My basic religious faith is that, just as around our bodies there is a physical universe from which replenishing power comes into us, so around our souls there is a spiritual Presence in whose fellowship our lives can be sustained and our characters transformed. So Step Eleven — “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God . . .” — describes a universal need.

To be sure, one sometimes meets a self-confident, two-fisted man who thinks he needs no power but his own. He likes to quote Henley’s “Invictus”: “I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul.” That sounds splendid, but the story runs that Henley had a friend who knew him through and through, and who understood how weak as water he sometimes was when the temptations of the flesh assailed him. One day, this friend quoted that line to Henley, “I am the captain of my soul,” and then added, “The hell you are!”

Many a man, proudly confident that he by himself alone is the master of his fate, needs to have it said to him: No! The Twelve Steps are right about that.

I can imagine a certain type of theological thinker who lifts his eye-

“One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

brows at that italicized phrase twice used, “*God as we understood Him.*” I applaud it. It is more than an expression of tolerance which makes it possible for Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews to join in asserting the Twelve Steps. Once more, a universal and indispensable truth is involved.

God can be thought of as Absolute Being. He is that. But in a crisis, where a man grapples with an unmanageable habit or an abysmal grief, Absolute Being can be as distant, cold, and useless as the man in the moon. What we need in a crisis is the near end of God, God as we understand Him, God as an available resource close at hand, our unseen Friend, our invisible Companion. Granted that our diverse and partial ideas of God are inadequate! But anyone who, because of alcohol or for any other reason, has gone through the experience which the Twelve Steps describe can understand at least a little what the psalmist meant when he said, “O God, Thou art my God.”

Some time ago, I heard a man talk about God. He was not dogmatic. He was not a formal creedalist. But he was not indefinite, either. He had been in an immoral hole that seemed hopeless. All his friends thought it was hopeless. And in that hopeless situation, although he had always thought himself an agnostic, he

threw himself back on any God that might be. And something happened to him, for which I know no better description than the phrase Vergil used when he led Dante up out of hell through purgatory and left him at the gate of paradise, saying, “Over thyself I crown and miter thee.”

So this once-helpless man stood crowned and mitered. No theologian could have been more sure of God than he was. To him, God was not “a sort of something,” or, as one college student described God, “an oblong blur.” Rather, like the blind man whom Jesus healed, he had had an honest-to-goodness experience that no materialism could explain, that only a real God could account for, and that gave to his testimony certitude and definiteness: “One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

It is this accent of realistic experience in the Twelve Steps that makes them so vital. Through them, one feels a gospel of hope: *No man need stay the way he is.* John Callender was a captain in George Washington’s army, and at the battle of Bunker Hill, he was guilty of such rank cowardice that Washington publicly cashiered him, telling him that what he had done was infamous in a soldier, most injurious to an army, and the last to be forgiven.

So that was the end of John Callender? No! He reenlisted as a pri-

vate, and at the battle of Long Island, displayed such conspicuous courage that Washington restored him to his captaincy. I will wager anything that, if John Callender could read the Twelve Steps, he would recognize the experience that he went through.

Especially impressive is the way the Twelve Steps avoid all self-pity, with its inevitable accompaniment of blaming others for our failures. “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” — that is ethical realism and psychological common sense. And from there on, admitting “the exact nature of our wrongs,” being willing “to have God remove all these defects of character,” and the rest, the Twelve Steps trace a course of penitence, confession, and restitution which makes a personal counselor wish that a lot of other people besides alcoholics would take the same indispensable path to moral transformation.

No words can adequately express the gratitude felt by many of us who have watched with admiration the amazing progress of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among the many factors which have contributed to this success, I am sure that one is central: The Twelve Steps represent the everlasting truth about all personal regeneration. Their basic principles are eternally *so*, not just for alcoholics, but for everyone.

November 1975

New look at the Fourth Step

From Madison, Wis.:

When I first started taking a "moral" inventory, it was more sexual and materialistic than moral. I really didn't know what "moral" meant other than in terms of sex and money; most of my problems during my drinking years seemed to involve these two unmanageable areas.

Later, I began to have a simpler and more embarrassing sense of values about morality, which eventually enabled me to know "the exact nature" of my wrongs. Being moral began to mean: to avoid doing things that injured me or others, and to do things that benefited me or others whenever the opportunity presented itself in any of my affairs. I changed my daily inventory to a moral inventory in these new terms, and presto! I discovered "the exact nature" of my wrongs, which has remained the same ever since.

It turned out that it was self-centered thinking, rather than God-centered thinking. It was acting to glorify myself and get attention and acclamation, rather than acting in a humble manner to glorify the Source of all life and power, and to direct attention instead to the evidence of His will and His power in our daily living and in our honest sharing of our hope, strength, and experience with one another.

T. G.

I Don't Work the Program

I DON'T WORK the program. Furthermore, I doubt that I ever will. I am not now, nor have I ever been, crazy about work. At its best, I believe it to be a necessary evil. It takes up a lot of my time that I could put to better use.

Back when we were living in caves, inventing things like the wheel, the spear, and the fishing pole, I don't think anyone ever said, "Let's invent work for the fun of it." What probably happened was more like this. A bunch of my ancestors had spent a day fishing and hunting and having a real blast for themselves. When they got back to the cave, they were dog-tired, so they looked around until they found someone who had been sitting in the shade all day and was well rested.

Then they beat the living daylight out of him until he agreed to clean and stow all of the equipment and cook the harvest of the day's outing. This is how work was invented.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not lazy. I have worked all of my life (except for the days I was bad snake-bit), and no one ever beat

me. I was paid in real, hard-earned money.

That money has bought me some good things and some bad things, some pleasure and some pain. But I still don't work for the fun of it.

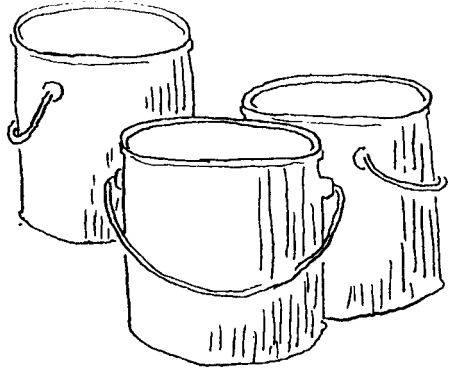
However, there are many things I do for the fun of them. I hunt, fish, and play golf and cards, and there is no work involved in any of these. I do them for the pleasure they bring into my life, and I practice them a lot, and I enjoy them all.

I don't work the AA program, either. I practice at it, and I thoroughly enjoy it. A short time after I came into AA, my sponsor told me that the whole thing — the Twelve Steps, the meetings, the fellowship, and all — was there to make me and my life happier. And he was as right as right can be. AA has changed my life from a nightmare into a beautiful way to live. Going at my program with the same enthusiasm that I have for anything else I really enjoy has added a lot of pleasure. I look forward to opportunities to practice at the program. And it has never been called off because of rain.

Contrary to what I used to be told when I was growing up, practice has never made anything perfect in my life — not my hunting or my fishing or my golf or my program. But without a doubt, one day at a time, they all do get better.

Bill C., Houston, Tex.

The Tenth Step



IN GETTING an apartment ready for a new tenant, who also happened to be an AA and a real friend of mine, I “salvaged” three full gallon cans of paint from the partially decorated confines of that apartment and hid them in my own place. My scheme was to sell the new tenant the three gallons to finish the badly needed painting, for a total of fifteen bucks.

After sleeping on that plot — or not sleeping, but tossing — I awoke early feeling upset about something that I couldn’t figure out. Facing the uneasiness squarely, I began to search the Twelve Steps with a desire to understand the problem. After just one inventory of the previous day’s dealings, I came up with the awareness that my old con tactics were recurring; I had tricked myself into thinking I could be comfortable with making a lousy fifteen dollars by cheating and lying to another AA member.

Now, being aware of what I had done, was I going to continue to let this bug me to distraction? Or should I use the honesty of the rest of the Tenth Step and ask for forgiveness?

I decided that the best way was to approach my friend with what I had done, and take the consequences. Whether they were good or bad, I would feel clean of the garbage.

I proceeded to ask my friend if I could take a Tenth Step. And I did. His answer was beautiful: “Thank you for being honest. We all have character defects, and they trigger us back to the old habits that drove us to drink, because we weren’t measuring up to what we thought we should be.” It was out! Thank God, it came from one who was able to forgive another human error.

That’s what the Tenth Step did for me today. Without the promptness of the admission, I wouldn’t have had only one sleepless night; it could have been nights upon end. This AA way of life has many rewards if we search for the honest way to live it. I’m very happy with the continuing rewards that I am aware of. If only we can see what is making our lives uncomfortable! Try the Tenth Step again, buddy. I’m glad I tried it today.

J. M., Rantoul, Ill.

December 1975

Helping can be selfish

From Temple City, Calif.:

Congratulations to B. M. of Saratoga, Calif., for her splendid detailing of typical alcoholic rationalizations in "Is it Really a Selfish Program?" in the August Grapevine. I always say and feel that *my* sobriety must come first. I have seen a number of us go down the drain who did *not* keep their sobriety first! However, this healthy attitude cannot contain the self-conning thoughts pointed out by B. M.

Amazingly enough, I have found that the most selfish (good-for-me) thing I can do is to do something for others. Our Fellowship offers me a great number of these opportunities, working with individuals, groups, general service, intergroups, and institutions committees.

If I am not involved in giving, using AA principles instead of my old ideas, it is my own damn fault!

D. B.

Steps to Understanding

We can go back over the Twelve Steps again and again, and learn something new each time

I BELIEVE there is no greater agony of mind than that of deeply craving a relationship with a Higher Power and being unable to find the way. There is no greater feeling of peace and thankfulness than when this craving has been answered and a happy relationship has been established. During my first year in AA, I ran the full scale between intolerable mental pain and the joy that comes with relief.

Somehow, a sort of miracle happened my first night in AA, and the compulsion to drink left me. At the time, I thought that the emotional shock of admitting I was an alcoholic did the job. Later on, I became

positive that this was a clear demonstration of the help available to me from a Higher Power.

After a few weeks of many meetings, as I tried to understand the Steps, it became increasingly plain that the program was of a basically spiritual nature. The AA books and pamphlets all used the words "God" and "Higher Power," as did the Twelve Steps. Group members spoke of God as a familiar friend upon whom they relied at all times.

I was crippled in the program from the start by my lack of spiritual appreciation, and I envied those members who came from religious homes. Many of these said they had

drifted away from their faith because of booze, but had found it again through AA.

Painfully, I had to avoid Steps Two and Three and try to move past them up the long ladder. After an honest effort at Step Four, I fumbled through Six and Seven trying to cut down on my many character defects by myself. I believed God was too infinite, too immense to be bothered with such trifles as my personal faults.

The mental pain throughout this period was beyond any description. Those other people had "that thing" — why couldn't I get it? There had to be something basically wrong with *me*. (This was probably the first time in my life that I freely admitted being wrong about anything serious. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was an important milestone.)

The turning point came when I carefully read and reread the Eleventh Step in our "Twelve and Twelve" book. This proved to be the ideal lesson and an excellent text for a beginner to learn meditation and prayer. I tried to follow its suggestions and practiced a few minutes every morning, at first feeling very

foolish and embarrassed. It seemed a bit like hollering up an empty chimney! But, as promised in the book, with practice came some degree of understanding.

Here's the way it worked for me. Many years ago, I had been taught a great deal about the actions and laws of such natural forces and sources of energy as gravity, heat, light, electricity, etc. These forces were known only by what they *did*. What they actually *were* was unknown.

One day, during my "quiet time," I realized that I was completely on the wrong track. I had been trying to visualize God, when I — a mere human being — was not capable of knowing who or what He is. I had been trying to draw a picture of infinity. I was asking the impossible of my mind.

Why could I not think of Him in terms of energy — *spiritual* energy, the greatest and most wonderful of all? I could try to observe and learn what this *does*, though I might never know what it *is*. Since God is infinite, any part of God *is* God, and spiritual energy is part of Him. Therefore, I can readily ask through prayer for use of this energy, this

"I was crippled in the program from the start by my lack of spiritual appreciation."

Divine Force. Perhaps "God's grace" would be a more familiar term.

From that line of reasoning, I was able to return to restudy the earlier Steps and work on them with an entirely different outlook. I know, today, that I had been helped all along by a Higher Power, but that I had also been intended to suffer along the road to understanding. I am all the more grateful.

During these "think sessions," a simple, clear analogy appeared. I can easily imagine the power of Divine Energy in a tank of unlimited size surrounding the earth. From the tank runs a pipe directly to every human mind. The pipe has an intake valve at our end. This pipe becomes

clogged when our minds are dirtied by resentments, self-pity, criticism, intolerance, fear, and anger. The effect is the same as boiler scale in a tube, impeding the flow. It is my daily job to work at keeping that pipe clean. Most important of all — I believe that *the first drink of alcohol tightly shuts the imaginary valve by immediately affecting the mind.*

Since my awakening, I have found a measure of mental peace hitherto unknown in my life. I try to ask daily for the guidance and use of this Divine Energy so that I can improve a little bit as a human being, and I never cease thanking God for disclosing a small part of Himself to my blind eyes.

B. L., Easton, Md.

February 1976

Around the Tables

Our Eleventh Step

AROUND THE TABLES, I have now listened to thousands of discussions related to the new concepts of God which are part of the recovery process. The change from an angry, vengeful, punishing God to a loving, forgiving, generous God is the normal course for the newcomer as time passes without the first drink. It was a joyful experience when I went through it, and it is a joy to feel this growth in others as they come to believe in a Power greater than themselves.

But as our years in AA go by, how much effort is given to obtaining a still better understanding of God? Recently, hoping to enrich my own experience, I began to question others. In day-to-day living, what portion of the day was being given over to studying God? Our Eleventh Step directs itself to improving our conscious contact with God. Isn't


that a suggestion to exert effort?

I don't think I can increase my understanding of God by immersing myself in lofty books filled with doctrine and dogma and deep theories. Prayer and meditation seem the best way, but some books dealing with spiritual matters do help to keep me working on a better understanding, not only of God, but of myself.

If reading the Big Book, the "Twelve and Twelve," the Grapevine, and other AA literature was so good for me in the beginning of my sobriety, it should be even more beneficial now, as the program continues to change my personality. I find life giving more and more to me. So I must give more and more of myself to the AA Fellowship, or I won't have *any* understanding of God. If I want to understand God *better*, I must use the program to even greater advantage.

Helping Others to Recover

*We have a responsibility to carry the message,
whether to the newcomer or to the old-timer*



AFTER A meeting in a nearby community, I steered a conversation with three other members to the question of how to hold on to new prospects. One of the members, with about two years' sobriety, said, "Just last week, I got a guy to a meeting that I had been working on for over a month. The s.o.b. got drunk the next day, so now I've got to find someone else to twelfth-step."

I had heard the same idea expressed over and over again in my travels over the last three months, but never was it put so succinctly. It brought all the bits and pieces of information together in my mind and pointed straight to the answer that I believe our group has been looking for.

A little over a year ago, we had at most ten members; we now have more than fifty with a month or more of sobriety. We believe that this is good, considering the number that we have worked on; but we are

sure that it could and should be better. We have had many group-conscience meetings with the Fifth Tradition as the subject, but we still felt that somewhere we were missing something. Hence, many of us purposely brought the subject up whenever we were visiting other groups.

We have known for some time that our group's sponsorship program was lacking, and even though we have tried to correct it, we believed that we were losing more new prospects after two or three meetings than we should. However, we kept saying (or thinking), "You have to carry the message and not the drunk." When a prospect rebuffed our efforts, we let him go, secure in the thought that we had carried the message to another drunk.

I believe that therein lies the problem, not only for our group, but, judging from Grapevine articles over the last several months, for many

other groups as well. Without meaning to, each of us (perhaps subconsciously) wants to say, "Here is the drunk that I got sober." We have let the popular conception — or should I say misconception? — of the Twelfth Step call replace the true intent of the Twelfth Step.

We keep looking for and working hardest on the new prospect. In itself, that is as it should be, but we are cheating him later, when after two, three, or four meetings, we say, "Just keep coming back," and put him more or less on his own while we concentrate on someone newer. Thus, we have let the desire for a success rate creep in by looking for quantity instead of quality, forgetting that if we have quality, quantity will come in its own due time.

The Twelfth Step says, "... we tried to carry this message to alcoholics..." It doesn't say that we tried to carry this message to drunks, to still-suffering alcoholics, to alco-

holics with less than a month's sobriety, or to alcoholics with less than twenty-five years' sobriety. The same can be said of the references in the Preamble: "help others to recover from alcoholism" and "help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."

I am an alcoholic. I still need to be twelfth-stepped, because I don't believe that I will ever have all of the message, nor true sobriety to the extent that I would like to have it. Furthermore, nowhere in AA literature does it say that I can get the message only from those sober longer than I, nor that I can carry it only to those with less sobriety.

Rosalie's letter in the July 1975 Grapevine said it better than I when she quoted: "We think of 'the alcoholic who still suffers' as the guy who is still out there drunk. But many alcoholics who are still suffering are in this room tonight, and are sober and may have been for some time now. It isn't as easy for some as for others to stay sober. Always keep in mind that the guy or gal sitting at your elbow may still be suffering. And if you sense that he or she is, and you're not, then put out your hand to that person, even though that person may be sober."

The articles on sponsorship in the September 1975 Grapevine show the real need for a strong sponsorship program within a group and the importance of the sponsor to the newcomer. However, I believe that we must go one step further and try to be sponsors to all alcoholics, whether

they are in the Fellowship or not, and regardless of the length of their sobriety or the lack of it. We should likewise try to carry the message to all alcoholics. We don't have to sponsor only those who have asked for it, nor do we have to wait for a phone call before we can twelfth-step someone.

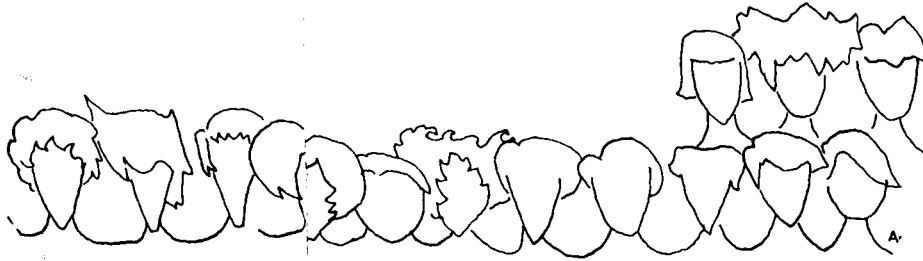
I have been sponsored and twelfth-stepped every time I heard something that I needed. What its source was and whether I recognized it as part of a message didn't make any difference.

I think that I have tried to carry the message in all directions, but I know that increasing the quality of my message-carrying is more important than raising the number of times I am able to carry it to active alcoholics. If I can remember to practice these principles in all my affairs, then the Higher Power will give me the chance to carry the message according to His will.

If I put someone else more or less on his own, then some day the Higher Power may put me more or less on my own, and then where would I be? Therefore, it is my duty to carry the message to alcoholics, period, without qualifications. As always, the Higher Power will decide the name, address, and Zip Code of who gets the message. We, as individuals and groups, must forever work on being the best possible messengers and leave the delivery schedule up to Him.

R. C. G., Fort Knox, Ky.

March 1976



Working the Steps in a Group

I BELONG TO an AA group that meets on Tuesday evenings at eight o'clock. The members are primarily from Chicago's western suburbs; several are from other areas. We meet in members' homes and discuss a Step each week.

We begin with Step One, go right through to Twelve, and then start at the First Step again. If a new person comes to the group and it's his first meeting and we're on Step Seven, for example, we don't go back to Step One. If the Twelfth Step call has been made properly, we figure, the First Step has been explained to the new person before he comes to the meeting. Otherwise, there might be so many meetings on Step One that the entire group would fail to move along as it needs to. *Every* member in the group helps the newcomer feel welcome and spends some time talking with him or her after the meeting.

Everybody in the group is work-

ing the Steps. If a new person comes into the group and attends regularly, he starts working them, too. He doesn't know any differently. He very quickly figures out that "How It Works" means that *this* is how it works.

Doesn't it get repetitious with the same people talking about the same Steps month after month and year after year? Well, it probably would if we worked each Step only once. However, every member in the group is working *and* reworking all the Steps. As a result, we speak from fresh experiences each time we go through them. We don't talk about the Fourth Steps we wrote years ago. We discuss inventories written recently and Fifth Steps we took not long ago. The same holds true for every Step.

This creates an atmosphere that stimulates each of us to continue work in the program. The group is far more than a place to go and ven-

tilate our feelings merely to find symptom relief. In our experience, conditions such as depression, anxiety, fear, boredom, hostility, and apathy are just symptoms, and they will disappear through persistent work with all the Steps. The answer, then, is not to concern ourselves with the symptoms, but to work and rework the Steps so that they may remove the causes. Then the depression, fear, boredom, or other symptom will disappear, too. We've seen this happen consistently.

Some members who join our group suffer from this condition. They have had substantial amounts of sobriety and have tried various therapies and brands of counseling, because they felt they "needed something more than just AA." In every instance, it turns out that they have not done enough continuing work with the Steps. Without fail, when these men and women begin to work and rework every one of the Steps,

their symptoms gradually vanish.

Very possibly, the Twelve Steps may be the most commonly overlooked and underrated long-term therapy there is for the alcoholic. Therapies of all kinds appear and promise magnificent benefits for the client. Gradually, each sinks into richly deserved obscurity, only to be replaced by something new. Unfortunately, AAs often get siphoned into such an "expanded approach," because they're hurting and don't understand that their hurt is the inevitable result of insufficient work with the AA program. Our home group has found that this program works effectively at any stage of sobriety for any AA who is willing to keep using it. It generates a vitality for change that is translated into increasing health and freedom.

The February 1975 issue of *Psychology Today* included twelve classified advertisements for Primal Therapy, under the heading of "Growth Centers." A few years ago, all of those listings would have been for Transactional Analysis. Five years from now, it will be something else. All of these fads flourish for a while and then fade into oblivion.

It seems to me that AA members often wind up in these various therapies because of inadequate sponsorship. Sponsorship in our group is strong. We try to be honest and open, and we don't waste each other's time pretending to be counselors or therapists. We simply try to share our actual experience in working the

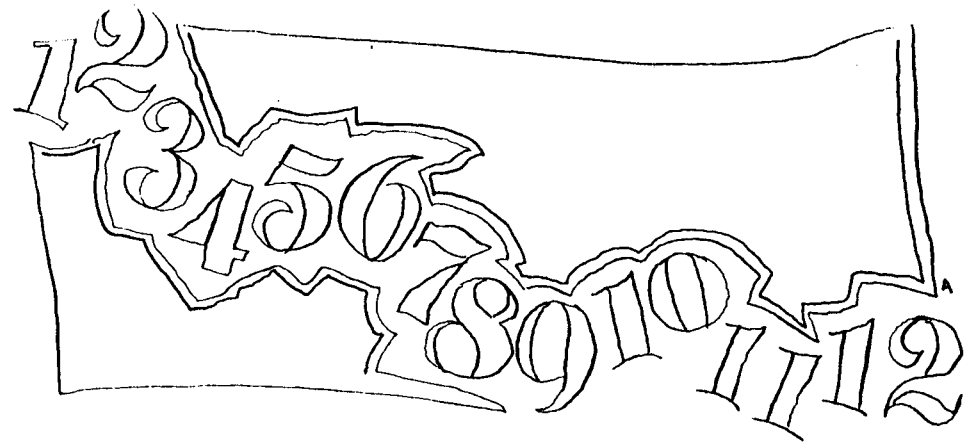
AA program.

Such experience — generally recent — has shown us again and again that outward problems in our lives are produced by conditions within ourselves. Persistent use of the Steps removes the inward conditions that cause the problems. As we experience changes in ourselves, we live our way into a new understanding, and we gradually stop creating difficulties in our lives. We find answers and solutions that we could never see before, and they all come from the program. It's so simple that it's sometimes tough to believe!

In the past several years, three other groups have branched off from our Tuesday-night group. These, too, are Step groups. A number of AAs with eight, ten, and more years of sobriety have joined our group because they heard about it from other members, who described the help found in our meetings and work with the Steps.

It is a working group. We get our directions from the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve." They are used as springboards for continuing work, not simply for talk about what we did with a Step years ago. This continued action in the program is the key to the healing vitality the group provides for each of us.

The meeting begins with a quiet time, and then someone reads "How It Works." The host or hostess generally leads off with some remarks from personal experience about the Step under discussion and then asks



for comments from each person present. Each talks about AA and the Step under discussion, rather than offering erudite philosophy or amateur psychology. No one talks about peer-group pressure, treatment modalities, attitudinal ambivalences, multidisciplinary approaches, or therapeutic milieus. Each member tries to honestly share his experience with that particular Step: what he has done with it, what he is doing with it, and what it has done and is doing for him.

Usually, we have between twelve and fifteen at a meeting; sometimes, as many as twenty. The meetings begin at eight o'clock and generally end by nine. We've found that if we try to avoid talking beyond our experiences, we can thoroughly discuss a Step in a surprisingly brief time.

Members in our group range in sobriety from a few months to many years. All of us go to the meetings because we need what the group gives us: a regular reminder of where our help lies, along with

steady encouragement to keep doing the work. There's a quiet enthusiasm in our members. We know what's made the changes in our lives, and we're equipped to talk about it from the standpoint of fresh, growing experience.

And that's the message. Regardless of where we are in sobriety, you and I have a specific method of dealing with what happens to us each day — by simply renewing our work in the program. Unless I do this kind of continuing work, I'll never know what the AA message really is or how to help another person experience it. One basic measurement of my progress in AA starts with what I'm doing in my home group. Our group helps me remember the transforming power of the program, summed up on page 562 in the Big Book: "I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous—everything I need I get — and when I get what I need I invariably find that it was just *what I wanted all the time.*"

Paul M., Riverside, Ill.

My Nine-Step Program

A collection of wisdom that didn't work

SHORTLY AFTER coming to AA in 1959, I devised my own nine-step program, a mishmash of things I had heard at meetings or things other AAs had told me in discussions. For the most part, I avoided the Twelve Steps program—particularly the middle portion, which required an inventory and the repairing of the damage I had done.

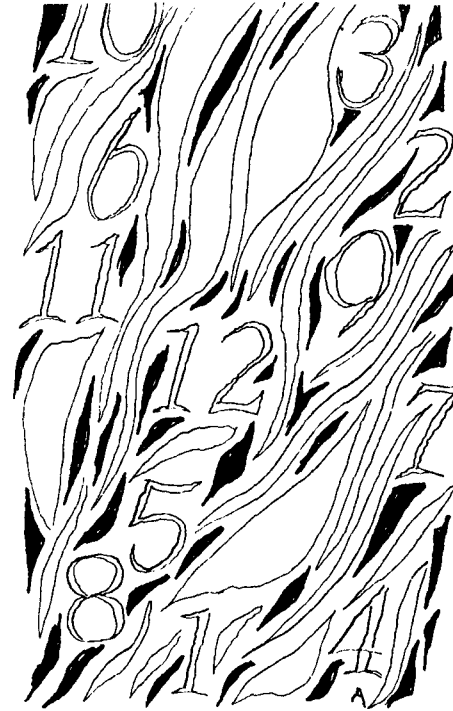
Somehow, I maintained my sobriety for all those years, subsisting on many sayings, aphorisms, and gems of wisdom, each of which contained a grain of truth. But they did not add up to a thorough working of the Twelve Steps.

Stretching these small quantities

of truth into my own nine-step program worked—in the sense that I stayed sober, through the grace of God. But by the end of that first decade of sobriety, I was more fearful, more depressed, and more insane than I had ever been, even in my drinking days.

Because I was so sick mentally and spiritually, I became convinced that the program had failed to cure my mental difficulties. In the belief that I was too sick for the program, I sought help from psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapy groups, all to no avail. I just continued to get sicker.

Here is the nine-step program



that carried me through nearly a decade of a sober hell, filled with depression, fear, and the certainty that I was losing my mind:

(1) *Easy Does It*; (2) this is an individual program; (3) if you are sober, you are a winner; (4) the Twelve Steps are only suggestions; (5) take an inventory only when you are ready; (6) the only people you really hurt are those closest to you; (7) you make amends just by being sober; (8) most modern AAs (especially me) are high-bottom drunks; (9) the Big Book is outmoded.

If you work my nine-step program, I am pretty sure you will get

the same bad results I obtained. But if you want to try anyway, you must equip yourself with a rationale for each of the nine steps. This will enable you to give smart, logical comebacks to the AA members who will continually counsel you to work the Twelve Steps as originally written. The best way to handle these zealots is to explain that you have nothing against any of the Twelve Steps and that you intend to work each of them eventually. But for now, you are simply not quite ready.

For the specific rationale behind each of my nine steps, I suggest the following:

1. Easy Does It

Occasionally, it occurred to me that I should be doing an inventory. Or I might wonder, "Why don't I get any serenity and contentment out of this program?" At these moments, there was instant comfort in remembering that getting myself all worked up about such matters might lead me back to the bottle. "Just take it easy," I'd tell myself. "Remember, I am to progress at God's pace. I will surely get serenity one of these days."

2. This is an individual program

This is another helpful aphorism. I stopped reading the Big Book after only a couple of months of sobriety because I realized that "this is an individual program." I could pretty much take (mostly, not take) the measures described in Chapters Five and Six of the Big Book when and as

I wished. My "individual program" translated into a lot of meetings and Twelfth Step work. When I felt particularly bad, I would heavy-up on the meetings. Apparently, I was willing to go to an awful lot of meetings if it meant that I didn't have to work the Twelve Steps.

3. If you are sober, you are a winner

What a helper this little step was when I was really feeling down. Often, after a meeting, I would talk to another AA about my depression or fear. Almost as often, I would be consoled with: "You must be doing something right — you're sober. So you're still a winner." But there remained my nagging, seldom-expressed question: "If I am a winner, how come I feel so much like a loser?"

4. The Twelve Steps are only suggestions

Here was solid backing for my position that you did any of the Twelve Steps you needed, at the time you needed them, in the way you wanted to do them. I never noticed until years later that there are at least a dozen musts in the Big Book. The book offers surprisingly little leeway in the manner and the order in which the Twelve Steps are to be worked. The only way to contented sobriety is to work all of the Steps as they are "suggested." There is no invitation to the reader to modify, reject, or interpret. There is no "easier, softer way."

"Now that I was sober,

5. Take an inventory only when you are ready

Another great help to the designer of his own program is this little gem. Its logic always impressed me, because, of course, I wanted my Fourth Step to be thorough, even perfect. "Today," I thought, "I am not prepared to do a perfect Fourth Step. To attempt it might get me more upset, more depressed, even drunk. There is an added benefit. I don't have to take a Fifth Step, either, because I am not yet prepared with a written Fourth." Somehow, ten years went by, and I was still not quite "ready."

6. The only people you really hurt are those closest to you

When I finally did get around to AA's amends Steps, my own sixth step helped a great deal. I told myself that I had hurt my wife and children only during my drinking days. But I had apologized for all of that alcohol-caused misery. Now that I was sober, I was no longer hurting anyone. A long time later, I realized that I had continued to lie, cheat, and steal through all of those sober years as a nonworking member of AA. All in all, I had hurt far more people in those sober years than I had ever hurt in my drinking days, including employees, business associates, shopkeepers, salesmen,

I was no longer hurting anyone."

clients, and friends — dozens and dozens of people.

7. You make amends just by being sober

Here's another way to duck the amends Steps. I presumed that my years of sobriety had made me a basically nice person, and that my family and others around me should feel privileged to associate with me. Just by being alive and being me, I was making amends to those I had harmed (my immediate family). This simple and beautiful step meant that I didn't have to list on a piece of paper *all* of the people I had harmed, and then make direct amends to them. Somehow, it escaped me that this sober, "nice" guy was abusing employees, lying to bosses and clients, padding expense accounts, and fencing sarcastically with almost anyone whom he perceived as a threat. These defects finally came home to roost when I was fired from a fine job — primarily for the faults just described.

8. Most modern AAs (especially me) are high-bottom drunks

This is another real comforter. The low-bottom, hard cases that Dr. Bob and Bill encountered obviously had to work the Twelve Steps faithfully and fast if they were to remain sober. But, just as obviously,

the "modern" high-bottom cases (like me) did not have to go to such lengths, I believed. We had much greater leeway in deciding when and how we worked a Step or even whether we wished to work the Step at all.

9. The Big Book is outmoded

This concept — that the Big Book was old-fashioned and had been replaced by newer, better stuff — led me into the wonderful world of non-AA literature. I could ignore the book with the blue cover and immerse myself in red books, green books, 24-hour books, little-this books, and little-that books. When I felt I was wandering too far afield, I could dip into the more modern (but much less specific) *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. There were also side trips into books on personality, psychology, and psychiatry. For ten years, the Big Book, the written source for working the Steps, was a deep, dark secret for me, as I searched for truth and meaning every place except where it was.

Working my nine steps for a period of ten dry years brought me to the point where I was ready to drink again. In those ten years, my untreated character defects caused me untold mental pain, got me fired, and drove me to many forms of mental therapy in a futile effort to

cure my depression and fear.

The turning point came when I met an old-timer who told me that if I worked the Steps, my fears and depression would begin to lift. As my sponsor, he encouraged me to work through the Twelve Steps quickly, including the action Steps in the middle, which require a thorough inventory, admission of wrongs to God, to myself, and to another human being, and the cleaning-up of the damage I had done, drunk *and* sober.

Since I started working AA's Steps, much of the fear and depression that haunted my life is gone. Some of my defects have been lifted from me, though I am still wrestling with two of the most damaging.

I believe that if I continue to work the Twelve Steps over and over again, my life will continue to improve in all areas — physical, mental, and spiritual. I also seem to be more willing and better able to help others through working the Steps myself.

D. O., Chicago, Ill.

*Here are the steps we took,
which are suggested as a program
of recovery...*

Chapter Five, Alcoholics Anonymous

*A twelve-page section in which three AAs
write of their experience with the Twelve Steps*

I SAT IN meetings for the first couple of years and heard statements like "Life is now a bowl of cherries" and "How I love living in this rose garden of sobriety."

At the same time, I was experiencing the "insane sobriety" that I heard some other frustrated, hurting, sober alcoholics talking about.

There were such stories as "After I got sober, I ran off and left four kids at home," and "When I was sober two weeks, I found out I had cancer, for which I had surgery. When are things going to start getting better?"

I, too, thought that things were supposed to get better after I put the plug in the jug. I, too, wondered when the goodies would start coming my way. Even though I wasn't the most patient person in the world, I knew I could wait for my rewards.

Well, two and a half years passed. I was still waiting; the proverbial plug had remained in the jug. I was going to meetings and getting active (no action, just activity), and something was obviously going wrong. The more sober I was, it seemed, the more frustrated and bugged I became.

In the meetings, they told me to ask for help in the morning and say thanks at night and I'd have no problems. Because I suffered from

many compulsions (not just defects) when I first came to this program, I needed tools and principles that would work on *all* my problems. After I had taken the inventory Steps, I felt so much better that I was convinced I now knew the only way for me.

I set about accepting the many kinks in my character: powerlessness over alcohol and other mood-changing chemicals; compulsive sexual behavior; self-mutilation; compulsive overspending (buying new clothes for every meeting where more than fifty people would be present); overeating (I weighed more than 200 pounds when I got here); and compulsive lying. A sense of knowing what I was all about settled around me, and I was comfortable with my new insights.

There could be a pause in the program for me at this point, I decided. (Where I ever got that idea, I shall not try to analyze.) The

Waiting for Things to Get Better

chaos and confusion that developed were as painful as the drinking had been. I became restless, insecure, and fearful. I even began to doubt the program. This was indeed insanity after sobriety.

I had been told that if I made meetings, asked for help in the morning, said thanks at night, and got active, I couldn't go wrong. Functioning on that basis, I ventured forth into one of the most painful periods of my life.

First, I believed everything I *heard*. I did not really take time to go between the covers of the Big Book and try to validate for myself what was being said. Everything said at AA meetings is not always in line with the suggestions precisely written in the Big Book. I didn't know this. Perhaps that is why my sponsor stressed (monotonously), "Read the book, read the book."

Second, I didn't *practice* what I did read. I read and reread the Big

Book as if it were a novel. I didn't realize for at least three years that it was a book of directions. When I read, "If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it — then you are ready to take certain steps," I merely read it. I realized later that the desire and the willingness are *prerequisites* to taking the Steps. Was I sure I even wanted what you had? Was I willing to go to any length to get it? Right there in the book, somebody was trying to tell me that if I ventured into these Steps, I would probably have to go to some *length*. Today, that sounds like an alert to me. It didn't then.

Third, I heard this was a suggested program. Therefore, I took it very lightly and discarded anything that cramped my style. I learned later that we use that word "suggested" very loosely. The Big Book tells me that these *are* the Steps. If I want to recover, it is suggested

that I take them. As my sponsor told me once, if we were out in the middle of the lake in a boat and I fell overboard, she would suggest that I swim!

Okay — I was sick of this insanity. Sobriety wasn't the name of the game. It was the opening of the door. Now what should I do?

So I came to Steps Six and Seven. They had been just words on paper to me. Then I got it — I didn't have to live with anything I didn't want to. If I was tired of seeing my relationships with people (especially the opposite sex) fall apart, I could put the problem in the context of the First Step and work through the Steps with it. If the Steps had worked with alcohol and drugs, they would certainly work with other problems, like dependence on others or making them dependent on me. I was sick of my fat body, too. It did control me; I didn't control it. How about the compulsive spending? I really didn't have to overdraw my account by \$500 or \$600 and then live with consuming guilt and regret. I didn't have to keep mutilating myself (my thing was razor blades — we all have our own ways).

I finally decided the key word was the one the Big Book uses — “situation” (“our intolerable situation,” page 25). What a revelation! I was powerless over the whole situation. I wanted to run out and tell everybody what I had just found out. “There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental



disorders,” the fifth chapter says. They had told me about myself right in the beginning, and I hadn't even heard it.

I had to scrape my disorders away a level at a time. I didn't feel hopeless any more. I knew I had a long, long road ahead of me, but it didn't matter. I talked endlessly to my sponsor, and she helped lay down guidelines for me. She pointed out the tools I needed at this stage.

I stopped just saying “help” in the morning and “thanks” at night. I started *pausing* “when agitated or doubtful,” asking “for the right thought or action,” reminding myself *constantly* that I was “no longer running the show” (pages 87-88, Big Book). I found out for sure that what I had was “a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of [my] spiritual condition” (page 85). I stopped asking my Higher Power for sobriety — He gave it to me six years ago. Instead, I thanked Him for it and prayed only for knowledge of His will for my life and the power to carry that out (Step Eleven).

tions, shared with other members, and didn't have to overreact to the situation.

I have not had a drink or a drug in six years and three months. I have not taken a razor blade to my body for four and a half years. I haven't beaten my kids for three and a half years. I haven't carried around 100 extra pounds of fat for five and a half years. (I am a member of Overeaters Anonymous, too.) I haven't overdrawn my account for three weeks. The defects are coming off in layers.

Last week, I took a recovery inventory. For me, part of the honesty of this program is to stop apologizing because the program works. It is difficult to share the progress that has taken place in me, but I have found such sharing beneficial and would suggest it to anyone who is sober, but bogged down with miseries. I found that the promises are true. I am not the sick person who came to this program nine years ago. I have to accept that. For a challenge, try doing a recovery inventory. Write down in black and white that this program is working for and in you. It is a revealing experience.

Today, when I hear someone who has been around AA sober for a while and is still hurting over some of the sicknesses I've suffered from, I can ask, “How are you coming on the Steps?” That's what others asked me. I didn't have to approach some of the people who shared with me; they saw me hurting and came to

Immediately following these revelations came Steps Eight and Nine — making the list of people I had harmed, becoming willing to make amends to them all, and making amends wherever possible. I had left a lot of human wreckage strewn through my past. Some people I was able to make amends to; some I will never be able to make amends to; and some I tried to force amends on when no amends were possible. Yet, in most cases, amends have been made by now.

What a change!

But no flash of lightning hit me. My life didn't become free of problems. Just six months ago, my teen-aged daughter almost succeeded in killing herself with alcohol, pills, and pot. She is part of my will and my life, and she is in the hands of my Higher Power. I took her to the hospital, stayed with her, loved her, held her, kissed her, cried, brought her back home, bathed and fed her, stayed in conscious contact with my Higher Power, paused (often) and asked for the right thoughts and ac-

me. When I need them next, I hope they will do it again. They weren't "playing God" or "interfering." They were loving me and sharing.

Sometimes, the alcoholic who still suffers isn't necessarily still drinking. He or she might be sitting beside you in a meeting, with several months or years of sobriety, dying inside with defects and not knowing what to do about them. Now I can say in a meeting, "Read the book. Do the Steps. Pray only for knowledge of His will. It works!"

J. Y., Sparks, Nev.

March 1976

Around the Tables

Those Missing Faces

It is sad

*that some are
missing out on
our program of
growth and joy*

AROUND THE TABLES, as my sobriety continues, I search for faces that once were familiar. Where have they gone? Where is the guy who wanted help with his Eighth Step?

I make a phone call, and the answer has a tone of avoidance. Not a blunt denial — just avoidance.

Over coffee, I discuss the missing faces and ask, “Has anyone seen X, Y, or Z?” Nope!

Each week, I go to groups other than my own, so I have a fairly wide acquaintance throughout our area. The other groups also have missing

faces. What happens? Why are these faces missing?

Usually, ultimately, such absence means that the missing face is not living a sober, joy-filled life. I have yet to encounter a missing face who is happy. One thing about a missing face is the endless stream of logic it spouts to explain why it is missing.

It is perhaps sad that these faces are missing, but as long as my face is at a meeting, I really won't be sad. I'm growing by going to meetings, and I know that I need not cry for the missing ones. Somehow, some way, they may come back and begin again in AA fellowship. For me, the meaning of the program is a steady increase in joyful awareness of life and love.

Don't be a missing face. Get to more meetings, and grow.

Meditation

How to Do It

*The search for the unknown
that leads us to sobriety and sanity*

1. Read *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 85-88, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pages 98-108, and two Grapevine articles on meditation, in the April 1969 and June 1972 issues.

2. Begin as you would any AA meeting. The leader may share experience, strength, and hope and then go on to readings and explanations. Fifteen to thirty minutes is adequate for each sitting in the beginning; questions may be answered during short rest periods, but there should be no protracted discussion.

3. The posture is upright and motionless. The eyes are kept open, gazing at the floor three or four feet ahead. (Eyes may be closed after more experience.)

It is helpful to begin with a period of awareness of sensory input, body sensations, feelings, and thoughts. The second period may be used for concentration on imagery, a prayer, or a Step. The third period is one of nonjudgmental, choiceless awareness, the mind still and receptive.

When these introductory stages no longer seem necessary, the group may proceed to one of two widely used standard meditations: (a) following a word or sound into silence or (b) counting of breaths. There is no fighting against thought. Without reaction, the attention is simply returned from its wandering to (a) the word silently spoken or (b) non-controlled, spontaneous breathing, counting the out breaths up to ten and then repeating the count.

Do not try to stop the thoughts. Learn to let them go by, "like drinks on a tray" — "not for me." Meditation is not thinking about anything; it is not controlling or suppressing thought; it is not an exercise in isolation or self-absorption. It is self-mastery by detachment and freedom from reaction.

4. Daily practice should be continued at home. From libraries, churches, and many other sources, the student can find suitable methods and levels of practice. Meditation is a vast subject; it requires study.

MEDITATION OFFERS release from alcoholic thinking as the First Step does from alcohol; like sobriety itself, sanity begins with the admission of reality into the mind. Alcoholic thinking uses denial to cloud the mind so that now one part, now another, can rule all the rest in an endless, fragmented search for gratification. Such a mind seeks out anything — sorrow, appetite, sickness, resentment, drunkenness, fantasy, distractions, impulsive action — anything other than the clear, all-inclusive, uncentered attention of sanity.

Here is one of the great values of meditation: As the mind becomes clearer, it is more capable and willing to acknowledge the truth; less pain is required to force honest recognition of defects and their results. The real needs of the whole person are revealed.

Confrontation with the consequences of our defects is the main reason that the first reluctant attempts at meditation resemble the first attendance at AA meetings. And precisely as in the rest of the program, so in the Eleventh Step do

effort and maturing bring a desire for more effort, more maturity, and a fuller life.

So, too, do denial, evasion, and rationalization pull us back. In my experience, skipping just a day or two will make the defects, discomforts, and temper worse, and I will start to think I do not need meditation. Indeed, nowhere else are we in such direct confrontation with resistance to maturing and sanity, for in meditation there is no place to hide and no one else to turn to. Bill W. pointed out both its demands and its rewards when he wrote that "Step Eleven can keep us growing, if we try hard and work at it continually" (Grapevine, June 1958).

As we become less driven by cravings and impulses, we become more aware of them: the racing thoughts, resentments, and fears, the turmoil of recurring scenes, memories, dialogues, and daydreams that we cannot let go, because of their illusory gratifications. The more such alcoholic thinking is denied or hidden, the more it contaminates, then subverts, and finally enslaves the mind. Trying to fight fear and

anger and craving is one of the most exhausting penalties of alcoholic thinking; this kind of circular trap is inevitable when we go against the Steps by trying to remove our own defects instead of using the Steps to achieve true sobriety by awareness.

The use of meditation can begin quite early in our AA lives. It is advisable, though not necessary, to begin in a group with AA members, but in any case there should be continuing work in some ongoing program. There are many available now; in larger cities, most AA members can find adequate instruction.

Starting alone is more difficult, but it can be done. We should begin with the two basic AA texts, *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. These offer instruction and comment, particularly for the early phases of meditation. The two Grapevine articles are useful. Patience and effort are the only essentials, although good instruction and sharing of experience, strength, and hope can be as helpful in meditation as in any other aspect of the program.

Sitting can begin with even five minutes at a time and should progress to at least thirty minutes twice a day and then more as real maturing begins. And the work must be daily; no one stays sober on yesterday's meditation! There is much literature available at every level, and our AA texts urge us to use this "treasure trove."

As the work progresses, the mind

slackens its struggles against the leash of concentration; thinking becomes more clear and calm; the working day is less harried and tense; concentration improves; and the agitated clinging and resentment typical of alcoholic thinking start to fade. The world begins to be quite different; even sleeping becomes better; and then, at some time during this process, something else begins, something so fine and subtle as to be unrecognizable. Readiness for meditation in daily life is approaching.

The ways of life and growth in the Eleventh Step, as in all of the AA program, operate beyond the boundaries of language. Understanding can come only to an open, willing mind — keen, sensitive, and still — a mind not looking for any result or carrying any image of the past. Only such a mind can recognize the experience of sanity, for it is sanity that begins in the course of meditative work, to make itself felt. The entire quality of life — its meaning and that which is beyond meaning — undergoes a change that cannot be effected in any other way. Meditation becomes more and more, not a way of life, but life itself; it becomes simply clear attention, carried over from the daily practice period. A new life begins — the life that has made so many experienced AA members say, to the astonishment of newcomers, that they are "glad to be alcoholic."

Meditation does not always bring up much that is really new; rather,

it makes full and sharp and certain those fleeting insights that would otherwise be lost or blurred or would have to reappear many times even to be noticed. As the formal work of daily sitting continues, the capacity for attention evolves and deepens. It is this uncentered attention, carried into all our affairs, *without seeking anything and without technique of any kind*, that becomes the meditation of daily life. To see and fully realize the events of the outer world or of the mind; to see the unity of thought and thinker; to see the constant search for experience and gratification; to observe this whole structure of thought completely,

As we advance into the further reaches of the life of mindfulness, we can turn for instruction to the world's libraries, specifically to two writers of this century who can give us their experience of meditation in daily life as both examples and teachings.

For those whose way of medita-

From *A Testament of Devotion*
by Thomas Kelly

One can live in a well-nigh continuous state of unworded prayer, directed toward God, directed toward people and enterprises we have on our heart. There is no hurry about it all; it is a life unspeakable and full of glory, an inner world of splendor within which we, unworthy, may live. Some of you know it and

minute by minute, without judgment or labeling — to do all this is to be free of the burdens of the past and present, of all the known. Only then can we enter the unknown. Surely it is not the known, but the unknown — however we define this spiritual force — that gives us sobriety and sanity.

This way of life, this way of mind, does not fight or bury the past or the present; it burns it all to ashes so that the mind is freed from its vast accumulation of feelings and images. Then the mind is silent, clear, vital with energy, and can find freedom, sanity, and all that is beyond. To live this way is the aim of meditation.

tion is the God-centered life, selections are given from Thomas Kelly's *Testament of Devotion*. Next, for agnostics, atheists, or those who seek the spiritual without the religious, there are some nonconsecutive portions of talks given in 1968 and 1969 by the great modern thinker J. Krishnamurti.

live in it; others of you may wistfully long for it; it can be yours. . . .

How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning of all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, toward Him who calls in the deeps

of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. . . .

Keep contact with the outer world of sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absent-mindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes, keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship. Keep it up throughout the day. Let inward prayer be your last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you awake. . . .

The first days and weeks and months are awkward and painful, but enormously rewarding. Awkward, because it takes constant vigilance and effort and reassertions of the will, at the first level. Painful, because our lapses are so frequent, the intervals when we forget Him so long. Rewarding, because we have begun to live. But these weeks and months and perhaps even years must be passed through before He gives

us greater and easier stayedness upon Himself.

Lapses and forgettings are so frequent. Our surroundings grow so exciting. Our occupations are so exacting. But when you catch yourself again, lose no time in self-recriminations, but breathe a silent prayer for forgiveness and begin again, just where you are. Offer *this* broken worship up to Him and say: "This is what I am except Thou aid me." Admit no discouragement, but ever return quietly to Him and wait in His Presence. . . .

I think it is clear that I am talking about a revolutionary way of living. Religion isn't something to be added to our other duties, and thus make our lives yet more complex. The life with God is the center of life, and all else is remodeled and integrated by it. . . .

Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. . . . It is radiant.

From *The Only Revolution, Meditations, Talks With American Students, and The Flight of the Eagle*, by J. Krishnamurti

Meditation is not a matter of being absorbed in some grandiose idea or image: that only quietens one for the moment, as a child absorbed by a toy is for the time being quiet. But as soon as the toy ceases to be of interest, the restlessness and the mischief begin again. Meditation is not the pursuit of an invisible path lead-

ing to some imagined bliss. The meditative mind is seeing — watching, listening, without the word, without comment, without opinion — attentive to the movement of life in all its relationships throughout the day. . . .

Only in total freedom does bliss exist. Pleasure, like happiness, you

can seek, and find, in many ways. But they come, and go. Bliss — that strange sense of joy — has no motive. . . . Meditation is not the pursuit of pleasure and the search for happiness. Meditation, on the contrary, is a state of mind in which there is no concept or formula, and therefore total freedom. It is only to such a mind that this bliss comes — unsought and uninvited. Once it is there, though you may live in the world with all its noise, pleasure and brutality, they will not touch that mind. . . .

We are concerned with life, and with the living of that life every day, with its painful struggles and fleeting pleasures, with its fears, hopes, despair and sorrow, with the aching loneliness and the complete absence of love, with the crude and subtle forms of selfishness, and with the ultimate fear of death. So it is that which directly concerns us, and to

understand it deeply with all the passion at our disposal, meditation is the key, but not the meditation given by another, put together by some book, by some philosopher or specialist, because the quality of meditation is very important. The word itself means to ponder over, to think over, to enter deeply into an issue. Meditation then is not how to think or what to do to control the mind so that it becomes quiet and silent, but rather the understanding of all life's problems, so that the beauty of silence comes into being, because without this quality of beauty, life has no significance at all. I do not mean by beauty, the beauty of those mountains, of those trees, the beauty of the light over the water or the bird on the wing, but the beauty in living, to come upon it in your daily life whether you are in the office or at home . . . walking by yourself communing with nature and the world.

Here, though, we must first be reminded of the solid realities. It is a great temptation to try advanced work immediately, but this is as self-deceiving and eventually impossible as is sobriety without meetings. Meditation in daily life can come only from solid work in the entire AA program, including fundamental grounding in daily meditation practice. The daily sittings should be the hardest work we do all day; if not, they are most likely not being properly done. Only work will develop

clear, uncentered and nonseeking, choiceless attention, and only this attention, released from all technique, ideology, or grasping for experience, can then be brought, little by little, into all our affairs. Without this capacity for attention, there is no real meditation and no way to live attentively, joyously, and in true mindfulness. An untrained mind is the slave of every whim and petty annoyance, even of its own reactions.

Attention and awareness develop

slowly as the time given to daily practice grows and the quality of the work improves. Above all we learn, slowly and painfully, that true meditation can never be made into a technique for the ego's purpose; the mind that is seeking freedom, joy, or any kind of experience can never be free any more than an alcoholic can find a way to drink. Let us learn from those who have gone far on this road that meditation begins and ends in freedom from seeking, controlling, and accumulating.

Meditation begins with the sim-

plest of self-disciplines; it leads on to the wholly open-ended range of experience in the eternal now that AA offers every day. The great values of sobriety, sanity, truth, joy, and maturing can never be accumulated or even grasped; the very act of seeking dissipates the treasure that is sought. Meditation in daily life is freedom from the known, from the past, from the whole burden of seeking. And the renewal of this freedom from moment to moment each 24 hours is the life of mindfulness.

D. D., MD, Manhattan, N.Y.

April 1976

Around the Tables

Where It Begins

AROUND THE TABLES, we worked on the First Step for a newcomer. The leader and I felt our lives had been unmanageable from an early age — primarily because our drinking was out of control. He drank only eleven years and reached AA at twenty-four; I plodded along until I was forty-one.

The more I reflect on being out of control, the more my inventory shows a loss of will in my formative years. The high-school terms were marred by periodic drunkenness; the summers, by prolonged bouts. College, service, and night school were times of serious drink-

ing. And, of course, the next twelve years were catastrophic. Yet my nonalcoholic friends consider only my last four or five years as a problem-drinking period. There are AAs who hold this view. Not I; I know my drinking was out of control early on.

The importance to me of recognizing this lack of control is that it precedes by a number of years the generally accepted concept of a “bottom.” Now I try with younger members to drive home this point, so that they may escape those last years when life is truly unmanageable.

June 1976

'How it works' — in one sentence

From Eatontown, N.J.:

I began to experience a feeling of inadequacy when called upon to explain "how it works," until one day I picked up the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. There, on page 15, are four lines that make it crystal clear how AA really works, and they leave me with no doubt in mind when I quote them to an individual who asks that all-important question. Here they are: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole." D. H.

July 1976

*Fourth in a series dealing with
seven deadly character defects*

Anger

ANGER FLARES often in the lives of many people. It is the ever-present demon who packs a knockout punch and is always ready to hang one on the alcoholic's chin. It is possibly the most dangerous of the seven deadly character defects, because it snakes onto the scene so readily: The coffee's cold at breakfast, toast is burned, that so-and-so cut me off driving to work, mail is late, work has doubled, lunch was awful, boss sneered at me, traffic is a nightmare on the way home, everyone's late for supper, turn off the blink-blank rock music.

Normal living is far from smooth. The wheels of progress often seem lubricated by bits of rusty metal, and this can get worse as a bad day stutters along. The experience is universal, and not only alcoholics get burned up — it's everybody, and it's constant. But whatever use anger may be to nonalcoholic John or Jane Doe (and its benefit to anyone is doubtful), it is deadly to the alcoholic, who at best gains serenity and stays on an even keel only by hard effort.

Often, a person marches through a real crisis with head high and is then flattened by some seemingly trivial goat-getter. Anger has tip-

toed in by the back door for the knockout, after failing in a frontal attack.

The plain fact is that in our sleazy modern culture there are myriad things to anger one under the best conditions, and more for special tantrums. The cleared-up alcoholic should know enough to make anger a number one enemy, and meditate in advance on ways to combat it (not to be saintly, just to stay sober). It's dangerous to wait for problems to arise — there may be no time to compensate when a storm strikes and a drink is only an arm's-reach away.

So once more we can turn to the Tenth Step and let daily inventory come in to help. I call the Tenth my Police Step — "Keep your eyes on that traffic light, or you'll get a ticket." The Tenth, backing up and also helped especially by the Third, Seventh, Ninth, and Twelfth, can be pure gold in building stability and emotional balance.

Anyone willing to make the effort can stay in daily training to battle anger, the sneak-punch KO foe, one of the trickiest and nastiest of the seven deadly character defects that stalk the alcoholic.

Bill C., Hull, Mass.

September 1976

Step Eleven and simplicity

From Fort Myers, Fla.:

I have enjoyed the articles in the Grapevine for many years. I am not criticizing the article "Meditation" by Dr. D. D. in the April issue. It is well written and no doubt useful to members on the same intellectual plane as the learned doctor. But I wonder what I would have done when I turned to AA for help in September 1940 had I been presented with this article when I asked my sponsor for help with the Eleventh Step (among others).

Many of us, regardless of early training, had long since withdrawn from matters religious or even spiritual, and required much retraining. In reply to my questions, my sponsor said, "Prayer is talking to God, and meditation is listening to Him," and he recommended a "quiet time" daily or oftener for the purpose. So simple and so wonderfully encouraging to my alcohol-befuddled mind!

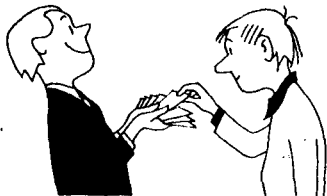
I was in the fortunate position of being able to converse with Dr. Bob on many occasions over a period of almost ten years, and was always impressed by his ability to go directly to the heart of a problem without window dressing or embellishment. I was privileged to hear his last address, at the Convention in Cleveland in 1950, in which he called to our attention that our program is, in the last analysis, merely one of "love and service," and admonished us to keep it simple and "Let's not louse it all up." Are we forgetting this?

D. S.

Is the game hide-and-seek?

From Edmonton, Alta.:

I have cards bearing the "I Am Responsible" declaration and my name and phone number. I place the cards in the hands of every newcomer or visitor who will accept



one. The past month or two, I have had a lot of phone calls from newcomers in search of members doing Twelfth Step work who failed to give a last name or phone number the newcomer could use.

As an example, I have tried most of this weekend to locate a certain member who was having some success with a new chap. This chap could not relate to me. He wanted his new friend from AA, and I could not help him.

So my plea is this: If you are doing Twelfth Step work with someone, be sure he has all the information he needs to get hold of you any time—day, night, or weekends. The next time I chair our group, I will ask my fellow members to stand up so newcomers and visitors alike can see them and look them up for after-meeting chats. Surely, the newcomer, the most important person at your meeting, should be easily able to contact the member who has moved him enough to open up and seek the help he needs from AA.

B. P.

December 1976

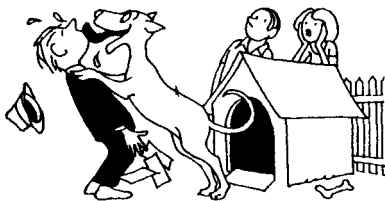
Four-footed twelfth-stepper

From Englewood, Colo.:

One weekend a few months ago, I made two Twelfth Step calls. Both the fellows have since quit drinking and are now regularly attending meetings with their wives.

I played each call by ear. I spent an hour on the first call and two on the second, plus hauling the man to six meetings. But I have to admit I had some extra help on the second call.

These people had recently been burglarized and had acquired a mean guard dog. As we went out into the backyard to do our talking, they warned me not to try to pet the beast. After sizing me up, the dog



jumped up and gave me a slurp across the face. Then the dog went and got a plastic ring, her most prized possession, and gave it to me to throw for her. This really convinced the fellow that I was a good guy.

I have heard it said that the ways of the Lord are, indeed, very strange and his messengers most ridiculous. The dog and I are good examples.

J. E. D.

Try...

*To those who
are far from
perfection,
but who make
an effort,
there come
miraculous
rewards*

IN EVERY SINGLE chapter of the AA Big Book, we can find the simple but all-important word "try." What a fantastically simple requirement for all of us, newcomers and old-timers alike.

The thought finally came to me that all I really had to do was try. We do not set the goal of spiritual perfection, but we are offered a way of spiritual growth if we are willing to try.

And so we might well ask the newcomer who wants what we have: "Are you willing to try our suggested program? Will you try to surrender and to believe that a Higher Power can and will restore you to sanity? Will you try to turn your will and your life over to the care of God as you understand Him? Will you try a stab at self-honesty and then try to seek God's help in removing your shortcomings and character defects? Will you try to make amends and practice a daily inventory? Will you try to improve your conscious contact with God and to learn His will for you?"

"And finally, now that you have received so much just for the trying, will you try to carry this message and practice these principles in all your affairs?"

For those who have tried, the rewards are truly miraculous and immeasurable. For the alcoholic, the first reward is the ability, however impossible it may seem at first, to stay away from one drink one day at a time. The ability to do this, which we could never do alone, is granted through God's grace, which, I am convinced, is showered upon any alcoholic coming to AA with a willingness to try.

The other miracles are too numerous to list, for they may range all the way from sobriety to serenity — and beyond! Initially, many of us

arrive at AA as willing as only the dying can be, and with this attitude, born of self-preservation, we try to stop drinking one day at a time. But when we go on from there, trying to make the Twelve Steps a part of our everyday lives, the simple but beautiful trying ceases to be a struggle and becomes our daily privilege, bringing new and unexpected blessings.

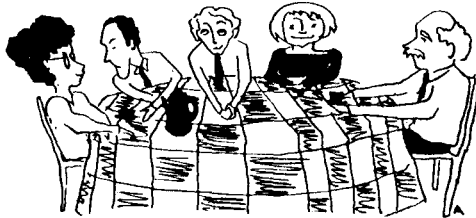
This simple word has come to mean so much to me that I now begin each day with a prayer of thanks that God has given me another day to try again, regardless of how much I may have faltered the day before.

It's as though God were speaking to each one of us, asking, "Will you try it my way?"

Ed C., Union City, N.J.

February 1977

Around the Tables



Twelve Steps to Happiness

AROUND THE TABLES, I found myself part of a discussion on Step Seven, and I said, as I always do, that the only way to take a Step is to do it. As far as I am concerned, talking about Step Seven at a meeting is great, but it is absolutely meaningless unless I do it. And if I haven't done Step Four, it is impossible to do Step Seven any justice. (I didn't take each Step just once and stop there; I'm always taking all of them.)

Don't debate the Steps; do them. There is much to be gained at a table as we exchange concepts, ideas, and the like, but sharing our actual expe-

rience must count far more than sharing abstract doctrines. One aspect of the AA experience is happiness, and it is delightful to share it. I have found unbounded joy in being able to share happiness, and the basis for my happiness is the practice of the Steps.

It is sad to observe the great waste of time and energy by many AAs as they pursue this new discovery or that new book, looking endlessly for happiness, but avoiding the Steps. Their example, however, is not lost on me; it reaffirms my simple belief that *doing* the Steps is the easiest, softest way to happiness.

The Third Step

Turning It Over

I REACHED the Third Step after trying to understand the first two. I had reflected on the First—I can't handle alcohol. In the Second, I had come to believe, slowly, in a Power that could restore me to sanity. Since I now did believe, it seemed a sensible idea to turn myself over completely to this Power. My own way of living had proved a disaster. Now I was willing to try the way of Someone Else.

Doing that isn't complicated. If I have a toothache, I turn my problem over to a dentist. I don't question him; I know that he is not going to drill a hole in my shoulder, that his knowledge and skill will end the toothache. The idea of turning to someone more competent than I can apply to multiple areas. In their fields, the doctor, lawyer, CPA, plumber, butcher, and so on are all greater powers than I. Only my ingrown pride, arrogance, and conceit could deter me from admitting this.

So now I made a decision to turn my will and life over to God, as I understood Him. There was no defensible reason for quibbling; I knew I should just try turning it over, and shut up. But then I asked

myself: How? It wasn't enough to say the Third Step aloud, then sit back and wait for miracles.

At first, I thought that since I was generously turning my life over, the Higher Power should quickly turn something over in return. The possibility that the Power, in taking such control, might cancel my free will and options (which I thought I cherished) didn't occur to me at that point.

Time brought a little common sense. Some strictly one-day-at-a-time way of turning it over must be found. It took a lot of meditation to reach the concept I hold today: Only one day need (or can) be tackled. Each day when I wake, I am guided by a set of conditions that outline what I must do, or ought to do, in the normal course. These might include going to work, or working at home, or caring for the children. The conditions are different for each person.

Since the Higher Power isn't going to write out instructions or give audible directions, I will have to proceed as best as I am able. Since I have free will, and certain duties have been laid out for me, I can

either tackle them or rebel. The mother of several brats, or the guy whose boss just sneered at him, may feel free to rush out and board a bus for Seattle. But all history proves that those who run out on others, who quit cold in the clutch, whose collars get a bit tight, eventually pay a high price one way or another. It seems I must try to do the things that come along in the course of just one day.

If I try to live one hour or one instant at a time, and do my best at each task with a cheerful and serene attitude, I believe I am implementing fully the spirit of the Third Step. I am turning my will and life over by doing all that has been placed within my reach today, which is apparently what He wants.

No longer am I letting self-will and selfishness run riot.

This is how I try to put myself to work on the Third Step. Others may in other ways try the same thing, groping for answers as I must do. I am a mediocre student and must think slowly and carefully. But with daily practice, my habit of reflection will become easier and at length constant, like breathing. And as Bill W. said, far from preventing anyone from exercising free will, such a daily effort of turning over everything in full trust will help lead to "those sterling qualities which can add up to greatness of spirit and action—true and lasting freedom under God, the freedom to find and do *His* will

W. C., Hull, Mass.

April 1977

The AA group

Working Together

WHEN BOB joined our Tuesday night Step group, he was sober nine years. He had gone to meetings regularly, but when he came to our group he was consumed by anger, depression, and fear. He had never worked the Twelve Steps, and so he'd never found the freedom the program promises.

Within just one month of his first meeting with us, Bob had done a good job of working the first eight Steps and was making progress on his amends. In the next several years, he swapped a number of Fifth Steps with the other members of the group. He cleaned up his amends by mak-

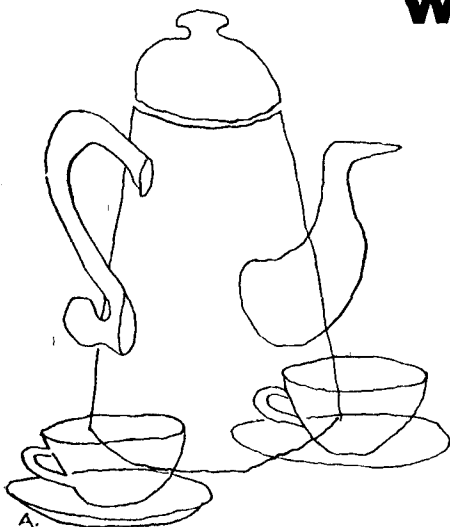
Through the Twelve Steps

ing them *directly* to those he had harmed. He learned about taking Step Three aloud with another AA member and did that numerous times. He did the same with Step Seven. He continued to write thorough Fourth Steps and follow them with the cleansing of Step Five.

Bob explained, "By example and encouragement, members of the group helped me find the benefits of the program that had eluded me. The promises began to come true. Anger, depression, and fear gradually dissolved and disappeared. Freed from the past, I began to live easily in the present."

In our view, a group is strong to the degree that its members are working the Steps. This releases the vitality needed for change, and all the members share in its power. A member joining the group is picked up and carried by this vitality. It starts him doing the things that make him well.

Martha came into our group two years ago, sober just a few weeks. Soon after that, several of the women helped her with her Fourth Step. When she was ready for her Fifth Step, Martha took it with a woman in the group, who took hers at the same time. They took Step Three



and Step Seven aloud. Then this older member helped Martha write out her list of persons she had harmed. Martha began to make amends. She has continued to work all the Steps.

She has stayed sober in the past two years despite difficult personal problems. The example of the group encouraged her to keep following the program's directions. This, in turn, enabled her to handle each day's trials. "As I worked the Steps, I found my own answers and gained the strength to put them to work in my life," Martha said.

We meet in members' homes and each Tuesday night take one of the Twelve Steps. When we get up to Twelve, we start over again. The comments are alive because each person is working every one of the Steps and is speaking from fresh experience. It's a working group, not a discussion group.

The spiritual life demands honesty and responsibility. It recalls the pungent observation of St. Theresa: "God is among the pots and pans." Speaking from where we are generates an honesty that helps each of us become a bit more sane. Persuasive in its power, the strength of the group helps us move along in the program. It carries a transforming message for all, whether new or old in the Fellowship.

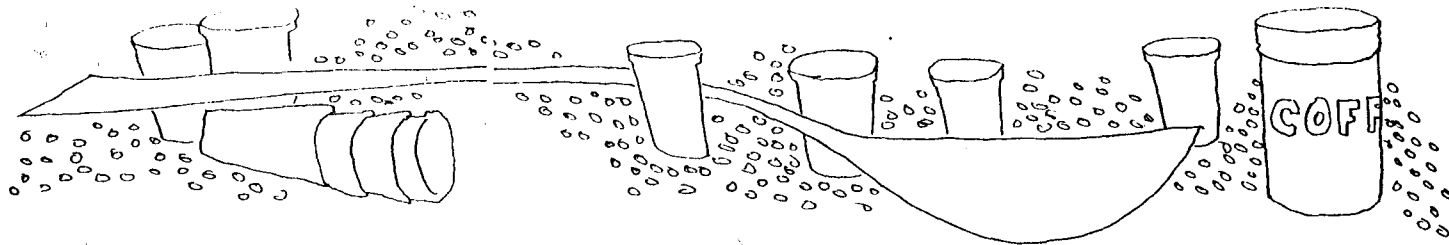
Working the Steps slashes through the empty rhetoric of conversation about God and provides an experience of God. The gap between the

two is measured in light years. To go from knowledge to experience is to move from one side of the earth to the other.

Each Tuesday night, the meeting begins with a quiet time. Someone reads "How It Works." The host or hostess speaks on the Step for that evening, each member comments, and the meeting closes with the Lord's Prayer. There's an unofficial collection, and occasionally we have a *brief* discussion of what to do with the money.

Our members live in about eight different suburbs west of Chicago. Recently, we donated Big Books to the libraries in each of these suburbs. Later, we may give them copies of the "Twelve and Twelve," too. We support local and world AA services, but we take care of these obligations with a minimum of time and no confusion.

I've spent a good bit of time in AA activities, committees, and so on, and some of those meetings should have been held in the violent ward of the local state hospital. Members of our Step group are concerned with the message—experiencing the message and carrying it. We spend no time in business-bickering.



Our Fellowship has Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity, and Service. Recovery starts with working the Steps. As long as I'm a member of AA, my recovery will continue through the Steps. That's where the message comes from. Without a solid base of experience in working the Steps, we'll ultimately have no need for either Unity or Service. There'll be nothing to unify and no understanding of how to serve.

We could find ourselves in the same predicament as a town with an elaborate water system—gleaming pipes, tanks, pumping stations, filtration plants—but no source of water. Many other spiritual movements have drifted down that dismal path where structure supplants spirit.

The power in our group is tangible, but not coercive. Each of us works the Steps because friends are witnessing to what they find through the Steps. A vehicle for God's love, our group liberates the wonderful spiritual alchemy that takes the worthless past and transmutes it into a useful present. It turns garbage into gold.

Initially, the bond in AA is one of mutual suffering. Then it becomes mutual aid, and finally a vision of a

future we couldn't reach anywhere else. In the spirit of Tradition Eleven, we have attracted members from all over the Chicago area. Several other Step groups have formed from ours in the past few years.

One of our members, Bill, was sober eleven years when he joined us six years ago. In those eleven years, he had gone to countless meetings, made innumerable calls on new members, sponsored a number of alcoholics. He'd made one slight omission, however. He had never worked the Steps.

Depressed, afraid, angry, he frantically sought relief from his symptoms caused by sobriety without Steps. "I went to a psychiatrist who explored my subconscious and checkbook with equal enthusiasm," declared Bill. "I tried other therapies. Nothing helped."

Then he visited a treatment facility near Chicago and talked to the chief psychologist, who supposedly knew something about alcoholics and AA. The psychologist suggested shock treatment. Bill now calls him "Dr. Electrode." Fortunately, before Dr. Electrode could connect him up to the current, Bill ran into a member of our group.

The member explained that Bill's

symptoms were the inevitable result of stopping drinking without working the program. Step by Step, he helped Bill follow the program's directions, right through Step Eight, which he helped Bill write after they had shared a Fifth Step. Bill joined our group, continued to work the Steps, and quickly lost his depression and other miseries.

In general, the experience of the AA members who have joined us testifies that *recovery is a process, not an event*. Some had been sober many years before they began to honestly use the program as it's designed. Others had been around AA for years, unable to find freedom from the insane obsession that kept bringing the first drink to their lips.

From these varying personal stor-

ies, they've all drawn the same conclusion, however: The program works just as the Big Book says it will; the payoff comes from persistent effort with all the Steps. Our group stimulates that kind of action in each of us.

No one can throw us out of AA, but we can throw ourselves out by living in a way that forfeits our membership. On occasion, I've nearly done that. Dishonest, irresponsible, self-centered, I've pushed myself to the outskirts of our Fellowship. My friends in the Tuesday night Step group have seen what's happening, caught me, and said, "Hey, come back. Stick with us or you don't have a chance." They've been right, of course, and they've saved my life.

P. M., Riverside, Ill.

Step Two

The Power of the Good

THERE WAS a time when I blitzed through the Twelve Steps because I wanted to get well in a hurry. I reasoned that if these Steps were the program for recovery, well, I'd just recover that much sooner and stop hurting.

That was several years ago. I still feel despondent and hurt from time to time. I also still have my moments of insanity, during which I seem deliberately to do each one of the items on my checklist of no-nos, even though I know better. For instance, I take myself far too seriously, try to change the things I can't, try to do everything by yesterday, believe I can do it alone, hang on to resentments, put first things last and generally procrastinate, seek out and dwell on the negative aspects of events or persons, *expect* too much, and *accept* too little. You get the idea.

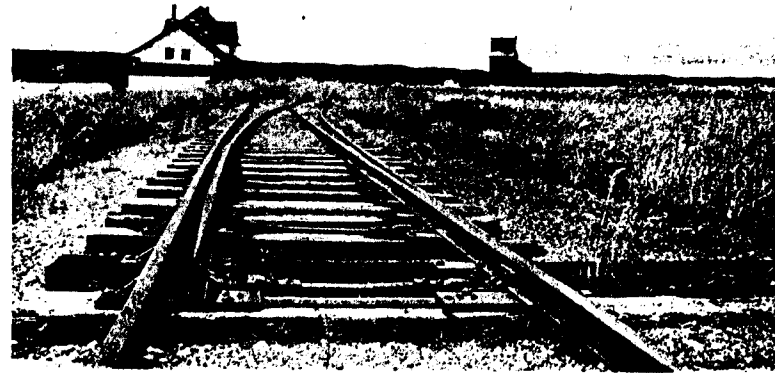
Just now is such a time. But despite all appearances (and as I was told in AA meetings but never quite believed), my worst moments sober are still far, far better than my best

moments drunk. At least, today I know I'm not going to have to lie about my drinking, mouth off to a friend or employer, pass out, or black out, any of which would make tomorrow impossible to face and would require another day of anesthesia, *ad infinitum*.

I don't have to cringe from the future these days, thanks to AA. More than the physical retching, throbbing headaches, and all, I remember the paranoia. I skulked around avoiding family, friends, associates, and neighbors, wondering what I had done the day before and absolutely certain they were all talking about my drunkenness and conspiring to put me away. I'm plenty grateful to be free of that!

At the moment, there are three facts of life I am trying to learn to accept.

First, recovery comes slowly for good reason: to teach me persistence, perseverance, and patience, all qualities I lack. Blitzing through the Steps before I was mentally and emotionally competent was just



another sign of my impatience. I need to work on the Twelve Steps continually, for as my head clears, my emotions stabilize, and my self-honesty improves, I find more garbage I need to rid myself of.

Second, hurting is part of getting better. I had anesthetized myself from feeling real emotions, from experiencing painful situations, and from developing any solid relationships with family and friends. Now, resuming an emotional and spiritual growth interrupted early in my teens with the onset of alcoholism, I am finding that this growth is sometimes painful. I need to learn to accept these growth pangs, along with whatever else life throws my way, as necessary for my growth.

Third, understanding that there is a Higher Power active in my daily life is necessary to my continued sobriety and serenity. I thought I had no problem taking the Second Step. As a youngster, I'd been given a good religious background, and I did not need to come to believe. I

already believed (or so I thought). In a later study of the Steps, I paused at that one and pondered it: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." I hadn't really taken that Step. Just to be safe, I turned to Chapter Four in the Big Book, "We Agnostics." I'd skipped that part before, since I didn't consider myself an agnostic.

Then I realized that had my belief in a Higher Power been stronger and viable before, I probably never would have followed a style of life that made it possible for me to become an alcoholic. So I needed to work Step Two. I saw that the phrase was "*came to believe*," *not* "*already had a belief*," or some such misreading.

The "sanity" part of "could restore us to sanity" was no problem. I had persisted in drinking in the face of overwhelming and painful evidence that I couldn't drink normally—what else but insane?

My mind fixed on "Power . . .

could restore . . .,” and I perceived that I had only to come to believe in order to receive active help from this Power greater than myself. Through this Step, the founders of the AA program were telling me a simple truth: Those successful in AA had developed, as an active part of their recovery, a belief in a Power outside themselves that was evident and active in their daily lives.

The wisdom of the founders in not being more specific about the form of this belief had once been lost on me but now became quite clear. This belief has to be arrived at individually, often through a *gradual* spiritual awakening of the type William James called “educational,” in terms of one’s own needs and experience, and in a way

that is practical for each individual. This power of the good, which I choose to call God, is not my earlier abstract concept, taken down from the shelf from time to time and dusted off when things got rough; it is a useful, practical, and active force for good in my life.

Having come to this point with Step Two, there was no turning back. Step Three followed logically: If God as I understood Him was an active force for good in human affairs, I should have no fear of turning my will and my life over to His care. And Step Eleven, reminding me to actively maintain this newfound awareness, suggested that I could improve this consciousness by praying to know and do His will.

D. S., Honolulu, Hawaii

The Third Step

Turning It Over

*It doesn't seem to work
very well when there are reservations,
conditions, or preconceived notions*

THE THIRD STEP says, "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*" A simple—not easy—procedure, I've been told, and one that would undoubtedly simplify my life, if I could ever take it.

Not that I've made a conscious decision to avoid this Step. On the contrary. I've frequently turned over my will and life, on the average of ten to twelve times each week.

Yet, in spite of my Third Steps, situations I've "turned over" reappear to race through the corridors of my mind and demand resolution. "I turned you over last week," I protest at such times. "How did you get back to torment me anew?"

The answer to this enigma lies, I've begun to suspect, in the way I

turn things over—selectively, temporarily, or with conditions and preconceptions about outcomes.

Turning it over selectively: My first attempts at turning it over were confined to areas of my life in which I felt sure of myself. For example, if I'd held the same job for five years and felt certain it would be there tomorrow regardless of what I or anyone else did, I turned that over.

I did not turn over, for many months, any areas in which the outcome seemed dubious. If, for example, my job appeared in jeopardy, I handled that one myself.

Turning it over temporarily: When I reread the Third Step and discovered no delineation between areas for God to manage and those left

to me, I decided to try turning over everything—for two weeks. Implicit in this concession, of course, was the expectation of grabbing back any issue not resolved as I felt it should be after a fortnight.

Serenity and undisturbed sleep followed—until two weeks elapsed and I took back all the problems. Now they "needed to be resolved." Clearly, I still felt my Higher Power couldn't be trusted to bring about the best solution.

Turning it over conditionally: I was reminded that the Third Step gives me no authority to specify my Higher Power's timetable. The Third Step not only means turning over everything, I was admonished, but also means turning things over indefinitely.

So I decided to try again. As a sign of good intentions, I announced magnanimously at a meeting that I was turning over my job. "Let God decide if I should be in this job or some other one," I said.

All was fine until it appeared I should, indeed, be in some other job. "This is one area of my life I'll have to manage myself," I concluded.

Turning it over "until": After months of job-hunting, I accepted a new position. "This must have been what my Higher Power wanted for me," I said. "I'll accept this as His judgment."

Two weeks later, I received a letter about another opening. "That would have been better," I lamented.

"I made a precipitous decision and should have waited."

If the issue had really been turned over to my Higher Power, how did I get back into the picture?

Turning it over with preconceptions: My last obstacle to turning it over—my tendency to prejudge a situation—dwarfs all other pitfalls. The moment I decide which outcome would be best for me, my attempts to turn over a situation are doomed.

A corollary of this is that whenever I decide any thing or person is indispensable to my happiness, stability, or life-style, I will be unable to let go of it.

If, in job-hunting, I decide what position I need, want, or could perform most productively, I've negated any chance of turning my will over to God.

When I decide where I should or shouldn't be in any area of my life, I've effectively blocked communication from my Higher Power. There is no longer hope that I'll be open-minded enough to hear.

Turning it over: Turning it over will work for me only if I apply it to all areas of my life all the time, and if I do so without imposing conditions or preconceptions.

I've learned this much through attending scores of AA meetings. Perhaps, with a few hundred more meetings, I'll acquire enough faith to practice it.

K. N., Grove City, Ohio

June 1977

Around the Tables

Show Your Gratitude

AROUND THE TABLES, from time to time, I hear this idea expressed: "After a while, you don't need to go to so many meetings. If you are really growing, there are so many things to do that you don't have time." This belief seems to be held by persons who have achieved some degree of sobriety and are attempting to gain certain of the advantages a sober life offers. We cannot fault anyone for expanding his horizons; clearly, we should all strive to improve ourselves.

As my sobriety lengthens, however, I find more and more that the way to expansion lies within the Twelve Steps. All I need to know is contained in the working of the Steps. This is similar to walking, which is one of the finest exercises because I don't need expensive equipment, a gym, a pool, courts, etc.—just me and the streets. With the Steps, I truly need nothing

else, because the work is in, about, and for me.

Dr. Bob knew what he was doing when he said, "Keep it simple." He recognized that within the Steps there is sufficient wisdom for all ages. Those who "don't need meetings" because of their growth and development overlook the keep-it-simple aspect of the Twelfth Step, gratitude. Carrying the message to other alcoholics is the only way I know of showing my gratitude for the people who were there to help me when I arrived. I go to a lot of meetings because I need them, but even if I thought I didn't need them, I would go purely out of gratitude.

The beauty of the Steps lies in their infinite application to developing a joyous manner of living by expressing eternal thanks to God for giving us the wisdom to avoid taking the first drink.

*Steps Six and Seven
are asking for*

'A Whole New Me'

THE BIG BOOK says, "At some of these we balked," and I did. Not at the first few Steps. Powerless over alcohol? Life unmanageable? Jolly correct. When you've lost an \$800-per job with promise of unlimited advancement, plus one wife and one son, plus the last red cent of capital, plus honor and self-respect, and your kid is in therapy because he lived with Daddy—you know your life is unmanageable. You say, "God—why?" And He, like the Ghost of Christmas Future, points to a garbage can full of empties. Alcohol. Oh.

God? No problem. Always believed in Him, at least on paper.

Moral inventory? Why not? I tried, as fearlessly and thoroughly as possible, and went on to the Fifth Step. The prophesied result of the Fifth Step came to pass; the compulsion to drink left me. I was free, on Cloud Nine.

Steps Six and Seven sounded awfully easy to me after the catharsis of Step Five. Nothing to it!

Time has shown me that Six and Seven are the toughest in the program. You can't just jot down in the calendar: "Today I finished Steps Six and Seven—Step Eight, here I come." No way. These Steps have stingers in them.

This is heavy stuff, friend. These Steps, I found, were asking me for an awful lot more than a sleepy assent, a sort of surface-level willingness to be made perfect (or more perfect than I already was). They were asking for a whole new me. They were reminding this alcoholic that the "prayer and meditation" lurking ahead in Step Eleven would be totally valueless if done by the old me with the old ideas and the old attitudes and the old character defects; that I had a habit of asking God for things without really wanting them or really understanding them; that what I should have been dealing with at this stage of the program was not surface-level flaws but deep-rooted defects.

In Steps Four and Five, I had

played the right tune in the wrong key. I had listed and admitted a host of flaws and wrongdoings, and had not really gotten down to "the exact nature" of my wrongs at all.

And it became clear to me why this was so. I was willing to have these surface-level flaws removed: to be no longer compulsively sarcastic, to stop walking away from people who didn't fit my notions of "my type of person," and so on. But the character defects behind these flaws remained. I was sarcastic because I had a deep-rooted feeling of being superior to others (or, equally often, of being inferior to them). I turned away from others because I had an ego trip going that I hadn't finished yet.

Steps Six and Seven told me to go back and do Four and Five again, this time looking for the real inside dope. What was basically wrong with this individual named Art, that made him behave this way? What was bent? Where was the root of this sickness of character?

And here I balked. I found that I didn't really want to change, not at gut level. Later, after a refresher

course in the dubious joys of alcoholic drinking, brought on by my unwillingness to work the program the AA way, I had—thank God—a second chance at the Steps. And then I understood what Steps Six and Seven were telling me about me. I was used to the old me, and to trade it away for a new one would mean starting all over again. I didn't want to do that—the old me would do for a while longer.

So that was it. I was resisting Steps Six and Seven because I wanted to preserve the old me that I was familiar with, and feared the encounter with a new self whom I would have to meet and get to know like a stranger.

But it can be done, and it was, and the result is that sobriety has lasted well into a second year. I'm getting acquainted with this new me, and I like him because he doesn't have to drink. Of course, the old self still lurks in dark places within and reappears from time to time. That's what Step Ten is all about. But there's progress. Sober progress. And *that's* what AA is all about. *A. H., Naples, Fla.*

August 1977

List debits, not credits

From Waukesha, Wis.:

Whenever I attend a meeting where the Fourth and Fifth Steps are being discussed, someone always mentions writing down assets along with defects. My life, before sobriety and the AA program, was spent pampering myself. As soon as I would entertain thoughts about my wrongs, I would quickly dismiss them



by remembering all my good deeds. What a cop-out!

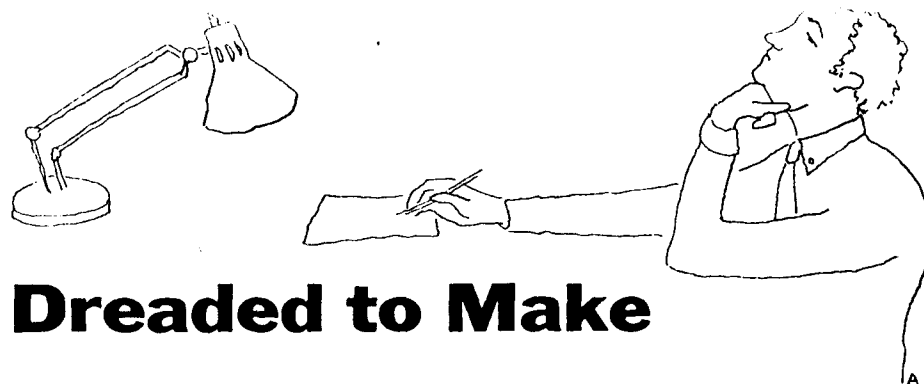
Let's face it, folks; these are uncomfortable Steps. Fear of being "too hard on ourselves" only complicates matters. I heard and read that the Fourth and Fifth Steps were necessary for my continued sobriety. This fact made the pain bearable.

I have never read, in the Big Book or the "Twelve and Twelve," that we should write down our assets when doing our moral inventory. I wanted to rid myself, finally, of my wrongs and to wipe the slate clean.

No way did I want to rid myself of my assets! These I just clutched close to my heart.

Being painfully honest in these two Steps started me on the road to humility. I could finally accept myself as human and go to work on my varied defects of character (Step Six).

P. H.



The Amends I Most Dreaded to Make

*Some things can never be undone,
but there is a spirit that heals old wounds*

I HAD MADE all my amends but one. I had faced my father, my mother, my brothers, my second ex-wife, and numerous employers and acquaintances I had stolen from or cheated. The results had been incredible. Every one of them was kind and appreciative of what I was trying to do with my life. Many of them told me, "If there's anything I can do for you, please let me know." The peace I was beginning to experience was astounding. I also kept a list of the people I wasn't able to locate, in case I should ever come into contact with them. Now, there was no more rationalizing, no more amends to make in order to delay the one I dreaded most.

She was a pedestrian I ran down in September of 1965. She was rushed to the hospital with a brain hemorrhage and wasn't expected to live. There were investigators looking for me, and I kept avoiding

them. When I was sent back to jail for the sixth and last time, I learned that she had been released from the hospital at her request and was returning to her home in Brussels, Belgium. That was all I knew. I had no idea what condition she was in. I didn't want to know. I was paying the price for my mistake in time behind bars. My debt was paid.

I had my last drink two years after the accident. I had just spent eight months trying to stay sober without those damn Steps, and the results had been nil. This time, I decided to give them a try. I had some difficulty understanding and coming to terms with some of the Steps in the beginning. I guess we all do. But eventually, the understanding came and the application followed.

Now, without realizing how far I'd come, I knew I had to face up to the one amends I had dreaded ever since I had come to comprehend

Step Nine. That little voice inside me wouldn't let up. I had to do it.

I really didn't know where to start, where to find her. I looked at the police report, found her address in Belgium, and wrote to her. The letter was returned: "Addressee Unknown." I called the Belgian consulate in Los Angeles. They told me there was nothing they could do, but that I might write the American embassy in Brussels. I did.

Then the news: "In response to your letter of April 27, 1972, I regret to inform you that Miss W— died in Belgium in 1966 shortly after her return from the United States. This information was provided to the embassy by her last known employer."

Oh my God, no! Not because of the accident. How would I know for sure? I was torn. Part of me was saying I had done all I could do and I would have to learn to accept it.

But another part of me felt uneasy and unsettled. Then I realized that she must have had a family, and that I certainly owed them amends.

In her medical jacket at the hospital, I found the addresses of a sister in Canada and two doctors in Belgium. I wrote my letter of amends to the sister. It, too, came back: "Addressee Unknown." I wrote to both doctors in Belgium. Six months later, I received a reply from one of them. He commended what I was trying to do and sent the sister's address, in Belgium. I wrote my letter of amends again. In two weeks, I had a reply in Flemish. It took another week to have it translated.

"This morning, we received your letter. I thank you with all my heart. Perhaps your letter helped to cure the deep wound that was caused by the death of my only, loved, younger sister. Yes, she is dead following that accident. It was terribly hard.

It still causes such a strong pain. We loved each other enormously. She was an artist; later, I shall send you a copy of one of her works.

"The insurance concerning the accident was paid to us [the writer and her husband], the trip and the burial by us. We suffered financially terribly much because of her death. She helped us very much. She was a good person. She was so dear to me. A day does not go by without my thinking about her. We have one child, Julie, eight years old. I am sending a picture taken on the day of her first communion.

"We are not rich, but my husband and I are very happy together, and are taking care of everything together with love. We do not want to profit by you. You must pay nothing. If you want, and if you can, perhaps give something to put in Julie's savings account. She will remain alone in life sometimes. But you must not defraud yourself of anything. I would be completely glad about that—the money for the child. I am a schoolteacher, and I try to make a good person out of my child.

"I keep your letter for Julie. And will you write a small letter off and on? That also I would like very much. And you must pray for us and all those who have lost someone in an accident. It is so hard. Life is so short. I am so glad, so very glad that you have written. I am so thankful to you. I shall finish for now, for I must go to school. Julie also prays for you and sends her best regards. I

hope you find someone who will translate the letter to you, because I don't know enough English. God is good and merciful, and we must be like that also. God bless you."

I did write again. The letters I received have been even warmer. I found it hard to believe and accept. How could anyone have that much love and forgiveness? Like most of my life in AA, it was too much to comprehend. Then we began to correspond about seeing each other some day and how nice it would be to sit and talk face-to-face.

In July 1974, I flew to New York to meet my nine-year-old daughter, who was going with me to Belgium. This was at the suggestion of my ex-wife, and I was startled by her new trust in me. I was impressed that I had changed that much.

It was difficult for my daughter, leaving her mother for the first time. I hadn't seen her in three years, and never had it been just the two of us. On the plane, we had dinner and went to sleep. I woke up suddenly, just before we began our descent into Brussels, and she was standing over me, just looking at me. Then she was in my arms crying, and I felt for the first time in my life the overwhelming and beautiful responsibility of being a parent.

I don't have the words to describe our trip to Belgium. When we were met at the airport by our Belgian friends, we embraced and cried as if we had known one another for years. We lived in their home for

two weeks. Our daughters were instant friends in spite of the language barrier. My daughter and I were given a grand tour of western Belgium. We crossed the English Channel from France to Dover. Everything was done for us. They fed us, washed our clothes, and introduced us to their friends. And when the girls had gone to bed, we spent many hours talking about the accident and its aftermath, talking and crying together. My daughter and I were loved in a way so total and so foreign to me that I thought there must be a catch. It scared the hell out of me. One day, they told

me that if anything happened to them, I would have to come to Belgium and take care of everything. I was very flattered but had no concept of the depth of what they were saying until my final day there.

At five o'clock on the morning we were to leave Belgium, I awoke to find sitting at the foot of my bed the sister of the woman I killed in 1965. She was crying and looking at me intently. Then, very softly, she said, "You are my brother. My real brother. My very dear and real brother. Don't ever forget that."

I never have. I doubt that I ever will.

D. S., Desert Hot Springs, Calif.

Don't Be Afraid of the Steps

*According to the Big Book,
they are the program*

MORE AND MORE, I hear new members and sometimes old ones say that they get more AA by going to meetings or by talking to other AAs than they would by reading the Big Book. Sometimes voluntarily, but generally only when asked, these and others will admit that they haven't even attempted working most of the Steps for the first time.

Some AAs, while saying they want the program, just cannot get honest enough to start working the Fourth through Tenth Steps. I believe that these people are not really happy with whatever measure of sobriety they may have, and that they had better find out why. I am willing to bet that they will find they have been more than just a little dishonest with themselves from the very beginning. They will probably learn that they have been holding back in turning their lives over to the care of God.

I have heard it said that there are no musts in AA and that we don't have to work all the Steps to be sober. Well, nothing says a sky diver *has* to

pull the rip cord on his parachute, but he will be happier and live longer if he does!

I do not see how an AA who hasn't read the Big Book or doesn't attempt to work all the Steps into his or her daily life can have anything but an eventual abrupt landing. The AA who uses all the other activities first is like the sky diver who jumps holding on to a lot of umbrellas and hoping to use the parachute if he needs it at the last minute.

The thought of staying sober the rest of our lives is not an easy thing to face, but honestly taken one day at a time, it becomes simple. Likewise, the thought of working all Twelve Steps in one day for the first time is not only monumental, it's impossible.

A no less monumental task would be to buy twelve new pairs of shoes and try to break all of them in and make them wearable from the start. Doing so would reduce our feet to a bloody mess the first day. It would be a long time before we could wear

any shoes, much less break in all twelve pairs.

A much simpler way would be to put all twelve pairs on a shelf and wear only the first pair for a little bit each day. As soon as it began to pinch, we could put it back on the shelf with the resolve to wear it again for a while later in the day or at least as much as possible the next day. When the first pair of shoes was completely broken in and could be worn all day long, we could try the second pair on a little each day until it, too, became comfortable.

If we use this method, we soon find that we have twelve comfortable pairs of shoes. Now it sounds as if we have it made, but we can't stop there. If we don't wear all twelve pairs frequently, those that are left on the shelf dry out and stiffen. When we finally try to wear them, they hurt and

pinch, and we have to break them in all over again.

My sponsor told me that I could understand the Big Book and work the Twelve Steps more comfortably if I tried this method. It has worked for me, and in the attempt I have gained some serenity and much happiness from my sobriety.

Working the AA program hasn't merely taught me how to be sober; it has taught me to be happy with sobriety. Today, I am happy to be sober, but I still have much to learn about how to face life day by day in a mature manner. For that, I must embrace and use the entire AA program, especially by working all Twelve Steps in my daily life. Using the first three and the Twelfth just isn't good enough if I want to be truly happy with my sobriety.

R. G., Fort Knox, Ky.

*"I knew I had to put this
extra measure of trust
in a fellow AA."*

I came to the painful realization that my confused and misdirected personality was not going to let me forgive myself for some of the things I had been involved in during my drinking days. These things would not be relegated to the caverns of the past; they could not be laid to rest. So, in order to keep this shame and guilt from spilling out into AA and the group, I built another wall around myself. Oh, it didn't look all that bad from the outside. Meetings were actively attended; newcomers were helped; my responsibilities to the group and AA were attended to; and thanks only to the grace of God, three years of dryness were accumulated.

By this time, however, I had learned that AA is not a program based solely upon external affairs, and it was clearly obvious that I was going to have to crack this wall wide open if I was going to hold on to my sobriety much longer. The hurt, fear, and anxiety had grown to such proportions once again that I became "willing to go to any length" once again — even so far as to take the Fourth and Fifth Steps in the manner that, I had been taught, they are supposed to be taken. This time, nothing could be held back. This time, I would be "fearless and thorough." For the sake of my sobriety and every-

thing else I had come to hold dear and precious, it had to be!

The crack in the wall came during and after the taking of my Fifth Step with a local priest. This experience gave me the release and clearheadedness to see that if the wall was to come down all the way, I was going to have to go further and share the entirety of my past experience and my grosser handicaps with a close friend in AA.

Before actually going through with this plan, I half expected to come out of the experience with an even greater sense of apprehension, guilt, and regret. But if I was to be satisfied that I had done what I had to do, and if my mind was to be calmed, I knew I had to put this extra measure of trust in a fellow AA. From past experience, I knew that God would give me the strength to handle the results.

The actual experience of turning myself inside out for the first time in the presence of an AA member left me drained and numb; but when feeling started to come back, I found that I had changed. For the first time in my AA experience, I could feel the sunshine of God's love on my wounds, and true peace of mind.

The day ended as quietly as it had begun. I laid my head down on the pillow that night confident that I had just surmounted a major hurdle in my continuing recovery. I was now one step closer to understanding the majesty of God and the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous.

D. S., Memphis, Tenn.

*"When it comes to ego deflation,
few Steps are harder to take than Five.
But scarcely any Step is more necessary to
longtime sobriety and peace of mind
than this one."*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

Finding Self-Forgiveness

MY LAST THREE years of drinking were a vicious cycle of falling flat on my face, picking myself up, picking up the nearest drink, and then falling right back down. A piece of me was lost in every drunken escapade, and it was not long before every semblance of human resilience, spirit, and dignity had been drained

from my life.

Even though I was only twenty-one at the time, my alcoholism had done its job quite thoroughly, and when AA was offered as a possible solution, I grabbed at it blindly, praying that it might have an answer for me. It did.

But then, as the months swept by,

*“When thus out of joint,
man’s natural desires cause
him great trouble, practically all
the trouble there is. . . . We want to find
exactly how, when, and where
our natural desires have warped us.”*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

How Step Four Came to Me



DURING ELEVEN years in AA, I have become more and more aware of the difficulty that so many of us have in the successful completion—or perhaps I should say the successful beginning—of Step Four.

There is much good material to guide us through this important Step, chiefly in the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. Perhaps because of so much written material, plus so many different personal approaches that I heard, it was for a long time very difficult, if not impossible, for me to “keep it simple” and thus approach the Step in anything but a mechanical manner. This I did twice in treatment centers, because I was told to do it, “and the result was nil” for me.

In retrospect, I see I had not accepted the three preceding Steps fully and honestly. My experience is only my own. I have known many who have apparently completed the

Fourth Step successfully in treatment on a “forced feeding” basis.

Between these two attempts in treatment, I tried the Step alone on the “outside,” and it very nearly led me back to a drink. Again, I either was not ready for it or misunderstood it, and therefore was confused and did not possess the honesty, willingness, or ability to be “searching and fearless.”

Contrary as it may seem, it is now my firm personal opinion that Step Four is strictly a *present* inventory or accounting of myself, and not a history of misdeeds committed during a long career as a practicing alcoholic. It strikes me that what needs my attention today is my present attitude toward these many destructive incidents from the past, along with other character defects that could lead me back to drinking or, at best, to an unhappy “sobriety.” I can see no profit in creating or increasing a

burden of guilt and remorse regarding the past by digging up those painful incidents with which I am already too familiar. Guilt and remorse are themselves among the very things that need looking at today in Step Four, so that they may be honestly admitted to in Step Five and removed in Steps Six and Seven.

As an aside, regarding the past, I have found comfort in two ideas. The first is this: Being a practicing alcoholic (a thing I did not choose or set out to be), I quite naturally did to myself and others many of the terrible things that are typical manifestations of the disease of active alcoholism. I am hardly alone in having demonstrated these outward manifestations. The second idea is this: Being a practicing alcoholic, I probably did about as well as I could under the circumstances at any given time. It usually wasn’t very good, but it was still my best under the circumstances,

and I must remember that, for many years, I did discharge a lot of daily obligations pretty well—until I began approaching the end, the bottom of the chart, the hopeless, helpless, full-blown stage of chronic alcoholism. I sincerely hope I am not using this rationale as an easy way out.

Now let me tell you how Step Four finally came to me. And that’s exactly what it did. It came to me; I didn’t come to it. I had come to Step One, then to Step Two, and then to Step Three over a period of time with all the honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness I could muster. Then, one early morning, Step Four came to me quite unexpectedly. I found myself reaching for note pad and pen and began writing, very rapidly at first and then more deliberately as approximately one and a half hours slipped by. Somewhere along the line, I believe, two convictions had finally gotten a foothold somewhere in my mind. The first was that I would go to any length to avoid another long and totally debilitating and terrifying period of dry depression; the other, that if God was going to restore me to sanity, I would have to do my full part in the process, unreservedly.

I did not concern myself with any pluses. I was already too aware of what I fancied to be my few remaining virtues. Nor did I concern myself with details from the past. I zeroed in strictly on what was wrong with

me. Of course, what was wrong with me was my thinking, those somewhat diminished but still very present and destructive remnants of the alcoholic mind. This defective thinking had kept me in bondage to alcohol. Later, it had condemned me to dry periods, more drinking, dry periods, more drinking, ad nauseam, and this thinking and the resultant feelings had made any true sobriety quite impossible. It was these old defects (the list was long) that had to be gotten out of me and onto paper so that I could look at them squarely and thus prepare myself for their removal in the next three Steps.

All that sounds rather simple,

doesn't it? The only hooker is that it isn't. Among other things, I have had to violate one of my cardinal rules and jump out of order to Step Ten each day of my life since then. But then, why not *continue* to take inventory? The alternative is not at all an attractive choice.

My sincere hope—and my only reason for writing this—is that it may somehow reach and help somebody still lost in that awful wasteland from which I am just emerging and back into which I could so easily and quickly fall. My experience has been that Step Four was the beginning of the way out.

C. W. B., Tryon, N.C.

October 1977

Around the Tables

The Eighth Step

AROUND THE TABLES, I have, of late, participated in a succession of discussions centering on the Eighth Step. I regard this Step as the easiest but perhaps the most subtle in the program. It requires only that I make a list of people I have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all. Unlike Step Five, Eight does not require that I seek out a companion and unload it on him. It does not require searching my soul or being humble — only making a list and becoming willing. Step Nine requires some damn bold action, so it is very different from, though obviously dependent on, Step Eight.

The Eighth Step relates to people other than me. Unquestionably, it points outward and not inward. Many of us feel anger about this position and protest, “I didn’t hurt anyone else but me. I figure I have

to make amends to me.” The phrasing may vary, but the idea is always the same: “make amends to me.” Frankly, I think this is so much garbage. It’s one of the “old ideas” the Big Book advises us to discard—namely, selfishness. If the founders had meant Eight and Nine to be directed at themselves, they would have so stated in plain English.

But here’s an AA paradox: I have found, to my great joy, that if I work on Eight and Nine and keep the emphasis on my relationships with others, these Steps actually do bring about the ultimate amends to me—a happy, sober day-to-day life that brims over with gladness, happiness, good fortune, and all that I could wish for. It’s far better to work on the Steps the way the Big Book and the “Twelve and Twelve” suggest than to risk losing this great life.

December 1977

It Takes Practice to Be Human

*Constant work
with the Tenth Step
shows us what we are
and what we
can become*

DURING MY drinking days, it seemed that I was either a god or a devil—but never human. I was either so grandly above everyone else that they were unworthy of my love or so desperately below the level of everyone else that I felt myself unworthy of their affection. When I was in my deluded god state, I was perfect, all good, and almighty. When I was in my depressed devil state, I was totally useless and worthless, hopelessly flawed.

After I stopped drinking and started to work the simple program that AA gave me, I gradually started to experience life in that condition between godhood and devilhood called humanity. Little by little, I came to learn that, while I wasn't as great as I sometimes fancied myself, neither was I as loathsome as

I often felt. Passage of time and reworking of the Steps taught me that I was neither a god nor a devil but rather a human being. Eventually, I learned that a human being is neither wholly good nor completely bad, but that a human being has the capability of doing either good or bad (or both).

I now believe that it is my lot as a human being, during my brief life, to help and harm, give and take, create and destroy, for I am neither perfect nor wholly evil. I also believe that my life will be a good life rather than a bad one if, at its end, I can honestly say that I helped more than I harmed, gave more than I took, and created more than I destroyed.

AA has taught me that the only way to work toward that goal is to do it on a day-at-a-time basis. So each night, I think of the Tenth Step and ask myself, "Have I, this day, helped more than I've harmed? Given more than I've taken? Created more than I've destroyed?"

M. B., Minneapolis, Minn.

Where's the welcome mat?

From Elmhurst, N.Y.:

Is it my imagination or are people in AA changing? It seems that way lately. When a Twelfth Step comes up, and people are asked, the answer is either that they are too busy taking the wife shopping or have something else planned for themselves, making it virtually impossible for them to go to the aid of a fellow alcoholic.

Where has that welcome mat disappeared to that we used to see at AA meetings? When I first joined, the people were at my beck and call. There was always a friendly handshake or greeting, and the members who gave me their telephone numbers were in the majority.

Only recently, I attended a meeting where I thought I was in a foreign atmosphere, with nary a cordial "Hello" or "My name is ____."

Today, there is a very cliquey atmosphere in various groups, and no one gives a damn for the newcomer. There he stands at the door to the meeting place, alone, frightened, and friendless, especially after just coming off one.

It might be wise to alert the members of AA as a whole to give new guys or gals a greeting and make them feel that someone cares and



they belong. God knows, if I had been given today's treatment when I first came in the doors of an AA meeting, I would probably have turned on my heel and walked out, back to the oblivion and hell I knew as an active alcoholic. Are the people in AA changing? I pray God they aren't.

ANONYMOUS

Action More Action

*tells us time and again
to give it away to keep it*

deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly."

Twelfth-stepping has always been one of AA's attractions to me. When I bought the Big Book, my first week in AA, I remember turning to the chapter "Working With Others," reading and rereading it, and dreaming that some day I might be able to help someone with an alcoholic problem. I am aware that not too many members care to go out on Twelfth Step calls. One of the reasons I hear is "I gave up after a few tries. I guess they weren't ready yet." What if Bill and Dr. Bob had given up? Where would we be now? The chapter "A Vision for You" tells how the early AAs experienced a few dis-

ing, I was in a wreck that totaled my car. The damage was so bad that my right front wheel wound up next to me in the front seat. There was no room in the car for anyone else to survive, yet my life was spared. I am another miracle among many in this beautiful Fellowship of miracles.

I keep involved in the AA program, trying to give back a little of what I have received so freely. Whenever I go to a meeting, I like to arrive early and stay late. I like the face-to-face sharing before and after the meetings. That way, I get to meet the new members and give them a warm welcome, a handshake, and a smile.

Both in and out of meetings, some of the promises the Big Book makes on pages 83 and 84 are beginning to come true. I found another one on page 100: "You . . . must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen." I read things like that, and I keep hearing that it gets better and better the longer I stay sober, and I'm not kidding — if it gets much better, I'll bust! When I was sober two years, I was told, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" Then, this month, after six glorious years of sobriety, one of my sponsors said, "You have barely scratched the surface!" All of the rewards that I'm

members cleared down in the (think of "Bill when he was sentiment du "When all work with as save the day.

One of the our local H& tion) committed message to th When I shared hospital, I ta helped me sta do it alone. I Chapter 3 — identify with I've found pe honestly dor more. In our *Twelve Trad* says, "The jo of AA's Twe its key word.

The Big Bo with Others' "Carry this holics! . . . meaning. To see them help liness vanish, up about yo friends — thi must not miss

tried AA but it didn't work for them. A doctor in AA told me to ask them, when they say that, if they have attended thirty consecutive AA meetings and at half of those gotten active with emptying ashtrays, stacking chairs, helping to clean up after the meeting, etc. Usually, that question rings a bell when I ask it at a meeting. Afterward, one man will come up to me and say he thinks that's the reason he slipped — he hadn't been active. "How can I help?" he will ask.

If you really want to get into action, and you have already taken Steps One, Two, and Three, and you honestly know that you should do Step Four, but you keep putting it off (the way I did), I suggest that you get moving right now. Open the Big Book and start at the bottom of page 63: "We launched out on a

course of vigorous action." For those who say, "Oh, I've taken the Steps": Turn to page 88, where it says, "But this is not all. There is action and more action." For me, that's what this program is all about. That's the magic word—*action!*

One of the best suggestions that I received early in my program, I'd like to pass on to others. I heard this from an old-timer in AA with lots of good sobriety. He held up four fingers and said, "AA is a simple program. There are four things you should do. One, put the plug in the jug. Two, go to plenty of AA meetings. Three, ask for help in the morning, and four, say thank-you at night." I'd like to add one more thing to that list to make it five: Get into action as soon as possible.

H. R., Millbrae, Calif.

Working the Steps Early

*Waiting until we're comfortable
means waiting to reap the
benefits of the program*

IN SHARING my experience, I have been a very strong advocate of working all the Steps as soon as possible after coming to AA. When I first started doing this, I was very direct about how soon I had worked them—less than four months after my first meeting—but it wasn't long until I started hedging in my talks.

When I told people that it was not only desirable but possible to work the Steps within three to four months after coming on the program, it seemed to make many members very uncomfortable. I was invariably told, either openly or privately, as a "friendly piece of advice," that this was an individual program and that I was scaring people off by trying to rush them into working the Steps so fast. Since it is a suggested program, what these people said made sense to me at the time, and I stopped referring

to how soon I had worked the Steps.

Today, however, I believe that I and most certainly many other members have been guilty of not fully sharing our AA experience. We have cheated ourselves and the whole of AA by trying not to be different from what seemed like the majority, rather than speaking out and having the courage to show what can be accomplished by working the Steps early.

If we will start fully sharing our AA experience, I think we will find this "majority" shrinking; AA couldn't exist today if everyone was as slow to work the Steps as some would have us believe. Until now, I thought that my working the Steps in three to four months was very fast, and perhaps it would be too fast for some members. But my attention has been drawn to page 292 in the Big Book, telling how Dr.



Bob "spent three or four hours" with a new man, taking him through the equivalent of the first eight Steps on that day.

Knowing that the Big Book not only suggests the program but suggests how to work it, I turned to Chapter 5 and found that those word-changing elves had been at it again. As many times as I have read Chapters 5 and 6, I hadn't understood what was so plainly said.

The first part of Chapter 5 brings us through the first three Steps, and the last paragraph beginning on page 63 states: "Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless *at once* followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of,

the things in ourselves which had been blocking us."

The emphasis on "at once" is mine, but it is there, taking us at once to Step Four. Now if the writers of the Big Book had meant that we could take several months or even years to work the Steps at a comfortable pace, then I hardly think that those two simple words would have been there. They wouldn't have been there any more than Chapter 6, which takes us through Steps Five through Eleven, would have been entitled "Into Action."

It is true that, because we are individuals, each of us must work the program at our own pace, but it is also true that we get out of the program what we put into it. "A man of action" gets things done, and he gets them done as soon as possible. He knows that the sooner he gets the work done, the sooner

he will reap the benefits of his labors.

A person who takes several months or years to accomplish eleven simple, but not necessarily easy, tasks may be described as comfortable, but surely not as a person of action. I don't believe that comfort is necessarily equated with happiness, serenity, and the other benefits we receive from the program. Further, when there is work to be done and we sit in our easy chairs, thinking of how to do it best, we are not just comfortable; we are lazy.

I believe the writers of the Big Book intended that we work the first eleven Steps just as fast as we can. They knew that once we had completed the Steps for the first time, and had begun to practice the principles in all our affairs, we would then be comfortable.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the Steps follow one immediately after the other; there is no indication that we should rest between them. There is no minimum or maximum time recommended for accomplishing each Step, but we are told to get into action and to go immediately from one Step to the next.

One exception is granted—but only under certain circumstances and not for our comfort or a chance to take a breather. On page 74, we are shown several suggested choices for people with whom we may take the last part of the Fifth Step, and are told that “we think well before we choose the person or persons.” We are also told that “notwithstanding the great ne-

cessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it *at the first opportunity.*” (Again, the emphasis is mine.) The paragraph ends with the sentence “But we must not use this as a mere excuse to postpone.”

It is my belief, based on my own experience, that if a person has honestly completed the Fourth Step, the Higher Power will provide that first opportunity very soon thereafter. I spent seven full days working on my inventory. On the eighth day, I couldn't find anything more to add. Then, I realized that in working the Fourth Step, I had actually taken the first two parts of the Fifth Step. With this realization came the unmistakable first opportunity to complete the Fifth Step. I took that opportunity and thus finished the Fourth and Fifth Steps in the same day. As the Big Book promises, I have never been happier.

Having had the good fortune to work the Steps so fast is exactly what has made my life so different since coming to AA. It is also something that I intend to share in working with others from now on. If this makes me different, then I am sure the HP will give me the courage to speak out. I want what those old-timers had, and I am more ready than ever to go to any length to get it.

R. G., Fort Knox, Ky.

*Faith comes to us
in mysterious ways*



Two Messengers

I FELT TRAPPED in my hotel room, imprisoned by my own anxiety and indecision. The events of the previous night had severely jolted the already shaky spiritual foundation of my AA program. For nearly four years, I had stayed sober despite the qualifications I attached to acceptance of a power greater than myself. Now, I was filled with the fear of abandonment by a God whom I had never really believed in.

The room emphasized my despair. It was a hideout. I was hiding from my boss, whose challenge to my faith had left me feeling helpless and alone. And I was hiding from everything outside those walls, because my insecurity made everything and everyone a threat. It was like some of the old days, when the best I could manage was to take my bottle to a secret place and shut out the world.

But the knowledge that I was hiding only increased my torment. Where else could I go? Where could I find escape from my doubts about all the beliefs I had previously been afraid to question? At an AA meeting, my sober experience told me. I found the number in the Chicago telephone directory. But I didn't call, and I knew I was withdrawing from the very Fellowship that had saved my life.

My mind drifted back to the night before. The sermon had begun at dinner and continued late into the night. My boss had enthusiastically expounded on his fundamental Christian beliefs. The strength of his convictions and his exhortations that I should embrace his faith only served to expose my avoidance of surrender to anything except AA as a source of help for alcoholics.

Reacting in self-defense, I had countered his arguments with the phrases I had learned: "... God as we understood Him . . . Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves . . . His will for us . . ." But they were words spoken from the head, not the heart. They were released as a smoke screen to hide my inner doubts. As we talked, the power of the distress signals increased. My days of paying lip service to Steps Two and Three were coming to a close, and I could feel the encroaching vacancy in my soul.

"How," I asked myself, "do you begin believing in something that you have *professed* to believe in all along?"

I thought again of going to a meeting. But I was afraid, frightened by my own hypocrisy, fearful of its exposure. Even if I could find comfort there, surrounded by the only power I had been willing to accept, I was unwilling to experience the empty loneliness that would come after leaving God, as I understood Him, behind at the meeting.

The need to get out of my room became more urgent. But where would I go? To the restaurant in the hotel? Perhaps even to the bar for a soft drink, just to feel a part of something? Neither was acceptable. Finally, I decided to leave the hotel to find a sandwich shop somewhere. The decision didn't make any sense, and I knew it. A blizzard raged outside. Chicago was an unfamiliar city. I wasn't even hungry. Still, I dressed

—suit, tie, and topcoat—and plunged into the snowy night. I had no idea where I was going. But Someone did.

God was about to introduce Himself.

I crossed Michigan Avenue and had walked just a few feet beyond the curb when a man emerged from a shadowy doorway. He was unshaven and wore dirty, long-unchanged clothes. There were holes in the grimy stocking cap pulled down tightly around his ears to ward off the freezing cold. His hands were thrust deeply into the pockets of his faded, grimy, Army fatigue jacket.

"Hey, mister, can you help me out?"

My initial reaction was to ignore him. But on an impulse, I stopped. He was much younger than he appeared at first glance, perhaps in his late twenties.

"Can you loan me fifty cents for a hamburger, sir? I haven't eaten since yesterday."

As he spoke, the old, familiar smell of stale wine flooded over me, overpowering the freshness of falling snow. Part of me wanted to refuse him. I knew the money would not be spent for a hamburger. But I remembered how it was, how the need for a drink could churn your guts and make your skin ache all over. I remembered how the first long pull could quiet the demons, if only for a little while.

I pulled out a dollar and shoved it into his shaking hand. I wanted to

say something more, something about having a choice. But I couldn't.

"Thanks, mister."

I mumbled that it was okay, and started to turn away.

"Hey, mister, do you know where I can find an AA meeting around here?"

The words struck me with a thunderous force. A throbbing numbness passed through my body. I distrusted my ears. "What?" I asked incredulously.

"An AA meeting. I . . . I can't stop drinking."

The incongruity of the situation was overwhelming. Why would a dirty, panhandling wino ask a respectable-looking, well-dressed businessman about an AA meeting? How could he think that I would know?

Yet, as I looked at him in stunned silence and saw the desperation that had been mine for so many years, I

knew the answer. Who better?

"I don't know," I managed to say. I felt suddenly buoyant. "But we'll find one together. I'm an alcoholic, too."

We found a pay phone nearby. I called the intergroup office for the location of the nearest meeting. My wino friend had to tell me where we were.

"The Mustard Seed Group," said the friendly female voice. "You're only a block from there."

Another shock. While looking up AA's phone number in my room, I had noticed a separate listing for the Mustard Seed Group. It struck me as an interesting name, and I had wondered about it. But with my ignorance of Chicago geography, it could have been ten miles from my hotel. It wasn't. It was less than two blocks away.

A discussion meeting was in progress as we entered the room. We

were directed to two chairs on the outer edge of the semicircle of participants. A hand microphone was being passed around as each person shared. My mind was reeling. It was some time before I became aware of the subject under discussion.

It was Step Three.

I felt as though I was living a fantasy, caught up somehow in a conspiracy of coincidences beyond my understanding. I flashed back to my first days in AA, when I was told to pray, whether I believed in it or not. I had been an atheistic daily drunk, unable to stay dry more than a few days at a time on my own willpower. With sobriety at stake, I had been willing to try. For the past four years, I had prayed because I was afraid to do otherwise. But I still didn't believe in it.

Now, trying to comprehend the events that had led me to this meeting, *this particular meeting*, I won-

dered. Could it be possible?

The microphone was suddenly in my hand. Before I spoke, I thought about the words of the Third Step: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*"

I knew then. This wasn't a fantasy. There had been no coincidences, no accidents of fate. In my anguish, God had sent me two messengers: one to show me that I was lost, the other to show me the way.

I shared. I talked about my earlier torment, about my feelings of withdrawing into myself, about my fears. I told them about discovering the name of this group, without knowing the meaning of that discovery. I told them how I had met my new friend, who was now beside me. And about how God, as I was beginning to understand Him, had brought us here to this meeting.

R. H., Culver City, Calif.

February 1978

Who is hopeless?

From Southold, N.Y.:

The Twelfth Step and the Twelfth Tradition are specific and precise. By no stretch of the imagination can they be construed as anything but exactly what the founders and formulators intended their meaning to be—first and foremost to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic, and to place principles before personalities.

They do not say, “temporarily,” “once in a while,” or “only in the easy cases where a single effort produces rewarding results.” Neither do they say how much effort is enough. Yet, time after time, we tire of the job, and say, “That guy’s hopeless!”

When is a person hopeless? After two efforts and a gallon of booze?

After twenty efforts and thirty cases of booze? Can such a judgment be made at all?

Certainly, we each reach a moment of despair in dealing with a tough nut and say, “Hopeless!” But the hopelessness is ours, and it is our cue to back off, give some thought to the situation, and perhaps ask others to try. With fresh minds and a new approach, who can say what will happen?

J. H.

Sponsorship



Don't Sell the Newcomer Short!

*Tell him that 'how it works'
means working the Twelve Steps*

JACK IS an alcoholic who lives in a comfortable Chicago suburb. Years ago, he recognized his drinking problem and joined AA. He went to meetings regularly and frequently. His drinking got worse. He continued to go to meetings, and every few weeks or months, he got drunk. His life became more unmanageable, and he went to more meetings. This continued for twelve years of meetings and drunkenness.

In all these years, Jack never worked the Twelve Steps. Why not? "I didn't understand how and was ashamed to ask, particularly after all the years I'd been going to meetings," he said. Nobody ever took him aside and explained to him that he got drunk because he hadn't worked the program. Finally, he got drunk again—and this time something happened. He ran into some AAs who told him that "how it works" means that this is how the program works. In addition, they

guided him each Step of the way in working the Twelve Steps.

"In a period of twenty-four hours," he declared, "I took Step Three aloud with another AA as it suggests on page 63 of the Big Book. I wrote a 'searching and fearless' Fourth Step and then took my first Fifth Step with another AA member, who took his with me at the same time. Then we discussed Steps Six and Seven and prayed to have our character defects removed. Then, with his help, I listed the people I had harmed, and we talked about making direct amends starting right then. I began with my wife that same evening. I did more work with the Steps in twenty-four hours than I had done in twelve years around AA before that day."

That happened in November 1971, and Jack has been sober ever since. He's made all his amends. He's continued to work every one of the Steps, including a number of Fourth

and Fifth Steps. Changes within him are reflected in a dramatically better life for him and his family. With a rueful smile, Jack says, "I'd have done those things much sooner, but no one ever showed me how."

Jack is talking about the sponsorship he didn't receive for twelve miserable years. For a dozen years, he heard about an "individual" program where members take what they want and leave what they find distasteful. He heard there were no musts. He went to meetings where people got in touch with their feelings instead of with the Twelve Steps. He stayed drunk. *Immediately upon working the Steps, he began to experience continuous sobriety.* He found the AA message.

That message is far more than just not drinking. It's the witness by men and women who have found a life so good, so joyous, and so useful that they don't *have* to drink any more. It describes a way of

living that offers hope, meaning, and direction, and it provides specific tools in the Twelve Steps that enable each of us to become what we should be. It works as effectively for a new AA member as it did for Jack.

It's axiomatic that I can't give away what I haven't got. Unless I work the Twelve Steps on a continuing, lifetime commitment, there are three things I won't understand: (1) what the AA message is, (2) how to experience it, and (3) how to help another alcoholic find it.

The kind of change that Jack describes will be experienced by *any* alcoholic who wants to stay sober and will follow the directions in the program. This will work, too, for the AA member who has been sober a number of years and finds himself suffering from depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom. Invariably, in my experience, these symptoms are the results of inadequate work with the Steps. Work the Steps, and

the symptoms disappear.

Sponsorship is carrying the message, and the Big Book outlines precisely how to do it. I think it's useful to go through each Step with the person I work with. We examine the First Step with the realization that no alcoholic can ever again drink successfully. At the same time, each of us stays sober only twenty-four hours at a time. Just staying sober does not bring manageability to our lives. That results from working the Steps that follow Step One, and each of us will be really healthy to the degree that we apply this program.

Step Two provides a natural basis for looking at the connection of honesty with sanity. Sanity is the quality of seeing the truth about any situation. If I lie or am dishonest in any way, this is a direct route to insanity and disintegration. God will restore me to sanity, but He'll do this only in response to certain actions on my part. The Second Step is the obvious place to discuss each person's right to approach God as he understands God. Honesty is my avenue to God as well as to sanity.

If the person is willing to do it, we take Step Three aloud as suggested on page 63 of the Big Book. Then we talk about what this means to each of us.

If an alcoholic could take only one Fourth and one Fifth Step in his entire AA career, he'd probably want to wait until he was sure of

"I think it's useful to

including everything. Even then, he'd undoubtedly miss some items. I spent the first sixteen years of my AA life suffering from the delusion that I should take only one Fourth and one Fifth Step. After sixteen years of sobriety, I tried repeating them and found immense benefits that far outweighed trying to subsist on the Tenth Step.

Reading Bill's story in the Big Book, I find that he took the first eight Steps in the first week he was sober. If he could do it, so can we. So I encourage the person I work with to get started writing his inventory early in his sobriety. This is with the understanding that his Fourth Step, like all the Steps, is to be repeated as long as he's in AA.

In my experience, these headings are generally helpful for a Fourth Step: Resentments, Dishonesty, Sex, Selfishness, Self-Pity, Fear, Sarcasm, Intolerance, Jealousy, Money. In addition, the seven cardinal sins can be used, too: Pride, Lust, Anger, Envy, Greed, Sloth, and Gluttony. There is some duplication, but not enough to hurt. To be effective, the inventory should be honest, thorough, specific, and written.

At Step Five, if the person wants to take it with me, I take mine with him at the same time. If I expect a person to be completely honest and open about himself, I have an obligation to be equally honest and open

go through each Step with the person I work with."

about myself. If I'm unwilling to do this, the obvious question is: What am I afraid of, and what am I hiding?

After Step Five, I suggest he read the paragraph at the bottom of page 75 and check the thoroughness of his work with the first five Steps.

Then, we discuss Step Six and examine our willingness to have our character defects removed.

Following this, we take Step Seven aloud, using page 76 as a guide but being specific in listing the defects to be taken away.

At this point, he can begin writing out his Eighth Step. Here, it's important to list everyone harmed, alive or dead, including those people who can't be found and those to whom amends cannot be made because it would injure them or others.

When the list has been made, I encourage the person to begin making direct amends as soon as possible and to do a thorough job with this part of the program. We often hear that we make amends "just by staying sober." That's in sharp contradiction to the line in the Big Book (page 82) that says, "We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough." Chapter Six provides a precise guide to the need for going to any lengths to make direct amends and clear up the past so we can live productively in the present.

We approach Step Ten as a daily inventory that often ties in with Step

Eleven in a review of the previous twenty-four hours. Making notes of what turns up in my Tenth Step gives me a useful reference for writing my next Fourth Step. I prefer to do this in the morning. Many prefer the evening. My experience with prayer and meditation has given me immense respect for the need to pray only for knowledge of God's will and the power to carry it out. Regular practice with Step Eleven provides a method that brings over-all discipline into our lives. It's only as good, I find, as my continuing work with all the other Steps. Not surprisingly, more time and effort invested in prayer and meditation pay off with better results throughout the day.

At this point, the alcoholic I'm working with will have a clear understanding of Step Twelve and the message. He'll be equipped to help others experience what he has found. The Twelfth Step promises us a spiritual awakening as a result of working these Steps. With compelling clarity, it says that we don't have a message to carry *unless* we work the other Steps.

My primary aim is to encourage anyone I sponsor to work hard and persistently with the Steps. If he does this, he will find a growing ability to reach his own answers in living. My role is not to give advice on job, marital, or other problems.

An alcoholic will live his way into an understanding of how to solve his own problems if he'll just work and rework the Twelve Steps.

That kind of sponsorship demands time and energy. If I do it right, working with others *is* work. It requires a far greater commitment than simply taking drunks to meetings or signing them into treatment facilities. It's what sponsorship meant when the Big Book was published. When that first edition appeared in 1939, the foreword began:

"We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book. For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary."

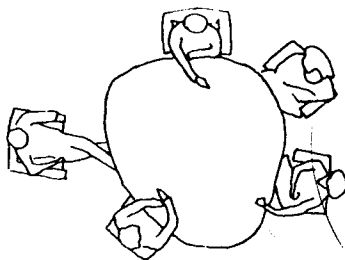
Since that first 5,000-volume printing, the Big Book has been revised twice and reprinted so many

times that 1,900,000 copies had rolled off the press by the end of 1977. More than one million alcoholics have experienced the miraculous vitality in its pages. It has turned them into sane, useful men and women who can say, "No thank you" to a drink and make it stick. For these grateful human beings, "no further authentication will be necessary."

The person I sponsor enables me to experience continuing change and growth, because working with him forces me to keep working with the program, too. Otherwise, I'm talking about things I used to do but don't bother with any more. He helps me find new meaning and relearn old lessons that might grow dim without his need, which reflects my own. I don't try to function as a counselor, therapist, or spiritual guide, but simply as one beggar showing another beggar where there is bread. Together, we share the program's healing message.

P. M., Riverside, Ill.

Around the Tables



Getting to Meetings

AROUND THE TABLES, whatever I need to keep me in line will arrive. Recently, a local bar association asked that we form a “group” to which attorneys and judges could be referred for help. This group of AA attorneys comprises really rotten sponsor types — you know, no pity, no praise, no hand-holding, no babying, just good sharing and love and get the hell to meetings.

I received a call and met a bright young attorney who had “no problems” in the office, home, or community — except that he would be fired, divorced, and thrown out if he didn’t do something about his drinking problem. It was so familiar, so very familiar. We got him into a hospital, and after seventeen days of treatment, lectures, and AA meetings, he came out all fired up. We went to a meeting the first day after his release. Since then, he has been too busy — law practice, house, sports, etc. — to make any AA meetings. I

have tried to reach him at his home and his office, but I always seem to call at the wrong time. Several others in our “group” have tried, and he can’t spare a moment to talk with them, either.

I received another call, and stopped by to take a young girl to her first meeting. There, I immediately turned her over to some veteran female AAs. She’s doing fine — not too busy for AA meetings, not too proud to pick up ashtrays, not too tired to help with the meetings. She’s willing to do anything to better her sobriety.

Somehow, I know I was given these two opportunities to show me that God is at work, not I. I pray for both of these newcomers, and I have no way of knowing whether either of them will make it. But judging from experience, I have a feeling that my lawyer friend is going to be giving us some more opportunities. There is, I find, a correlation between meetings and sobriety.



Unfinished Business

*Working Steps
Eight and Nine
heals old wounds
and frees us
from guilt*

THE BIG kitchen window of the ninety-year-old house in which we live faces south, and the morning sunlight falls onto the stove and floor. A few months ago, I was standing by the window, looking at the vegetable garden, waiting for the coffee to boil, when Bill stepped out of our wine supply room, closed the door, and said, "Boy! We've used very little wine this past year."

I mentioned that when we had worked together in previous years, that was not the case. Then, I had drunk secretly but copiously from the church supplies.

Bill began recalling that, at the time of my drinking, he suspected something was wrong, but he did not know I had an alcohol problem. "The only indication I had that you were drinking was a telephone call I had one night from a widow and her daughter," he said. He gave the gist of a call he received from this confused, upset woman I had visited. Her husband had just died, and when I went to the house, I had examined bedrooms, sat with my foot on the upholstery, and asked questions about money. Later, she called Bill to check on me.

As Bill reminisced, my heart pounded, and a feeling of discomfort floated up inside me. I said to myself, "That's enough. Don't talk about it any more. Please stop. Please stop!" My cheeks burned.

For a few days after that conversation, I was aware that my feelings had been caught off guard. The memory of that particular instance of alcoholic behavior triggered

something upsetting to my spirit.

I began talking about the conversation and my disturbed emotions at discussion meetings and with sponsors. In about ten days, I started to understand that the discomfort I felt was aroused guilt. At a discussion meeting, someone said offhandedly, "Jim, here, still feels guilt and fear about what he did when he drank." Upon hearing that observation, I knew I had the problem isolated.

I was not sure what I could do about the truth that guilt was still with me, except to admit it, accept it, and continue to use the higher power in the Fellowship for guidance.

After a couple of weeks of talking to other AAs about uncovering this guilt, its makeup grew clear to me. I saw I had unfinished business with the widow and her daughter—and with many others. It was time to make a list of all the people I had harmed and realistically satisfy my-

self that I was willing to make amends to them.

Until my jarring conversation with Bill, my attitude toward past events in which I had taken advantage of, frightened, or hurt people in some way was a feeling of new goodwill toward them all, and I thought the memories did not bother me. Now, I learned that my generalized good intentions did not affect the guilt associated with specific individuals harmed by my drinking and my alcoholic behavior.

I made a list of all the people I could recall having harmed. Toward each person on that list, I set my mind to plan carefully and reasonably to make amends: to tell them I had received treatment for alcoholism and had been successfully recovering since; to tell them I wanted to straighten out my affairs; and to own up to having taken advantage of, manipulated, or hurt them in

some way. I would express my regret, apologize, ask their forgiveness, and also settle any financial claims or obligations for material damages I had caused.

It seems to me that sharing with these people the truth about my behavior and my efforts toward recovery is an offering to them that generates peace and heals old wounds.

Previously, not having specifically listed the people I had harmed, I automatically minimized the events and the emotional damage I suffered from alcoholic behavior. Now, however, my list has retrieved this ugly part of my disease from the recesses of my spirit and thrust it into the open. In the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have found courage to face it and energy to do something about it.

As I composed my list, I saw my guilt was extensive. The list has helped me become reconciled to the

reality of my alcoholic behavior. I have been able to accept the things I cannot change. Periodically, when a new entry for my list walks into my mind, I set aside time to deal with this person and get clear in my mind the amends I am going to make.

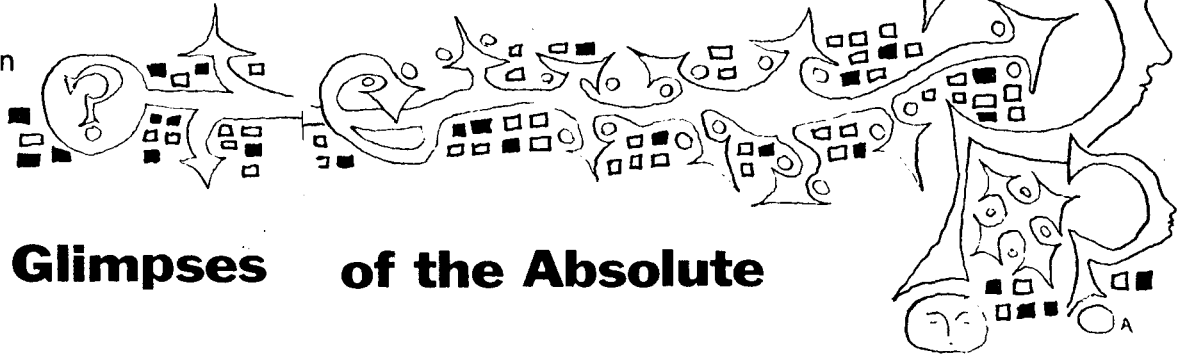
I don't feel that my growth from guilt to health is *exceptional* spiritual progress, but rather that I flat-footed my way through the problem into the solution. It was ordinary progress that thousands of us make. I knew that I was practicing the suggested AA way, and that it would pay off.

Often, during this spiritual progress, I didn't know what was happening to me. I simply hung on to and worked the program. Even though I didn't understand what I was experiencing, many in Alcoholics Anonymous understood quite well.

J. F., Ashland, Va.

Search for Spiritual Experience

Spiritual awareness comes in many forms. In the pages that follow, six AAs tell how it came to them



We Seek Glimpses of the Absolute

IN A LETTER written in 1960, Bill W. said: "More than most people, I think, alcoholics want to know who they are, what this life is about, whether they have a divine origin and an appointed destiny, and whether there is a system of cosmic justice and love.

"It is the experience of many of us in the early stages of drinking to feel that we have had glimpses of the Absolute and a heightened feeling of identification with the cosmos. While these glimpses and feelings doubtless have a validity, they are deformed and finally swept away in the chemical, spiritual, and emotional damage wrought by the alcohol itself.

"In AA, and in many religious approaches, alcoholics find a great deal more of what they merely glimpsed and felt while trying to

grope their way toward God in alcohol."

How true this has been for me! And I have been strongly reminded of it on a couple of occasions recently.

The first reminder came one evening as my date and I chatted over his Scotch and water and my plain tonic. It was our second date, so we were trying to get to know each other by talking about ourselves. As the evening went on, it became increasingly obvious that my friend was concerned about his alcohol consumption. Anyway, he was quite a talker. For hours, I listened to stories about his search for God—through Zen and Judaism and Hinduism and Christianity. This forty-eight-year-old man had spent most of his life in an intensely energetic but frustrating search for the

"truth." He summarized his story—while sipping his Scotch—by claiming to be a newborn Christian because during a Zen meditation session he had been pushed to the floor by an unknown force, and when he looked up he saw the Christ figure.

I cannot doubt the sincerity of this man's agonizing search for God. However, as Bill W. said, my friend's glimpse of the Absolute has become deformed. He has no peace. He has no faith. He moaned about the unmanageable condition of his life and about his high blood pressure. And he bragged incessantly about the amount of money he made.

In my opinion, my friend is an alcoholic, but I cannot and did not take his inventory. I could only be grateful that he was sitting across the table from me as the mirror

image of myself in sadder days before I came to AA.

In my early drinking days, my search for cosmic truth brought me to even a worse state of mind than his. I ran around with people who claimed to have "the whole story." I read the books they gave me about mysticism, flying saucers, automatic psychic writing, and various psychic phenomena unsubstantiated by evidence. The books scared the pants off me! But not wanting to be a fraidy-cat, I kept delving and scaring myself until it became necessary to drink myself to sleep every night. I found no truths, only fears. Besides insomnia, I hyperventilated constantly because of anxiety, until I developed a serious case of pleurisy. When that illness passed, I searched in other places. I made the rounds of all the churches. I actually prayed

that God would somehow manifest Himself in a physical way to my sick, drunken mind so that I might have a glimpse of the Absolute.

Thank goodness, God has restored some of my sense of humor to me now, and I can look back on the past with a chuckle. At the time, however, I was a spiritually, mentally, and physically ill person who found nothing funny in the grim void where my spiritual self had fallen. The desperate search! I even paid twenty-five dollars for a pair of Aura Goggles, which were supposed to train my eyes to see the human aura so I could prove to myself once and for all that the human body emanated something of the divine. I nearly went blind wearing the goggles and staring into bright lights trying to find my spirituality.

Today, however, I feel my search was not fruitless. My hope that God existed eventually saved my life. My intentions had been good. My methods had been pathetic. I had complicated human spirituality to the point where I could apply none of it to my life, and where the only peace I could find was in the oblivion of alcohol and drugs.

When I finally arrived at AA and heard the group talking about "turning it over to a Higher Power," I could not understand how they did this. Surely it *had* to be a complex process requiring specific ritual and rules. Even then, I believed the benefits could not possibly come to everyone. Perhaps only a few who

succeeded in having a giant cosmic orgasm? Being the stupid and unworthy worm that I believed I was, undoubtedly it would never happen for me.

The sober and happy ones assured me it worked for everyone who tried it. I only had to turn my life and my will over to my Higher Power, as I understood Him, and accept the will of that Higher Power. Finally, with much doubt, I began to feel maybe I did understand what they were saying. And it did work. So long as I turned my life and my will over to God, my life became manageable. There came moments when I actually felt peaceful. I began to understand the potential of serenity. The strength of my serenity, acceptance, and joy was dependent on the strength of my faith.

Today, after fourteen months of sobriety, living my life by AA's Twelve Steps to the best of my ability, I feel that truth is beginning to unfold in my life. I know now that God means calmness instead of the anxious search, love instead of anger at an unjust universe. I look forward to waking up each morning because I know the day will unfold according to God's will for me—so long as I stay out of the driver's seat! And although I know my spiritual conditioning needs many more years of work to bring me to that place where God is directing me, even now I feel a sense of ecstasy at being part of this universe. Most of the

time, I truly love both the animate and inanimate creations of God. The frantic, agonizing search is over for me.

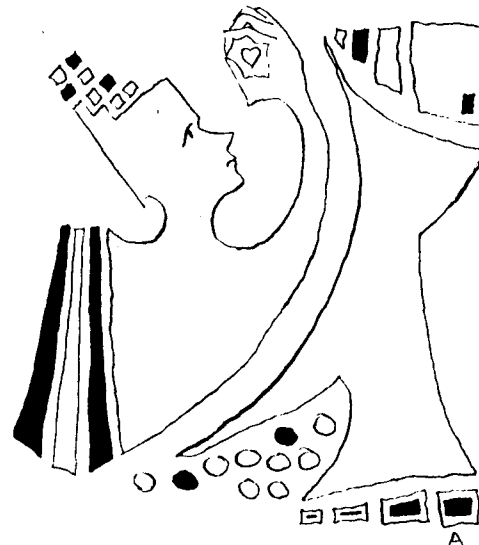
Related to this feeling is the second recent reminder I mentioned at the beginning. This occurred when a friend of mine from San Francisco told me about his use of marijuana and LSD to assist him in finding cosmic truth. I had told him of my commitment to AA and of my incredibly wonderful life since I had turned my life and my will over to God, also of my ever-growing spiritual awareness, which I never found

through chemical hazes or hallucinations. This friend had raved about his LSD visions, although he admitted he applied no spiritual principles in his life. Yet, though he seemed convinced for himself that the truth he would see would result from drug-induced trances, he listened carefully to my experiences through the AA program. And he expressed envy. He said there would be no point in my taking LSD or other trance-producing drugs, because I had found through AA all those things for which he was still looking!

M. B., Coronado, Calif.

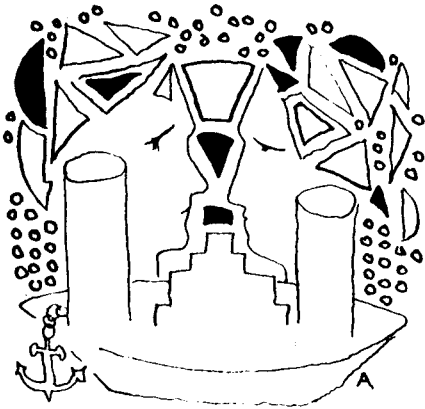
Search for Spiritual Experience

Higher Power—You Bet!



IN THE BEGINNING, when I was still living in the cold, spiritual vacuum of agnosticism, I did not know what to do with the "God bit" in AA. What a pity, I thought, that these people found it necessary to mix in religion with their program. That surely was a weakness in the setup. It complicated things a great deal!

I still remember, almost with fondness and with a smile on my face, how ambiguous my feelings were at that time. Maybe, just maybe, I had a problem with alcohol, but logically all a person had to do was stop drinking. So why drag in the religion?



It took a lot of meetings before this gentle program of AA started to fill the spiritual vacuum in me. And I found out, much to my relief, that I did not have to become a religious person. The only prerequisite was a willingness to grow along spiritual lines.

What had been strange and frightening territory slowly became familiar pasture. After a year, my fears and anxieties started to decrease, and I know that faith had started to grow and that I was becoming aware of a loving God.

For me, this whole process has been and still is an intensely moving experience, which fills me with gratitude. It has erased all the old feelings of "why me?" which had been part of me since my earliest childhood and which I had carefully cultivated by splashing them with alcohol.

Early this summer, I had an opportunity to join a small vessel headed for far northern latitudes.

For the first time in three and a half years, I would not be able to go to my daily meetings. This was going to be a new experience in many respects, and I wondered how I would manage all by myself for an indeterminate period of time.

I packed my Big Book and "Twelve and Twelve," also a number of AA pamphlets and brochures, together with my toothbrush, camera, slippers, and other essentials. After flying for a couple of days, I finally boarded the ship in a port in the northern Pacific. Here I was, a long way from any meetings, left to my own resources, nobody to talk to about our wonderful program—so I thought! I need not have worried. During the first hour of the first day on board, I was introduced to a member of the crew who, after a little bit of small talk, started to tell me about the problems he had with boozing during short leaves. He did not understand why he was always blowing all his money and why he could not remember what he had been doing with the time on shore or what happened to him. He was baffled, confused, and concerned.

A feeling of intense gratitude flowed into me as I listened to his tales of woe, gratitude to my Higher Power, who had provided for my needs much more promptly and effectively than I could ever have dreamed. Surely, this was no coincidence! I had not brought up the subject of alcohol; I had not told this man anything about myself. Yet here

was a fellow sufferer, and he and I had been guided to meet at this isolated spot on the globe.

"Let's go to your cabin," I said. "There's something I want to tell you."

And so it happened. I was given an opportunity to deliver AA's message of hope, a message that my new friend had never heard before.

We had many talks after that first time, and I lent him my Big Book and the other literature. He did a lot of reading and listening, and he did not take part in the couple of roar-

ing parties that developed during the month I was on board.

To grow from a doubting, ego-centric agnostic into a man with faith in a loving God took time. Above all, it required that I open the door to my heart, and the encouragement to do that has come through this Fellowship. Very often these days, "my cup runneth over," and it is impossible to close my eyes at night without saying, "Thank you for another beautiful day!" To whom? You bet—my Higher Power!
C. B., Calgary, Alta.

Search for Spiritual Experience

The Power of Good

I SHOULD LIKE to write a few words of encouragement to you who are unbelievers, as I am. By unbeliever, I mean you who do *not* take for granted that there is a transcendent God or an ultimate purpose in human existence. You need not alter your convictions or take it lying down when other members of our Fellowship say these are "old ideas," which must be got rid of. I can assure you from my own experience that you can take all the Steps without frustration or hindrance while still maintaining these views.

Let me entreat you, however, not to use this as an excuse to belittle another member's faith. We are not

in the business of proving others wrong, or for that matter proving ourselves right. We must at all times keep in mind the maxim "Live and Let Live," and maintain a charitable, unselfish attitude toward all people in and out of the program. Without such an attitude, we are surely courting disaster.

The genius of the Big Book is that it is not dogmatic. Its contents can be tailored to fit just about anyone who keeps an open mind. The chapter "We Agnostics" helps us past our first milestone—the need to form a fundamental idea of a Power greater than ourselves. This Power need not be anthropomorphic or

substantial. It can remain conceptual only. Its necessary ingredient is that it precipitate a spiritual experience, since the purpose of the book and the program is "to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem."

This chapter leaves us with several very comforting assurances: that our own conception of God is sufficient; that the realm of the spirit is not exclusive; that we need not accept on faith concepts that are difficult to believe; that we need not be antagonized by others' beliefs. But just what can we use as a Power greater than ourselves?

For myself, I found the answer to this dilemma in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. The Twelve Steps were shown to a Buddhist priest in Thailand. After he read them, he said, "Why, these are fine! Since we as Buddhists don't understand God just as you do, it might be slightly more acceptable if you inserted the word 'good' in your Steps instead of 'God.' Nevertheless, you say in these Steps that it is *God as you understand Him*. That clears up the point for us. Yes, AA's Twelve Steps will certainly be accepted by the Buddhists around here." It goes on to say, "Alcoholics may be led to believe in God, but none can be forced." If anyone tries to intimidate you by saying you will fail if you don't believe as others do, you might lovingly remind him of this.

So my concept of a higher power

is the power of good. The power of good has restored me to sanity; its absence nearly killed me. That part of the Big Book dealing with Step Three emphasizes that I am not to set *myself* up as a god, deciding what is right and wrong for others. I am to root out selfishness, self-centeredness, and pride. On this basis, I have been able to take a satisfactory inventory and make a verbal admission of my wrongs.

The key words in Step Six are "entirely ready," implying that under no circumstances do we want to hold on to our defects any longer. We want the power of good to push them out and replace them. We no longer put our defects into practice. The firm assurance that good can overcome evil is abundantly clear. That one catches more flies with honey than with vinegar is self-evident. The power of good will drive out our shortcomings *if it is sought*. Step Seven has now been satisfied. Resentment, pride, selfishness, dishonesty, all summed up in the word "fear," have been rooted up and are being disposed of. The power of good is beginning to take over. We become drawn to make our amends joyfully.

I must now repeat this cycle of Steps as summarized in Step Ten each time I falter. They always work if I take them without balking. Consequently, the power of good can remain with me.

Step Eleven might frustrate you, since it mentions prayer. It need not.

Notice that the phrase *as we understood Him* has been reinserted into the Steps at this point, as if to reemphasize the great latitude allowed us regarding our concept of a Power greater than ourselves. I have found that reflection on the power of good and how I might use it in my life is a very satisfactory approach to taking this Step. There can be no end to the possibilities of serving my fellows. They are limitless.

By this time, a true spiritual awakening has already manifested itself. In the words of the Big Book, we have undergone a "personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism," a "profound alteration" in our reactions

Search for Spiritual Experience

Closet Atheist

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS ago, I called AA. I told the girl who answered that I had a problem.

"What's your problem, alcohol?" she asked.

"Of course," I answered, "but I'm an atheist."

She said just the right words: "Oh, that's all right; we have lots of atheists in AA."

To run me off, all she would need to have said was, "Aw, you're not an *atheist*; surely you believe in some kind of a higher power."

to life, and have "tapped an unsuspected inner resource" identified with our own idea of a Power greater than ourselves.

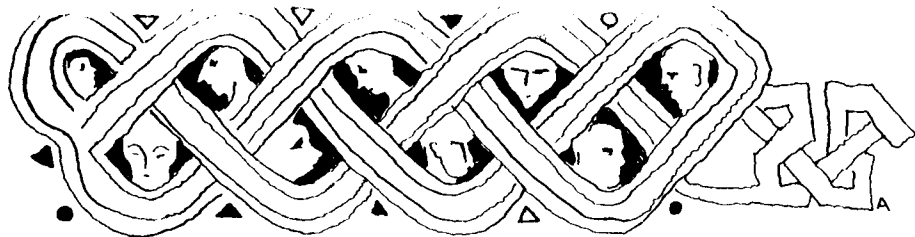
Finally, we have a message to carry to others who have suffered as we have, and we hope to be able to transmit it lovingly to our fellows at every opportunity.

A while ago, someone asked me a question, brilliant in its simplicity yet profound in its philosophy. He asked, "Do you think anybody owes you anything?" I hope that my answer will always be, "Definitely not." I expect no rewards, now or ever. I am trying to do what I can to love, today. Can anything else be more important?

Anonymous, Pasadena, Calif.

This was a while back, when AA was smaller, and she may have passed the word that there was going to be a new man, and let's take it easy on the spiritual. In any event, not much in the way of God was stressed at the early meetings I attended.

A little background on me. I was intensely interested in the Scopes "Monkey" Trial in Tennessee in 1925. For a few years afterward, the newspapers and Sunday supplements were filled with articles on the "missing link." I began to read



Darwin, Wallace, Lamarck, Mendel. In the 1930's, I joined with other free-thinkers in New York City in speaking on atheism. A group of us picketed a radio station in San Francisco, demanding (successfully) that an atheist be allowed equal time on Sunday. So much for background.

The Twelve Steps appeared to mean what they said. The members told me that I could use any concept of a higher power I liked. In Step Two, maybe it makes sense to believe that the power which is to restore my sanity is the power of the group, and in Step Three, maybe the group could do something with me if I turned my will and my life over to it. But it didn't make much sense to *me*. Then came Step Five. How do I admit my shortcomings to a God or something I do not believe in? Six and Seven required some mental skirmishing. I concluded, within eight or nine months, that if I couldn't reconcile my beliefs, I couldn't stay sober on the program.

Since I had been a Catholic in my youth, I went to the church for instruction. For nine months, once and sometimes twice a week, a priest labored with me explaining Genesis. I argued Darwin to him. After nine months, he (and I) thought I now

believed in God and the theory of creation. Because of a series of marriages and divorces, the church allowed me to attend Mass, but not to take the sacraments; this made me a sort of second-class Catholic. Talk about *resentments!*

But I stayed sober. For five years. Then I blew it. After a short stay on skid row and with the help of Goodwill, I got back uptown and back on the program. I recently celebrated my twentieth AA birthday.

I think what keeps me sober more than anything else is the AA Preamble: "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem. . . ." That, I can buy, and I do buy it.

I'm a "closet atheist." I join in the Lord's Prayer, knowing it doesn't harm me, any more than it harms a Catholic to add "for Thine is the kingdom, etc." When any spiritual question is under discussion, I usually pass when called upon to speak. I don't proselytize inside or outside of AA; I'm not trying to convert anyone to my way of thinking. I'd just ask some well-meaning, enthusiastic members not to come down so hard on the God question.

There *are* atheists in them there fox-holes; there *are* atheists in AA.

So let's have a little tolerance—tolerance perhaps of the unexpressed secret beliefs of the person next to you. We'll never know why that new member didn't come back. It's

unpopular to be an atheist, and not every atheist admits it openly. So let's not run the agnostic or the rationalist off, back to the world of drinking.

I'm glad they didn't run me off!

C. C., Sacramento, Calif.

Search for Spiritual Experience

The Gift of Surrender

HAVING A Ph.D. in psychology, being a professor and a college dean, these were no protection from alcoholism. In fact, they were hand-icaps to recovery in AA. A lifelong reliance upon brainpower nearly prevented me from learning what I needed to know: how to live simply and soberly in the Fellowship of AA.

My drinking began away from home at an Eastern college, where I decided to learn to drink like a gentleman. Quickly, I "mastered" beer, Scotch, martinis, manhattans, and wine. My drinking did not seem to me abnormal, except that it was possibly better than the drinking of others. This same opinion persisted through twenty years, during which my drinking increased gradually to a heavy daily dose of alcohol. During this period, I earned a Ph.D. degree, married a lovely girl, had three children, and was promoted through the academic ranks to full professor. Only in looking back can I see the signs of

addiction: the steadily increasing intake of alcohol, sneaking and gulping drinks, drinking to quiet nerves, drinking to summon courage, alibis for drinking, sweats and shakes, and so on.

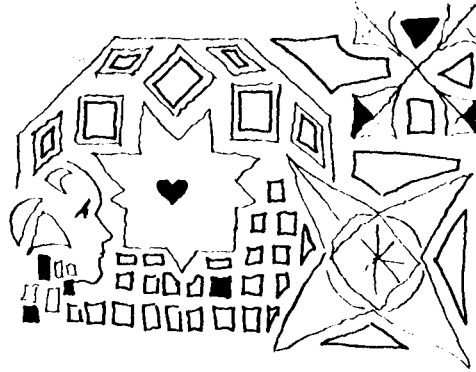
Also, through these years, my life became progressively unmanageable. Problems at work and at home accumulated. Promotions came, but never fast enough. Family obligations became burdensome, money a problem. Outside interests—singing in the church choir, reading, golf, tennis—these left. I became generally dissatisfied with life and often melancholy.

At no time did I believe these living problems were caused by drinking. Quite the reverse: I explained increased drinking by the problems. The pressures of work and home caused me to drink more. Thus, when I was offered a job at another university, I decided to move. The move, I thought, would improve my situation, and a side

benefit would be a decreased need to drink. Of course, the move was no solution. The problems continued to increase along with the drinking.

At the new location, paradoxically, a promotion was to bring me the pain needed to make me ask for help. An opportunity came to be the dean of a college, and I took it. The higher status and pay also brought more work and more drinking. I began to be shaky in the morning, nervous all day, and unable to sleep at night. A doctor prescribed tranquilizers to quiet my nerves. For the next eighteen disastrous months, I took Valium plus booze—a lethal combination, I now know—and went downhill at a rapidly accelerating rate. Desperately, I tried to keep up with work and family obligations. My life became a nightmare of drinking in order to function, which made functioning more difficult all the time. Hopelessly, I tried to hide from others and from myself the inevitable slide. Something, I knew, would have to give—job, family, me. Still, alcohol and tranquilizers were not to me the main problem; they were necessary, I thought, only because of my other problems.

After a year, I returned to my doctor to say that I was worse. His first reaction was to increase the dose of tranquilizers. Almost in passing, we discussed my drinking, and he asked me a fateful question: "Could you quit for a week if I

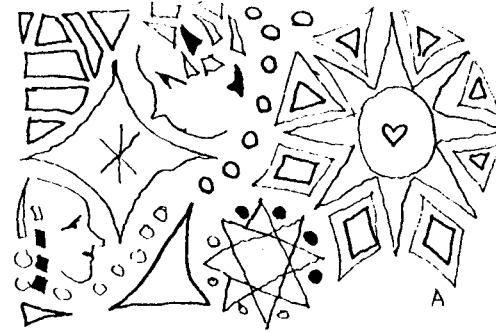


asked you to?"

That question stopped me short. Without knowing it, I was started on the First Step of Alcoholics Anonymous. "Doctor," I said, "I'm afraid to try." As a daily drinker (or daily drunk), I had always believed that I could quit if I wanted to quit. With the doctor's question, however, I was faced with the fact that I hadn't tried to quit because of fear that I could not quit. Underneath, I knew I was hooked.

The doctor referred me to a psychiatrist who was experienced with alcoholism. With the help of my wife (I thought she needed help herself), I made an appointment. Much to my surprise, the psychiatrist dismissed my wife from treatment, looked me in the eye, and said, "When did you lose control of your drinking?"

The question shocked me, because I had not yet admitted to him that my drinking was out of control. After a struggle, I was able to reply, "I don't remember." The powerlessness was finally in the open. The psychiatrist then told me



that I should go away for thirty days to be detoxified. I replied, "The hell I will! I'll quit by myself!"

Those famous last words were, fortunately for me, empty. By then, I knew I needed help and was ready to follow advice. Even so, I procrastinated. Finally, with urging from an AA member, I revealed my problem to the president of the university and made an appointment for treatment at a private rehabilitation center. There, I was detoxified and introduced to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

How I resisted! I was the "proud balloon," sure of his powerful intellect and proud of his willpower. I was too successful to be an alcoholic and too smart to swallow AA. The Serenity Prayer, to me, was trite. Slogans were oversimplified. Higher powers, especially God, were fictions of primitive people. The AA Fellowship was lower class. In no way could a person of my importance attend AA meetings all the time.

It is easy to see, in retrospect, the false pride in such intellectual

pretensions. Yet, as obstacles to recovery, they were real and could have been fatal. I have seen other psychologists, other professors, and other professionals struggle with the same difficulties.

How I happened to overcome these obstacles where others failed is something I do not understand. I consider my recovery a mystery, which I can only gratefully acknowledge and accept. All I know is what happened to me.

First, I was able to discard reliance on my own intellect as a guide to recovery. A sermon by a recovering alcoholic minister on the text "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" helped. So did the AA priest who told me, "Leave your brains outside." The first slogan to make sense was "Utilize; don't analyze." I accepted the advice "Don't think, don't drink, and go to meetings."

Second, I attended many AA meetings. It made sense to me that if I could get drunk every day, I could go to meetings every day. To my surprise, this was no great interruption of my schedule; instead, AA meetings became a welcome refuge from problems of the day. Because I went to many meetings, I began to hear the plain and simple talk I needed: "If you don't drink, you can't get drunk." Believe it or not, this was big news to me, Ph.D. and all.

Third, and most important, I received a wonderful gift of faith—

faith in mysteries. As the alcoholic fog began to lift, I could see how foolish I had been about God. I had tried to believe only in what I understood, yet God is a word for what is beyond understanding. Slowly, it dawned on me what I had to do. Against my better intellectual judgment, I had to surrender to the mysterious happenings of the AA Fellowship and to other mysteries beyond my comprehension. Thank God, this gift of surrender was given to me; it marks the beginning of recovery for me.

As in so many things, the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, describes exactly what happened to me. In Bill's story, a similar spiritual breakthrough occurred when Bill let down his own intellectual defenses against God. "It was only a matter

of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning."

With this beginning, a wonderful new life has unfolded for me in AA. Although not without problems, my life is becoming progressively more manageable. The depression, the nerves, and the insomnia left long ago. My hobbies and interests have returned and multiplied. Best of all, I know the way to peace and serenity.

The Psalmist puts it beautifully in Psalm 34: "Here was a poor wretch who cried to the Lord; He heard him and saved him from all his troubles. Taste, then, and see that the Lord is good. Happy is the man who finds refuge in Him."

D. J., Newark, Del.

Search for Spiritual Experience

As You Understand Him

I WAS TALKING to a prospective member the other day, and he objected to the religious aspects of AA. In the back of my mind, I groaned, "Oh, no—not another one." I smiled and was about to go into my routine about the difference between spirituality and religion, but decided against it. I am bored with that old song and dance.

"Tell me, are there religious people in the bars you frequent?"

"Sure."

"Not all your pub friends are religious—just some of them?"

"Yeah."

"Do you stay out of those bars because they are religious bars?"

He smiled. He had gotten the point. But it set me to thinking through this old complaint.

I am not frightened by the word "religion" any more. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives as

one definition of religion "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith." AA, along with many other modern movements or fellowships, could fit into that definition without stretching too many points. Many atheists I know are religious by that definition.

My former objections to religions were based on the need to "join" and what I saw as a tendency to exclude people. When I came to AA, I felt it was so loosely structured that the "joining" aspect was replaced by more of a "clustering" concept. And AA, with all its basic beliefs, still managed to be so all-inclusive of people, regardless of what or who they were, that before I knew it, I was inside looking out.

I feel we scare away people who want scientific approaches. Scientific approaches are based on observable, repeatable, predictable experiments. When it comes to alcoholism, AA has conducted more observable, repeatable, predictable, and successful experiments than anyone else.

Why, then, do we sometimes lose these pseudoscientists? We don't ask new people to signify that they are "ready" by changing their skin color, sexual orientation, language, or ethnic background, so why should we assume atheists and agnostics must always change their minds? This is exclusive thinking. Some of these folk come to believe in a higher power, but I venture to guess that some others come to believe *less* in mystical higher powers after years

of sobriety. Some even come to believe they were wrong all these years and there is no Higher Power, only logic. And AA is very logical.

Can we drop all prayers and references to Judeo-Christian ideas in order to become more inclusive? We could, but it would create problems. In becoming too broad and progressive, we just might be left with nothing people can relate to in society. Groups must explain their work with words and ideas that the minds of today can comprehend.

We pay much lip service to the idea that everyone can belong to AA. Some newcomers, however, get the impression that if they do not eventually conform, they will be lost or go crazy. Why does their individuality scare us? Why do we sometimes feel that this non-God minority is either unreal or not there? It is there, and perhaps it would be larger if nonbelievers knew they could comfortably belong.

I had no idea what I believed at the start. If I had been required to believe everything I read or heard, I would still be drunk. But so many people told me they felt the same way that I stayed around for another twenty-four hours. I felt comfortable after three months, because I saw the diversity possible in AA. I realize now that my own antireligious feelings were resentments, and AAs are masters at helping resentful newcomers.

But what about the newcomer who has thought it through and sim-

ply doesn't believe in God, and never will? If we slam into this person with a condescending smile, we may lose him. We wouldn't dream of telling a believer or religious person that he can be saved without all that voodoo. Why do we sometimes feel this approach is sound when we run into the free-thinker? The civil rights movement has sensitized us to the needs of many groups; why not the needs of atheists and agnostics?

I have seen some AAs sneer at agnostics or atheists and say, "Intellectuals have ruined many societies—don't be intellectual." The advice to utilize the AA program and not analyze it is sound. But I try not to come across as if I am telling the intellectuals to stop think-

ing. It infuriates them or makes them wistfully decide to go someplace else.

There is room in AA for different opinions.

I was warned not to be influenced by religious fanatics when I first came around. In twelve years, I have met one religious fanatic, and my main problem with him was that he was nice but very dull. Hardly a damaging influence. Incidentally, he had been sober a very long time, as have many agnostics and atheists. Happy sobriety, at that.

I heard somewhere that there are many paths up the mountain. I have taken one that works for me. There are certainly other paths for other people. Thank God—or whatever.

Anonymous, New York

A Twelfth Step Call

*It was the newcomer
who made it*

I HAD THIRTY minutes before I was to meet my wife for dinner. Being near an Alano club, I dropped in for a soft drink. A few years ago, it would have been the nearest bar, and my wife would have waited . . . and waited . . . and waited.

There was a stranger sitting at one of the tables, just finishing a lonely game of solitaire. I asked him if he wanted company, and he invited me to sit down. I did, looking him over and immediately deciding that he was new in the area but had "been around" for quite a while. In other words, he looked hale and hearty, thoroughly sober.

I was dead wrong. He had exactly three weeks and was waiting for his newfound sponsor to pick him up for a meeting.

When he discovered I was a few years ahead of him, he just sort of shook his head and said, "I guess it works. It *must* work."

Twenty minutes later, when I took my leave, I had been back to what it was like for me those first three weeks. Talking to my friend and hearing his brief story, I felt as if I

was talking to myself in a mirror and the mirror was talking back. We identified on virtually every point. Our drinking patterns, from the very start, were identical.

He asked me, "What did you do to be like you are now?" I had to think about that for a moment. He could not know—nor was I about to tell this newcomer—that at that moment, I had just (or had almost) succeeded in making it through another day, one day at a time, with a severe financial crisis at home, family illness, job problems, and a host of other problems that once would have sent me into the nearest bar instead of an Alano club.

I didn't want to tell him those things. Besides, there really wasn't time. What I heard myself saying was: "Well, I went to meetings every night and a few during the day for a long time. I still go to four, five, or more a week. Most of the time, I can't think of any other place I'd rather be, because, after a while, I began to catch on to what was happening.

"My spiritual awakening came on

slowly before I even recognized it, and it's still going on today, every day. It doesn't stop. It grows stronger. Fear left me, not suddenly but little by little. A calmness, or serenity if you will, took its place. Waking up in the morning was no longer a dreaded thing, but a challenge to find out what the day would bring.

"The obsession and the desire to drink left me, and I don't even know when that happened. One day, it just wasn't there any more. Sure, the thought of it flits through my head once in a while, but that's all it does. It flits through and is gone—after I talk to my sponsor or whoever I can

find, go to a meeting, and meditate with my Higher Power.

"Most important, keep coming back. Read, study, and practice those Steps to the best of your ability even if you don't understand them right now. And don't forget, God's with you all the time, right this minute, just like He's with me."

My new friend stared at me for a moment, then nodded. He seemed more cheerful as I got up to leave and go meet my wife. Twenty minutes almost to the second. He didn't know it, but he'd just experienced a Twelfth Step call. I didn't make it. He did.

A. B., Huntington Beach, Calif.

It's a practical and effective tool of the program

Reap the Rewards of the Fifth Step

I AM PRESENTLY twenty-five years old and have enjoyed a little over three years of reasonably contented sobriety. In the past, I was never contented. In fact, I was not even certain why I was staying sober. I paid a lot of lip service to the benefits of sobriety then, but I didn't feel the feelings as I do now. I assumed things would rub off on me. Some did, but spirituality didn't. For me, this takes some doing—work.

I hadn't been drinking or ingesting anything that was mood-altering. I read "How It Works" in the Big Book, went to meetings, did some outside speaking, attended other AA functions, made the effort to carry the message and practice these principles in all my affairs, and had taken one Fifth Step. So how come no "reasonable contentment"?

Fortunately, insight came from my Higher Power through other human beings. My AA friends were telling me that they could see something lacking in me. I was mistaking a lot of elated feelings for the deep, solid feelings of spirituality.

Thank God for one friend who

had the love and courage to share with me. His insight was spelled out plain and simple: "It's time to move into action. Get busy preparing for a Fifth Step, or you'll end up drunk!"

My initial reaction was defensiveness. I thought, "Mind your own sobriety; take your own inventory!" My thinking was that of a practicing alcoholic—not checking anything out, impulsive, full of denial. Did I need a Fifth Step?

Now I know there were some things I omitted from my first Fifth Step. At the time, I was as honest as I possibly could have been. However, I had not been sober too long, and my mind was preoccupied with other things. I was afraid even to look at some of the incidents and feelings from the past, much less talk about them. I wanted to hang on to some of my phoniness and inadequacies. I didn't understand what this key to a new life was that people were talking about. I did it for the sake of doing it, so I could say, "I took the Fifth Step."

If nothing else, this first Fifth Step was my introduction to an ef-

fective, practical working tool that would help me to ventilate, dump, take a look at the things that needed to be put on the table. All I had to do was use it.

I had grown complacent, and a lot of garbage had collected. I was losing sight of my character assets.

Thank God for that second Fifth Step. It gave me the fulfillment and awareness that I needed. The clergyman I took it with helped me to see that I was becoming more perfectionist as time passed.

Within the first two years of my sobriety, I took five Fifth Steps! When I began getting sober, if someone had told me this was what it would take, I would have said, "Go fly a kite." With each attempt, I was able to focus on something that had been a stumbling block. The third one spelled out impatience; the fourth, resentments; the fifth, forgiveness.

I had been planning on only one, but who am I to manage my life? There has always been a "flag" or signal to let me know when it's time for this Step. Learning to read those

flags and signals is the important thing. Most often, it has come through other people. I think if it had been up to me, I wouldn't have taken any of my Fifth Steps.

The Big Book tells us that faith without works is dead. Here, in the action of Step Five, we can perform our verbal works. Like all other Steps, this Step is full of wisdom and knowledge that can be used as effective tools toward an abundant sobriety. We repeatedly work all the other Steps. This Step isn't worked as often, but it is worked vigorously.

I do make an effort to admit it when I'm wrong, but I am not always aware of my attitudes on a daily basis. What results from this is self-deception. Usually, by the time we get to a Fifth Step, we've let some things build up into a rationalization system. We can see this in a Fifth Step. We can reap spiritual rewards, take a look at our own life's meaning, begin to experience deeper meaning in fellowship and in awareness of our Higher Power.

T. R., St. Paul, Minn.

Working the Steps

Don't Wait Until You're Comfortable

ASAYING THAT I have been hearing around quite a few of the AA tables is "Wait until you're comfortable," in reference to the working of certain Steps—particularly the Fourth, Fifth, Eighth, and Ninth. These "Into Action" Steps seem to be frightening to some people, and I must admit that they were to me. However, I did not become as comfortable as I am on this program without being very uncomfortable while working these Steps.

My first Fifth Step, which was taken with my first sponsor, was quite painful, so painful, in fact, that I took it in ten or twelve sessions. I was truly afraid that I would end up

in a state hospital if I was honest about myself. But with help and support and some "tough love" (I had blown my life entirely out of perspective), I slowly began to get better.

My second Fifth Step made me almost as uncomfortable prior to its taking. But the benefits far exceed the apprehension I felt before I took it. (It hurts to grow.) Now, I know where I'm going emotionally. I know, to some extent, who I am, and I know what I must work on if I'm to stay sober. This, to me, is a big reward for the small price of being uncomfortable during a short period of time.

The Ninth Step, taken after the Eighth, was also uncomfortable. I

faced rejection from two of the four people I made amends to, and I was damned uncomfortable. But I can't think of any time in my life when I could comfortably face my amends to those people who loved me and whom I had hurt, even if I had waited forty years. Thank God I didn't.

An occasion arose when I had to return to my hometown, where I did my drinking. Had I not taken the Eighth and Ninth Steps, I would not have been able to face these people as comfortably as I did. "Living" amends, for me, must be preceded by direct amends, and that, if possible, means eyeball-to-eyeball. I don't make amends by merely walk-

ing down the street sober, saying to myself, "God, I'm great!" I accept the responsibility for my past irresponsibility by saying I'm sorry and then being sober, available, and *useful*.

God gives me only as much honesty as I can stand, and He has been good to me by putting the right people, places, and things in my life at the right time. I am grateful on most days, but not all, and I work even harder on those bad ones, drawing from my AA insurance. Thank You, God, for giving me the guts to be uncomfortable, or I might have gotten comfortably drunk.

B. M., Fort Wayne, Ind.

May 1978

Around the Tables

Practice the Principles

AROUND THE TABLES, with lengthening sobriety, I find full and substantial evidence that happiness is merely a matter of working the AA program. As I have listened to the sharing of others, my life has become enriched almost beyond imagination by following the bold principles set forth in the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*).

The Twelve Steps are a must if a sick alcoholic, like me, is ever to obtain happiness through sobriety. The Twelfth Step drives home with utmost simplicity the cardinal advice "to practice these principles in all our affairs." The longer my sobriety, the more I work on the Steps. I use

them in daily living, and the results are marvelous.

How others regard what I am doing, I now know, is unimportant. Here is what really matters: Upon honest comparison, how will what I am doing square with the standards set in these Twelve Steps? Step Ten requires me to admit it when I am wrong and to check myself to see how I can change. And the other Steps are just as fundamental to happiness.

Now I am certain, as never before, that the way of the founders is truly the easiest, softest way in the long run—and in the short run as well. It is *the* way for this happy, joyous AA.

The Fast Learner

She couldn't understand why they spent so much time on one Step

BEING AN impatient and skeptical newcomer, I spent the first forty-two days of my sobriety attending each of the forty-two meetings in the area. At each, I stood up, identified myself as a newcomer, was clapped at, and then sat down trying to gain a semblance of nervous composure.

And always, during the next fifteen minutes, when my senses returned and I could hear again, I would realize that once again the First Step was being discussed. What slow learners these AAs were! Would they please get on with it and cover the rest of the Steps! I already had the First memorized and could say it by heart. I had no idea they were repeating it for my benefit. I had no gratitude for the groups that were holding out their experiences, guidelines, hope, and love to me. I didn't even recognize that they *were* doing it.

I didn't feel "we" had a common problem, or if we did, I wasn't going to let them know it. I was different.

My problem was unique. I didn't drink with people like this, and I didn't relish getting well with them, either. Anyhow, why should I get involved? I was only going to be a member of their organization for a short while — one year. By that time, I would have found out all the answers on how to drink and not get drunk, and be in shape again (in shape for what, I don't know).

A lifetime without drinking, one day at a time. Imagine — a whole lifetime! Incredible! And such a dull way to live. This was an order I surely didn't want to go through with. I have a keen mind, I said to myself, and it won't take me a whole lifetime to have it all down pat.

If these ex-drunks and their meetings were more organized and if they didn't spend so much time on the phone, then they would all learn as fast as I planned to. They didn't know how quickly I grasped things, or they wouldn't have been repeating themselves so often. Resentment welled inside me against this insult to

my intelligence. Imagine discussing the First Step forty-two times!

I was practicing being humble, so I didn't tell them that, during the first two weeks in their organization, I had obtained all the AA books, had read each from cover to cover, and had also read all the pamphlets the groups offered. I had even purchased "the twenty-four-hour book," although it isn't AA Conference-approved literature, and read it, too, from cover to cover in one sitting — easy reading. I didn't like that book, because it talked about God, which I felt meant church and religion, and a few passages mentioned items such as being sorry for beating one's wife. This clearly indicated to me that the little book was for fanatics and recovering male alcoholics.

Well, what next? I had read all their literature — sure wished they would get on to the other Steps. I had only one year to learn all this stuff, and if this rate of forty-two nights on each Step kept up, they would be hindering my plans for recovery. I had figured out that each of the Twelve Steps would take one month, maybe less, but never forty-two days!

By the time the forty-third meeting rolled around, I was tired of just sitting and nodding and smiling at all the right times. Anger at their ways, so easygoing and so different from mine, and impatience, because I had only one year to spend in their organization, not a lifetime, gave me

the courage to bottle up my fear and speak at this meeting. I told them of my feelings and our differences. (Since the members were so repetitious at all the meetings, I had been given plenty of time to pick out how each member attending was different from me. With such obvious shortcomings, I was amazed that any of them were sober at all.) I told them that *they* could spend a lifetime learning about this thing called alcoholism, with its mental, physical, and spiritual problems, but *I* had a deadline. I had absorbed the phrase "It's our choice," and my choice was not to have to go to these meetings for the rest of my life. I had lots waiting to be done, and I wanted to get on with it. Time was a-wastin' (and isn't that the truth!).

Can you believe that the rest of the people called on to share during this same meeting still continued to talk about the First Step, even after the criticism I had just expressed? It was obvious that I couldn't change them. *I couldn't change them!* With this thought, a fleeting flicker of something began to grow within me. I didn't know what to call it — it lasted such a short time. But it was good. Little did I realize that this feeling was the forerunner of my becoming teachable. How many times I had heard, "Bring the body, and the mind will follow." That flash of being in contact with reality and the source of peace, both at the same time, was quite a trip.

After this meeting, a few people

came over to me with advice such as “Take the cotton out of your ears and keep it in your mouth for a total of ninety days” (which I immediately recognized as “Shut up, dummy, and listen”). Others told me to keep on talking at the meetings, because only by opening up could I be helped. Confusion! Which group should I please, and which should I offend?

I don't like making decisions. I tried to size up both groups of advisers to see which I would derive the more benefit from if I pleased its members. Since I have always been a poor judge of character, I decided to think about it. The final analysis reached in my theorizing was that I hadn't been paying much attention to either group. So I decided to play it by ear at the next few meetings. At

some I spoke, and at others I kept quiet. No one reproached me or patted me on the back for doing either. If I was going to share at these meetings, I decided that I had better listen to what was being said. My pick-apart mind remained silent at times, so I could listen.

I began to feel better, and eventually we did cover the rest of the Steps. My first AA birthday came, and on arriving at my one-year deadline, I knew that I had a long way to go — the rest of my life. And I said so, through tears of gratitude.

It has been over 2,000 days since then. Little did I know during my first forty-two meetings that I would be saying the First Step each of those mornings — and each morning for the rest of my life, I hope.

B. P., Seattle, Wash.

Sponsorship

Like Chooses Like

*Rewards come from both
giving help and receiving it*

MY FIRST year and a half of sobriety had been rocky. I had needed a few days at a retreat to come to terms with my five-months-sober realization that years spent in mental hospitals might not have been necessary; that my diagnosis of chronic, paranoid schizophrenia (which led me to try to kill myself) could have been caused by a toxic psychosis—and the toxin was alcohol, which I had been consuming by the half gallon.

After a year, I needed a second retreat when I realized that all my life decisions had hinged on a non-decision. I had never decided whether or not I was going to be a drunk, and from that nondecision, made at age fourteen, had followed all that I was: a wife, a mother, and an employee. And I wasn't sure I wanted to be any of these.

Finally, with the help of a lot of good people, AAs and counselors alike, I reached the stage the promises in the Big Book predict: I did "not regret the past nor wish to shut the

door on it." But the effort had been enormous.

It was shortly thereafter that Debbie asked me to be her sponsor. I had a million doubts, and the first thing I did was call my own sponsor.

"You have a hard time talking about things that bother you until they build up," my sponsor said. "Be her sponsor. Listen to her feelings and frustrations, and you'll identify. You'll be able to feel some of the things that bother you. Besides, you've got enough AA. You can help her."

I had some misgivings. It seemed upside down to take on a new member and expect her to help me. That didn't fit my concept of the all-knowing sponsor.

But one thing tipped the scales. Debbie had an excellent, ongoing relationship with an AA-oriented therapist. She also had a close tie to her spiritual adviser, her minister, and spoke to him frequently. I would hardly be her only resource.

So I accepted. And when I did, I

told Debbie, "You'll be good for me." And I added, "I hope I'll be good for you."

Sometimes, I think that like picks like in this program, for Debbie, like me, did not talk easily about herself. I found myself creating trips to faraway meetings and other commitments together, because she seemed to be most open in the car. Often, since I work at home, a ten-minute bus ride from Debbie's office, I grab two containers of yogurt and we share a lunch hour. But the initiative to arrange occasions to talk has been mine.

It has now been more than three months, and my sponsor's prediction has come true. Debbie's confidences

have helped me to see things about myself—and because I've experienced these feelings, too, I've helped her. Last night, after we had filled a commitment, she got out of the car and said simply, "Gee, I like you."

I could say with all my heart, "I like you, too."

It all reminds me of a research course I took some years ago in which the professor referred to the "significant other"—the mother/father/sister/teacher figure who influenced the life of the subject under discussion. Debbie and I have become "significant others" to each other. That is the God-given benefit, to me, of being Debbie's sponsor.

L. K., Belmont, Mass.

It Takes What It Takes

*Her first
Fourth Step
wasn't too honest,
but it opened
the door to
self-acceptance*

I COULD BOTH laugh and cry over my first approach to the Fourth Step: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Being a writer and accustomed to an elaborate style, and having a do-it-myself complex, I decided I was supposed to write about my dramatic and unique life. I didn't ask questions or attend Step meetings. I just settled in and supplied myself with plenty of paper and the typewriter. Some 180 pages later, rough drafts strewn all around me, I surfaced to see where I had been.

Sobriety does interesting things to the mind—clears it up some, lets a bit of honesty and truth filter in, and begins to demand reality. What I had written was a dramatic story of someone else, of the person I had taken to the clergyman, the psychi-



atrist, the doctor for help for my "troubles." Being totally dishonest about myself, I found no relief. It was only when I really wanted sobriety, admitted I was an alcoholic, and realized my unmanageable life was completely beyond me, that doors began to open.

My fiction pages portrayed the person I had conned myself into believing I was, the poor martyred soul who found no rest in a troubled world. At first, I was shocked and horrified at what I had written. Then I recognized that this tormented character demanding center stage was at last out on paper and could be dealt with. Maybe, if I followed directions, I wouldn't have to live with that person any longer.

With the glaring example before me of what happens when I shoot off

on my own do-it-myself road, I began a Fourth Step inventory that made more sense. With pencil, paper, and a prayer that I would write down only what actually happened and how I felt about it, right along with dates, places, and boring details, I labored on. I followed examples in the Big Book. And this time, I did not attempt an inventory without the support and help of sober members of AA and the sharing at Step meetings that abound in my AA neighborhood.

I began to get down to the alcoholic that I am, the childish person who reacted poorly to life. A beautiful release happened as I approached myself with a newfound humility. At last, I had found some willingness to peel off the trappings of self-deceit and rationalizations. I

“A beautiful release happened as I approached myself with a newfound humility.”

discovered some truths about myself. I tended to blame people, places, and things for my unhappiness. I thought it had been necessary to drink to alleviate my misery. In the beginning, people in AA let me go right on believing that, knowing that I would trip over these old ideas when I took the Fourth Step again. And indeed I did.

I began to see how AA members, formerly sad like me, were happy, joyful, and capable, having serenity enough to live with unresolved problems. They had done their homework, this Step in particular. “You grow or go,” they told me. And I received courage from the promise that “we will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.” Painful as my journey was, I knew at last the healing power of following the path set before me.

But I had no idea how to accept responsibility for myself, so the knowledge that no one else could dictate how I felt was both relief and burden. Then someone said, “Misery is optional.” I cringed, recalling all the misery I had heaped upon my own head. Yet, as I carried the Fourth Step into the next directed action, the Fifth, I heard myself talk about how I allowed myself to wallow in self-pity and despair. I began to gain by pain, to win by los-

ing, to get control by letting go of control. And good feelings poured in from all sides. I discovered how many words that I had been fond of using were actually traps, setting off negative thinking—“If only . . . ,” “You always . . . ,” “never,” “forever,” “If you would only . . . ,” and so on. I dug in and tried desperately to change word habits, to share time instead of spending it.

Today, I am relieved that I don’t have to carry around that dramatic and so often drunk person. I believe in the restorative power of the Steps, and can now take a continuing inventory so that fifty years don’t pile up on me as they once did. I live and breathe in an adult world, instead of cringing in the corner of an emotional playpen. What a blessed relief to find I am not that dramatic actress after all!

Today, I am a sober alcoholic who desires to stay that way, and I often reflect on the healing experience of the Fourth Step. Now, I believe that “it takes what it takes,” and for me, the grueling ordeal of writing a “novel” to get the phony me out of the way was worth every word and agony. It wasn’t a very good novel, either; the main character was too emotionally immature to be very interesting.

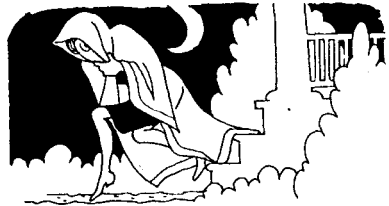
B. P., Pompano Beach, Fla.

Is it time for the Steps?

From Miami, Fla.:

“Don’t Sell the Newcomer Short!” (March Grapevine) was the balm I needed for a sore spot. It seemed nobody in my group thought a *new* person should start working the Steps (except Step One). At least, what I heard was: “Just keep the plug in the jug—make meetings—and things will get better.” (Things couldn’t have been worse!) This classic still grates on me: “You’re not ready for the Steps yet—wait till your head clears” (a month for every year I drank?), and on and on.

Well, I worked the Steps early in spite of all this advice. And guess what? It kept me sober then, and it keeps me sober today. I took them in order. How well I remember the day I took the Fifth (the first time). I didn’t tell anyone, because I felt a twinge of guilt—like I was sneaking off to do something I shouldn’t.



Then, I returned home, where I could be quiet and review what I had done. I was delighted. Now, I could look the world in the eye. I began to feel the nearness of our Creator.

“The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared” (Big Book, page 75) did come strongly!

I’m glad I followed the directions Bill gave in his recipe for sobriety. The things he said would happen did happen to me.

E. C.

June 1978

During my first three or four years in AA, I balked at taking most of the Twelve Steps. I thought I could find an easier, softer way. Needless to say, I did not gain sobriety.

Finally, I hit my bottom, surrendered, and took all Twelve Steps to the best of my ability. Last summer, I celebrated my fourth AA birthday, and found much happiness.

All the winners I know in AA have thoroughly taken and live the Steps. In working with others, I have found that without exception, those who are not successful in AA—those who have not found sobriety and/or happiness—have one thing in common: They have not taken all Twelve Steps.

The evidence to me is overwhelming! To achieve the sobriety and happiness the AA program offers, we must take the Steps. C. N.

One Sunday Afternoon

*Who knows what might result
from a chance encounter?*

THE FIRST of my three home groups is the Laguna Beach Wednesday-night speaker meeting. Here, in the summer, from the back porch, one can watch the sun drop into the Pacific Ocean. Recently, my wife and I attended an AA convention in Manhattan, an island of seven or eight million population in a bay of the Atlantic Ocean.

On Sunday morning, the convention ended, and everyone we knew in Manhattan went home. We stayed on as tourists and continued to walk the streets and enjoy the sights and especially the people. We saw the rich and the poor, the sane and the obviously insane; we saw drunks sleeping in the streets and prostitutes walking the streets; we saw a couple of winos panhandling and trying to take advantage of a young couple who were totally bombed out of their minds on drugs. We saw cheap shops and very expensive restaurants.

On Sunday afternoon, we walked forever trying to find an open coffee shop. As we walked along, I had to

slow down slightly as a drunk came out of a bar and stepped directly in front of me. It was Bill, a former secretary of our Laguna Beach group. He had had a slip and had recently run off from a Laguna hospital alcoholism program, leaving some of his clothes behind in his rush to get away.

When I spoke to him, he recognized my wife and me, but declined to have dinner with us, because he "had to meet a man." When we insisted, he foggily came along for eight to ten blocks, but then decided he couldn't make it, because he had to go in some other direction.

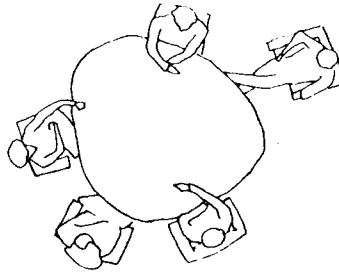
I told him where we were staying and held on to his hand as we said goodbye. I expressed my amazement at the coincidence, asking, "Why in the world do you suppose we met like this?"

He looked at me a bit bleary-eyed, thought awhile, and said, "Maybe some day we'll know."

And he walked away. And so did we.

P. O., Santa Ana, Calif.

Around the Tables



No Strings Attached

AROUND THE TABLES, there is sometimes heard a lament or complaint about failures in Twelfth Step work, or lack of appreciation shown by some constant “slippers” in spite of all we are doing for them. Reviewing my own record, I realized how often I had been piqued because some newcomers didn’t thank me or appreciate my efforts sufficiently. (Of course, I had said, “As long as I am sober, it is successful Twelfth Step work.”)

There came a time in my growth when I recognized my efforts and my expectations for what they truly were—defects of character, manifestations of selfishness and pride. When I saw them in that light, it

meant I had to have God’s help to remove them and change the defects to virtues. Clearly, my actions had been right; it was the intentions behind them that had been wrong. So it was deep within me that the change had to come.

Now I realize that not only Twelfth Step work, but all other forms of AA service must be on a “no strings” basis. I must do them for the sake of doing them, to pass on what I have received, expecting nothing. As I have done this, I have found that my sobriety improves in quality and unexpected rewards pile up beyond description. In fact, the “no strings” approach works everywhere.

*Continuing work
on the Steps
will keep us
connected with*

The Power of the Program



I HAD COME to the AA program and had found a new way to live. Life was good. I experienced a level of freedom and happiness I had never before known. Then, after almost five years of peaceful, contented sobriety, the honeymoon was over.

In my first year of sobriety, I had worked on the Twelve Steps. Upon the advice of a good sponsor, I had written an inventory. I had discussed my inventory with my sponsor in the Fifth Step. I continued on through the amends Steps. I did about all I could see to do with those Steps at that time.

I was convinced from the beginning that the power of the program works through the Twelve Steps. The compulsion to drink left the day I consciously took the Third Step. My life seemed to become more

comfortable as I worked my way through the rest of the twelve. I had what I consider a real spiritual awakening, i.e., a great change in my outlook upon life, people, and God.

It all came to an abrupt end, however, when things started happening in my life that I could not accept. I had enjoyed four years of sanity and sobriety, and now fear, frustration, anger, resentment, and depression became the ruling emotions of my life. People who were important to me rejected me. All around me, people were doing things I didn't like or approve of. I reacted with every conceivable negative human feeling. The misery of these emotions was even more intense than it had been during my drinking days, because my senses were not sedated by alcohol or other chemicals.

I started out to try changing the unacceptable circumstances around me by attempting to manipulate people and situations. Nothing worked. I became lost in a maze of confusing emotions. There seemed to be no way out.

I could argue quite convincingly that the problems in my life were being caused by the conduct of others. "If only those people would straighten up," I would tell myself. When I talked of my problems with others, I sometimes received sympathetic agreement. "You are absolutely right," they would say. "You have a right to be upset." That kind of sympathy I didn't need. (I don't want to exercise my right to be upset. What kind of "right" is that?) The effort to justify my resentments did nothing but intensify the problem.

For three or four months, I pur-

sued the frantic search for my lost serenity. Because I had heard and believed the "spiritual axiom," I knew that something was wrong with me. To find out what was wrong and where the answer might lie, I read extensively in psychology, philosophy, and theology. With each new theory or dogma I encountered, I thought, "Maybe this is the answer." There *are* many interesting, plausible, and possibly valid ideas available from many sources. But every time I thought I saw a glimmer of hope in some new system, I fell back into the pit of my black emotions. I considered seeing a psychiatrist. It seemed to me that the battle was no longer worth it. Five years without alcohol, and I was an emotional basket case.

Where had I failed? Had I missed something in the AA program? I continued to go to many meetings. I was doing much Twelfth Step work. I was still seeking through prayer and meditation for guidance in my life. I thought I was working the program.

Then I started to suspect that despite all the outward appearances, I was not really practicing the principles in all my affairs. The Twelve

Steps were things I had done, not something I was doing. In the Step study group I attended regularly, I had begun to talk of the Steps in the past tense: "When I took this Step . . ."

I had begun to study, analyze, and

"Lives are noticeably changed . . . when we work and rework the Steps."

expound upon the Steps, but I had gradually ceased to make them a part of my life by actually working them and keeping them current each day. Perhaps the answers I had been seeking in more esoteric realms were back where I had left them, in the Twelve Steps. Indeed, they were.

With renewed commitment, I started again with Step One. By the time I had written a new inventory and taken the Fifth Step, I began to receive convincing demonstrations of the effect of reworking all the Steps. People began to appear in my life who eloquently expressed the continuing need to keep working on all the Steps. They urged me on and told me how to apply the Steps to my life today.

It works. As a result, I have acquired an enthusiastic new faith in the AA program. I have personally experienced what is available at any

time, at any stage of sobriety, when we honestly approach the Twelve Steps as the solution to the condition of our lives today.

Now, when a particular Step is discussed at our meeting, I ask myself, "What am I doing about that Step today?" or "What do I need to do about that Step today?"

Perhaps our groups should be Step *application* groups instead of Step *study* groups. I have seen others start to really work on the Steps either with renewed commitment or for the first time. You don't have to ask which members are doing it. You can tell. Lives are noticeably changed, far beyond the removal of alcohol, when we work and rework the Steps. People change.

Now, the important thing for me to remember about the program is that I must continue to work it and live in it and grow in it, or I will slide backward. It is not in the nature of things for me to get my life "fixed" and have it stay "fixed." If I don't keep working on it, it will, sooner or later, fall apart. How do I work on it? With the simple kit of spiritual tools offered to me by the AA people when I first came—the Twelve Steps. I have tried other tools, but they don't work too well for me. Of course, I reserve the right as an individual to practice any form of religion or study any science, pseudoscience, or mental discipline. But I have discovered that knowledge acquired through such study does not really solve anything in my life.

Knowledge alone never does.

If I am to have a share of those promises enumerated in the AA book, there is a price I must pay. That price is "destruction of self-centeredness" (Big Book, page 14). The roadway to freedom, sanity, peace of mind, and serenity is not traversed by intellect. AA directs me toward a goal of greater humility and less self-centeredness. It means replacing some of my self-will with God's will for me. Acquisition of more knowledge has very little to do with that goal. My acceptance of a Higher Power came, not from understanding how God works, but from a simple faith based upon the premise that I need not understand as long as I have faith that "the Great Reality" is at work in my life.

Sometimes, I have deluded myself with thoughts of a lofty spiritual realm where I could rise above the problems of ordinary people and attain some exalted state of being. Such thinking, I now believe, contradicts the idea of the AA program—humility. It also seems to abandon the AA method of attaining some degree of that humility. The method, I'm told, is the practice of this simple program.

When I learned about the Twelve Steps, I had the knowledge I needed to keep me sober. That same knowledge will give me maturity, sanity, freedom, serenity, and real happiness—but only if I keep applying that simple set of spiritual principles to my life today.

I will remember, I hope, that life is not always 100 percent built to my specifications. God doesn't work well under close supervision. When things do go my way, and when I have the pleasure of realized hopes and dreams, I want to meet those conditions with gratitude born of the realization that the good things are now possible because of God in my life and the AA program and the AA people. But when the disappointments come and the pain starts to reappear, they bring real opportunity for growth. The pain can also be a

"Perhaps our groups should be Step application groups instead of Step study groups."

cause for gratitude. Without it, I probably wouldn't grow much.

I am grateful today that I have been forced by the circumstances of my life to find a deeper meaning in the AA program.

Bill W., AA's co-founder, once said that we measure our progress in AA by two words, "humility" and "responsibility." May I ever keep my eye on these yardsticks as I continue to seek only knowledge of His will for me. Where I found it before is the most likely place to find it again—in the Twelve Steps.

C. S., Tulsa, Okla.

*It isn't easy
to know what to do*

When an Old-Timer Needs Help

ALL TOO OFTEN in our AA lives, conversations and situations like the following arise in one fashion or another.

"Hey, Fred."

"Yeah?"

"C'mon with me. I've got a Twelfth Step call to make."

"Okay. Who is it?"

"We're going to see George. He's drunk and called for help."

"George? You gotta be kidding. George drunk? Why, he's been sober eleven years. One of the hardest-working AAs I know."

"Don't tell me. He's the guy that brought me into the program. And now he's the one who needs help."

There is a long silence. Then, perplexed, bewildered, Fred says, "But what are you going to say to him? What *can* you say? What can you do? George has more years in AA than you and I have combined."

"I don't know. Pray, I guess. C'mon, let's go."

There is probably no more vexing, disturbing problem in AA than what

to do or say when an old-timer slips and you face the job of twelfth-stepping a man (or woman) who has more years and more knowledge of AA sobriety than you. What's the solution?

I've been on both sides of the problem and still don't know.

When I first came into AA, my sponsor was a big, hearty, outgoing guy with twelve years of sobriety in the program. With his booming voice and quick way of moving, he pulled me after him into AA as a powerful magnet draws a particle of iron filing. He told me what to do, and I did it without question or hesitation. I was entirely ready, and whatever lengths he demanded of me, I went to willingly. (A year later, I discovered he was a "by the book" guy, and everything he told me was straight from the Big Book.) I built a special pedestal for him in my hall of heroes.

I had four years of sobriety and was living in another city when he (my sponsor and hero) showed up at

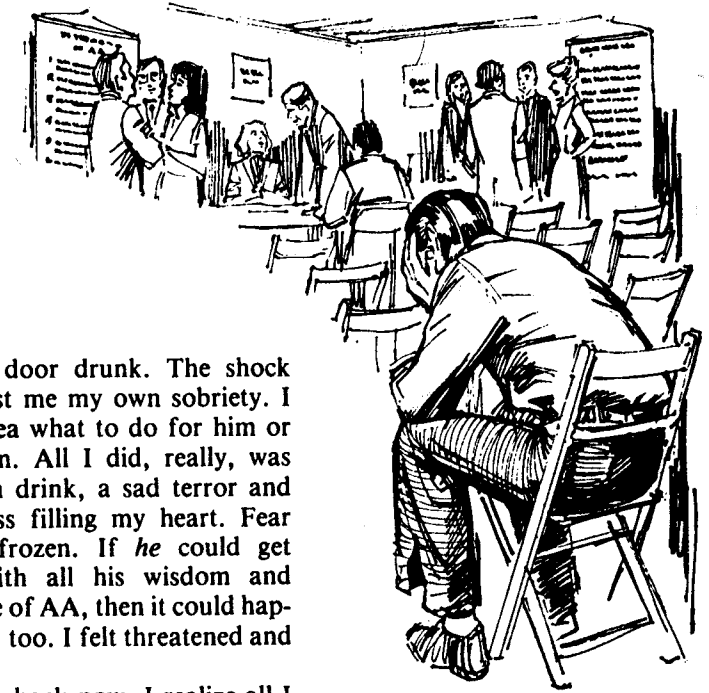
my front door drunk. The shock almost cost me my own sobriety. I had no idea what to do for him or say to him. All I did, really, was watch him drink, a sad terror and helplessness filling my heart. Fear held me frozen. If *he* could get drunk, with all his wisdom and knowledge of AA, then it could happen to me, too. I felt threatened and insecure.

Looking back now, I realize all I did was twelfth-step myself, praying to my God for help and understanding, praying this would never happen to me. My sponsor never made it back to the program.

Later, I went out several times on Twelfth Step calls to "veterans" who, after six, eight, even twelve years of AA sobriety, had gotten drunk and were desperately seeking their way back. Some made it. Too many didn't. And despite these experiences, I still didn't know what to say or do.

Then came my turn.

After years of sobriety as a leader



of Step meetings, intergroup representative, public speaker, convention platform headliner, and all the rest, I got drunk. The reasons are not pertinent to this story. The way I was twelfth-stepped back into AA is. Maybe it offers one clue, one way of handling a drunk old-timer, and others may find it useful when they face the task.

I had left the country and buried myself at what I was sure was the end of the world, where I would never be found. I didn't go with the idea of drinking, but to escape other prob-

lems, which were beyond resolving. I fled to a foreign country, to a tiny village where there was no AA but lots of drunks. I joined them.

Then one day, coming out of the little market by the plaza with my half gallon of rum, I looked up and into the face of an AA member from my own city back in the U.S.—a man I'd known well. I scurried away like a mouse running from a tomcat.

Of course, he found out where I lived, and he "dropped by just to say hello."

Then began his strange way of twelfth-stepping me. He did it with silence. Total silence regarding my drinking. Defiantly, I made and gulped a drink in front of him. It provoked no comment. Not even a glance of surprise or dismay. He merely said, "I'm going into — [a major city some distance away]. How about coming along? We'll have a night on the town, hit all the joints and nightclubs." I agreed.

When we drove into the city, Sam said in a casual way, "Do you mind? I've got to stop at this place on some business. It'll only take a couple of minutes. Okay?"

"Sure," I slurred, already half-bombed.

We pulled up in front of a building that looked like someone's home. "Want to come in with me? I'll only be a minute," he said.

Suspicion crept into me. "Wha's this place?"

Sam was already out of the car. Over his shoulder, he tossed the

words "It's the local clubroom for AAs." And he continued walking away.

Slowly, I got out of the car and followed him—mainly, I guess, because it didn't seem to matter one way or the other to Sam whether I followed.

Inside, the room was typical AA. On one wall was a large poster with the Twelve Steps. Another held a poster with the Twelve Traditions. Other signs with AA slogans dotted the walls. Sam was busy in one corner, talking quietly with several men and women. No one paid any attention to me. Nobody spoke to me. Not even "hello."

I sat down, alone, far removed from the others. My eyes lifted to the poster carrying the Twelve Steps. I began to read them, saying the words silently to myself. I felt tears fill my eyes, brim over, and trickle down my cheeks. I made no effort to stop the tears, wipe them away, or disguise them. I wept silently.

Then Sam was standing in front of me. "Okay, I'm finished. Let's go." He saw my tears but said nothing.

Back in the car, he kept his eye on the road and kept his silence. Tears continued to wet my cheeks. Finally, I turned to him. "Sam."

He looked at me briefly, then turned his attention back to the traffic. "Yeah?"

I said, "You s.o.b. You know what you've just done to me. You know damn well."

Sam looked at me again, smiling. I

searched his face and his smile intently, looking for a sign of smugness, cleverness, or triumph. I found only love and understanding. And still not a word from him.

"Sam," I said, "you know what I need now? Really need?"

"What?"

"I've got to have a drink."

"Okay," he replied, "let's get you one."

We got me one. We got me many that night on the town, and not once did Sam mention my drinking, AA, or anything remotely connected with my drinking.

Sam twelfth-stepped me with silence. Silence that let all my memories of the good years in AA flood back into my heart and overflow down my cheeks.

The next day, I went to Sam and

said, "Would you please help me get into a hospital so I can dry out? It'll take medical help. I'll never be able to cold-turkey alone."

Five days later, still shaky as a newborn colt, I appeared at the front door of that building that looked like a home, knocked, and entered. I walked up to the first person I saw and said, "Hello, my name's Woody and I'm an alcoholic. I would like to be a member of AA."

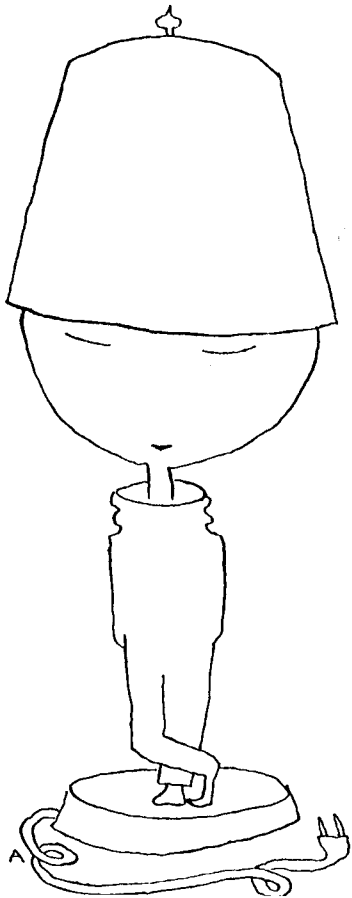
I was home again.

So maybe that's one way to twelfth-step an old-timer. Maybe you don't have to say anything. Just expose him to what he's left and lost. Chances are, he'll know what to say and what to do better than you. It's an approach that can work.

It did for me.

W. C., Ajijic, Mexico

Being Restored to Sanity



FOR THE FIRST several months in AA, I couldn't look at the Second Step: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The implied word "*insanity*" drove me quickly from the First Step to the Third. I was so deluded that I could not conceive of that powerful and graphic word applying to me.

Several months passed, and I developed at least a nodding acquaintance with the other eleven Steps—but not Step Two. I continued to avoid it, because that awful word "*insanity*" was like a conceptual wall. Perhaps, in those early days of sobriety, the fear that I was going insane during drinking was still too fresh for me to face Step Two honestly. "Irrational," I'd admit to; "insane," I couldn't.

About this time, I joined a Step group. Every twelve weeks, the Second Step would once again appear. Finally, I developed enough honesty

and self-awareness to acknowledge that some of my bizarre activities during my drinking days had been so irrational as to warrant the label "insane." But I quickly dismissed further consideration of Step Two by rationalizing that my bizarre behavior ended when my drinking did, and that I had thus been restored to sanity. After all, I no longer raced the police down the main street nor drove my motorcycle off the dock into the lake. So much for the Second Step.

More time passed, and each time the Second Step would roll around for group discussion, I'd sit through it silently, feeling it no longer had any application to me. But gradually, a nagging thought started to tell me that I was missing something. The more I heard the Step discussed, the more I knew that something was passing me by—perhaps something very important. Finally, after months of uncomfortable ignorance, it came to me: Although my insane *behavior* had largely disappeared with my drinking, my insane *attitudes* persisted. Being restored to behavioral sanity was only the preliminary part of the Second Step; attitudinal insanity was still very much a force in my life.

As I pondered this new-to-me discovery, I realized that any attitudinal insanity leads directly to inappropriate behavior, which then results in emotional pain for me and often for others. Slowly, I started to see how this worked. My personality

defects, not yet checked by use of the AA program, resulted in an insane attitude, which caused inappropriate behavior, which, in turn, led to pain.

An example I experienced involved my grandiosity. One spring day, my grandiosity became so insane that I thought I could afford a new luxury car—despite the fact that I had an almost-new car, purchased with overextended credit. So my insane attitude led to the purchase of that new car—inappropriate behavior—which in turn resulted in self-inflicted pain. Each of the next thirty-six months, I kicked myself for the higher and longer monthly car payments, which continued long after the "fix" of the new car had worn off.

Now, I see that buying the car was not an insane act—just inappropriate for me. There is nothing insane about buying an automobile, and under certain circumstances, it is fully appropriate. But the grandiose attitude that told me to buy the car when I couldn't afford it was clearly a *form of insanity*.

Thus, I have concluded that, while insane behavior pretty well evaporated with booze, insane attitudes linger on. Studying the Second Step has heightened this awareness; and now, beginning to work the Second Step in earnest, I find that my Higher Power is helping to identify those insane attitudes before they lead to inappropriate behavior and the inevitable, consequent pain.

M. B., Minneapolis, Minn.

“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”



We Have Gained a Partner

HOW MANY times in the past few years I have felt the warmth, friendship, and intense love that can be expressed only by one alcoholic for another as we attend our meetings and share.

It was best expressed to me by a fellow alcoholic I was sharing a jug with down on the Bowery some years back, long before I came into AA. He put it this way: “Ya know, buddy, I’m going to tell you something, and don’tcha ever forgit it. There’s the love of a son for his mother. There’s the love of a brother for his brother. But there’s no greater love in this whole wide world than one drunken bum for another.”

How eloquently put, I always thought. The simple, sincere honesty of it enveloped me and eventually became the hallmark of my every action in AA. It was one of the major factors in my continued commitment to the AA way of life—that is, until recently.

Something was bothering me. I wasn’t losing any ground, but by the

same token, Mt. Sobriety was getting harder to climb. The meetings were starting to lose some of their original luster, and at the same time, paradoxically, the periods between meetings seemed aeons longer. I knew from past experience that the answer had to be in the Twelve Steps, so I carefully went back over them. If the Second Step had had neon lights, it couldn’t have been any more obvious. I, who had been turned off hundreds of times by the religious nuts in the program, gleaned a ray of hope from this Step: “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

This was the answer, and I knew it. But it was a hard pill to swallow. I kicked it around for quite a while until it dawned on me that this was the introduction to the spiritual side of the program. Then, I began to look at it through the eyes of those who came before us. I realized that our predecessors in the program were desperate people. They had no AA

to seek help from. Society rejected them. The medical profession rejected them. The clergy rejected them. There wasn’t any human being who could comfort them or alleviate their suffering. They were physically sick, mentally ill, and spiritually starved. They admitted in the First Step that alcohol was a power greater than themselves, and they realized that no human being could help them overcome it. So why not appeal to a superhuman Being—or Higher Power, as we call it today—to help them out in their time of despair?

Even if we can’t accept the words “God as we understand Him,” surely we can accept the possibility that there is a source of power greater than man’s, since it manifests itself by keeping the planets in orbit, the seasons of the year changing, night giving way to daylight, even the lonely blade of grass sprouting in the fields come springtime. The Second Step does not ask us to believe in this Power, but only to believe that this

Power can work for us if we so desire.

The simplicity of the Second Step became overwhelming. My ego retreated as soon as I became aware that I had relied on a power greater than myself most of my life—namely, alcohol, as expressed in the First Step, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . .” The substitution of another power, a Power greater than myself, became even easier when I realized that the Second Step did not ask me to identify this Power, only to accept it on blind faith and to allow it to work for me. There would be plenty of time before I got to the Eleventh Step to improve my conscious contact with it.

This, then, became the key that unlocked the spiritual side of the program for me. Now that I had the wrinkles out of my belly, as the saying goes, was I willing to accept, on blind faith, that which the first AAs had to do in order to maintain their sobriety? The only rational answer I could come up with was yes. Today,

I am extremely grateful.

Each of the Twelve Steps has its own reward for those who practice it and accept it for what it is. The Second Step offers us a partner, to aid us both in times of joy and in times of despair. The loneliness that only an alcoholic can feel, whether by

oneself or in a crowd, slowly but surely dissipates as a Higher Power is more fully employed in our times of need. We never again have to be alone, for in surrendering a small bit of our ego, we have gained a powerful partner.

F. G., Queens, N.Y.

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 8 9 10 11 12

Self-acceptance was only one of many rewards he found in working and reworking the Steps

Living the Steps

IN THE LAST six months, I've begun to experience the striking benefits of working and reworking the Twelve Steps on a regular basis. My life is changing; my relationships with my family are improving; work goes better; and I've started to understand that I can help others by simply passing on this kind of experience.

I drank heavily for fifteen years, bankrupting myself physically, mentally, and especially spiritually. Today, after twenty-two months of alcohol-free living, I can still discount somewhat the days of mental terror and drastic physical ills. Drinking allowed perfectionistic thinking, and I felt godlike in my abilities. Therefore, if I did not get what I wanted, I believed I was entitled to drink.

But my unwillingness to accept myself and the world had existed before I drank; it continued while I drank; and this same unwillingness cropped up after I stopped drinking. My greatness still was not appre-

ciated. Poor me! With my mind directed to that kind of thinking, it was impossible to consider that God had a plan for me.

I attended an average of over six meetings a week in my first year of sobriety. During that time, I took two Fourth and Fifth Steps, about six months apart. I made amends to one person, but I did not work the Eighth Step. No regular meditation was practiced, although I did receive some benefits from reading the Big Book, from the beginning of "How It Works" through the Third Step prayer (page 63), and then saying the Seventh Step prayer (page 76).

After sixteen months in the Fellowship, I was greatly depressed and

out of touch with reality. I was probably disappointed (as I sometimes am now) that this humble, spiritual life wasn't paying off in instant sex, large bank accounts, big cars, and overdue, constant recognition.

My wife was beginning to wonder about the life of sobriety, with me out six or seven nights a week at meetings for the first year. So I cut it to three meetings a week. These were mostly closed, general-discussion meetings, and I wasn't getting as much help from them as in the early months.

While I was attending an AA conference that summer, one of the speakers told about the benefits of repeated working of all the Steps.

After the conference, I learned more about this approach and became convinced that this is what the AA program consists of.

I began to work the Steps. Since that time, I have prepared written inventories and then swapped Fifth Steps with approximately ten different members of the Fellowship. In my Fourth Step, I list specific character defects, but I do not list my assets, as I believe that they will take care of themselves, and that the main asset is the freedom derived from revealing my innermost thoughts to another human being.

I have worked the Eighth Step by making a written list of people to whom I owe amends, and I have become willing to carry out these amends. I have actually made amends (Ninth Step) to twenty-five out of the thirty-five people on the list. Immediately after making one of these amends (to my father), I experienced a feeling of exhilaration similar to the effect of a Fifth Step.

I have practiced regular prayer

and meditation for several months now. In the early mornings and before going to bed, I say the Serenity Prayer and the Prayer of St. Francis (as found on page 99 of the "Twelve and Twelve"). Saying the Third and Seventh Step prayers with fellow AAs over the phone and in person, if the occasion arises, has increased the effectiveness of these prayers and made them more meaningful.

I consider it a part of the Twelfth Step to tell other AAs the way I have worked the Steps and the effect of this work. I continue to go on actual

"I have good feelings toward myself and others more often"

Twelfth Step calls.

The results of this repeated inventory-swapping and amends-making, regular time spent on prayer and meditation, and Twelfth Step work seem enormous when I compare my present situation with where I was in sobriety before I started doing these things. I have experienced a stronger Third Step and a more relaxed attitude. Depression is reduced in length of time and

depth, and occurs less frequently. I have good feelings toward myself and others more often, and I am able to cope with life's problems more effectively. I have increased energy and tolerance, and my mind is beginning to become more orderly.

Taking the Sixth and Seventh Steps follows each taking of a Fifth Step. I have learned that some character defects may be reduced for a time, and then reappear with renewed strength. When this happens, it may seem that all this work has minimal benefit. Not true! "God could and would if He were sought." By working the Steps in this manner, I am *seeking* God's will for me, and *striving* to do all I can to effectively change my life by continuous use of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. For me, the seeking of God's will means willingness, acceptance, and the ability to cope with life no matter what comes along. If we believe we are honestly doing everything we can with conditions *as they exist*, we are using the Serenity Prayer as a guide to our lives.

By repeatedly revealing my innermost thoughts to others, I accept these innermost thoughts more and thereby accept myself more and more. My ego cries for perfection, but honesty tells me that I am human, that humanity is not so terrible, and that it's okay to be half child of God and half s.o.b.

When I make amends for harm I have caused, I am not only doing a

lot to remove conscious and subconscious fear and guilt about the past; I am also learning to accept myself as I am today; and that gives me greater ability to deal with the future.

My meditation helps clear the spiritual airwaves to allow me better conscious contact with God's will, as He chooses to reveal it to me. Twelfth Step calls remind me of the grim reality of "what it was like," and how grateful I can be.

To carry the message today, I try to lead another alcoholic into doing what the Steps say. This includes helping him get his Fourth Step inventory written, and encouraging him to take a Fifth Step. If he takes his with me, then I take mine with him at the same time.

The Fourth and Fifth Steps dramatically changed one man's life. He had gone through several hospitalizations and spent quite a bit of time in a halfway house. Although he had some periods of sobriety, he returned to drinking each time. After one such bout, he was going around obviously intoxicated, asking various members to help him. He questioned whether another hospitalization would be of any use. He was a nervous wreck. Then it was suggested that he write out his inventory and go over it with someone.

I saw him a week or so later. He looked physically refreshed and was not visibly nervous at all. He reminded me that I had mentioned the great benefits derived from working the Fourth and Fifth Steps.

For some reason, this had stuck in his mind. He contacted his sponsor, and after writing out a lengthy inventory, he went over it with his sponsor for three and one-half hours on each of two consecutive days. The effect of this work was overwhelming. He told me that guilt had

"My ego cries for perfection, but honesty tells me that I am human"

previously caused him to drink, but he could now talk about this feeling and cope with it. He had prepared a written list of amends and was proceeding to work on actually making the amends. I see him every week or so, and he is more and more outgoing and interested in others.

At present, I attend two or three meetings a week, finding discipline and benefit especially in Step meetings. Thank God for the Fellowship and members like that conference speaker. Thank God for the Steps; they have allowed me to live in the world with increasing freedom, through good and bad days, a day at a time.

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

Losing the Desire to Drink

*Beyond the desire to stop drinking
is an even more positive goal*

WHEN I ASKED my sponsor how I could get a desire to stop drinking, I was told simply, "You already have a desire to stop drinking, or you wouldn't have asked!" He went on to say, "Getting a desire to stop drinking isn't important *now*. What is important is *losing the desire to drink*. As long as you have the desire to drink, no matter how strong the desire not to drink is, you may eventually drink again. If you want what the program of AA has to offer and if you want to lose the desire to drink, then you must work the Twelve Steps program of AA."

I wanted what my sponsor had, and I went on to work the Twelve Steps for the first time, completing them in less than four months. I have not taken a drink of alcohol since attending my first AA meeting, and I

am sure that this is due to the early prodding to work the Steps as soon as possible.

Today, I understand why my sponsor was so insistent on this point. In working with others, I, too, heavily stress that losing the desire to drink is infinitely more important than just getting a desire to stop drinking. I try to explain that losing the desire to drink was the beginning of a new way of life for me, and that I began to lose the desire to drink, along with my drinking problem, as soon as I had completed the Fifth Step. Further, I believe that the desire to drink will leave anyone who has honestly completed the Steps, and that it will not return as long as we continue to practice AA principles in all our affairs.

Many people balk when I say that

we must work Step Five before the desire to drink will begin to leave. But I tell them what it says on page 72 of the Big Book, where "the best reason" for working this Step is given: "If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking." However, even that is a negative incentive, so I also tell of the positive rewards for working Step Five, in order to encourage people to work all of the Steps.

At every opportunity, I point out the middle paragraph on page 75, in reference to Step Five: "Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs,

but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. *The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly [my emphasis]*. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe."

Also, whenever possible, I tell of the promises we are given on pages 83-84 for working the Steps. If I have the Big Book available, I read these promises and continue reading on page 84. There, in explaining our situation upon completing Step Nine and beginning Step Ten, the book says: "And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will

find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality—safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. *Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us* [again, my emphasis]. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.”

When I first read the foregoing paragraph *with understanding*, I had my doubts about whether my desire to drink had actually been removed. Even though it had been a while since I had completed the Steps for the first time, I still occasionally thought about taking a drink or thought that a drink would taste good at a particular time, like right after mowing the lawn.

A renewed Fourth Step inventory helped me to evaluate myself in this respect. I think this is something so deeply ingrained in my mind, from many years of habit, that I will never completely lose it. Also, I have heard it said that the Higher Power gives us these thoughts of drinking so that we will not forget we are alcoholic. Whatever the reason, since I completed Step Five, there has not been a single instance when the thought of taking a drink wasn't immediately

followed by a much more rational thought: “I not only don't need that drink, I definitely do not want that drink!” In other words, since I first completed the Steps, the thought of taking a drink has not once progressed into any form of action; therefore, I did lose the actual desire to take a drink, and to this day, it has not returned.

“The problem has been removed.” It does not exist for me. I am neither cocky when I am around alcohol nor am I afraid of it. Bottles, bars, taverns, package stores, and all the other concerns of the active alcoholic that I once was hold no more interest for me today than my wife's macrame.

I have found a substitute for all that, and it is vastly more than a substitute. It is the comradeship that I have found in Alcoholics Anonymous. I have found release from care, boredom, and worry. My imagination has been fired. Life means something to me at last. I know that the most satisfactory years of my life lie ahead. I have found all of this and more in our Fellowship.

Because I am so happy with what I have found, I want to share it with the people who ask, “How do I get a desire to stop drinking?” I want them to have what I have found. As it says on page 153 of the Big Book, I want them to know that “the age of miracles is still with us.” My own recovery proves that!

R. G., Fort Knox, Ky.

Four words gave her a key to meditation and opened up a whole new understanding of the Eleventh Step



To Improve Our Conscious Contact

my independence and not always make decisions based on what might gain the approval of others.

Most important, I have gained freedom to pursue a better understanding of my Higher Power, in the best way I see fit.

The next word is "comfort."

Comfort certainly follows upon Step Two—trusting in a Higher Power to restore us to sanity. God, as I understand Him, is the great comforter. It is wonderful and reassuring to know that this all-powerful, loving force is always there. I am never alone. He even knows my name. And He cares, as He has demonstrated dramatically and tenderly hundreds of times over the past twelve years of continuous sobriety.

Physical comfort has been restored to me through good health habits developed in the new AA way of life. Getting proper rest, eating well, and avoiding overwork and fatigue have meant a balanced life.

A more mature, less demanding outlook on life has emerged,

STEP ELEVEN calls for "prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God . . ." For me, that meant some intriguing research and study on how to meditate. In one of many books, I found four words suggested for reflection, and I realized these words define what has gradually happened to many of us in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The first word is "freedom."

As an alcohol addict, I learned through AA to admit my imprisonment within the walls of round-the-clock drinking—a most important

First Step toward finding freedom from the dread compulsion to drink.

Other new freedoms began to follow. I no longer had to be furtive about my movements, for a program of self-honesty was unfolding. I felt free to tell the truth, no matter what the consequences. This new self-awareness enabled me to express how I felt in difficult situations. Further, this meant growing self-confidence in myself and my judgments, and clear thinking added another dimension to my new sense of freedom.

I had been completely humiliated

and degraded by alcoholism. Flattened. And yet, through divine intervention, I miraculously faced up to my drinking problem and sought help from AA. Containing the monster of alcohol one day at a time had put steel in my spine. I was able to hold my shoulders back and my head high and face the world with growing self-respect.

Freedom from fear and loneliness had been given to me by regular attendance at AA meetings and the warm, understanding, compassionate fellowship of AA friends.

There is also the freedom to assert



measured against the terrible mental anguish, guilt, and despair experienced in the final stages of drinking.

Word number three is "beauty."

Step Three is beautiful: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*" When we make all of our actions an offering to God, there is, indeed, beauty in loving, serving, and giving.

For a person whose self-will ran riot, the ability to step back and observe, appreciate, and enjoy the simple things of life is a miracle of AA recovery. Racing, acquiring, and winning were at one time paramount for me. Now, it's living a little along the way by being on the lookout for beauty in everything.

A spectacular sunset is an easy example. Flowers, seashore, mountains, music, paintings, writings are also objects of beauty given to us generously from the divine source of infinite supply. Pine fragrances and the crisp crackling of an open fire can offer a spiritual experience. Watching sparrows splash in a mud puddle on a busy city street can illustrate the wonder of it all.

The last word is "joy," which summarizes the remarkable Fellowship of AA.

Joy is a result of beginning anew with plenty of workable tools to rebuild a shattered life.

AA promises the joys of deep, concerned, and lasting friendships, of self-respect, of self-honesty, of meaningful work and accomplishment, of appreciation for the little, wondrous things in life, of consideration for the rights and wishes of others, of diminution in the need to possess, direct, find fault with, manipulate, or use others.

Instead, we find a growing hunger to "improve our conscious contact with God" as we understand Him, to discover His will, then to do it. One discovery in my journey inward is this: Simply *trying* to please God does, in fact, please Him. Whether we are making a stumbling effort at a Twelfth Step call or trying to articulate a deep and painful secret while taking the Fifth Step with a trusted friend, God is pleased.

Freedom. Comfort. Beauty. Joy. They all add up to completeness.

N. P., *Kitty Hawk, N.C.*

January 1979

An interpretation of
Step Three

STEP THREE says, "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*"

Drunk or sober, we all have our own lives to live, each one different from all the others. And while we are drinking, each of us has a different will, leading toward destruction in its own way.

But when we make the decision in Step Three, we surrender to God by merging with the powerful, supportive will of every member in the Fellowship of AA. Our own wills become blended with the total goodwill of a million alcoholics. We retain individual wills in our routine affairs; but in the critical spiritual qualities that insure our sobriety, such as honesty, open-mindedness,

and willingness, we become part of the spiritual potency of the Fellowship. We become intuitively aware of the enormous network of loving support woven around us by AAs all around the world. And we become contributors to this network as we merge with the one will.

We reinforce our contact with this will whenever we attend an AA meeting, work at the Steps, extend a helping hand, "practice these principles in all our affairs."

The total will of AA embraces the miracle of recovery in all kinds of distorted lives. It helps us to be worthwhile human beings—today, one day at a time. It wills us to become better than we now are, no matter what we have been.

W. K., Palo Alto, Calif.

How responsible are we?

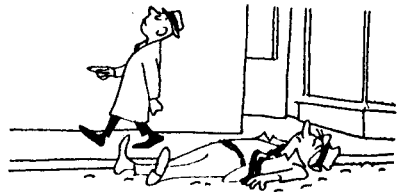
From Decatur, Ala.:

"I am responsible." Can we all say that? Too many times, we are guilty of taking an attitude that says, "Old Joe's had another slip. Who the hell does he think he is? I helped him through his last slip, and he stayed sober for eight months. Well, let him tough this one out by himself. I don't even want to see him."

Think again, my friends. Old Joe may not be as strong as you. His problems may be much greater than yours. And he is surely suffering more this time than he did before. His remorse is more intense because he has not only let himself and his family down again, but he has also let his new friends in AA down. He has not personally affronted *you* by getting drunk again. So for God's sake, don't abandon him now. He needs you more than ever.

Do you feel disillusioned because he still owes you a little money? Or maybe he has lost the job you recommended him for. AA does not say, "Help him one time, and if he does not make it, to hell with him." Think how many times Bill W. need-

ed and received help. And think real hard about "But for the Grace of God."



I have been guilty of these things in the past. But after much soul-searching, hours of meditation, more personal inventory, and earnest prayer, with the help of the same God who lifted me from the gutter, I will from this time forward be there to render all possible help for any hand that reaches out. C. W.

Twelfth Step**'Can I Talk to You?'**

*Who was the stranger at the door?
A man bringing the best of gifts
to a grateful AA*

I HAD WORKED hard that day at a new temporary job while a friend was on vacation. I was tired from the change of pace. My wife suggested that I lie down and rest while the steaks cooked on the outdoor grill.

As I started to pull the curtains in the bedroom to close out the late-afternoon sun, I noticed a pickup truck stop at the front door. A man, not too well-dressed, got out and walked slowly and cautiously to the front door. Not wanting to have my supper delayed, I went to the door. "Hello. What can we do for you?"

"Can I talk to you for a few minutes?"

"Sure. What's on your mind?"

"You're Frank, right? And you're an alcoholic, right?"

His questions made me angry. He was very nervous, glancing around and down at the porch floor, his cap

pulled down over his eyes. In fact, I was very angry. "Yes, I'm an alcoholic."

I did not know this man, and it was none of his business what I might or might not be. My anger hit the boiling point. "Who are you? What do you want? Who told you I'm an alcoholic?" I raged on. "What right do you have to come to my home and start making remarks of any kind about me?"

He removed his cap as he began to speak, and this time, I could see a troubled man, with bloodshot eyes and tears running down his cheeks. "I'm in trouble. I need your help. About eight months ago, I saw you at an AA meeting. You were so honest and sincere when you told about being an alcoholic, about asking for help, about going in the hospital for twenty-eight days. Can

you tell me, am I an alcoholic? Can you make me stop drinking? Can you cure me?"

My anger left. Compassion and humility filled the void. "No, my friend," I said, thinking of the answers I had been given when I asked for help. "Only you can say if you're an alcoholic. No, I can't make you stop drinking. Only you can stop when you're ready to stop. There is no cure for our disease, but God can help! And AA can help."

I had not remembered him. That had been his first and only AA meeting, eight months ago—for me, eight slowly recovering, gratefully recovering months.

We sat down and talked for a long while and exchanged a lot of questions and answers. Then we took the first three Steps of AA together. Did he understand? Was he ready to give

up drinking and his alcoholic ways and turn his will and his life over to God or a higher power of his understanding? "Yes!"

I explained the sponsor system to him and agreed to be one of his sponsors and handed him a token that had been given to me, bearing the words "Think! Call your sponsor before, not after, you drink!"

"You do me an honor," I said, "by coming to me. Keep the token as long as you don't drink. Sometime, you may want to pass it on to somebody else after you begin to collect other chips—the white one for surrender, red for three months, green and yellow, and so on. Remember, you're only human. If you drink again, throw the token away, but *you* come back. It's you, your life, your family that I'm interested in for the future."

He promised he would be in touch and would be waiting to go with me to the next AA meeting. He would call when he got home.

The call came ten minutes later: "Thank you." His son and grandson had been there when he got home.

My family had eaten an hour earlier. All at once, I was no longer tired. I sat down to a supper that had been kept warm—steak never tasted so good!

F. E., Boone, N.C.

Twelfth Step

*Out of the night and
into* **The Day of
the First Meeting**

*Two people are blessed when a
willing newcomer calls on an AA
member for help*

THE SHAKY voice blurted it right out on the Sunday-morning telephone: "I'm an alcoholic and I need help." Visions of a nightmarish Saturday night came to me through the receiver in my hand, and I hurt for the woman on the other end. As I listened to bits and pieces of her predicament, my free hand fumbled with an AA meeting list. It revealed a Sunday-morning meeting we could make if she could pull herself together a bit. I had always felt that the best time to get a newcomer to her first meeting was the morning after, when she was really hurting and craving a drink.

It didn't take much persuasion. I think if I had told her we had to take an African safari, she would have agreed — she was that beaten down and crying for help.

The address was not Park

Avenue, but, as I drove to pick up a woman on welfare with five children and no husband around, I hadn't expected it to be. The door opened, and I saw a woman who most certainly had once been lovely. The dark eyes told a story of their own and could not meet mine eyeball-to-eyeball, because she could not hold her head up yet. It was not the physical sickness that made her keep her head down, but the guilt and shame she felt, and I knew it well.

On the way to the meeting, I explained to this shaking, fidgety, very sick girl that alcoholism was an illness, not a moral issue, and she must not be ashamed. From the few things she told me as we drove, I realized that she was not an irresponsible person but had become snarled in the clutches of alcohol and, in her drunken travels, had lost sight of the



woman she had meant to be. Underneath those heavy eyes, that florid complexion, and that disheveled hair, a lady was hiding, begging for a way to surface, but unaware that a world of AAs was extending a hand to her that bleak January morning. I put my arm around her and restrained myself from crying with her. Believe me, her pain was in my heart. I thought over and over, "Oh, my God — but for the grace of Thee . . ."

I don't believe she digested much of what was said at that speakers meeting, but I know she was touched by the countless people who approached her, introduced themselves, and gave phone numbers, offers to help, encouraging words, literature, and good wishes. She received them all gracefully, swallowed hard, fought the nausea and the shakes, and once, during the

meeting, turned to me, met me eyeball-to-eyeball, managed a tiny smile, and let a tear run down her cheek. I took her hand and felt a trembling plea for help.

I, too, did not hear all the speaker had to say that morning. I was silently praying to my Higher Power that He would remove the hurt she was feeling deep down in her soul, and replace it with the dignity and feeling of well-being that come to an alcoholic who is recovering in the AA program. I wished I had a hypodermic needle and could shoot the whole program right into her and bring her instant relief from her pain, but I knew that it would take time and that our sickness can be healed only after we have experienced it to the fullest extent each one of us can bear.

After the meeting, we found a lit-

tle restaurant and had breakfast together. She could not understand why I, a perfect stranger, would want to befriend her and buy her breakfast. For an hour, we talked. She explained her drinking pattern and what had happened to her. I explained AA and how it could help her.

There is usually a crisis of some sort that catapults an alcoholic into the arms of AA. Hers was a blackout the previous night that had left her to wake up in a strange bed in a room she had never seen before, with no recollection of how she'd gotten there. She recalled her frenzied dash out of there and plainly showed her bewilderment. How could this have happened to her? Slowly, she calmed down enough to learn that, although blackouts are not uncommon with alcoholics, they are danger signals, and that she was in the right place if she truly wanted to recover and if she was willing to be honest. (I had already heard more honesty out of this woman than I had been able to muster for months after I dried out.)

I'd been twelfth-stepping for about six years, and I'd seen many types of women come into AA, but this one was really refreshing. As sick as she was, she pulled no punches, made no excuses for her behavior, blamed no one but herself, and expressed an honest desire to become sober. I saw nothing but green lights for her. She'd gone up the Nile until she saw the first crocodile, and she plainly demonstrated

that she was not built for the worst rigors of active alcoholism. She loved her children dearly, hated herself today, did not want to exist in a drunken stupor around the clock, and was reaching out for a hand to help her off that merry-go-round. She had it!

My commitment was total. I broke a cardinal rule of mine. I never, never, never gave my phone number to a new person on our first encounter. I always got her phone number and called her several times a day, instead. I had learned a sorry lesson: Some people who are not in earnest will get drunk the day after they call AA and keep me up all night with their phone calls. But this time, I knew I had a winner. Instinctively, I gave her my phone number, address, blood type, Social Security number, and heart, because I wanted her to have all the support I could give her, right from the start. I told her that I was in her corner, backed up by a whole community of AAs, and that the Higher Power behind her was greater than the task ahead of her.

A meeting the next day was followed by a meeting the day after that, and so on for a couple of weeks. She was off and running in good form. Next thing I knew, she had a dozen acquaintances in the program who were calling her daily. With an announcement that she was taking up too much of my time, she began to get to meetings on the bus or to manage rides with other folks.

Her purse was stuffed with AA literature, and she'd leaf through it, stop at a particular passage she had marked, and ask questions—proof positive that she was reading. When

It began to spread to other newcomers around her. Although she did not know it, she helped at least one other new member over the threshold of AA by her example.

“The words ‘I can’t’ have never accomplished anything, but the words ‘I’ll try’ have worked miracles”

asked to read the Steps or Traditions at a meeting, she didn't back off with an excuse; she accepted and said, “I'll probably botch this up, but I'll try.” The words “I can't” have never accomplished anything, but the words “I'll try” have worked miracles.

One day, she called and said she couldn't stand her messy house any longer. While she was drinking, she said, she hadn't cared what it looked like; but now that she was sober, she couldn't stand it. She went on a cleaning spree that lasted two weeks and brought her heaps of satisfaction. Suddenly, I noticed that she was standing up straight, looking people in the eye, smiling, and putting her hand out. Her self-respect was returning. Through the Fourth Step, she found that the more faults she was able to face, the more respectable she became. Her eagerness was refreshing; her honesty was astounding; her enthusiasm knew no bounds; and most of all, her willingness to try sobriety was positive.

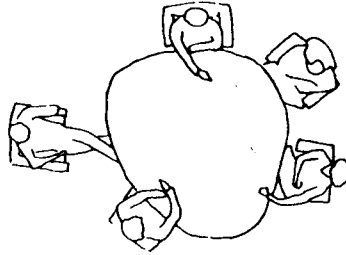
It's been said that a rain-drenched rose cannot hold its head up right after a storm; but a woman can. Just give her a few minutes with her compact, and she comes sailing forth with a freshly lipsticked smile flashing and hope in her heart. This woman's recovery was exciting to watch. As if seeing a beautiful flower blossom in a slow-motion film, petal by petal, I watched her unfold into a wholesome, sober woman with a new zest for life. I felt honored to be a part of this rebirth.

Tonight, our group had the pleasure of presenting a ninety-day card, and the recipient came forward to accept it from me, the secretary. I saw a very attractive lady who had lost twenty pounds in ninety days, had a new, stylish hairdo, and was perfectly radiant. I choked up a bit as I handed the card to a lady who, ninety days ago on a cold winter morning, had bowed her head and said, “I'm an alcoholic and I need help.”

I. C., Rochester, N.Y.

Around the Tables

Principles



AROUND THE TABLES, I heard a very fine talk by a guy with whom I disagreed on a lot of things, including his understanding of Step Twelve. But he is sober and so am I, and isn't that what AA is really all about?

The more I thought about it, the more emphatic the idea became that *principles*, not dogma and doctrines, underlie the entire fifth chapter of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Once again, the collective conscience of the Fellowship drove me back to the basics—which, for me, are the fifth chapter. How the evening's speaker regards the Twelfth Step is solely and uniquely his own concept, just as mine is my own. The method applied to the Fourth Step also varies with each person. The style of the Third Step and its

collateral Step, the Eleventh, again demonstrate the individuality of AAs.

Yet, individual though the approach must be, the success of the quest depends on principles. At this date in my experience, the "rarely" of the fifth chapter has an inescapable connotation of "never." "The steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery," have proved their absolute merit over the almost forty years since the original publication of the Big Book. And "The principles we have set down are guides to progress" is, to me, one of the best statements ever made on "How It Works." I recognize that if I continue to practice these principles, there is growth waiting for me that I can't even begin to comprehend.

No Human Power

THE BIG BOOK says that our stories tell "what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now." What happened to me? My recovery was not of the "instant success" variety that we occasionally hear about in AA. I was in and out of AA for fifteen years before my compulsion was taken away. You might say I was one of

those persons written about in Chapter 5: "There are such unfortunates."

During that period, it was the Third Step that gave me the most trouble. I could never formulate an acceptable concept of God. And without a concept of God, I did not think it was possible to take the Third Step. This is the surrender

Step. Without surrender, a person is still fighting booze alone. And for me that was an impossible fight. Booze always won. The compulsion always overwhelmed me.

What happened eventually was that I quit placing my hope in treatment centers, medical sources, inspirational books, or psychologists. I did, however, turn again to Alcoholics Anonymous. When I did, I also turned again to the Twelve Steps. I did Steps One and Two, and then I jumped directly to Step Eleven. I understood that what I needed was a concept of God. I am thankful that I was able to discipline myself to seek God through prayer and meditation, to achieve a conscious contact with God, and thus achieve an understanding of God.

I practiced a Step Eleven spiritual discipline for nearly two months, consistently, persistently, on a regular basis. At some point during that period, my compulsion for alcohol disappeared. I was unaware when it

left me. One day, it just occurred to me that I no longer had a compulsion. I was free.

On page 60 of the Big Book we read that "probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism." I firmly believe that statement. Probably no human power could have relieved my alcoholism. I was insane because of an insidious disease. Now, I am free of the major symptom of alcoholism: the diabolic compulsion. That is not to say that I am free of the disease; but alcoholism, for me, has been arrested. I did not free myself. In fact, no human power did it.

Step Eleven of Alcoholics Anonymous turned out to be the key to Step Three for me. Through prayer and meditation, I came to an understanding of God. At that point, I was able to turn my will and my life over to His care. In the beginning, my chances were less than average, but Step Eleven made me a winner.

K. S., Seattle, Wash.

Faith and the Speed of Light

I ATTENDED an exhilarating AA meeting, a Big Book discussion on Chapter 1, "Bill's Story." As you know, it is a synopsis of his drinking and recovery and is heavily laced with his conversion to a belief in a Power greater than himself. The members spoke variously, some self-consciously, about their interpretations of God and their faith and its meaning.

I had lunched that day with a job applicant, a recent Ph.D. in high-energy physics, whose dissertation was on theoretical elementary particles—quarks and their kinfolk, now so numerous that they are differentiated by subscripts. None can be seen or even photographed. Their life span is measured in nanoseconds (billionths of seconds), and they are known only by inference, based on the deflection of the path of longer-lived particles that would otherwise travel in a straight line. The theory is far removed from the old belief in four basic elements—earth, air, fire, and water—but it's the same game.

I had long been impressed by the utter faith of physicists in their science and its tenets, and I mentioned it at the meeting. Other examples came to mind; I spoke of these to the effect that if you show me a scientist without faith, I'll show you a charlatan.

In the 1950's a man achieved some small fame by manufacturing apparatus that enabled the production of temperatures closer to absolute zero than had then been achieved. No one has produced absolute zero, but the concept is unquestioned. It is an article of faith. Another article of faith is that of Isaac Newton, whose first law is based on the concept of a perfect vacuum. No one has ever produced a perfect vacuum, either.

The most mind-boggling of all is the speed of light. No matter how fast the speed of the measuring instrument, or its direction, the speed of light moving past it is always a constant 186,000 miles per second. This is manifestly impossible. It cannot be. It blows my mind. Yet high

school sophomores accept it as a fact with casual ease.

Is there conflict between science and faith? I think not. If faith is a belief in events, conditions, or forces which cannot be isolated but which influence behavior, then evidence of these conditions and forces abounds in science and in life.

Just as there are physical laws, so there are moral laws. Religion contains many of these: Thou shalt not kill, neither shalt thou steal, neither shalt thou bear false witness. But religion and morality do not start and stop together and, indeed, are entirely different. A moral law as powerful as any commandment is found in Plato: It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. A moral law concerns our relations with others; it is unconditional, applying to all men everywhere and always; we know it to be true, whether we

obey it or not; in its presence, we confront the absolute.

If a man believes in a moral power greater than himself, a fool may challenge him to produce a miracle. That's easy for me now. I'm a miracle. Those I meet in AA are miracles. We should all be dead. Camus wrote that "man's greatness lies in his decision to be stronger than his condition." I'm told that that is your basic, average existentialism, and is kind of ho-hum. Ho-hum, like the speed of light.

Well, those were my remarks at the meeting—or, I should say, I wish they had been, since they were much more rambling at the time. The powers greater than I am, both physical and moral, leave me absolutely awe-struck. I can get very excited about them. I am alive because of them.

J. S., Pebble Beach, Calif.

*He doesn't let twenty-four hours
go by without trying to*

Make It a Happy Day

I HAVE NOT done any special research on AA's Twelve Steps, but I have done a great deal of thinking and meditating. My thoughts and interpretations are not creative, unusual, or unique—because everything I know about this program, you have taught me and the founders of our Fellowship have given me through their books and writings.

In the beginning of my AA experience, the first three Steps were the most important; more than that, they were essential. Then, when I reached the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and so on, the real work began. Finally, I settled on Step Eleven as my keystone, because it provides me with the guidance for day-to-day living, through asking my Higher Power to show me the way. Now, I realize that it is up to me to make the decisions and take the actions out-

lined in Step Twelve—but with the confidence gained from all that has preceded it.

Like many of the other Steps, Twelve is easily separated into parts, and that is how I like to view it. Let's look at part one: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps . . ." What is "a spiritual awakening"? In my opinion, and as I apply it, it simply means becoming aware of love—love of my Higher Power and love of myself. To become aware of those around me, of their needs and desires, and of my own true worth and values, and to begin, however slowly, to come alive again—this, to me, is a spiritual awakening. And we achieved it "as the result of these steps," because, most assuredly, we couldn't have done it before or without AA; we couldn't have done it alone; we

couldn't have done it without the "Power greater than ourselves."

The next part of the Step states that "we tried to carry this message to alcoholics . . ." What message? "You, too, can stop drinking"? "If I can do it, you can do it"? "Leave your evil ways and follow me"? Or all of the above? No. To me, the message is much deeper and more meaningful. It is a new way of life, and it is carried by active demonstration. In the Eleventh Tradition, we are told that AA's "public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion." We don't preach or posture. We don't promote or sell. We simply live in our new life-style and leave it to others to make an evaluation of what we have.

Just last night, I spoke with a man who has been in the program for three months. He was the "greeter" for his group, meeting people at the door and making them feel welcome—no showmanship, just a warm handshake and a sincere voice. He told me that some of his friends have noticed his changed life-style and asked about it. When he acknowledged that he had been going to AA meetings, two of his friends confided that they thought they might have a problem and wondered whether AA could help them. He may have planted the proverbial seed that will one day save the life of a friend—and *that* is carrying the message.

When I go out to answer the call of a suffering alcoholic, that is carrying the message. But it is just as

important, if less dramatic, to talk to the quiet little guy in the corner who has been coming to meetings for the past ten weeks and still doesn't know anyone or understand how it works. He hears the words and he sees the people, but perhaps what he desperately needs is a kind word from us, a hand held out to him—personally, not just at the door—to let him know he belongs, that he is one of us. This also is carrying the message.

To spend a little more time and understanding at home with a teenager who seems tough, worldly-wise, and disenchanted but may actually feel abandoned and terrified of life, with a spouse who may be totally confused by the changes taking place in an AA's life, or with parents who deserve a little share in an AA's joy after all the worry they have experienced—this, too, is carrying the message. To hold the door for a lady or to step aside for a senior citizen or to help a child untangle a kite string, just to be aware of others and let them know we care—all these are carrying the message, "as the result of these steps."

Finally, we try "to practice these principles in all our affairs," and this is why Step Twelve is the important one to me. "These principles" are each and every one of the preceding Steps, studied, examined, discussed, and worked until they have become a part of me, to help me deal with resentments, anger, anxiety, or fear. It has been said that AA is not a life sentence, but a way of life, and

that is what trying “to practice these principles” can accomplish for each of us. AA is not an end in itself; it is the means to an end we will never attain but can always strive for. As we reach each new plateau, these Steps always stand ready to help us achieve still higher levels of peace, sobriety, and, we hope, serenity.

I don't let a day go by without making a conscious effort to improve, to grow. That, to me, is the essence of the Twelfth Step: to be aware of the life and love around me, to share what I have been given so freely, and to grow enough to know and carry out the will of my Higher Power for me.

The other day, I passed someone on the street and said hello and wish-

ed him a happy day. It occurred to me that it had become almost automatic for me to say, “Have a happy day.” I meant it, but what was I really saying? As I thought about it, I realized that not every day can be happy, but there is always something of value in it, if only that we survived! Then I recalled another saying, “Nothing is going to happen today that God and I can't handle,” and I realized that there are truly bad days. If it gets too heavy for me, I can turn it over to my Higher Power and let Him straighten it out. So now when I greet someone, I say, “*Make it* a happy day.” And that is what I wish for you: “Make it a happy day today and a better one tomorrow.”

J. R., Bucktown, N.J.

May 1979

Tenth Step

From Manhattan, N.Y.:

I was both shocked and angered at the poor taste of the ethnic joke on page 19 in the February Grapevine. In some way, the Grapevine represents me—is a symbol of our common bond, of our desire to reach out to one another to share our experience and opinions in love. That joke does not fit that ideal.

I think you ought to make amends, to both me and our Polish members, and perhaps to the author of the column—even he expected your blue pencil to act.

This is terrible! You have saved my sobriety and my sanity countless times in the past fifteen years, and the first letter I write you is one of criticism.

J. W.

*Several readers wrote to us in the same vein, and most of them—like the writer of the letter above—are not of Polish descent. We are grateful for our readers' steadfast guardianship of the Grapevine; so we hasten to take J. W.'s loving suggestion—with both a Ninth and a Tenth Step. We were indeed wrong, and we resolve to be more scrupulously mindful of our responsibilities to the Fellowship in the future.—
The Editors*

May 1979

A first Fourth Step

From Seattle, Wash.:

I am an Eskimo from Alaska, and I am just starting to live. I drank for five years, and it took five years to make one year on the program. Through the grace of God, I will have two years tomorrow. In my first year without a drink, old-timers used to come up to me and say, "I thought you would never make it."

I am working on my emotional sobriety now that the alcohol is gone from my body. I look back and see how I was—first a compulsion to drink, then good old depression. I still get depressed today, but one great thing is that the depression is not as intense. Today, I am able to recognize it for what it is and can do something about it. I also should add thanks to my friend and sponsor, although he fell off after six years in the program. He drank about four days and returned to the program. He is doing well, with about ninety days again. I still consider him my sponsor.

I agree with Bill W. 100 percent when he says that one of the most important aspects of the AA program is God as we understand Him.

I have personal health problems today but have been able to cope with them. One problem is cataracts—will have one removed very soon. Thank God, the other operation is delayed. I just love to read. Many times, I reread the Grapevine.

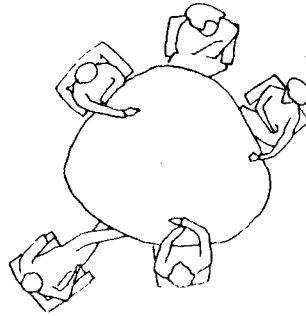
I cherish my first inventory: "Why I'm feeling bad—(1) I am not satisfied with my sobriety; (2) I am alone; (3) I can't talk to a girl; (4) I am hungry; (5) I don't have the Big Book to read." You may draw your own conclusions of what type of personality I had. I love to share what little experience I have. D. E.

Around the Tables

'God Help Me'

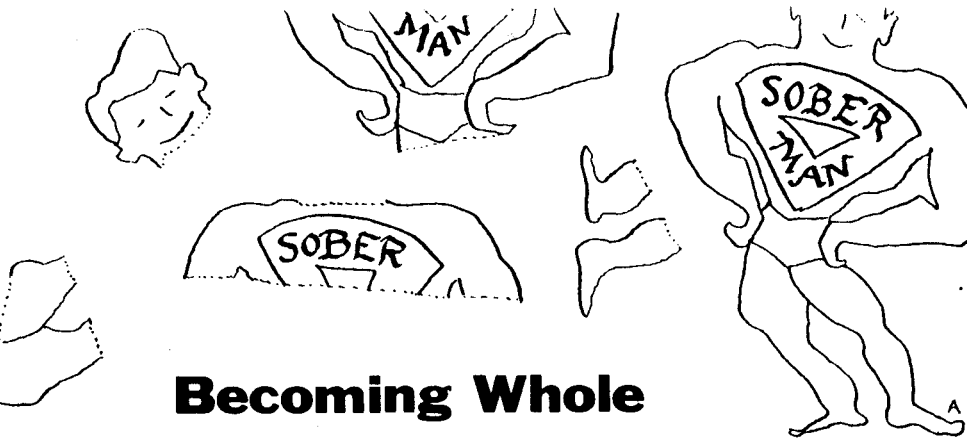
AROUND THE TABLES, I realized the power of trying to keep all things simple. Without question, it was the prayers of others that gave me the spark of a desire to do something about my drinking problem. Yet *I* also had to pray. My prayer was a simple "God, please help me," and I'm not even sure about the "please." So I came to AA, and God's help was here, just waiting to be used, and life began.

As my mind cleared, I began to learn — to learn as I never had before. Clearing away the wreckage left by selfish living meant adherence to the Twelve Steps. Constant, repetitive practice with the Steps carved sharply into my intellect's desire to



complicate things. Slowly, it has come to me that if one simple prayer brought about so much good, why complicate any prayer? Why waste time and energy building complex, compound sentences to tell God what He already knows? — namely, that I need His help all day long to carry out His will for me.

Beyond the simple "God help me," the most powerful prayer I know now is just to live all day long trying to practice these principles in all my affairs.



Becoming Whole

AFTER WE HAVE put the cork in the bottle (Step One) and unloaded the garbage (Step Five), a burden is lifted from our shoulders—a burden we have borne so long, we have come to think of it as a permanent fixture. Step Three has removed the heavy responsibility of judging others and ourselves. In short, we have become ready to be put back together after being shattered by alcohol.

The Steps spell out the recovery program beautifully. I need only pick up the tools and use them. Unless I do, my Higher Power is faced with a situation similar to trying to steer a parked car. It is impossible to guide it unless it is going somewhere.

Fortunately, I am not obliged to know how this can best be done. *God* removes my defects of character. He somehow turns my capacity to suffer into a new and delightful ability to enjoy a folk song or a tiny child wrestling with an ice-cream cone or a tree just being a tree or a jet

trail lacing up the evening sky. This spiritual alchemy has transformed poor, drunken me into grateful, sober me, the pain of suffering into the joy of living.

Had I tried to do this on my own, I would have discarded sensitivity and been numb the rest of my miserable life. Let God do it. He alone knows which are assets, which are liabilities.

My revolting past experience has somehow become valuable. Suffering has become sympathy and empathy, which make it possible for me to be a part of the same process in another's recovery.

Trying to elevate one's spiritual worth by tugging at one's own bootstraps yields only herniated hypocrisy. I cannot, by an excess of virtue, compel God to do anything. What, then, is the key? This has worked for me: Accept myself as I am just for today; be as honest with myself as I know how; use what I have, however humble that may be; face reality and

do what is indicated, though it may be as pedestrian as washing the dishes or shoveling the driveway.

My Higher Power has a knack for making the right thing happen at the right time, with every "t" crossed and every "i" dotted. More often than not, it is something that hadn't even occurred to me, but it fits perfectly.

I have been taught these things by people who were once problems to themselves and others, but are now

being made whole by the program.

Through some quiet, puzzling process, my alcoholism has been transformed from the ugliest to the nicest thing that ever happened to me. It forced me to surrender and change in a manner that I never would have done otherwise.

I dwell in a spiritual home of which I could not possibly have been the architect. I am on my way to becoming whole.

J. B., Rochester, N.Y.

Bus Ride to Sobriety

ABOUT FOUR months ago, I was traveling by bus to Connecticut. Just seconds before departure, a young man struggled onto the bus. He passed my seat and sat with a passenger a few rows back, proclaiming immediately that he was an alcoholic, that he had been drinking for six days and couldn't stop, and that he was fearful of the reaction of his family.

I knew that somehow an opportunity would present itself for me to have a chat with him, and it did. We had a ten-minute stop later on, and his seatmate got off to make a telephone call. I beckoned him over, and he came.

I identified myself as a recovering

alcoholic and told him that in my drinking days, I would have had at least one bottle to fortify myself for the ride. This broke the ice, and for the rest of the ride, normally a very boring two-hour trip, we talked. I told him about the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and how it worked, and dwelt on my own past inability to accept my alcoholism and the depths to which my drinking had taken me.

We exchanged phone numbers. He was getting off at my destination but lived ten miles beyond and would have to arrange for a family member to pick him up. He said he was going to the local bar to have a few, before making the call. I urged

*A happy example of how it works:
one alcoholic talking to another*

him to make the call from someplace besides a bar, but it looked as if my suggestion was falling on deaf ears.

An hour later, I called him and was delighted to discover that he had gone right home. That weekend, I called him four times, and my last call was to tell him I would be leaving on Sunday afternoon but that before leaving, I was going to attend an AA meeting at 12:30 PM, in the city where I was visiting. He found excuses not to come — chores to be done, leaves to be raked, etc. However, what a surprise when I got to the meeting! My friend was standing at the entrance with a cup of coffee in his hand, eagerly looking for me.

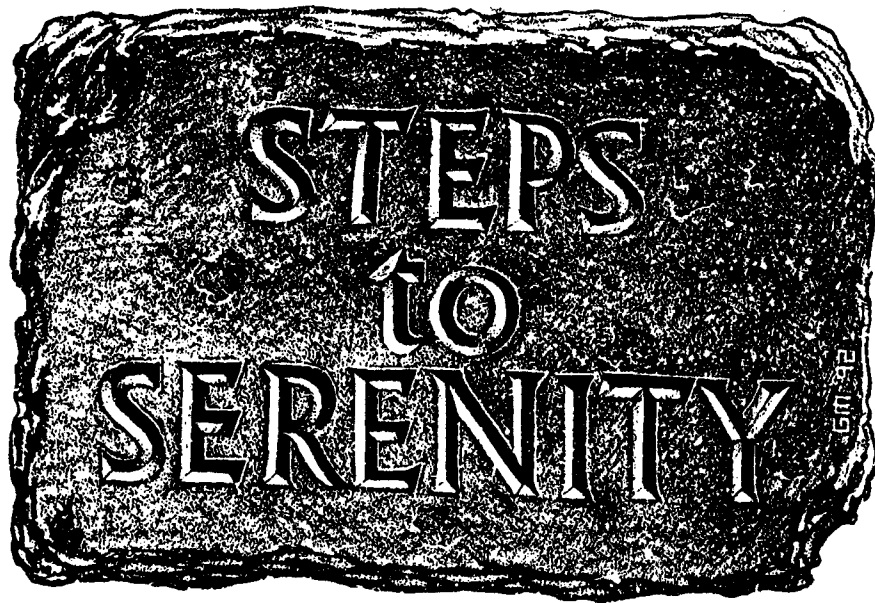
We stayed for the meeting, and

then I had to leave, because my bus was taking off. My newfound friend walked to the station with me. My final words to him were "Please look into AA. It was there for me, and it certainly could be there for you." Since then, he has called me, and at Christmas I received the best present ever — a card with a thank-you note.

I don't have to elaborate on the happiness this episode on the bus has given me.

Incidentally, when I first started talking with him, he wanted to know what was in it for me. I said I hoped that one year from now, he would be doing the same for a fellow sufferer.

P. B., Brooklyn, N.Y.



Continuing work with the Steps
has given this AA increased periods
of serenity

I drank for fifteen years, and for the last of those years, there was no question about whether or not I would drink.

Today, the AA program and the grace of God have restored my choice. There's no possibility of my staying sober on my own will or strength. I can't do it alone. I have stayed sober with the help I find in the AA Fellowship.

During my first year of sobriety, I

attended six or seven meetings a week and took two Fourth Steps and two Fifth Steps. I found my sponsor while I was still in a rehabilitation hospital, and he kept me busy with Twelfth Step work.

I began going to Step meetings in my second year of sobriety. During that year, I wrote several Fourth Steps and shared them with a number of other AA members. They usually shared their Fifth Steps with me at

the same time.

I got into making direct amends, as Step Nine tells us to do. After making these amends, I experienced a marked improvement in my ability to meditate. Something changed after I had tried to thoroughly work Steps One through Nine. I was able to sit quietly and turn my thoughts to God, and I began to meditate for about fifteen minutes in the morning – noise and family conditions permitting! I would begin by saying the Third Step prayer found in the Big Book on page 63, the Seventh Step prayer described on page 76, the Serenity Prayer, and the Eleventh Step prayer. I then repeated a phrase such as “Thy will be done,” or perhaps the word “love.” I would keep bringing my mind back to this, and if the period was going well, might continue longer than fifteen minutes.

This kind of continuing work with the Steps, including regular meditation, has given me increased periods of serenity, more emotional balance, and greater acceptance of myself. My tendency toward depression and fear has lessened, and my life is more stable. It's as if God's will is a river, and by working the Steps, I find myself going naturally with the current rather than trying to swim upstream or cross-stream.

During my sober life in AA, I've occasionally wondered about drinking. Last spring, I was in Houston on business, and I ordered a ginger ale at dinner. By mistake, I was served a highball, and drank a mouthful be-

fore realizing what it was. I set the glass down, but the terror that had accompanied my last drunk came back. It had been two years since I'd had a drink, but here in that Houston restaurant, the fright washed over me once more.

During my last drunk, twenty-four months before, my mind was shattered with numbing terror and I was physically unable to get out of bed for a full day and a half, except to crawl to the bathroom. I was sleeping in a back bedroom by myself. My wife and children were living a separate life, as if I didn't exist.

During that last drunk, I became acutely conscious of my powerlessness over alcohol. Sick, alone, frightened, I heard a voice say over and over, “You can't stop drinking. You're hopeless. You're weak and you're hopeless and you can't stop drinking.”

Well, I did stop, with the wonderful help of our program. But then, two years later, those same fears overwhelmed me when I took a drink by accident in that Houston restaurant. I didn't drink any more that evening, and I haven't since, thank God.

However, the experience was valuable, because it renewed my awareness of precisely what the stakes are in Alcoholics Anonymous: life or death. It reminded me of the words on page 85 in the Big Book: “We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.”

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

Miracles of the Steps

From Tel Aviv, Israel:

When I finally found my way to AA, I was a complete wreck. That was three years ago; I was then sixty-three, with nearly thirty years of drinking behind me; and my beloved wife was in the hospital suffering from terminal cancer. These last three years have certainly not been the happiest or the easiest, but they have been the most exciting and, in a certain sense, the most rewarding years in my life.

I have changed completely. I have become entirely another person. No more cheating and lying; I have begun to manage my affairs again, to become honest with myself and other people by surrendering wholeheartedly to the program.

I succeeded beyond all hope and expectations in making amends to the three people nearest and dearest to me, my wife and my two grown sons. I managed to help my wife bear her terrible illness, and we spent two and a half years in most beautiful harmony and deepest love. She was happy with my sobriety and the change in me. She had several remissions, and we went abroad three times, and celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary. At her inevitable end, I was able to help her die with dignity.

I had not lost the friendship and love of my sons, but I most certainly had lost their respect, which I am happy to say has been won back.

I could not have achieved these

changes on my own. AA had existed in Israel for only one year when I was fortunate enough to find it. I was helped by the deep understanding of the members of my group, by their unstintingly given friendship and love by day and night, for which I am and shall be forever grateful, more than words could express. R.D.

What's the Hurry?



*“You’ve got
the rest of your life
to work
this program”*

FOR THE FIRST few years of sobriety, I kept comparing myself with those who seemed to have a good amount of serenity and peace of mind, and I wished I felt that way, too. Until one day, after about three or four years, a thought struck me: “No way am I ever going to know what it feels like to be sober ten years until I’m actually sober ten years.”

The thought gave me a sense of relief. Most of the people I’d been envying and comparing myself with had ten years or more on the program. I might *guess* how it felt to be sober that long, but I would never really *know* until I’d actually put in the time. So why be in a hurry?

One night when I was all uptight, an old-timer looked at me and said, “How long do you expect to be

around here? You’ve got *the rest of your life* to work this program.” He helped me to slow down.

Growth takes time. I was like a plant wanting to grow a foot a day. And I couldn’t, and I felt frustrated. Now, I realize that a plant has an almost fixed rate of growth. The right quantity of water and sun will help it, but it won’t grow faster than it’s supposed to grow. Today, I feel like that plant; growth and change take time, and I can’t hurry the process.

Now, after ten years, I know what it feels like to have put in ten years of sober living—it feels so fine, I want to sing with joy at times. Some days, I hurt or get depressed, and that’s okay. I don’t have to live life perfectly—only, as the Big Book says, strive to “grow along spiritual lines.”

The difference in my life today seems to be more concern with today—I’m beginning to realize some of what “a day at a time” means.

Rome wasn’t built in a day; my life can’t be rebuilt in a day. It’s taken days and days of meetings and daily readings and working with other alcoholics to maintain the good feeling I can experience most of the time today. I’m more aware that whenever I want to make a change in my life, I’ll likely have to chip away at the problem a day at a time. Five minutes a day perhaps, until I make some headway.

For the first five years of sobriety, I went to meetings every day, and one day, my life did change. After a

Fifth Step, my spiritual self did waken. I’d been looking hard for the magic answer but learned that the *process* is the answer—the process or working the program long enough and hard enough. As in another AA expression: Bring the body and the mind will follow.

Today, I realize my life isn’t going to change substantially from day to day—I mean the inner life, which is the important one. It’s a matter of daily doing the things that have gotten me this far.

Discipline? A word I never liked to hear. And I must admit that a lot of sticking with a job is boring. I wanted constant excitement. I wanted to feel good all the time. I don’t feel good all of the time now, nor do I expect to. I can’t sit back and relax and coast the rest of the way. But the daily working of the program is more familiar today—a comforting process rather than a chore, as it was in early sobriety.

I’m grateful for that. Sometimes, it seems God just looked down at me when I was struggling and said, “You poor dummy. I can’t stand watching you slam your head against the wall anymore. Here.” And the wall fell down.

Ten years, and what can I say? Mostly, just things I heard from others. I feel grateful for the chance I’ve found in life to discover me. I thank God, and I feel like thanking the AA Fellowship for this gift of life. So thanks. And love.

Anonymous, Milwaukee, Wis.

A Small Price to Pay



LITERALLY hundreds of times in the past few years, in gatherings of various sizes and compositions, I've said, "My name is Robert, and I am an alcoholic." Usually, I've said it at meetings of that anonymous Fellowship of which I am a member, but also, occasionally, in other groups. Whatever remarks may follow, whether mercifully short or of longer duration, whether foolish or full of wisdom (as they sometimes are, no thanks to me), they're prefaced by that comment.

Why do I say that? I don't say, "I'm Robert, and I'm an attorney," although I am, and have been for many years. Nor do I say, "I'm Robert and I'm a CPA," though I'm that, too. And I don't say, "I'm Robert and I'm a fifty-year-old divorced father of fourteen children." I don't even say, "I'm Robert, and I'm a Christian," though I am. And

the last is something I'd never have become, I believe, if I hadn't been granted the humility to make that first comment, *and* to understand what it meant.

Why is the statement "I'm Robert, and I'm an alcoholic" so important to me? Why must I say that *first*, rather than any of the other things?

Because that statement means many things to me. I'm still an alcoholic, and I have to keep remembering that, particularly as my active addiction and its results fade into memories. I'm not a long-timer in AA, though I do have some consecutive birthdays. But, after observing the experience of others, I believe it's necessary for me to keep remembering. Real long-timers, with ten, twenty, or even thirty years of seemingly serene and successful sobriety, have slipped, back into that mess from whence we came.

And some of them—my friends—have died drunk and miserable. I know I'll die someday. But I prefer to die sober and happy, when my time comes.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom," and I've been granted freedom—freedom from the thrall of my active addiction, which lasted for some twenty-eight years—and not only that, but freedom from other forms of obsessive-compulsive behavior that extended to all areas of my life, including work and sex. So if the form that my vigilance must take is active participation in AA and a continuing, honest attempt to work the program, that's a small price to pay.

It is no price at all, really, because the "sacrifices" involved are infinitely less than the rewards. I've been allowed to trade an old way of life for a new way; insanity for sani-

ty; slavery for freedom; pride for humility; dishonesty for honesty; and my belief in my own "uniqueness" and "superiority" for some understanding of the marvelous interdependence of God's creatures, including me.

I lost some things through my alcoholism. Among them was some of my intelligence. But in return, I gained a little wisdom. And the beginning of that wisdom lay in the First Step of AA, recognizing that I was powerless over alcohol (and everything else) and my life was (is) unmanageable (by myself).

The end of that wisdom lies in the Twelfth Step: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

R. F., Jordan, Mont.

Once We Become Willing...

HOW MANY times have you said, or heard someone say, to a newcomer, "It's a simple program, but it's not easy"? I have come to believe that this well-meaning statement could prevent people from working any of the Steps after the Third. I think that instead of stressing the difficulty of working the Steps, we should be stressing how easy they are, once we become willing.

In the first part of the fifth chapter in the Big Book, we find two short sentences telling us that it is not easy: "We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not." We hear this read at many meetings, and this is probably the basis for our statement that it is not an easy program. But is that really what was meant?

As we drunks so often do, we may be complicating things, in this case by concentrating on those two sentences, rather than on understanding the whole paragraph. But the first sentence of that paragraph reads: "At some of these we balked." To me, this means that we balked before we even got started on some or all of the Steps, and that therein lies the difficulty. Becoming willing to work the Steps is difficult,

*We are given
a guide
to find our own
best way*

but the Steps themselves are easy, *once we have made up our minds to do them.*

Once we became willing to work each Step, was it then really so difficult? I think not. A careful reading of both the fifth and the sixth chapters will show us that they are aimed mostly at making us *willing* to work each Step; comparatively little is written about how to work the Step itself. We are given a guide to find our own best way.

Over and over again in those chapters, it is stressed that the willingness to practice the principles of the Steps is more important than any precise set of words, actions, or prayers, or even the actual perfect accomplishment of the Steps. For that matter, the first part of the fifth chapter tells us that we should strive for "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."

In my own experience, I can say that once I had become willing to work each Step, it was then the easiest and most natural thing to do.

When taken as a whole, working the Steps has become the most rewarding and satisfying part of my life.

The night before I made my first AA meeting, I had actually worked the first three Steps, even though I didn't know what they were at the time. For the next three months, concentration on those three made it easy for me to stay away from that first drink. After barely three months in AA, and surely by design of my Higher Power, I was placed in a situation where I had to begin working the rest of the Steps or get drunk. At that time, I began rereading the Big Book. When I got to the fifth chapter, I was completely ready and willing to start on the Fourth Step, and I did.

Virtually every waking minute of the next seven days was spent on taking my inventory. On the eighth day, I went over and over what I had written, but nothing more would come to mind. With the understanding that I had completed my inventory to the best of my ability at the time, I commenced reading about the Fifth Step.

Then, I realized that in working the Fourth Step, I had really worked the first two parts of the Fifth Step, and all that remained of it was to find another human being with whom I could talk. I made up my mind that I would do this at the first opportunity. As soon as I had made the decision, the opportunity presented itself, and I completed the Fifth Step that very afternoon.

I can say that the rest of the Steps were just as easy for me. It seemed that no sooner was I willing to work a Step than it was accomplished for the first time. The last part of the Twelfth Step sent me back to the First, and since then, with the passing of each twenty-four hours, the practice of these principles has become a natural part of my life.

For the person who is not willing and is afraid of the difficulties ahead, that Third Step can be made, perhaps subconsciously, into a monumental stumbling block. We can complicate it to the point that it stymies all progress, and at the same time, use the thought that we are trying to work it as a balm on our conscience for our lack of progress.

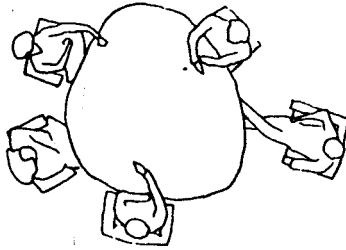
Once we become willing to progress, we see that the Step requires only "a decision." We make it, and we move on to the Fourth Step. What could be easier?

At a discussion meeting I attended not long ago, the topic was the question "How does one become ready and willing to work the Sixth Step?" What ensued for the next few minutes was a discussion of whether or not God would actually remove any defects of character. Finally, one of the older members spoke up and said, "If you want to become ready and willing to work the Sixth Step, work the first five!"

Let's think positive. It is a simple program, and it's easy—if we are willing to try it!

R. G., Fort Knox, Ky.

Around the Tables



A Selfish Program?

AROUND THE TABLES, it is often said, particularly to newcomers, that AA is a selfish program: "You don't do it for your wife, husband, or children. You do it for yourself."

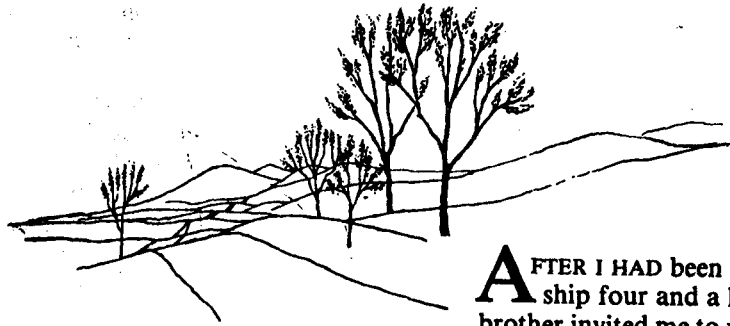
This concept of AA as a selfish program has a facet that probably has been apparent to others but has just dawned on me. This facet, perhaps, is only my way of looking at a part of the definition of "selfish"—regarding one's own comfort or advantage. My life prior to AA was unmanageable and pure hell. If I have any rational concept of what is truly my own comfort, then I must regard AA as the only means to

develop and insure that comfort. Obviously, this is selfish.

But there is a still deeper meaning to the word: If I want to grasp what the AA program offers, I must do it myself. For the first time in my life, I can't rely on dear old Mom, Dad, or Sister Sue, on Father X, Rabbi B, or Doctor S, on friends, or on any other human being. It is the naked "I" that has to do something.

No one else's staying sober or getting drunk can affect *my* sobriety. No one else can turn me toward his or her Higher Power—I must turn to *mine*. It's not someone else's life I turn over to the care of God—it is my own. Mom can't admit my exact wrongs; Dad can't ask God to remove *my* shortcomings. The Twelve Steps tell us what AAs have done—but to follow their path, I must use the Steps; if I don't, then I—not Charley or Mary—will be out there drinking. If I am to hold on to the beautiful life I have found through AA, then I must remember that, in this sense, AA is a selfish program.

'Made Direct Amends'



*Time and his
Higher Power had built
a bridge
to his sobriety*

AFTER I HAD been in the Fellowship four and a half years, my brother invited me to visit him at his home in Ohio. I had been invited before, but I had doubts about my acceptance into his home, because of my track record. Our initial meeting after five years apart had me more nervous than the first time I spoke from an AA podium. The kangaroos in my tummy were having a real feisty boxing match.

All the way to Ohio, I kept going over some of the key personality flaws I have trouble with — chiefly my ability to open my mouth before engaging my brain. On the flight, I

promised myself that no matter what I found disagreeable in my brother's way of life, I would keep my mouth shut. I also promised myself that I would make amends to him and to his wife. When the wheels hit the tarmac at Cleveland airport, the Serenity Prayer kept slipping through my mind.

My brother and I had long talks about everything. We hit it off like two long-lost pals. Of course, I was smart enough not to drag him through all the sordid details of my past. I talked about what had happened when I was with him. I was deeply surprised to find he had been doing his homework about the Fellowship and alcoholism. He had watched me trip down Rummy Lane and said that he had done the opposite of what I had done. He felt that because of watching me, he had not used booze or drugs as a means of escaping from the realities of his problems.

In taking Step Nine, it turned out, I was walking across a bridge that had already been built by my Higher Power, time, and sobriety.

My sister-in-law was receptive to my amends, but not in a verbal form such as "Yes, I understand." Her

acceptance of me — my past and present — was silent. At first, it made me feel very uneasy. I felt as if I was being watched to see if my actions matched my words. I had to consider that these people have two small children, so I expect some of her motherly fears were blooming.

For the first few days, I walked softly and minded my p's and q's. I became slightly schizo, jabbering and loosening up with my brother and being careful around my sister-in-law. On the third day, I knew I had been accepted when she asked me to carry my eighteen-month-old niece to the car. Halfway to the car, I got a little nervous about dropping her (as a thirty-three-year-old bachelor, I do not get too much practice carrying babies). When we got to the car, I turned the wee one over to Mother with a sigh of relief.

In their own ways, they had accepted my amends. On the flight back to my home in Florida, I felt very good about the trip and my Ninth Step. Of course, I had attended two meetings for reinforcement while in Ohio. That, coupled with a healthy dose of Step Eleven, made the trip a success.

R. B., Fort Myers, Fla.

'Persons We Had Harmed'

IN MENTAL preparation of my Eighth Step list, I discovered that some names came to mind naturally. In most instances, we *want* to change for the better where our children and family are concerned.

However, I found there were other people I did *not* want to make amends to, people I hold some resentments toward — so I impulsively concluded they didn't deserve any amends. I have to keep in mind that had I behaved in a more reasonable manner, they might not have responded as they did. If the circumstances had been reversed, I might have taken the same action they chose. I have to allow others to make mistakes and be human. Harboring resentments because of something others did is, in effect, imposing my values upon them. By imposing my standards upon them, I am trying to assume God's role. I must realize I am not responsible for the actions of others, whether I approve of them or

not. If I take on that task, I am passing judgment on them for reacting in a way that was unacceptable to *me*. I am taking their inventory.

In this Step, it states that we "became willing to make amends." This implies that there is going to be some conscious effort on my part to make all the needed amends. Those that come easy, to my old way of reasoning, would be an excellent stopping point. Yet the Step says we became willing to make amends to *all* those we had harmed. In going to these other people, I don't need to crawl or go on and on about how sorry I am, because this would make me appear worthless. I don't believe I need apologize for being human; rather, I simply need to acknowledge that I was at fault and humbly ask them to pardon me. I do not need to make amends on my hands and knees; I need to walk tall, without false pride. When I go in humility and sincerely ask people to forgive me, this

will remove the burden from my shoulders. They, too, may have been at fault, but I am neither their God nor their conscience. I am responsible only for myself.

For me, this Step offers two features: I am being responsible, by owning up to my wrongs and making amends for them; at the same time, I

accept others as they are, regardless of what they did, or of what they may do when I go to them to make amends.

It's a Step with a double feature. When doing it, we make a double play. After finishing it, we receive double indemnity. Our reward is two for the price of one.

B. D., Reynoldsburg, Ohio

'Entirely Ready'

IN JANUARY of this year, through God's grace and the miracle of AA, I had achieved approximately fourteen months of continuous sobriety. I had just taken a Fifth Step.

After about a week of sharing with AA friends about my Fifth Step, I began to look at Step Six. I had no idea what to do for a while. It didn't take long for some ill effects to settle in. My arrogance and my inflated ego returned. I was very fearful and quite confused. Why had everything looked so wonderful such a short time earlier? Why was the future looking so bleak? Why couldn't I stay in the now? This went on for about two months. Needless to say, I was an emotional wreck and a spiritual scoffer.

One night, unable to sleep, I began to talk to God for the first time in weeks. I cannot recall all of what I said, but my words came out something like this: "I don't want to be this scared little boy anymore. I don't want to have so much foolish pride. I want to be more honest. I want to be more capable of loving myself and others." After about

twenty minutes, I closed by telling God that I *was* scared, that I knew He loved me, and that I didn't know where to turn.

Unbelievable as it seems, it wasn't more than ten minutes later that serenity replaced the self-pity in my bones. Peace of mind pushed the fears right out of my mind. Then, I realized what had occurred. Unconsciously, I had just worked Steps Six and Seven.

I can see now, in looking back on this experience, that the three months of pain were absolutely necessary. Without that bit of hurt and confusion, I do not think I could possibly have been "entirely ready" for God to remove my character defects. At a time when I could not help myself and would not ask for assistance from another human being, God—as I understand Him—led me through what has probably been the most trying time of my life. I can think back to the promises in the Big Book now and say, "God really does do for me what I cannot do for myself."

The old defects occasionally crop

up again; but now, I seem to have the sense to talk to my sponsors or other AA friends when I'm scared, lonely, and/or confused. Again, the Big Book promises on page 84, "We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us."

Well, this is just one of several miraculous experiences in my life since joining AA, all of which have had much influence in making me what I am today—a very grateful alcoholic.

J. M., Minneapolis, Minn.

September 1979

How many Steps?

From Chatham, Ont.:

I am concerned that we may be drifting away from the use of the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" as tools for recovery. I believe every member's opinion is important, but I feel the basic recovery is found in our literature.

There are many members who state they can stay sober on *certain* Steps only, but if the Big Book was read at closed meetings, it would reveal: "Here are the Steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery." It suggests *all* the Steps, not just some.

Let's keep our AA as it should be, by depending on the wisdom and experience of the pioneers who laid down our beautiful program through trial and error, and then entrusted it to us.

S. R.



Success Story

KEN WAS a former college football star—and an alcoholic. He was a big man, hearty, back-slapping, loud—a natural-born salesman. Until he drank himself out of one sales job after another, and nearly out of the human race as well.

Sober in Alcoholics Anonymous, he began to rebuild his life and his career. He finally was hired as the California sales representative for a large eastern firm. Its president was aware that Ken was a recovered alcoholic, and Ken was highly successful in the job.

The president, a personable and dynamic young executive type, made a trip one year to California and invited Ken and his wife to join him for dinner that evening. But it happened that a sponsor of Ken's was celebrating his third AA anniversary the same evening, and Ken naturally wanted to go. He told his boss of the situation and invited him to come along to the open meeting. The boss, who had never attended an AA meeting, agreed.

It turned out to be a dynamite evening—lots of AA love and sharing, lots of enthusiasm and gratitude

and good fellowship. The president was enormously impressed.

The next day, he went on to Seattle with the unpleasant task of firing his northwestern sales representative, who had a poor record. To make the job easier, he took the man to dinner. When the waiter asked whether they wanted anything from the bar, the salesman ordered a martini. The president passed. The salesman pressed him to explain why he didn't want a drink, and the president mentioned his visit to the AA meeting the night before.

The salesman lowered his eyes, choked up, and blurted, "I think I have a drinking problem."

The president leaped into the opening that had been created. Instead of firing the man, he gave an AA pitch straight from California! And he concluded by asking his employee whether he wanted to go to

a meeting. The hapless salesman agreed. The president made a call or two and whisked him off to an open meeting.

The nonalcoholic president's pigeon hasn't had a drink since and is an active member of Seattle AA.

Last year, he and Ken and the boss were all present at the firm's annual sales conference. The highlight was an award to the Seattle representative from the northwestern area for the best sales achievement of the year. As he walked up amid the applause to accept this plaque, others in the audience might have been slightly puzzled to see tears of joy in his eyes. They would have been even more surprised had they caught a glimpse of the faces of Ken and the president as they exchanged glances—for there were tears in their eyes, too.

Anonymous, Riverside, Conn.

October 1979

On Twelfth Step calls

From Irvine, Calif.:

Finding myself drunk again regardless of my will not to drink that day, I phoned AA. Within a short while, two very together ladies were sitting at my kitchen table telling me that they understood and that I would never have to be drunk again if I didn't want to. Their Twelfth Step call has meant so much to me.

For the small amount that I choose to donate (Seventh Tradition), I can become as worthwhile and secure as I desire to be. Fears about finances and anonymity would have shut the door to hospital-care programs for me.

I want to thank all of you who are doing home Twelfth Step calls—for myself and for those who are still suffering and will be waiting for your visit when they call.

N. F.

From Somerville, N.J.

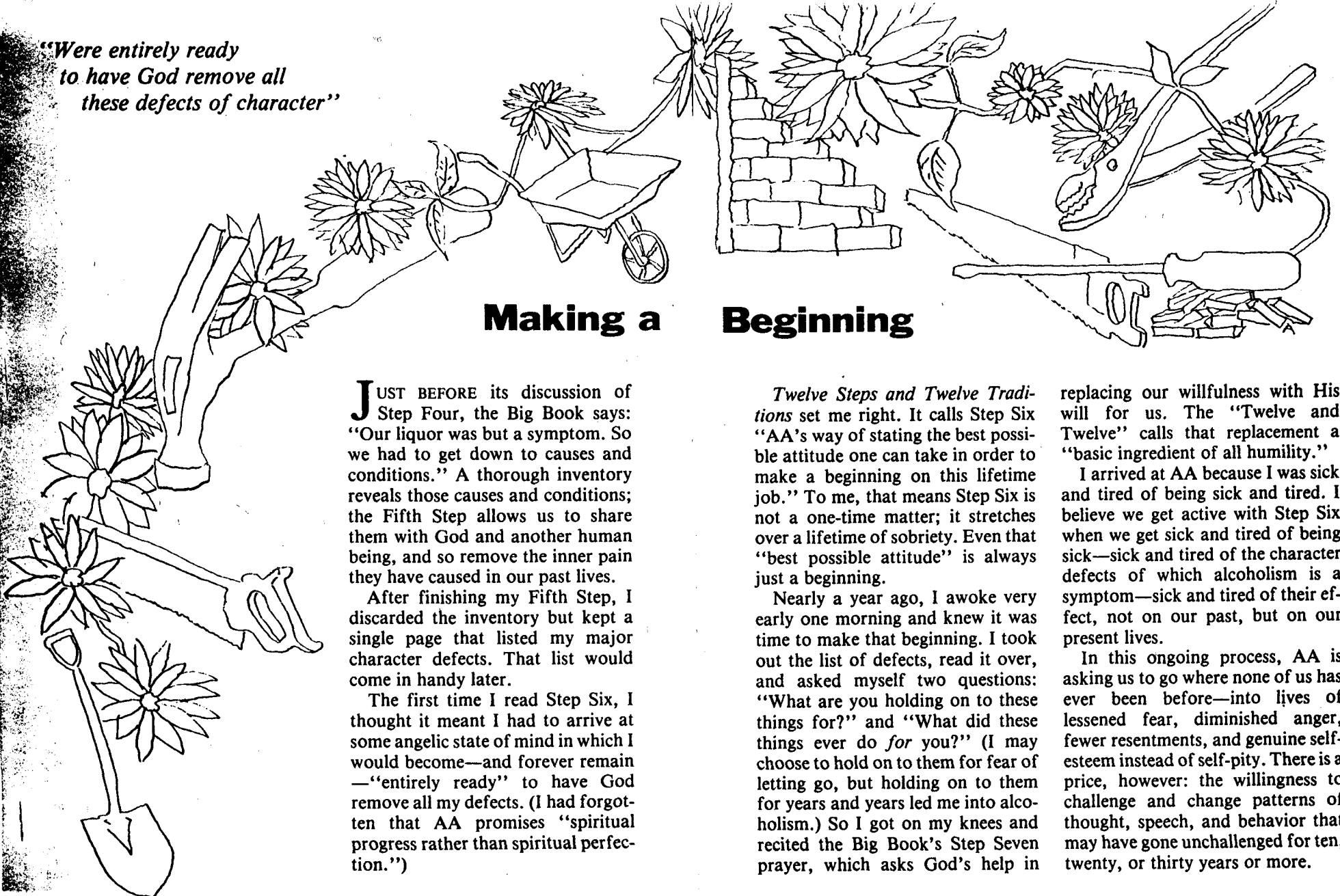
Yesterday, my husband and I got home from the bowling lanes; he had been in a tournament. I expected him to stay home, have a nice dinner, and do some small chores around the apartment. But he received a call from intergroup, and off he went to pick up two other AA people and then on to pick up this poor soul who was reaching out for help.

I simply cannot say enough about the AA program. It is fantastic! A person makes a phone call; another phone call is made; then, three people stop whatever they are in the midst of doing and go to this person's aid. Last night, they brought him to a place where he can get help and is safe for the moment from himself.

The togetherness, the unselfishness, the caring and giving of these AA people are really too wonderful to be able to put down in words. But as a member of Al-Anon and the wife of an AA person, I felt I had to say how grateful I am.

E. P.

*"Were entirely ready
to have God remove all
these defects of character"*



Making a Beginning

JUST BEFORE its discussion of Step Four, the Big Book says: "Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions." A thorough inventory reveals those causes and conditions; the Fifth Step allows us to share them with God and another human being, and so remove the inner pain they have caused in our past lives.

After finishing my Fifth Step, I discarded the inventory but kept a single page that listed my major character defects. That list would come in handy later.

The first time I read Step Six, I thought it meant I had to arrive at some angelic state of mind in which I would become—and forever remain—"entirely ready" to have God remove all my defects. (I had forgotten that AA promises "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.")

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions set me right. It calls Step Six "AA's way of stating the best possible attitude one can take in order to make a beginning on this lifetime job." To me, that means Step Six is not a one-time matter; it stretches over a lifetime of sobriety. Even that "best possible attitude" is always just a beginning.

Nearly a year ago, I awoke very early one morning and knew it was time to make that beginning. I took out the list of defects, read it over, and asked myself two questions: "What are you holding on to these things for?" and "What did these things ever do for you?" (I may choose to hold on to them for fear of letting go, but holding on to them for years and years led me into alcoholism.) So I got on my knees and recited the Big Book's Step Seven prayer, which asks God's help in

replacing our willfulness with His will for us. The "Twelve and Twelve" calls that replacement a "basic ingredient of all humility."

I arrived at AA because I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I believe we get active with Step Six when we get sick and tired of being sick—sick and tired of the character defects of which alcoholism is a symptom—sick and tired of their effect, not on our past, but on our present lives.

In this ongoing process, AA is asking us to go where none of us has ever been before—into lives of lessened fear, diminished anger, fewer resentments, and genuine self-esteem instead of self-pity. There is a price, however: the willingness to challenge and change patterns of thought, speech, and behavior that may have gone unchallenged for ten, twenty, or thirty years or more.

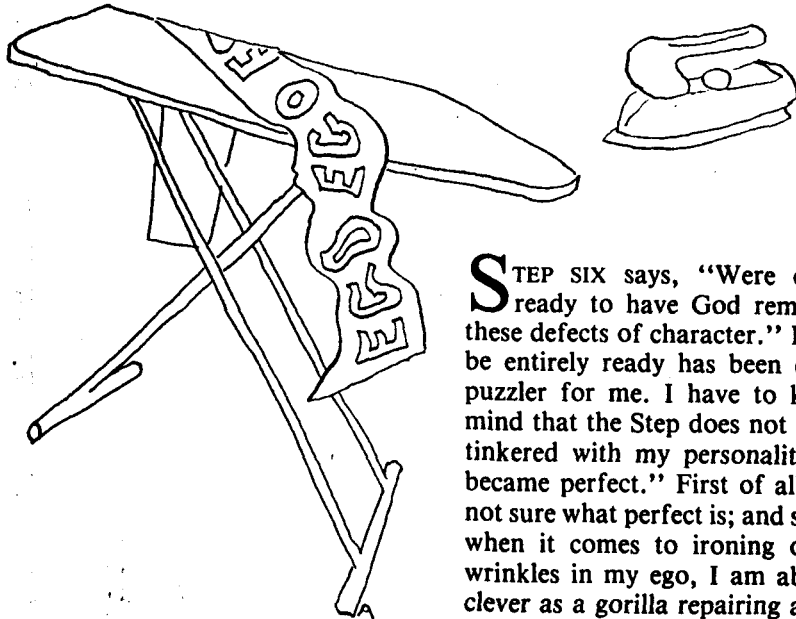
Once I know, from the inventory Steps, what my causes and conditions are, I am without excuse (except my own willfulness) for not making that beginning. Having turned my will and my life over to the care of God in Step Three, I can proceed with the faith that has, through this program, replaced much of my former fear. "The only urgent thing," according to the "Twelve and Twelve," "is that we make a beginning, and keep trying."

With AA's help, my compulsion to drink has been removed. My other

character defects have *not* vanished. But one day at a time, when I accept that God's will for me includes surrendering the causes and conditions of my alcoholism, the power to help me work to lessen those shortcomings is always there. God supplies the power, but I must choose to use it. In this case, I get what I pray for, if I do what I pray for. Whenever I am willing to accept the challenge, I experience another of the Big Book's statements: "We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free."

R. F., Houston, Tex.

Wrinkles in My Ego



STEP SIX says, "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." How to be entirely ready has been quite a puzzler for me. I have to keep in mind that the Step does not say, "I tinkered with my personality till I became perfect." First of all, I am not sure what perfect is; and second, when it comes to ironing out the wrinkles in my ego, I am about as clever as a gorilla repairing a wristwatch.

The first thing I have to keep in mind is that *God* does the removing, as well as deciding what is to be removed. So many of my difficulties were caused by the misapplication of God-given virtues that if I tried to sort them out, I would very likely throw out much of the wheat with the chaff. But, after twenty years of trying to become entirely ready for God to do His work, I can honestly say it sure is worth the effort.

At one time or another, many of us feel insecure, inadequate, and uncertain. Somehow, we just aren't very enthusiastic about the present. As of today, I am quite sure what *not* to do for this state of affairs. I used to resort to a form of liquid courage that seemed to be just what I needed.

For me today, the process of becoming ready to have God remove these defects of character starts with being where it is happening—at meetings! If we ask for God's guidance and go about our business *as though* we were going to get it—we will. I also believe that we should be active in seeking God's help and passive in accepting His guidance.

Perhaps, one of the next things to remember is that, since I have been mixed-up for several decades, it would not be realistic for me to expect to come up smelling like Albert Schweitzer overnight. "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small." I have to tell myself: Stay sober and wait.

It is very difficult to steer a parked

car and make much progress toward any destination. I try to get moving by using what I have. When I first came to AA, I was so far gone, I couldn't remember a phone number

*"You might say
I had a very promising
future behind me"*

long enough to dial it, so I had to write it down. I was not stable enough to hold a good job, so I took a mediocre job. In fact, I had five jobs after I sobered up, and each paid less than the previous one. You might say I had a very promising future behind me. The sixth job finally paid off, and I got back to my trade. I had to use what I had. In short, I had to be going somewhere before I could be guided.

These are some of the things I have learned along the way from the people in AA. I have also seen people who have grasped the program hang on in spite of tremendous odds, such as slow death by cancer or sudden loss of loved ones by accident. Whatever the character defects of these people might have been, drinking was not among them. They stuck to the program.

God as I understand Him does not cheat anyone. I don't pretend to know how, when, or where the score is evened up, but I am certain that it always is.

J. B., Rochester, N. Y.

Do the Steps need revising?

From Carrollton, Ga.:

Immediately after coming into AA and hearing "How It Works" (with the Twelve Steps) and the Twelve Traditions, I started trying to figure where changes should be made. If I could only rewrite "How It Works," with the Steps, it would benefit a lot of the old-timers (some with as many as nineteen years of sobriety) who sat around the table talking about the problems they were having.

However, I found the ones with the most sobriety were the most ungrateful. They wouldn't stand for my changing anything. Oh, how ungrateful they were! After all, it was for their own good. I continued coming just to try to help those poor souls.

I finally gave up and started reading the literature, trying to make sense out of what was written. Guess what! It started making sense just as it was! As a result, I now have almost four and a half years of sobriety. Thank God for those stubborn, ungrateful old-timers who didn't want things changed.

Later, a new member came in. (He is now my special and dear friend.) He wanted to change the whole Big Book. Talk about being grandiose! He was finally convinced that the Big Book was okay just as it was



(and is). As a result, he now has good sobriety.

G. C.

A traveler comes home

From Pepper Pike, Ohio:

We were in Israel for six weeks, and even though I've been in the program two years, I wanted and needed a meeting. I wrote and called the person listed in the *International AA Directory*, to no avail. I bought the *Jerusalem Post*, looked through the phone book, and called hospitals, churches, and synagogues, even tourist bureaus, psychiatrists, and mental hospitals—but no one had heard of AA in Israel.

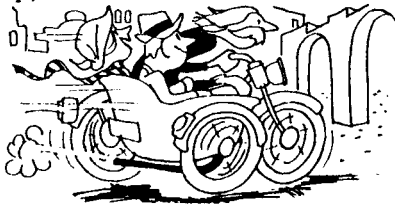
After three and a half weeks, I prayed on a Jerusalem street corner, telling my Higher Power this was His city—could He please find me a meeting?

My seventeen-year-old son found a telephone number for the Minister of Public Health, who gave us the name of a lady in Tel Aviv. We finally reached her, and she told us there was a meeting in Jerusalem. I started crying because I was so happy.

In front of the King David Hotel, a motorcycle with a sidecar pulled up, and a bearded man with long

hair whirled us off to the meeting. I was so grateful. There were only four others there, and we all shared stories. They had a hard time keeping sober, they said, because they didn't understand the Steps. So I spent that week helping them translate the Steps into Hebrew. It was a most rewarding experience. Not only are we all instruments of God, but when we truly need help, we do get an answer.

R. A.



Odyssey of Self-Discovery

DURING MY twenty-five-year drinking career, I was always being asked a question I couldn't quite answer. People would ask me what I did for a living, and I would freeze. I'd finally give an incoherent answer, or I would mumble, "I'm a writer," in much the same way I might have announced that I was an ax murderer.

Though I had spent much of my life making a better-than-average living writing, had written for stage, television, and radio, and had published a book, I couldn't enunciate what I did. Now that I think about it, it wasn't so much that I doubted the evidence as that I always saw myself as a fraud, likely at any moment to be caught out and exposed. Just as I wasn't very sure of myself, I wasn't very sure of my work, and I could never accept any praise for work nor feel it was deserved.

The fact that I can now say with pride, "I'm a writer" came out of a second "bottom." I'd been in AA for about a year and a half, had been

involved and active, generally quite content, and had even inched my way up through Step Five. Then *it* hit. I call the impact *it*, because I'm still not sure where it came from, but the effect was devastating. It happened at a meeting. I stood at the back of the room, and the tapes in my head started up and, instead of simply racing, began playing at a maniacally squealing speed. I stood there feeling that I had been surprised by madness, that the insanity I thought I'd avoided by coming into AA had finally caught up with me. I stood there hoping no one was noticing that I was going nuts, unable to raise my hand and speak. What could I say? I didn't know what was happening.

To this day, I don't know how I arrived at the decision to go back to Step Four, but I somehow knew that the answer lay there. I had enough sanity to realize that whatever I had done about that Step wasn't enough. I also knew that I could not simply read the Step and write it out (I'd

done that), but would somehow have to live it and feel it. In other words, all my old devices to escape feeling and living—activity for activity's sake, talk, writing—wouldn't work. I was finally going to have to jump into that space between the trapezes, and trust.

I spent six months doing nothing, learning to be alone with myself, learning to tolerate peace, and quietly exploring my past. I made no effort to understand it; I tried to simply contemplate that past. It took all my savings to underwrite myself. I invested in myself to buy the time I needed, and went on a long, often troubling journey.

One incident illustrates something of what I found along the way. I had lived for twenty years with the idea that the "one great love of my life" would someday be revived. And for the twenty years since we'd parted, on the rare occasions we were able to be together again, we would both get drunk and share that same illusion. Ah, someday! But what about now? What about sober?

I flew to the West Coast to find out. Without booze, I found, I couldn't recapture that juvenile illusion, and I was forced to look at the inroads of time and the fact that more than geography had made such a romantic reunion impossible. As they say, "Things look different now"; sober, I could see that we could both do with a little "ironing."

At first, it was sad to lose that

now-antique illusion; but eventually, it was wonderful to be free of that piece of my past. Much of that six-month journey turned out to be other visits to the past, but now made by a man who lived soberly in the present.

After about five months of such journeying, I called my psychotherapist. I'd not seen her since I came into the program, and I was now pretty broke, so I asked her if she could put me on the cuff for a Fifth Step. (She's program-oriented and knew what I was talking about.) She said she'd love to work with me.

What I planned to tell her was for her ears only. The first time I'd taken the Fifth Step, I had "confessed" to all manner of major sins, seeing them as somewhat epic in their awfulness. What I now had to talk about was the pettiness of which I'm capable: my arrogance, my grandiosity, my selfishness. There was nothing epic or Freudian in what was finally surfacing. I wasn't being overwhelmed by an avalanche of great sins; I was being nibbled to death by my own shortcomings. I spent nine weeks doing intensive work with her, and they were wonderful and relieving and helpful.

As I said at the beginning, I had decided to work the Fifth by keeping my dirty hands off it, praying that I would be taken to where I should be. I was.

The work with the psychotherapist produced fine results, but my real Fifth Step was taken in another

way, one I didn't recognize till I'd completed it.

While living the Step, I got interested in returning to work on a novel I'd begun and abandoned while drinking. I went back to work on it to fill time. The finished book contains a portrait of me as a fearful, secretive alcoholic, and I didn't see me till I'd finished the book. There were all my defects laid out on the page, and there was something shabby and sad about that man who possessed so much and didn't have himself.

That odyssey of self-discovery taught me some things that have stood me in good stead. If I can truly turn my life and will over—get out of my own way — the answers will come. And the answers will almost invariably come, not from where I've fixed my gaze, but from unexpected places. I also learned something of the uses of pain, a lesson I first learned when I brought the pain of my alcoholism to my companions in AA.

Now ask me what I do for a living.

B. R., Manhattan, N.Y.



Atheist

*She made personal translations
of the Steps and applied
them to her living*

SOME TIME ago, a fellow AA member asked me, "How in the world does an atheist make it in AA?" She was referring to my eight-year membership, in spite of my lack of a god concept. "How do you do Steps Two and Three and the others that depend on God?" she wanted to know.

The only answer I could give her then was that I guessed I didn't *do* Steps; they just sort of happened to me along the line. To her questions

of how AA works if you're an atheist, I could only say, "Very well, thank you."

Her questioning how I, as an atheist, could stay contented in AA's program set me to some analysis of my relationship with and attitude toward the Higher Power of our program, and of how I can stay sober, progress in enjoyment and quality of living, improve my relationships with others, and live well within the goals of AA's personal program

—and still not believe in a god.

I came into AA at the urgings of a man I knew to have no religious inclinations and to have been sober a number of months. He had warned me that there might be a lot of talk about God; he said he just overlooked it, because AA was his best chance of getting off booze. I decided to take the same attitude, and when the first three weeks of meetings seemed to be on the Third Step, I was neither surprised nor offended. I knew I needed what AA had to offer in learning to live without drinking, and I immediately made personal translations of the Steps and applied them to my living.

At the very early stages of my sobriety, I was concerned only with the conversion of Steps Two and Three into terms I could understand and apply in my life. Step Two says the first 100 people came to believe that a Power greater than themselves could restore them to sanity. My Step Two, in my head, said simply that I was willing to accept that I could be helped. Step Three, for me, translated into a decision to avoid trying to direct my life, and instead to go with the current of life. These translations, along with Step One and frequent attendance at meetings with good sponsors, produced my first two years of life without alcohol.

After those years, I found I was beginning to have an idea of a well and happy person inside me that had become overshadowed by the sick

alcoholic. It seemed reasonable to me that I had been born whole and that alcohol and pills had damaged me. With the alcohol and drugs out of me, the healing had begun, and the well and happy person was getting stronger and taking a greater role in the conduct of my daily affairs. Letting that well and happy part of me get stronger was and is my equivalent of asking God to remove shortcomings.

By proper nutrition, exercise, and regular living habits, I worked at taking care of myself physically. I looked after my emotional and mental health by attendance at AA, repeated introspection, some outside therapy, consultations with trusted AA friends, and avoidance of relationships or decisions I knew were likely to bring emotional chaos to me. The positive actions I was able to make on my own behalf in my daily life nourished the well and happy person in me and were my Steps Ten and Eleven.

Gradually, my life got better, and I got healthier and happier in every way. I was able to do things I never expected. One was to return to college to get the degree I had never attained because of the way I had lived as a practicing alcoholic. Twenty years after I had first started, I resumed my studies in the natural sciences and ecology.

I have learned that education does more than provide me with factual information; it vastly improves my vision and other perceptions. I no

longer saw a forest—I saw five species of trees, eight of shrubs, and thirteen kinds of wildflowers. I also saw in the natural world an order and a flow that are consistent, producing an intricate web in which everything has a place. Ecologists call that place for living things a “niche.” I became aware that I, too, must have a niche in the world. The nature of my alcoholism had been the denial of that niche and the inability to perform within it. As a sober person, I can recognize that I fit in the world, and that my obligation and privilege in living are to strive to remain in harmony with my niche, not in conflict with it, as practicing alcoholism surely is.

Sobriety has come to me, and remains mine, through attendance in AA and by close relationships with other AA members. It lets the well and happy person in me survive, and

permits harmonious living in my niche and within the natural flow. Conversely, my efforts to strengthen the well and happy person and to live each day with an intent of remaining in concert with the world, instead of at loggerheads with it, permit my sobriety. It is the web of AA.

When I review the last nine years, I can see that the pattern has been one of improvement, even in times of depression or actual misfortune. I have no reason to think the pattern will not continue; this is the one bit of knowledge I have of my life that is probably more belief than fact. It is the closest thing in my thinking to what one might call faith. I still do not believe there is an omnipotent being that runs the universe. Nevertheless, I stay sober and am not troubled. AA works for everyone, even atheists.

J. L., Oakland, Calif.

January 1980

AA

WE JUST NEVER KNOW what we'll end up doing, as was revealed in a story about an AA member who was making a Twelfth Step call on a drinking alcoholic. The latter's wife had walked out on him after a fight several days before, and the house was a mess, including a kitchen sink full of dirty dishes.

After the two had been talking for a few hours, the lush asked his new AA friend if he'd care to share a pot of stew that had been simmering on the stove. The AA accepted, began to eat, and became puzzled about the behavior of the drunk's dog, which was whining and pawing at him. "Why is he acting so odd?" he inquired.

"Oh," explained the drunk, "I guess it's because you're eating out of his dish."

Open and Honest

On the list was a young woman, a professional colleague, who had been hurt by an action executed by me. She was unsure of the identity of the offender.

At every Eighth and Ninth Step meeting attended during the following three years, I became increasingly aware that I must someday summon the courage to become honest and reveal my transgression to Lynne. Projection, a formerly favorite preoccupation, told me I undoubtedly would lose her companionship. False dependence told me I needed her as a friend. (Wanting is one thing; needing, quite another.)

Lynne continued to be a good friend—especially generous with her invitations to social outings, her help, and her support whenever I permitted. Recently, when I knew she was about to perform yet one more act of affection, I became intensely uncomfortable. After thirty-six hours, I knew action was required to rid me of the pain. I became willing to take the risk of

losing her friendship. For my own good, I had to take Step Nine.

During the past eight months, I have become aware of the need to start liking myself. I realized that all other areas of my life hinged on the concept of self-worth. After repeated practice, I did progress in the direction of this goal. But I have learned in this challenging program that one is never finished. Sure enough, a dear friend drew to my attention that it was time to start loving myself. My original aversion to this idea has been removed, and I daily practice this new discipline.

It was through this mental exercise that I came to realize I had to be good to myself and stop dragging the past with me whenever I encountered Lynne. The friendship seemed doomed unless it could become a *now* relationship.

An empty conference room at nine on a Friday morning provided the setting for my revelation. Fortunately, the amends were graciously accepted. But curiously, tears from Lynne followed. She explained that she had been deeply hurt, not by my disclosure, but by my earlier withholding of the news that I was an alcoholic, had stopped drinking, and had embarked on a new life through AA.

I had held back, failing to share with her. The fear that Lynne might find the news repulsive and reject me as a friend caused my procrastination. She had not been able to discern why our conversations were

short and lacking in meaning. Among other things, how does one explain traveling several evenings throughout each month around the state with various men if one's friend is unaware of AA speakers' commitments?

Can it be that, at numerous discussion meetings, I actually told my group I was *not* a procrastinator and had *no* fears? Thank God, this is a program of mental growth and deepening awareness of self. Thank God, my eyes can open wider. Thank God, it is a gradual process. Thank God—acting through Bill W. and associates—for Steps Eight and Nine, which have healed wounds in an important relationship and have strengthened and enriched it.

How delightful to be open and honest! How delightful to be able to look Lynne squarely in the eyes and not feel that all-consuming, paralyzing guilt!

How delightful to grow up a little more! I almost called my sponsor to ask whether I should go ahead with the amends, but I knew the answer. I could use my sober mind and the pain in order to act as a mature woman and move in the direction my Higher Power was leading. I *believed* the leader of a recent meeting when he said that the intent of working Step Nine was to benefit me, not the other person, and that it would enable me to have a freer spirit as I continue to live my life. Now I *know* it. There is a difference.

B. F., Meyersville, N.J.

9TH STEP

A FEW MONTHS after coming into the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and solely under the motivation of fear, I compiled a list of those people to whom I judged I owed amends. At that stage of dryness, I felt compelled to do what the Steps suggested, lest I lose my precious sobriety. In retrospect, I find that attitude perfectly reasonable at that point.

Beginners

*In about thirty seconds
he devoured a quart of*

Strawberries and Ice Cream

DURING FIFTEEN years of drinking and denying reality, I created a vicious circle for myself. I had to drink because I couldn't stand reality; eventually, I had to sober up each time—and there was reality again. I didn't get my own way as often as I believed I deserved it; so, I reasoned, since the world was so unkind and God was so unfair, I'd drink to feel good in spite of it all.

This routine lasted until I was no longer able to deny the destructive nature of my actions—drinking to oblivion every other day, getting into car wrecks, missing work, living alone in the same house with my family, and suffering drastic physical ills and mental terror.

I entered a treatment center a little over four years ago. I had tried AA five years before, but it was only for old guys who stayed in their rooms alone and chugalugged a bottle—not

for young guys like me who were out in bars all the time chugalugging from a glass with ice cubes in it.

My surrender to the fact of my hopelessness and absolute powerlessness over alcohol was so complete, I was totally willing to do whatever the counselors at the treatment center suggested. One strong suggestion was to take the Fourth and Fifth Steps before leaving. I got right to work on the inventory. I was as honest as I was able to be at that time, and I wrote out thirty-eight pages of garbage.

My unchecked ego told me that this was obviously the best Fourth Step ever written—the perfect Fourth Step! Now, all I had to do was tell it to someone—Fifth Step—and I would be well on my way to spiritual perfection (if not there already). Near the end of the third and last week at the treatment center, I arranged an appointment to

take a Fifth Step. I spent one hour telling that lucky minister all my innermost secrets, which obviously would overwhelm him, because of my total honesty. (He was listening to the perfect Fifth Step.)

Well, after I finished, all he said was: "It was nice meeting you. Thank you for coming in." I couldn't believe it! No fantastic congratulations about my greatness in being able to give such a super Fifth Step. I had read all the books suggested by the treatment center, including *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, which describes our co-founder Bill W.'s spiritual awakening — like a light coming through the window. I decided I didn't need the minister. I would just continue my great spiritual ascent.

I went to my room and shut the door. I am not sure whether I had to open the curtain to leave room for the ray of light to come through. Anyway, I opened the Big Book to pages 58-59 and got on my knees and repeated the Sixth Step: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." I laid the open book on the bed and raised my arms above my head, while still on my knees, and said Step Seven: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings." There was no ray of light. I decided to give it a chance. I waited thirty seconds—then a minute—then a few more minutes. Something was wrong. "This stuff doesn't work—nothing happened. The hell with this!"

I left my room, got a pass to go outside the treatment center, and

walked downtown. A liquor-store sign attracted my attention, and for twenty or thirty paces, I headed for my guaranteed cure-all—alcohol. Suddenly, I changed directions and went into a supermarket instead. I walked around in there for a minute or two, and then I bought a quart of fresh strawberries and a pint of ice cream. I went back to the treatment center and ate them both in about thirty seconds.

As I look back on this, I have come to realize something. I did not get what I wanted (great praise for my work on the Fourth and Fifth Steps). I did not get what I thought I deserved (an immediate, transforming spiritual awakening). But, for the first time in my life since my drunkenness started, I was able to react without self-destructive behavior (drinking). The strawberries and ice cream, I'll admit, were quite filling; but they at least represented a positive reaction to my first Fifth Step. Many Fourth and Fifth Steps have followed. Working all the Steps of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous on a repeated and continuous basis checks my ego and keeps my self-will from running riot.

Even today, I have a special fondness for strawberries and ice cream. They'll never get me drunk!

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

Made a Decision

*In order to
find faith, she
had to act as if*

THIS GOD-GIVEN program of Alcoholics Anonymous has answered a question I once asked a minister, with heartfelt sincerity, when I was a young girl in high school. Now, I know I went to him seeking a conscious contact with God. But all I knew at the time was

that I had an inner yearning and need for something outside myself.

I said to him, "I want to have faith, but I really don't. How can I find it?"

His reply was: "Either you've got it or you haven't." This wasn't much help to me, or it didn't seem to be at the time. I went away discouraged and a bit resentful. However, I have come to realize that he was basically correct. It might have been more helpful if he had suggested that I act *as if* I had faith in order to find it.

How can any of us have faith in something we have never tried? The analogy would be the Wright brothers' building their first airplane and never taking it off the ground—but just standing around admiring it and telling everyone they had faith it could fly. That's not faith; that's an opinion, and opinions are no match for experience.

How many do this very thing with the Third Step? I did. I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. But for quite some time, that is all I did. I took no action and made no conscious effort. So nothing happened. I was still filled with anxiety, worry, fear, projection—all tomorrows and not one today. My dependence was still on the big "I" and my imagined ability to manipulate people and circumstances to do my will.

I suffered depressions, was positive I would never get this program, and confronted daily the over-

whelming mental obsession with alcohol. During my first year of attempting sobriety, I picked up five white chips and two blue chips. Every drunk I ever suffered through was important, because each brought me one step closer to the truth.

My last drunk brought me face-to-face with these facts: I had not been honest with myself or this Fellowship; I had not *acted* on my decision in the Third Step; I was still depending on and using people; I wanted my fellow AAs to get me sober and keep me sober, while I continued to run the show. Why I was able to see these things so clearly at the end of my last drunk, I do not know. I do know that I hit an all-time spiritual low. I saw myself for a brief moment as I really was, and the sight was repellent.

I thought about my decision and the Third Step for a long time, and

realized that acceptance played a big part in this action, which amounted to "Thy will, not mine, be done." I had to give up an old way—that of always having my own! I decided to give it an honest effort. I began by letting go of my will, being very specific in prayer about *what* I was turning over. You see, I was still a bit skeptical that God could do the job, so I wasn't going to give it to Him all at once. However, I did turn over the most troublesome areas of my life—those that I knew were causing me to be depressed and overanxious. It was simple, but not easy. It was my first Wright brothers flight. What I found from that trial run, I consider to be a truly spiritual experience. That's when my faith became a reality. Actual reliance on my Higher Power, which is God, put life and breath into my dormant faith.

God didn't always handle things the way *I* would have, and the end

results were not always as I would have had them. But I had made a decision, and I meant to give it an honest effort. So I repeated, "Thy will, not mine," stood back, got out of the way, let go, and let God. After a short period of time, I found that He is a pretty good manager. Looking back at those things that didn't come out the way I would have had them, I realized that they had come out exactly the way they should have. This strengthened my faith, and my skepticism began to fade.

Reliance on my God has given me a newfound freedom; a great burden has been lifted from my shoulders. I no longer have to plan my whole life; I can live it one day at a time, walking hand in hand with my God. He has given me this day to live as I will and His will to be mine, if I choose. What I do today is important, because I am exchanging it for a day of my life. When tomorrow comes, to-

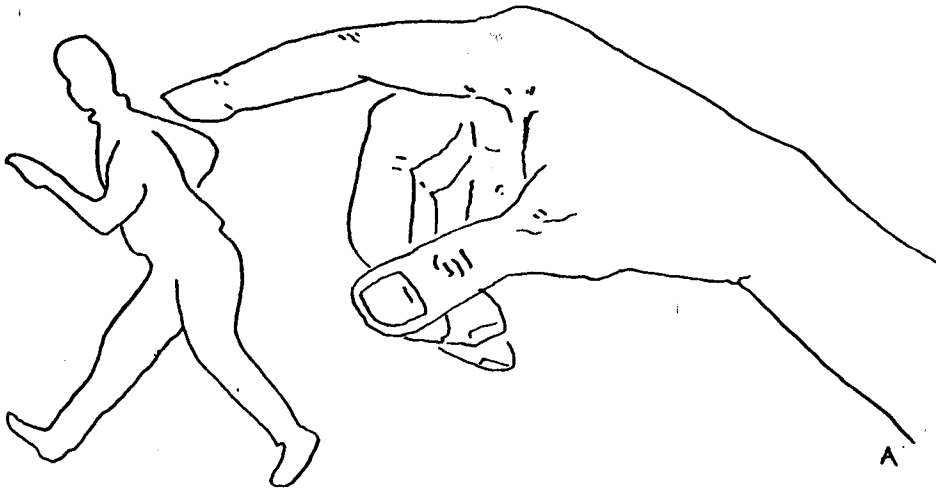
day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something I have traded for it. I want it to be love, not hate; good, not evil; spiritual progress, not an ego trip.

The last time I picked up a drink, I stepped down from my throne. I gave up being my own higher power. I became the created and not the would-be creator. I ask, not to be the source of all good, but only to be a channel through which it can flow.

That day long ago, when I went to my minister, I was looking for something outside myself. I found it within me and within you. This is the medium through which the God of my understanding works.

If you have not as yet acted on your decision in the Third Step—you have an exciting and spiritually rewarding experience in store for you. I know, because I have been there.

D. M., Clearwater, Fla.



An Easier, Softer Way

BECAUSE OF my "creativity" and my "inquisitive" mind — I thought — I was willing to throw any idea out the window if I didn't think the speaker was talking to *me*. In my early days in the Fellowship, I lived with anxiety and resentments.

I tried to offset my ongoing problem with work around AA as group secretary, etc., but that "easier, softer way" didn't work well for me or for the group. I was also jogging to relieve the tension — jogging with seventy physical pounds of excess weight and a spiritual ton of resentments and anxiety. Many months

and about 700 panting miles later, I concluded, nursing a sore knee, *surely* there must be "an easier, softer way" than this!

God, in His wisdom, put me in with a group of AAs who were working the Steps. They didn't have self-perpetuating, constant anxiety, nor were they eaten up with resentments. They could drive on the interstate without taking a searching immoral inventory of all the other drivers. They could do absolutely incredible things, better than leaping tall buildings or outracing fast locomotives. Amazing things like cashing a check

at the supermarket by going to the manager's office first; like getting a little ding in the side of the car without losing days to anger and resentment.

These beautiful people said to me, in effect, "If you want what we have, you'll do what we did — work the Steps!" Aha! Here, at last, was the real "easier, softer way"! I did what they did, and I have what they have.

Look at what the program has given me. The day I joined AA, I saw no way to pay off my creditors. Today, I am director of a large savings and loan association. While my debt to AA is astronomical, I owe no money except for a small, current home mortgage.

While drinking, I resigned my part-time teaching job, to the great relief of a junior-college administration. Two years ago, I was a part-time professor at a major state university.

To the best of my ability, I practice the AA principles in all my affairs. I am an active leader in my field of business, a respected member of my church, a vigorous member of my AA group. I am sponsoring five newcomers who are scattered between Steps Five and Ten, and I have a dozen more close friends with whom I've shared all Twelve Steps. My life is good.

A few months before I joined AA, I heard a barroom acquaintance trying to give away some mongrel puppies, and I was afraid to ask for one

for my two kids for fear of being refused. In 1978, my divorced sister-in-law was killed in an auto accident. The court took about five minutes to award us a "new" eleven-year-old daughter and a "new" ten-year-old son to go with my after-sobriety daughter, now eleven years old. We want them, and they want us. My Al-Anon wife and I know that great things will come from our expanded family. We have experience, strength, hope, and deep abiding love to share with all. Great pleasure and joy are in store for all of us.

The wherewithal to provide for a wife and five children (one in college) has been steadily coming in. Through the program, we get what we need and find that it is what we wanted all along.

Between the first and second drafts of this article, I had the front bumper of my car ripped off by a lane-changer. I was able to write the cab company and tell them — nicely — that, while their vehicle was at fault, the driver was polite and professional after the wreck. Talk about change! I am grateful to AA, which has completely changed my life.

If I could speak to myself of a few years past, I would say, "Don't throw every new idea out the window. Work the Steps, all twelve, *in order*, and the promises on page 83-84 of the Big Book will come true. And every time you think things couldn't get better — they will get better."

Anonymous, Texas

3rd STEP

*She has learned
to do the best she can
with what she has*

RECENTLY, I stood in the middle of my kitchen floor and prayed, "God help me," as I frequently do, and as I learned to do some twenty years ago when I got sober in AA. But on this occasion, the prayer was inspired by the galling, gnawing, incessant outrage I felt at a problem that has threatened to overwhelm me

for the past fifteen years. "It's unfair," I said, and I realized as I said it that I sounded like my fourteen-year-old daughter.

"What are you going to do about it?" a little inner voice asked.

"Do?" I replied. "What I've always been taught to do in AA. I'm going to confess it."

And this I proceeded to do, with an AA member who was then a guest in my home. We both agreed that it *was* unfair. In this mood, I returned to my kitchen and again said, "God help me."

At that instant, the telephone rang. It was another member of AA, and she, too, was finding life "un-

fair." I agreed, and as I attempted to show her that the answer to her problem lay in the acceptance of the Third Step, in surrender, in turning her will and her life over to the care of God, I found the answer to my own problem. I thought I had surrendered it, but I had merely refused to look at it — I had swept it under the rug.

Surrender is not a repressive thing; it's an active opening up of one's inner self; it's saying — and meaning — "I'll take my chances with life. There is no guarantee that I'm going to make it, but I'm going to face it, and I'm going to do the best I can with what I've got."

The AA way of life is not easy; we were never told that it would be. But I have found it to be the most exhilarating, the most exciting mode of existence that I can possibly imagine. I have found in AA all that I ever sought in drinking. I can choose to believe in myself today, in my own thinking and my own feelings. I can choose to live today. I can live in the light of that choice today. If I make mistakes (as I frequently do), I can say I'm sorry and learn from that mistake — and each time I make a mistake, I learn a new truth. But truth is not an absolute, and I have a long way to go before I sleep.

G. L., Elizabethtown, Ky.

March 1980

The power of a Step

From Hilton Head Island, S.C.:

It's amazing how Step Three works without our being aware of it. I have been a member of AA since January 1945 and have been most fortunate in that I've never found it necessary to take a drink since then.

However, I'm still working on practicing these principles in all my affairs. That is a constant effort. I feel that we sometimes work the Steps unconsciously. In a little over a year, I've had three trips to the hospital, and my husband has had one trip. At the time of my operations, I wasn't the least bit concerned or worried. It occurred to me that my acceptance of the situation meant I had turned things over to God as I understand Him — and I hadn't even realized it! I do remember asking Him to be with the surgeon when he operated on my husband. As for me, I knew that whatever the outcome, with His help, I would be able to cope.

B. B.



The Message I Carry Today

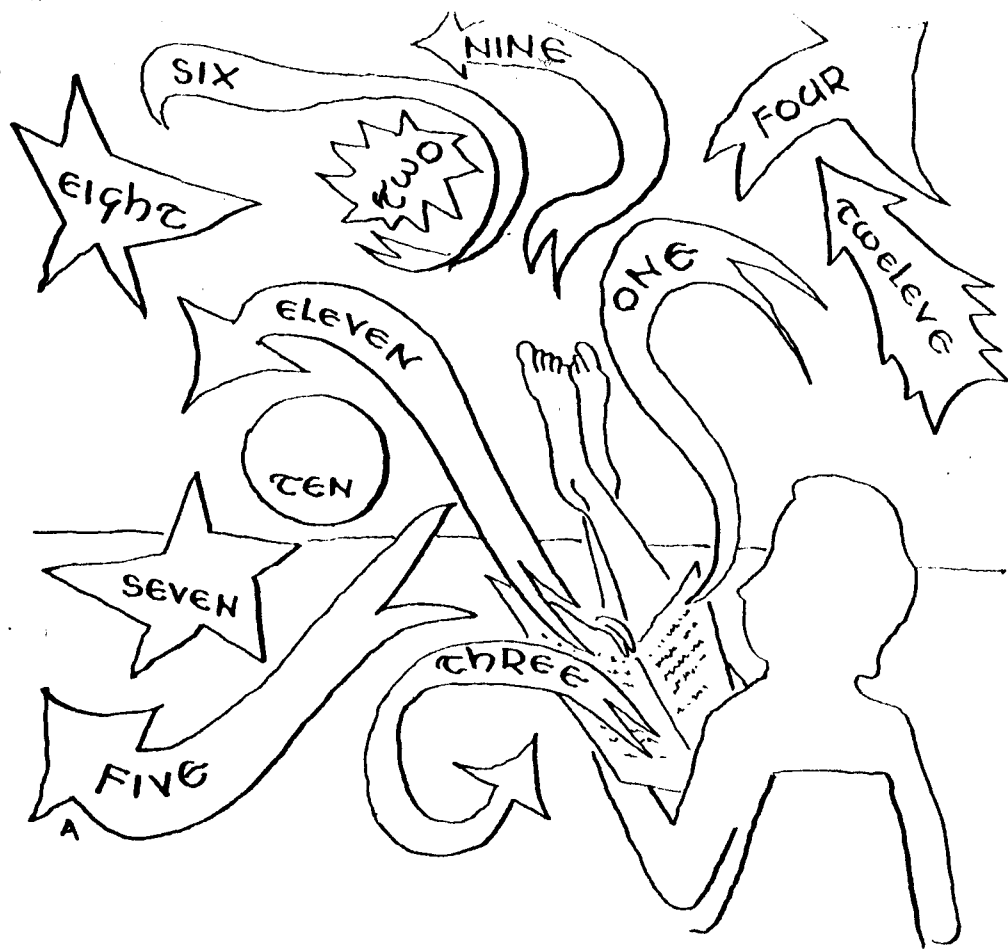
MY FIRST spiritual awakening was the realization that I could live in this world without having to drink alcohol. At that point, I could try to help someone who was asking for help but still drinking, even though I had no more message than "I'm in AA, and I don't drink. My life has improved drastically, because I don't drink anymore, a day at a time."

But in order to have "this message" to carry in the Twelfth Step, I had to work the preceding Steps. In order to develop this message and keep it, I have to do the Steps continually. I must continue to believe, a day at a time, that a Power greater than myself can restore me to sanity.

When insane thinking hits, I must seek God and turn it over in Step Three. I must let go and let God, work the Serenity Prayer as much as I can that day, taking action on things I *can* change, and then "Easy Does It"—I've done my part.

In *As Bill Sees It*, the very first excerpt from our co-founder's writings says that stopping drinking is not enough—we must develop a personality change to meet conditions, or we will drink again. Repeated working of the Twelve Steps of AA will create this personality change, allowing me to continue to develop a message to carry to the alcoholic who still suffers (wet or dry alcoholic). In Step Four, writing out specific defects of character (resentments, etc.), as shown by example in the Big Book on page 65, makes me aware of them and helps free me from their effects.

If, while I am writing this inventory and sitting and thinking about it, certain things pop into my mind that I would really never want to tell anyone or have anyone find out, I make sure I am fearless enough to put those specific things down and tell them to someone I trust in Step Five. This self-disclosure can reduce the power that the particular fear or resentment or other defect has over



me. Freedom begins. Awareness of living without constant crisis or conflict develops. Periods of genuine peace of mind begin to occur.

Step Six also is necessary in order to continue to develop the message I carry in Step Twelve. It calls for thorough willingness to let God remove all the defects listed in Step Five. It can never be a complete job,

or we'd *become* God—but the very efforts of all the action Steps (Four, Five, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve) can gradually create more freedom from defects. Let's allow the benefits to follow the working of the Steps as they may. Our immediate reaction doesn't determine the real benefits, which may be much more far-reaching and

surprising than we think!

In the Seventh Step prayer (Big Book, page 76), I ask God to accept me as I am—"good and bad"—human. I pray that He remove the defects that stop me from having my selfishness reduced and so becoming useful to Him and our fellows. Repeating this prayer on the phone and out loud with others helps develop the message I want to carry, too.

In Step Eight, I can do concrete work on the Twelfth Step message. I write out a list of everyone I ever harmed at any time in my life—drunk or sober—including close relatives, employers, friends, and enemies. More than likely, other names will occur to me as a result of the first list, and more lists will follow.

Taking more action, I honestly communicate my amends to each person on the list (Step Nine), and admit being truly sorry for any harm I caused. If I owe additional action or money to completely make amends, I take that action. If I can't pay money due all at once, I can send it in installments.

I do Step Ten daily in order to maintain balance and awareness of my relationships with others.

By praying and meditating regularly (Step Eleven) in the morning and late afternoon or evening each day for twenty minutes or so, I help clear my mind of the pressures of the day. (If you can't sit still that long, start with a few minutes at a time

and work up.) I pray for the gift of sobriety for that day immediately upon awakening, say the Third and Seventh Step prayers, and then repeat a word or phrase ("Thy will be done," "God is love," "truth") every minute or so. I let my thoughts just pass through my mind and sort of watch these thoughts without reacting to them.

It slows my mind down. Peace comes gradually. The real answer is in the trying, which develops discipline as I continue to do these things no matter how I feel. There is a definite difference between will-power and discipline. Working the Steps gives me discipline and helps promote *God's* will, not mine. What is *God's* will? Doing what I'm supposed to do—not drink, go to meetings, read the Big Book, work the Steps, go to work, do my job, take care of my family, get proper rest, and eat properly.

Now, I've got a message to carry in Step Twelve.

Now, I can give it away in order to keep it. This type of work on the Steps creates a greater awareness of what I should do. I may not always be able or willing to do it, but a greater knowledge of the fact that I *should* do it develops. I am better able to be honest in my life—to practice these principles in all my affairs, to clean up the inside of me, instead of worrying all the time about what's outside of me. The message I carry today is how I work the Steps.

S. M., Joliet, Ill.



U-Turn

SINCE GETTING into the AA program, I have frequently been conscious of my Higher Power's working in different ways in my life. One of the ways He gets my attention is to lead me to a meeting. I recently canceled an important assignment to attend a Step meeting, although I didn't realize why at the time. But it became quite obvious to me as soon as members started to read and discuss Step Seven: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Things had not been going the way I wanted and had reached a climax with a disappointing experience the night before. I recognized that I was having a problem with the Serenity Prayer—to accept the things I cannot change. I wasn't accepting the fact that He would provide me with

what I needed, not necessarily what I wanted. Also, I lacked faith that His will was best for me, even if I couldn't understand it. But at this meeting, I realized that the major problem was my lack of humility.

I came into Alcoholics Anonymous when I was literally driven to my knees in desperation—when I wanted to die and was afraid I wouldn't—when I considered suicide but lacked the courage to do it—when there was no other place to go. I had reached my hell and was forced to make a U-turn. I took the first three Steps almost simultaneously. The results were no less than miraculous—truly a spiritual experience. My desire to drink was removed completely, and I can honestly say that since then, I have never been seriously tempted, nor

have I even casually considered taking that first drink.

How could I ever have forgotten that lesson—that I was not self-sufficient, that I needed the help of my Higher Power?

But I had forgotten, until they read at that Seventh Step meeting from the "Twelve and Twelve": "As long as we placed self-reliance first, a genuine reliance upon a Higher Power was out of the question. That basic ingredient of all humility, a desire to seek and do God's will, was missing."

Although I believed that God existed, my belief remained barren, because I was still trying to play God. I was not satisfied with God's providing what I needed; I was

frustrated because He wasn't providing what I wanted.

With this guidance and help for my meditation, I was quickly able to realize that I *had* everything I needed—family and friends, food, clothing, and shelter—and was eventually able to realize that my goals were shortsighted, that my desires were unworthy. With this came the awareness that I was making unreasonable demands upon my friends and my Higher Power. This meeting helped me to get back on target—recognize that I needed a lot of work on myself and my "humility" and that there had been little progress on this character defect since I first came into the program.

W. H., Winchester, Ind.

At the Point of Need

THE SPIRITUAL program of recovery in AA meets the individual at the point of his or her need, allowing each person to advance at his or her own pace, with neither a standard nor a limit put upon spiritual progress.

Unfortunately, when I reached a level of spirituality where I was comfortable, I believed it would support me indefinitely. As the plateau began to crumble beneath my feet, I looked back and saw numerous other plateaus that had once held me but could not bear the weight of my burdens today. I held my ground, sure that if I held it long enough, the erosion would cease. But at last, I had to move forward again. It was a long struggle to the next level, and as

I advanced, the total unmanageability of my physical, emotional, and spiritual life was made known to me.

My need for a stronger "Manager" became imperative. My loosely defined Higher Power, who had held me together for several years when the going got tough, needed a further commitment on my part. Deep within, there was the nagging certainty that serenity still eluded me, that the constant struggle I maintained, in fear of losing ground, could be turned over to a loving God who would take my hand and ease my journey forward.

This occurred during my fifth year of sobriety, when material gratification held only a promise of temporary respite, when relationships

and attitudes troubled me, when a sense of "Is this all there is?" pervaded my being. Bill W.'s suggestions in the Eleventh Step chapter of the "Twelve and Twelve" led me to seek a deeper, more personal contact with my God.

Today, my program does not allow me to be lax about my spiritual development; it does not allow me to

take moral standards lightly; rather, it demands that I walk a straight spiritual path.

The plateaus do not crumble beneath my feet anymore. I outgrow one and just move on to the next, full of "the joy of living." Once, I chose to live within a limited sense of an unlimited program. Today, my spirituality has no boundaries.

P. L., Rocky Point, N.Y.

'...As the Result of These Steps...'

He found that there are solid benefits in reworking all the Steps

JIM CAME into AA more than twenty years ago and bounced in and out for the next fourteen or fifteen years. He'd stay sober for six months sometimes, and then disappear for another round of booze and trouble.

In January 1971, he came back again—this time with a difference.

He began to work the Twelve Steps. Shortly before that, Jim and his wife had been called to school and told that their youngest son, who was eight, was retarded. The boy was put in a special class, because he had difficulty learning and remembering.

"About that time," says Jim, "I began trying to live honestly and do

what the Steps tell me to do. Within six months, my son was back in his regular class, and he was consistently making grades near the top of his class. As I changed and got to be healthier, my son recovered right

"What I need becomes what I really want"

along with me. My drinking and actions had made him sick, and as I got better, this was reflected in more health for him. As I look back, it was really me that was retarded."

Some months ago, I had dinner at Jim's home. After dinner, we sat and talked. I asked how his son, who is now sixteen, was doing, and Jim replied, "He just got his report card, and the lowest grade on it was a B. Not only that, but he's been on the honor roll every grade period since he started high school. None of this would have happened if all I had done was quit drinking."

While there are probably limitless definitions of spiritual awakenings, Jim's experience remains spotlighted in my mind as an example of a *real* spiritual awakening. "As the result of these Steps," a human being starts to radiate God's healing power. The experience gives life to the sentence on page 77 in the Big Book: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

Sobriety without consistent work

on the Steps misses the mark. On the other hand, if I work with the tools of the program gradually, I find that it gives me what I need, and this, in turn, becomes what I really want.

My experience during sobriety has shown with stunning frequency that I'm often a very poor judge of what's good for me. We sometimes hear that alcoholics, as a group, are smarter than other people. I don't know where that myth began, but I am sure it wasn't started by a member of Al-Anon. As I've stayed sober in AA, my self-will has again and again bruised and battered me while I frantically battled and schemed to get what I wanted, only to find it brought misery as its inevitable companion. However, the pain created by "self-will run riot"

"Health means wholeness—mental, physical, emotional"

has never been wasted, because it has always provided a persuasive inducement for spiritual effort.

A tireless capacity to complicate my life led me into a long period of investigating all those attractive, advanced approaches that float about on the fringes of the AA Fellowship. They promise much but invariably deliver little, except occasional symptom relief and gratification of the feeling that I'm unique, that AA may be enough for others, but I'm special. With all of them, careful

study and effort showed they have much less than meets the eye.

Health means wholeness—whether it's spiritual, mental, physical, or emotional. Nothing stands by itself, and the prescription for regaining or retaining wholeness is very simple and has nothing to do with special groups, special methods, or relentless study. The mind has extremely limited usefulness as a tool for experiencing reality.

Working and reworking the Twelve Steps provides experience, a spiritual experience such as Jim had, and our lives change. Reading won't do it. Talking won't do it. Thinking won't do it. Arguing and philosophizing won't do it. For that matter, just going to meetings won't do it.

Working the Twelve Steps *will*. It's outlined in simple prose in that part of Chapter Five that's read at the start of many meetings—"How It Works." And that *is* how it works, but the words sometimes become an automatic, unthinking litany that we salute but never get around to doing.

In his introduction to *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley wrote: "Unfortunately, familiarity with traditionally hallowed writing tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad—namely, a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of sacred words."

Huxley might have been talking to you and me about the "stupor of the

spirit" that often surrounds and makes mysterious precisely how we get well. Avoiding the first drink is only the first step in recovery. Again and again and again, I've seen AA members waste impressive amounts of time and money looking for answers for painful inner problems, never understanding that what they need is patiently waiting for them in the AA program.

There's no possible way to get by on the work I did in the Steps years ago. My answer is continuing work with *every* one of the Twelve Steps to maintain health and growth today. For the first sixteen years of sobriety, I suffered from the common misconception that we work the first nine Steps once and subsist on the last three for the rest of our lives. I'd never tried anything else, so probably could be forgiven my ignorance. Finally, I ran into the view that there are solid benefits in reworking *all* of the Steps. I began doing that and have experienced far greater rewards as a result.

It's all here. If we work the Steps, all of the Twelve Steps, on a continuing basis, we get what we need and what we really want. God's healing power, through the program, raises us out of the pit we've dug for ourselves. Gradually, often painfully, as we fight to remain ignorant, the program lifts us into the light where we can see, and breathe, and live as spiritually awakened human beings.

P. M., Riverside, Ill.

Growing Up

*He spent seven minutes
on the Steps
the first time
and twenty-three years
the second.
He's still working on them*

I DON'T KNOW how many times I have heard this sentence: "The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines." But for some reason, it had special significance on one particular day.

I am still the same person who came to AA, only now I am not sick, in debt, unemployable, frightened, or at war with myself. In fact, I am happy all day long. I am supposed to be retired, but I am busier now than I was when I was working. How did all of this come about?

A doctor once gave me a Twelve Steps card, and when I recovered from the insult enough to get clever, I devised a means of getting the benefits of AA without being tarred

with the same brush as you alcoholics. I now had the card containing all the secrets of the organization. What was to stop me from working the Steps and reaping a harvest of spiritual splendor?

The only flaw in my scheme was that I overlooked a small detail that you people called the First Step. The way I was going at it was much like trying to sew a button on a poached egg. It just wasn't possible to do it well enough to win an Oscar. The result was inevitable—an unqualified disaster. Then, I saw myself exactly as I was—still drunk. Something had to change.

In answer to my call for help, AAs told me: "Just don't take the first drink today." I tried it. It worked! There were no other options left. I got through two whole days without a drink. There came a time when I had put two solid weeks together, and I was fully eligible for sainthood by default. I had not gotten into any trouble, and even though I was nervous as a woodpecker with a migraine headache, I was getting better.

I came to the conclusion that whatever was wrong with me would not be aggravated if I didn't drink. Surely, someone would be bound to notice my drastic improvement. As I sat looking out the window, it suddenly occurred to me that the neighbor's dog and I were running neck and neck in this spiritual race; he was not drinking, either.

Could it be that I had not yet

realized my full potential for spiritual growth? Oh yes — there were some other Steps. The first time I saw them, it took me seven minutes to go through them all. The second time, it took me twenty-three years, and I am still working on them.

As I said, I am the same person who came to AA. I couldn't play the piano then, and I can't to this day. I have the same emotions and sensitivity and shortcomings, but there is a vast difference: All these things are put together differently now. I am sure that God loves me, warts and all. I am not hounded by fear. I was dependent then and I am dependent now, but my dependence is on my Higher Power, rather than on alcohol. I am at meetings frequently and regularly, honestly looking for answers, rather than out there looking for a drink. I can accept myself just as I am, for today. I am not obliged to judge myself or anyone else; if I do take a fling at it once in a while, someone at a meeting will put me back on the track.

I shall be eternally grateful to the doctor who started this whole thing by giving me the Twelve Steps card and to the hundreds of friends who have done so much successful research on my disease, to the point where I can be better integrated and happier than I have ever been before in my memory.

The keys are willingness and honesty. God will help you turn into what you are supposed to be.

J. B., Rochester, N.Y.

Freedom From the Past

I OWE SO MUCH to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am especially grateful I no longer have to fear my past. The price of this freedom is honesty.

Steps Eight and Nine took me quite a while to complete. I had a list of people I had injured, resented, and feared.

I am a dental hygienist. The shakes were the worst when I worked. That scares people, when you have sharp things in their mouths. I used to drink the mouthwash to steady myself.

By the end of my drinking, it was becoming increasingly impossible for me to regulate the drinking so that I felt mellow and yet made sense. I began to make the rounds of the drying-out sanitariums. I would work a week for someone and then take off, or never show up again. In the midst of this insanity, I worked one-half day for a Dr. L. The poor man hardly knew what hit him. I made it until ten o'clock, and a patient canceled. I slipped out to purchase a little extra energy, or medicine. At eleven o'clock, Dr. L. said, "My dear, we can't have this!"

I replied, "I can't help it. I'm an alcoholic." I remember bouncing off the walls in the corridor as I made my exit. After a little "nap" in the car, I awakened at 4:00 AM — in the only car in the parking lot.



Pitiful demoralization, all right!

One year later, I entered a women's recovery home, and life began again. Life was and continues to be far more beautiful than I ever dreamed possible, but that is a story in itself.

Four years sober, I had recovered some self-respect. I went on a job interview, and guess what? The walls of the building looked vaguely familiar. The parking lot, too. I had blacked it all out, but in looking at the directory for the building, I recognized a name: Dr. L.'s. It all came rushing back — the disgust, fear, humiliation. Now I had further amends to make, and I thought I had finished with them. I was hired by another dentist, and I put off going to see Dr. L.

My first day on the new job, I arrived early, and the office was not open. I said to myself, "Here goes!" and marched upstairs to Dr. L.'s office. Wouldn't you know, he was there, and so were five patients, waiting in the outer office. I knocked on the Dutch door, ten eyes boring into my back. He opened one-half of the door and said, "Yes?"

I said, "I have come to make amends."

He said, "Yes."

So I broke into a short version of my story and apologized. He said, "Oh, okay," and closed the door. I turned, smiled at my audience, and left.

Walking down the hall, I asked silently, "Well, God, who was that

for? For me, for him, or for one of those patients waiting in his reception room? Or for all of us?" The important thing was that I was no longer afraid to run into Dr. L. in the hall; I was free.

I have been at my job in the office downstairs from Dr. L.'s for many years now. Several of his patients come to me just to have their teeth cleaned. Over the years, I have come to know them fairly well. One day, I asked a woman why she did not let Dr. L.'s hygienist clean her teeth.

She said, "My dear, I will not trust those girls he hires. Once, one of them cleaned my teeth, and would you believe it? She was drunk!"

I said, "Oh? How many years ago was that?"

You guessed it — it all matched. I was the reason she no longer had her teeth cleaned upstairs.

Now, I wish I could tell you that I immediately made amends to all those patients. I *have* told two of them, who laughed and shared their problems with me. There are four more I haven't had the courage to approach yet, but God and I are working on it.

My God has a sense of humor second to none. I firmly believe He guided me to this job so I could clear away some wreckage from my past. I am respected in my profession now. I sometimes teach. My life is rich, varied, and full, and I thank God and AA every day for my second chance at life.

M. R., Agoura, Calif.

*Loners, leaders, priests,
potentates, and
just plain folk—
alcoholism is*

The Great Equalizer

THE SHRILL ringing of the doorbell jabbed into my sleep. Another of those middle-of-the-night visitors. This one must be desperate or furious — or both. I groped for my robe and stumbled down the stairs. According to my watch, it was 2:00 AM. The porch light revealed my visitor, a man slumped against the doorjamb, his finger stuck to the bell.

"Come on in, friend," I told him, "before you wake my wife and kids." (Seven of our eight children still live at home.) I could see he had the shakes, so I guided him to a chair and went to turn on the coffee. I was sure it would be an all-night session.

He began his story the way most of us do — pretending. "Your name was given to me, Doctor. But I don't often go around disturbing my colleagues' sleep. I'm a physician, too, so I feel I can be candid with you. I believe I may have a slight problem."

I looked at him curiously. I recognized the struggle between his pride and his despair. He was still hanging on to his denial. But he was perspiring, and I knew his need for alcohol was blurring his mind.

As I watched him turn the hot coffee cup in his trembling hands, I recalled another room and another doctor, slumped in a chair with his coat collar turned up to hide his face. That physician — hostile and withdrawn — was myself, ten years ago. I can remember my surly explanation to the leader of the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting (where my wife had finally succeeded in dragging me): "My wife thinks I have a problem."

I can still hear the blunt reply of the AA, who had himself been evicted from medical school for booze addiction. He said, "Look, Buster, you may as well go home. We can use our valuable time helping somebody who really wants it." Well, no-

body had ever talked to me, an important surgeon, like that. It was a revelation to me. And though I had gone into that meeting unreceptive, there was something that touched my heart and soul. That night, my renewal process began.

So now, ten years later, I put my hand on my visitor's shoulder and said, "Bill, it doesn't matter if you're a doctor, a corporation executive, or a garbage collector. You are an alcoholic seeking recovery. It's hard to admit you have this disease, but it is the first necessary step. Now, you have got to have two things: *a commitment to yourself and a program for sobriety.*"

Bill sat with his head in his hands. "Was it very hard for you to stay off?" he asked softly.

Hard? I was what they call a white-knuckled nondrinking drunk. For the first eleven months, I stayed sober by the hands of my watch. I was physically sick for seventeen months, chronically fatigued for the first three years, and mentally scattered for a long time. Then, one morning, I was in my backyard, and the sun was shining. I knew something was different. I was free. The craving was gone. I was in the world again, and it was beautiful.

"Yes," I answered. "It was painful. But the joy of being alive again is worth every second of the pain."

Would Bill make it? He was no more deeply submerged in his personal pit that I had been. In the process of my enslavement, I lost my

dignity, my medical license, my practice (and with it the trappings of an expensive life-style — houses, cars, boats); also, I came near to losing all I held dear in life — my wife and the respect of my children. One can become so addicted that one's whole thought content changes. However, under the self-pity and hopelessness of my former life, a few shreds of my childhood religious faith still remained. And that proved to be the seed of my salvation.

"You're a surgeon — right, Bill? Well, I can tell you that a surgeon can cut, but only God can heal. The forces of man can help an alcoholic free himself from chemical dependence, but they are almost powerless unless they have the gift of knowledge from the Source. I know for a fact, Bill, that God can heal the broken spirit and the blasted mind; He can eradicate the scars of alcoholism. He can reunite a family and bring back peace and harmony and joy."

Bill's defenses were finally broken down. I was pretty sure that he had made the *commitment* and was ready to start on the *program*.

What makes an alcoholic different from others who drink? That question haunts doctors like me as we treat those whose ruined lives bear witness to the tenacity of a disease afflicting millions. Could there be a metabolic abnormality? Perhaps. When I was a child, I couldn't tolerate honey. After I stopped drinking, I carried a honey jar around with me

and also gorged myself with ginger ale or any carbohydrate that could keep me from shaking.

Is there a hereditary influence? Perhaps. My father, a Canadian judge, was a teetotaler. His father died drunk. I had my first drink, a glass of ale, when I was twenty-six, celebrating my graduation from medical school. Everyone else in my

maculately groomed, obviously a man with leadership skills. Shortly after David's retirement as head of a prestigious law firm, his wife died. In his bitter loneliness, he formed the habit of having a tumbler of wine before dinner. He told us, "I have just realized I don't get to eat my dinner anymore. I just drink it. And if I can't sleep, I have another glass,

*"The disease of alcoholism is progressive,
and so is recovery.
It can be accomplished in stages."*

group had just one glass; I immediately ordered another.

But alcoholism is in a way like other diseases (cancer for one); it is not unique in the complexity of its cause, which is not really pertinent to recovery.

In the treatment facility where I work, we treat alcoholics who are extraverts and those deeply inhibited; those who are nervous, neurotic, calm, or passive. Women executives living alone in condominiums and imbibing secretly find their way to us. We treat loners and leaders, priests and potentates, and just plain folk from the mainstream of America.

For the alcoholic, there is no such thing as moderate drinking. I remember David, who walked hesitantly into our clinic one day, im-

and then one during the night. I believe I have a problem."

Here was a brilliant, decent man whose dependence on alcohol had sneaked up on him. I told him, "David, I can assure you with absolute certainty, from my experience as a participant and spectator, that no problem will ever be alleviated with booze. None. The only approach to recovery for those of us whose primary passion is drinking is total abstinence. We are alcoholics, but we can always be sober."

A commitment and a program. I think of Amy, a bright and cooperative patient who had done well in her primary recovery stage. "What's your program, Amy?" I asked her as she prepared to leave.

"Oh, I'm fine, Doctor. I don't want to drink anymore."

"Yes, but what defense have you set up?"

"Well, I plan to get busier."

"Amy," I said, "you've been here thirty days — and you don't have a program for the days ahead?" I asked her to memorize the Twelve Steps to recovery set up by Alcoholics Anonymous. Without support systems, a patient may delay progress.

There is still a low level of public awareness of the problems of alcoholism. Until recently, the stigma was akin to that attached to leprosy in biblical times. Many an alcoholic, confronted with the intervention process, will deny his addiction. Yet alcoholism *can* be treated; we constantly return patients to productive lives. It is a common misconception that an alcoholic needs to hit bottom before starting back up. Not so! The disease of alcoholism is progressive, and so is recovery. It can be accomplished in stages. An afflicted patient can be taught to take the first step up. The time to get sober is *right now*. The time to start improving is *today*. No alcoholic needs to suffer further degradation. Attaining a new life is like riding on an elevator: You push a button, and you can get off on any floor you wish. You can go up or down, but you certainly don't have to go all the way down.

Another cliché is equally true: We keep sobriety by giving it away. When I went, reluctantly, to my first AA meeting, I was on a desperate treadmill. But as a half hour passed, something penetrated my closed

mind. I began to get a feeling of hope. There was something about those people; they seemed carefree, and there was a joy I hadn't experienced for a long time. Then there was total acceptance for that chap in the corner — me — who was ill and miserable. There was, in fact, love in that room.

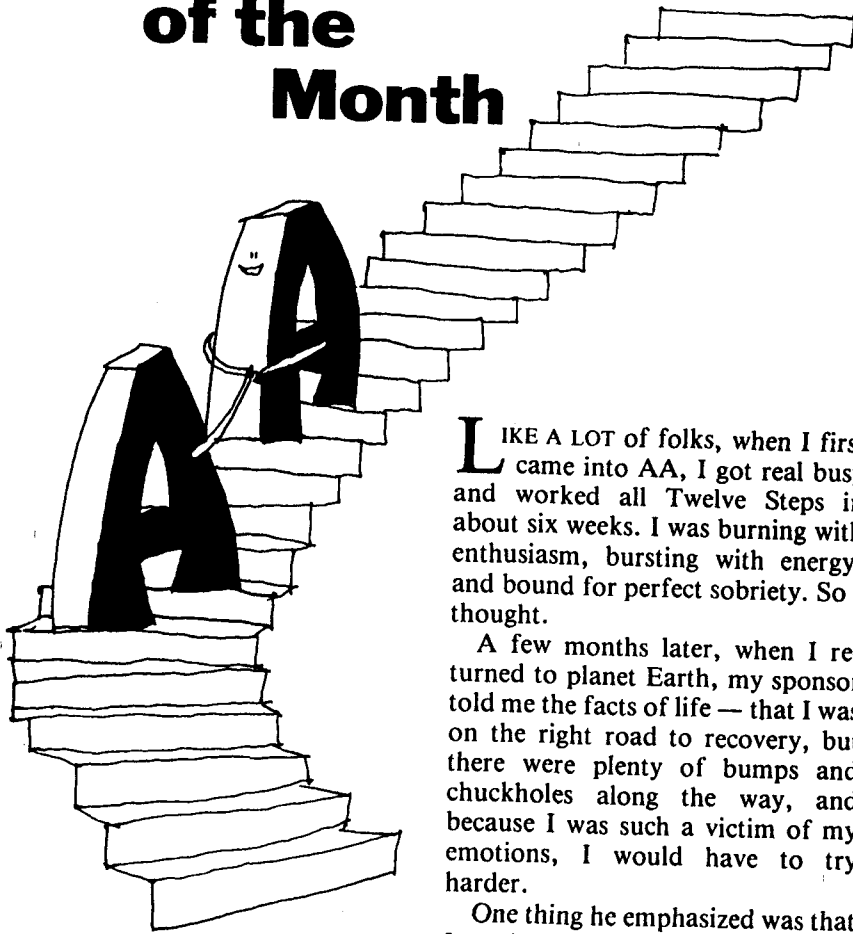
This is not to say that all meetings are a panacea. Occasionally, a person will enter a meeting with the wrong attitude — irritation or depression, sometimes inevitable — and the meeting seems dull. But if alcoholics persevere, continue to attend, they find a mystical magic there, an indefinable spiritual quality that permeates them and helps them not to drink and to want to become completely well.

I can only emphasize that the trauma surrounding the lives of drinking alcoholics is unnecessary. We can abort the disease if it is recognized and if intervention is intelligent and loving.

The second of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous reads: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." To me, this clearly means a surrender to His will and a reliance on His grace. This Step provides us with a springboard to a new life. In my own family — perhaps because of our adversities — there is a new, joyful intimacy, an interaction and a communication among us. There is love.

J. R., MD, San Diego, Calif.

Step of the Month



LIKE A LOT of folks, when I first came into AA, I got real busy and worked all Twelve Steps in about six weeks. I was burning with enthusiasm, bursting with energy, and bound for perfect sobriety. So I thought.

A few months later, when I returned to planet Earth, my sponsor told me the facts of life — that I was on the right road to recovery, but there were plenty of bumps and chuckholes along the way, and because I was such a victim of my emotions, I would have to try harder.

One thing he emphasized was that I needed to keep working the Steps

over and over. All of them. In fact, he implied that a day should not pass without some involvement with at least one of the Steps. This could be as simple as admitting I was an alcoholic or taking my inventory at night. I believed him and began to work on Step One again, then Step Two, and on through to the end. I did this for about a year. After that, I just let it quietly go away. I still went to meetings and did a little Twelfth Step work, but I had an uneasy feeling that I wasn't doing enough on the Steps.

I am not a very well organized person, generally speaking; so after about four years in the program, I decided something had to be done. I needed some kind of simple system



to insure that I would be working on at least one of the Steps at any given time. I tried using my desk calendar at the office, and that worked for a while. I tried using stops at traffic lights. Someone suggested thinking of AA every time the phone rang. These were all good reminders, but there was too much interference to permit serious working of the Steps. I needed something steady, dependable, and neat. Something I could carry around in my head. Something easy to recall.

Suddenly it hit me! There are twelve months in the year, and there are Twelve Steps in AA. Why not concentrate on one Step a month? For years, I had heard of the Book of the Month, Fruit of the Month, and Employee of the Month, so why not Step of the Month? My AA birthday is in January, so it would work out just right: First Step in January, Second Step in February, and so on. I decided to try it.

During the month when I am concentrating on a particular Step, I read about it, talk about it, think about it, meditate on it, and generally try to apply it whenever I can. This does not rule out working on other Steps as the occasion arises, but it focuses my scattered brain on one Step a month, giving me a sort of security feeling. It's a kind of insurance that I will cover all the Steps each year.

Sounds mechanical? Maybe so, but a disorganized person like me needs some framework, some system to help him keep moving. Otherwise, I procrastinate; I say I'll do it tomorrow, and you know how that goes. I am convinced that AA will keep a person sober even if the program is worked in a purely mechanical way — plus willingness and the grace of God, of course.

I used to worry that I wasn't doing enough about working the Steps, but since using the Step of the Month idea, I feel a lot better. At least, so far.

G. L., San Antonio, Tex.

July 1980

AA and prison

A Shocking Awakening

An eleven-page section
devoted to the AA experience
behind prison bars

WHO WOULD have imagined that, after I had taken Steps One through Five and worked on most of the others, Step Six would become the cliff-hanger?

After nearly a year's sobriety, I was doing fair at managing my life with the help of my Higher Power, one day at a time. I was gaining a bit of self-confidence and even caught slight whiffs of self-respect.

There was one area of my life that remained in its original granitelike state. It was my negative, pessimistic, and resentful attitude. Despite my sobriety, I remained bitter, irritable, impatient, and sometimes downright arrogant. I viewed myself with extremely low self-esteem, because of my rotten personality.

I began to doubt and question the effectiveness of my Higher Power. Why didn't He remove all these defects from my character? How

could anyone stand me, when I couldn't stand myself?

Ultimately, out of sheer desperation, I began to set a time aside daily for working Step Eleven. I did it by myself, because, at the time, I was still too proud to ask for help. It was a long process, and there were moments when I just wanted to give up. As I worked to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understood Him, I came to the startling awareness that I did not understand Him at all! What a shocking awakening that was, but an extremely essential and uplifting one for me.

I began an immediate and in-depth review of my road to recovery. In the days and weeks that followed, I jumped around the Twelve Steps like a man on a pogo stick, considering each of them, but always working Step Eleven, hoping that, with

the help of my Higher Power, I'd discover what it was about the Steps that I had misinterpreted.

Considered in that light, Step Three turned out to be the one I had stumbled over, instead of working through. I had made a decision to turn my life and will over to God, but I had not acted upon that decision. Therefore, it was not a decision at all, but merely a mental agreement that I had made with myself.

Consequently, whenever I attempted Step Six, it was fruitless. I was not "entirely ready." In order for my Higher Power to remove my defects of character, I would have to allow Him to do so. I would have to act.

It became plain to me then. He had given me legs, but I must do the walking. He had given me ears and eyes, but I must do the listening and looking. He had given me a mind,

but I must do the thinking. He had placed the power at my disposal with which to overcome my defects of character, but I must grasp that power and apply it to my life situations — and that is what I immediately began doing.

Now, two years later, and still sober, I still have many character defects and, without a doubt, always will have. But I allow my Higher Power to make up the difference between my imperfections and His perfection, because I, as a human being, cannot attain such a goal.

To conclude: The key for me was not to be entirely ready for my Higher Power to change me, but to be entirely ready to use His limitless power to change the things that I could, and to be entirely ready to accept the things that I wanted to change, but could not.

G. H., Thomaston, Me.

5TH STEP

I HAVE NOW been sober for four years, as a direct result of the recovery program of AA. I arrived at this program only through the grace of God. The outside situations in my life were not indicative of the inner destruction that was killing me. My job, car, and house did not reflect my self-hatred, self-pity, depression, anger, pain, or desperate loneliness. My crowd of "friends" that attended social events with me did not reflect the absence of love in my life or the emptiness that I felt. My life was in perfect order on the outside, and the inner person was on the verge of death from the fatal disease of alcoholism. I had spent my whole life focusing on people, places, and things, while alcoholism slowly and powerfully consumed my inner self.

I had lived with the fear of dying from a car accident for many years.

Then, one evening, such a disaster nearly became a reality. The result was my first request for help — I called Alcoholics Anonymous. My first year in the program was a time of extended grace from God. It was a time of discovering that my life was a shambles. It was a first experience at realizing that an inner person even existed. I attended an average of eight to ten meetings a week in order to stay sober, and I learned that there was a suggested program of recovery that contained Twelve Steps.

At the end of the first year, I was experiencing great agony from discovering that, although I had stopped drinking, I was still the same person. The only "things" that had really changed were the outside situations. The euphoria of being sober was beginning to wear off, and I was left with the same inner reality of

self-hatred and depression. I thank God that I had attended as many meetings as I had, so I could believe what the Big Book states: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." I knew that I had to change as a person and that the Twelve Steps were my only hope. I had been trying to apply the Steps to my life but knew that something was missing.

When I began talking with someone who I knew was on the path of living the Twelve Steps, I realized that I had made little progress because I did not have a good foundation in working the first three Steps. I learned that it was okay and, indeed, necessary to admit and accept the fact that I would always be learning about and reapplying each of these Steps in my life, over and over again. With this new awareness, I realized that I had to examine the first three again, before starting my Fourth Step, and that I needed to admit my powerlessness in areas other than alcohol.

I saw that other people were able to do these Steps, the power of which came from God, they claimed. They were living examples. This enabled me to believe that God would restore me, as well, to a sanity that would not include self-hatred and depression. So I made the decision to trust Him and to ask Him to take my will and my life into His care. It was suggested that I use the Third Step prayer from the Big Book.

I was amazed. My life began to

change. I was now able to begin writing a Fourth Step inventory. I was told to pray that prayer before each session of writing, and it worked. In my first year, I had tried many varied approaches to this Step, all of which had failed; none had come from AA literature. It makes sense to me today that my approach was unsuccessful because it was not the path that the original members had followed. I struggled with the Fourth Step over a ten-month period.

I included in my inventory anything that came into my thoughts, because I trusted my sponsor, who was supporting me throughout the process; she would be the person who would listen to my Fifth Step. I had come to realize that she would not reject me for any of my faults. There was very little information in my Fourth Step that I did not share with her as I was preparing my Fifth.

I had meanwhile asked a nonalcoholic woman to be my spiritual adviser, somewhere in the middle of doing my Fourth Step. I had come to love her as deeply as I loved my sponsor and, therefore, began to risk letting another human being get to know me. This time, however, I proceeded with extreme caution. A question that plagued my heart and mind was: "Would a nonalcoholic ever accept me as I am?" I knew that a goal of our recovery was to return to the human race, yet I was fearful. My self-hatred and self-loathing had not yet been relieved. Even in sobri-

ety, I could not risk rejection by someone I loved, especially someone who was so important to my coming to understand my Higher Power. But the best motivator for me—pain—set into my life once again, and I knew that action had to be taken.

I realized that my Fourth Step was completed. The self-centeredness that became so obvious to me began to make my life miserable. I wanted to be free of it. I approached my sponsor and asked her to do my Fifth Step with me. We set up two different meeting times, which were canceled because of uncontrollable circumstances. I had signed up for a spiritual retreat that my spiritual adviser would also be attending. Only because of the intense pain that was consuming me did I finally approach her the day before the retreat and request her to do the Fifth Step with me.

I went into that day with fear in my heart, sweaty palms that were holding my inventory, and a very shaky voice. It no longer mattered whether my spiritual adviser accepted or rejected me. The Fifth Step became very clear in its simplicity: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." There were no promises for the results. My faith in the program, which was there because of my own experience, offered additional support.

I shared with this woman what I had seen over the preceding ten months. When the day ended and

the process was complete, I knew for the first time in my life that the God of my understanding loved me. I knew that He revealed Himself to me through this person. He had chosen the person who would bring me the greatest gifts of self-acceptance, self-love, self-forgiveness, and most of all, hope for a life of sanity. By leading me to a nonalcoholic, He was issuing me a greater freedom than I had dreamed, the freedom of being accepted for who I am, independent of my disease. Had I known this during the writing of my Fourth, I might not have thoroughly followed the path. But just as His grace was unknown to me as I entered the halls of AA, so it had been unknown to me at this stage of sobriety.

My initial reaction to the overwhelming sense of freedom from doing my Fourth and Fifth Steps was that it was too good to be true and that I would probably experience only temporary relief. But this was not the case. I came to understand that the new life I was given included seedlings of self-love and love for others. It was the beginning of a process of growth that would require perseverance, nurturing, and great amounts of support from individuals with sound spiritual foundations. By removing the obstacles of the past, I would be able to address the real nature of my inner being.

The following year was a learning period, integrating each of the first seven Steps into my life. My power-

lessness became obvious in every facet of my living. I began to discover and accept my humanness. I began to relate to my fellow human beings with more openness and love. I began to feel sanity.

Then another crisis emerged. Pain was to be my "touchstone of spiritual progress" once again. I had prepared an Eighth Step list, but I proceeded to procrastinate with it. I married another sober alcoholic and, through the experience of my first total commitment to an intimate relationship, discovered that I knew nothing about love. I was horrified and confused. How could my life have changed so drastically in sobriety?

The answers came through much suffering. Because of the program, I knew that somehow the trouble was inside me. In the next four-month period, I discovered that my Fourth and Fifth Steps had addressed only the symptoms of my disease: my behavior. I managed to act differently, because I had seen my patterns of jealousy, possessiveness, self-righteousness and self-centeredness. So I seemed different on the outside, but the inner person was still the same and again the root of my misery. I now had to address the causes and conditions of these hidden defects, admit them to myself and another human being, and humbly ask God to handle them.

I was led through my Ninth Step at this time. Once again, I had to be thorough. Direct amends meant that

I had to seek out the individuals that He led me to and ask their forgiveness. Because I now knew something about my character defects, I went without self-righteousness and without judgment. Then, as our literature tells us, before I was halfway through, I experienced the promises of the Big Book as I had never known them before. I began to reap the harvest of the first nine Steps of this program. I was released from the bondage of my sick nature as an alcoholic. I began to emerge as a person who could finally love and feel compassion.

I am not very far along in my harvest; but today, I have no fear that it is temporary. Today, I know that all people, not just alcoholics, are available to me for meaningful and loving relationships. Today, I know that I have been set free and must rely on this same wonderful, loving God to grant me "patient improvement" with my character defects, as the discussion of Step Six in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* describes it. Today, I am able to love myself and others. Today, I am what people see me to be; my outer life reflects the inner person who is reaping her harvest. And because of the slow and painful journey into the depths of my inner being, I am free to focus on people, places, and things with an attitude of gratefulness, joy, and desire to share my sobriety, my "self," and the gift of love.

J. G., Portsmouth, R.I.



I BELIEVE hope is the one, all-inclusive reward of sobriety. I further hold that hope and my restoration to sanity are closely and necessarily related.

When I first came to AA, I had only a store of negative and painful experience; I had little strength, just enough to make that desperate try at AA. But I had no hope. On blind faith, I believed that maybe what I had heard from my first AA contact would work, namely, if I stayed away from the first drink one day at a time and kept coming around to AA, I would get better.

After four months of following those simple suggestions one day at a time, I was better physically, and my life had become relatively manageable, even happy. I was thrilled with my newfound state of sobriety. I had

it; I wanted with all my heart to keep it. And yet there hung over me a dread, an ever-present fear that I was going to lose this great gift, that I was going to fail at sobriety as I had failed at so many things in my life.

Then one night, around my fourth month in the program, I went to a meeting as usual. A woman chaired the meeting. She said something that I had heard at my first AA meeting and at many others afterward; but it had taken me four months to become capable of understanding this statement: "I need never drink again if I work this simple program to the best of my ability one day at a time."

Suddenly, with those words, I was aware of hope; the fear of losing sobriety fled. I knew then, as I know now from my own personal experience, that this program worked yes-

terday, works today, and will work tomorrow if I work it to the best of my ability. I knew then, as I know now from my own personal experience, that I had the strength, have the strength, and will have the strength to stay sober if I continue to seek it from my Higher Power and the AA Fellowship one day at a time.

What a tremendous reward I received that night — that night when I finally began to share in the hope of this program! I received the foundation for all the other rewards of sobriety — serenity, spiritual growth, a chance for a whole and useful life. For without the hope of staying sober, none of these would be possible.

I say that hope and my restoration to sanity are closely and necessarily related. One of the necessary condi-

tions for sane living and sound mental health is a sense of continuity, i.e., the realization that what was true yesterday is true today and will be true tomorrow.

As a result of my drinking, I lost my sense of continuity. I ended up in a state of total chaos, insanity, and hopelessness. By the grace of God — my Higher Power — and the AA program, I got sober. I stayed sober long enough, one day at a time, to realize from my own personal experience that with my Higher Power, with AA, and with my own individual efforts, I can stay sober. I have an immutable and reliable concept today — the AA program worked, works, and will work. I have a sense of continuity today. I am restored to sanity today. I have hope.

D. M., Philadelphia, Pa.

August 1980

Meetings...

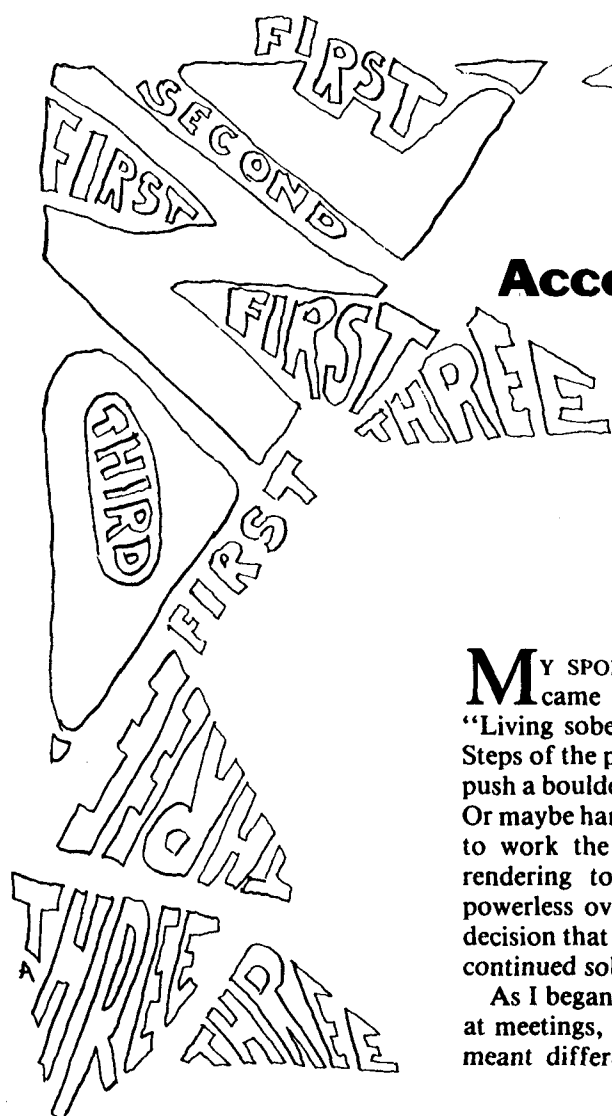
AROUND THE TABLES of late, it has been forcefully brought to my attention that I am not this Fellowship's head troubleshooter, leader, expert, judge, father, confessor, king, or president. I am merely a recovering alcoholic who, through God's patient understanding and AA's help, has stayed away from a drink for just one day at a time. This aspect of sobriety shows some growth, for I recognize the absolute futility of attempting to specify some other alcoholic's program for him or her. The Twelve Steps have long been set; I try to practice them, and the results show.

The above "insight" has been a part of my AA life for some time. The difficulty is that I forget it and

can resume my particular grandeur in the blink of an eye. Recently, as a delightful speaker spellbound his audience of grateful AAs, I began mentally to criticize his talk. When I realized this, I put Step Ten to work and asked God to change my attitude and let me hear. I changed, and it was fine.

Each time I think I know the exact nature of my wrongs, I am confronted by ego in yet another form. I have noticed, however, that there seems to be less trouble with ego when I am attending a sufficient number of meetings *every* week. In my case, attendance seems to be more effective if I don't bunch three in a row and then skip a week. I guess the important thing to remember is that I need AAs to help me, and the best place to find AAs is at an AA meeting. It takes time, but I'm learning!

*"Made a decision to turn our will
and our lives over to the care of
God as we understood Him"*



Accepting and the Third Step

MY SPONSOR told me when I came into the Fellowship: "Living sober without working the Steps of the program is like trying to push a boulder uphill all by yourself. Or maybe harder." So I began trying to work the Steps soon after surrendering to the fact that I was powerless over alcohol — a crucial decision that is still necessary for my continued sobriety.

As I began to talk about the Steps at meetings, I soon found that they meant different things to different

people. And as I gained more sobriety a day at a time and began to work the program, I found that the meanings of the Steps also underwent subtle changes for me.

For example, when I entered AA, I had already admitted that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life was unmanageable. I had simply avoided coming to meetings until I reached that point. Later, when I quit fighting and surrendered to the power of the AA program, I realized that I was truly accepting the First Step in a way different from any that I could have visualized at the very beginning.

Coming to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity was, for this alcoholic, relatively easy by the time I joined the Fellowship. I had traveled the

atheistic route during my drinking days, determined that I had to be in charge and that God could not exist, simply because I said that He did not. Then, I became disillusioned with the man-centered, materialistic world that I had created and gradually decided that there might be a Power greater than the one that I had conceived. So I tentatively accepted the Second Step "by default," having reached the point where I no longer believed that I could — or wanted to — run the universe all by myself and on my private terms.

Good things began happening to me. There were no noticeable changes in my job or the people around me, but I began to enjoy the work and my companions more than I had for many months. Whoever

my Higher Power was, He seemed to be doing a better job of running my affairs than I had been capable of doing during those last ten years of drinking and denying that God existed. One day, I realized that I was literally "forgetting to take a drink" for days — or even weeks — at a time, and I knew that I had taken the Second Step at a deep, satisfying inner level. I had truly come to believe.

When I originally took the Second Step, I quickly went on to the Third and made a decision to turn my will and life over to the care of God as I understood Him, admitting that I did not yet understand Him. Nor, for that matter, did I really understand what "turning it over" meant in practical terms. However, I mentally took the Third Step early on in my program. I had to wait awhile to *experience* the Third Step. It happened this way.

Things had begun to go well at work once again. People who had quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) begun avoiding me during my last years of drinking began talking to me once again. In my second year of sobriety, superiors began to entrust me with responsibility again. And best of all, I began to trust myself, to enjoy my work once more, and to feel some of that old self-confidence that had once run high in me before it began slipping away like a phantom on a foggy night during those last years of heavy drinking.

As my confidence level rose, I dared to dream dreams again, instead

of living in a shadowy nightmare of self-deprecation. So, when an opportunity for a promotion came along after I had been sober in AA for over a year, I applied for it.

The very act of applying for another job was a big step for me, because I had been "hiding out" on the same job for over six years, trying to avoid being noticed as my drinking got worse. Now, I dared to step forward and put my performance in the spotlight again.

At the same moment, I remembered the last time that I had applied for — and received — a promotion. It was after my drinking had become truly alcoholic but before others at work had noticed. Although almost assured of getting that promotion because of friendship and a good track record at the time, I had agonized over the delays caused by red tape and cursed the people who were holding things up. One night, in a drunken fury, I had attempted to call a highly placed official and tell him off. I had been saved the embarrassment (and loss of the job I sought) only by my wife's quick action in unplugging the telephone and hiding it, leaving me to drink, swear, and rage in the den at home, where no one else could see or hear the spectacle.

Now, years later, I was again applying for a promotion — but with the outcome much less assured in advance. I talked to my prospective supervisor, a person I knew, and all seemed to be going well. This

time, I resolved, there would be no repeat of the earlier agony, with or without the bottle. So I turned the matter over to my Higher Power and left it there while I went on working a day at a time.

Things dragged on for three months, but the signs looked good when I discreetly inquired about what was being done. Finally, a few weeks ago, the word came. Another person had been selected for the job instead of me.

I was disappointed but far from

crushed. Somehow, it just doesn't seem all that important this time around. It never crossed my mind to curse or drink about the way things turned out. Instead, I feel that my Higher Power, whom I choose now to call God, has other plans for me. I don't know what they are, but I feel that I've made some progress toward understanding the meaning of our Third Step and the way to apply it to my life.

If so, that's the most important promotion that I could ask for now.

G. B., Alexandria, Va.

Third Step

A Measure of Humility

I BELIEVE THAT Steps One, Two, and Three form a trilogy, and that no one of them will work if the other two are omitted.

Step One means surrender. In other words, alcohol has power over me; it is bigger than I am; I can become totally obsessed and possessed by it. As soon as I came to that realization and felt my whole being rendered helpless, I had surrendered. Automatically, I became ready to believe that another power could arrest the power of alcohol; i.e., I was approaching Step Two.

*There is
humility in the
willingness
to be honest*

Several experiences led me into the full meaning of Step Two. I had, for the first time, communication with another alcoholic when I came to AA. I discovered other people shared the same experiences I'd had with alcohol, but I could see that something was helping them beat it for periods much longer than the interludes when I had been able to stop drinking on my own. Not only that, but so many of them looked happy and full of life.

Second, these same people did not judge me for my terrible behavior. For the first time, I was totally accepted just the way I was — ill and beaten. Although I had always been a very religious person, I thought God had let me down, and any idea of a deity had become extremely remote and confusing to me.

I trusted, to some degree, that whatever was helping these other people in AA could help me, too. I followed along after them, kept attending meetings, and did whatever anyone suggested. I was sober a whole week, two weeks, a month, and then two months. I began to develop something called faith — in exactly what, I wasn't sure. I didn't know how it worked or why, but it worked. "It" was, and is, the Power higher than myself that could arrest my obsession.

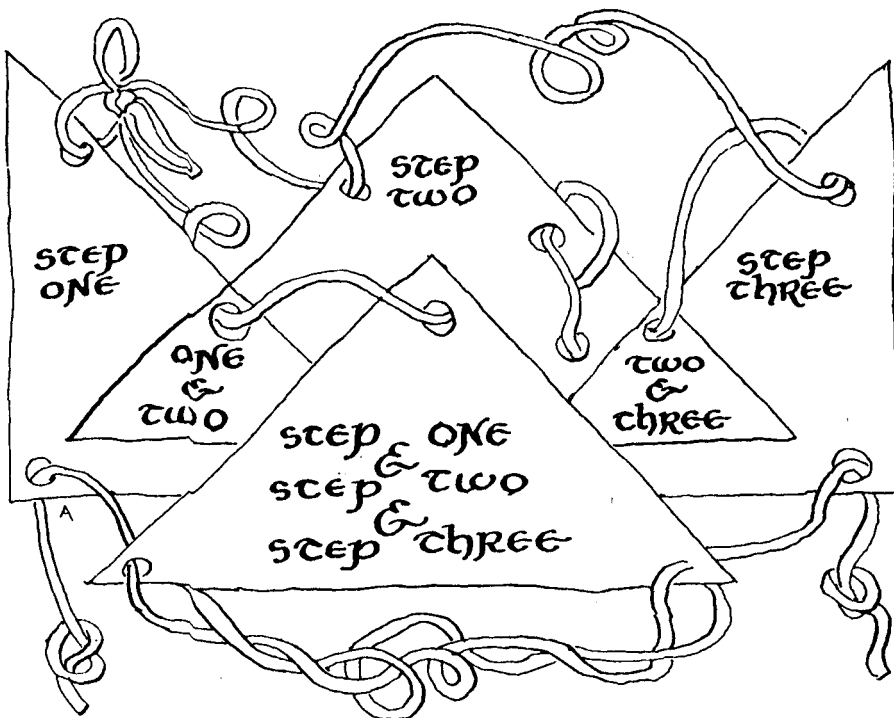
Into my third sober month, I became aware that my peers in AA loved and respected me. To me, this meant that maybe I was worth being loved and respected, and perhaps I

could begin to think of myself in another way besides hateful and guilty. Also in my third month, I became ready for Step Three.

I believe one of the prerequisites of Step Three is a complete understanding and acceptance of alcoholism as a disease or illness that has total power over me and will render me completely helpless in mind, body, and soul after the first drink. And so it was time to make the decision called for in Step Three — to turn my life and will over to the care of God as I *had come* to understand Him. I began to have insights into what "it," now labeled God, was all about. Through constant interrelationship with my fellow AA members, some indefinable force was making me be more honest with myself and people around me. In surrender and in acceptance of the illness, a measure of humility had been achieved, since I had lost some of my false pride. There is humility in the willingness to be honest.

With the acceptance of the illness came the realization that this was for keeps, all the days of my life; also, the acceptance that I was mentally and spiritually ill, and if I was to place my sober life in the hands of this Higher Power, I must be willing to keep putting one foot forward into the unknown, even in the face of fear. This spiritual force was calling me to the potential of love and the goodness buried within me.

Much later, the Twelve Steps began to fit together with an



organized religion, but that is purely a personal choice of mine. AA and any formal religion still remain separate and always will. The spiritual power that arrests the power of my alcoholism is contained within the mutual need and love one alcoholic has for another, and the tools we use are the Twelve Steps and Traditions. Although the meanings contained in the Twelve Steps may be the same as the tenets or theology of an organized religion, the formal church alone cannot arrest my disease. I tried it, but it never worked, until I reached out my hand for

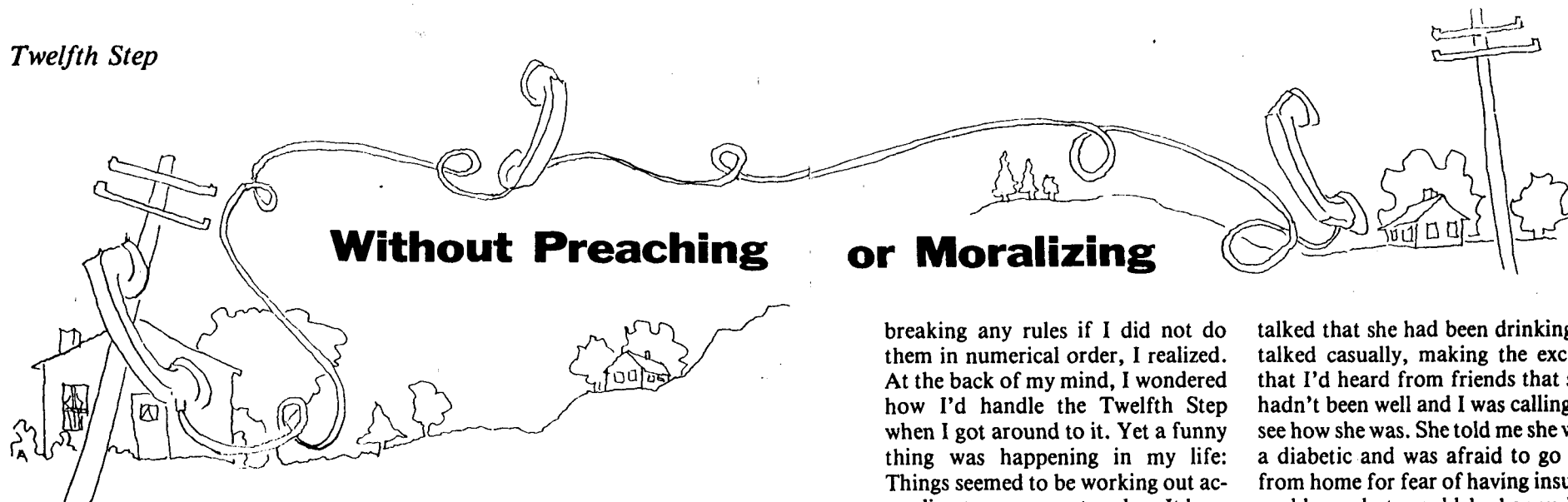
help to another alcoholic.

I have discovered that the temptation to forget where I started from can be great. Many times, I find I have turned over my will for about an hour and taken it right back again. Step Eleven is a help in maintaining Step Three, but there are times when I have to come back and remake that Step Three decision.

This Step, therefore, having developed from Steps One and Two, calls for a commitment to physical, mental, and spiritual health born of humility, honesty, and faith.

E. G., Minneapolis, Minn.

Twelfth Step



Without Preaching or Moralizing

He thought it would be like earning merit badges in the Boy Scouts

I AM AN alcoholic. I had heard about AA long before I was ready to admit this to myself or anyone else, and I had a mental picture of what I thought AA was all about. I imagined that the members were a straitlaced bunch of people who gathered together in a large hall, took turns giving their testimony on the evils of strong drink, and waited for phone calls summoning them to rescue missions. When I attended my first AA meeting, after being a patient in a hospital recovery program, it was a pleasant surprise to

find such a friendly group of people — people from all walks of life with a common problem, alcoholism.

My next wrong impression was about how the Twelve Steps system operated. I thought it would be like earning merit badges in the Boy Scouts: You would have to show proficiency in the First Step before moving up to the next one. At the meetings, I expected people to be called upon to explain how they had completed the Step on which they were working. It took me a while to find out that I had to take the Steps myself, with a little help from my friends, and could take them informally at my own pace.

After I got over the big First Step, I found that I was subconsciously working parts of the other Steps in my everyday affairs. I was not

breaking any rules if I did not do them in numerical order, I realized. At the back of my mind, I wondered how I'd handle the Twelfth Step when I got around to it. Yet a funny thing was happening in my life: Things seemed to be working out according to some master plan. It happened that way while I was still thinking about Step Twelve.

A woman friend, Anne, who knew of my problems with alcohol and association with AA, called me for advice about a friend of hers. This friend, a widow of several months, was drinking heavily, and her son, sisters, and friends were not having any luck getting through to her. Anne asked me if there was anything I could do or suggest.

As she talked, it slowly dawned on me that she was talking about a mutual friend. I'll call this friend "Alice." At one time, she and her husband had owned a bar near where I worked, and almost every day, I would join a group of friends there to drink pitchers of beer at lunchtime. Well, I called Alice on the phone. I knew from the way she

talked that she had been drinking. I talked casually, making the excuse that I'd heard from friends that she hadn't been well and I was calling to see how she was. She told me she was a diabetic and was afraid to go far from home for fear of having insulin problems, but would be happy if I could drop in to say hello.

I went to see her a few days later. I was shocked at her appearance. Although she was clean and tidy, her face showed the ravages of alcohol, and I could smell it in spite of her perfume. She was sipping a soft (?) drink from a large glass, and the ice cubes rattled as her hand shook. Her hoarse speech was slurred as she stubbed her cigarette butt in a full ashtray.

We talked about old times, and she showed me an album full of photographs of earlier, pleasanter days at the bar. She went on to tell me about her older son's being killed in Vietnam and how her husband had drunk himself to death at the age of fifty-two. She cried uncontrollably for a while, then asked what I'd been doing lately.

In a casual, gentle way, without preaching or moralizing, I told her how I'd slowly become addicted to alcohol, to the point where I was helpless against it, and how I'd finally admitted I was an alcoholic and what I'd done about it. I remembered, as I was talking, a sign at an AA meeting: "Attract Rather Than Promote." When I left, she said, "You've given me a lot to think about," and she thanked me for coming over.

She called me a few days later asking me more about my experiences, so I wrote her a letter, going into more details about how it was — my struggles and gradual recovery.

About a week later, Anne, the friend who had asked for the advice,

called to say that Alice had phoned her, all enthusiastic about my visit and letter. She had made arrangements to enter the same hospital that I had gone to. Her son and sister were overjoyed and were going to take her there.

I was certainly glad that I had been able to influence Alice, and I know it helped me. I saw in her where I had once been, and a feeling of gratefulness for the experience came over me. I question less and less the way my Higher Power works in mysterious ways; there have been just too many coincidences to doubt it. He set me up for my Twelfth Step and led me all the way through it. I'm a believer now.

A. B., Torrance, Calif.

Twelfth Step

Who's Responsible?

THE TIME was 7:30 PM; the date, August 27, 1969. I was sitting on a barstool waiting for a cab to take me to meet a guy who was to take me to my first AA meeting. That evening was the end of a five-week drunk, which was the end of a thirty-year drinking career. What had hap-

pened on that day to give me the one requirement for acceptance of this program of AA — a sincere desire to quit drinking — I do not know. Today, I give credit to a loving God as I understand Him.

When I got out of the cab, there was the guy to take me to my first

meeting. I had been wearing the same clothes for a long time, had been drunk for a long time, and had smelled for a long time; my problem was obvious. Eddie did not hesitate or ask any questions as he loaded me into his car and took me to the meeting. For that, I am grateful.

For the next ninety days or so, Eddie was always there to take me to a meeting. I was scared, shaking, sometimes angry; but it didn't bother him. I learned a lesson from him that I used for many years: No matter how sick or shaky a man may be, take him to a meeting.

I took a lot of drunks to meetings, because that's how I was treated when I came in. Several years ago, there started a trend that continues today. A large percentage of people coming into AA come from treatment centers, hospitals, rehab houses, etc. How they get here is not important; whether they stay is. Coming here from various facilities, to my way of thinking, has several disadvantages. They miss the one-to-one concept of one drunk helping another, which is how AA started,

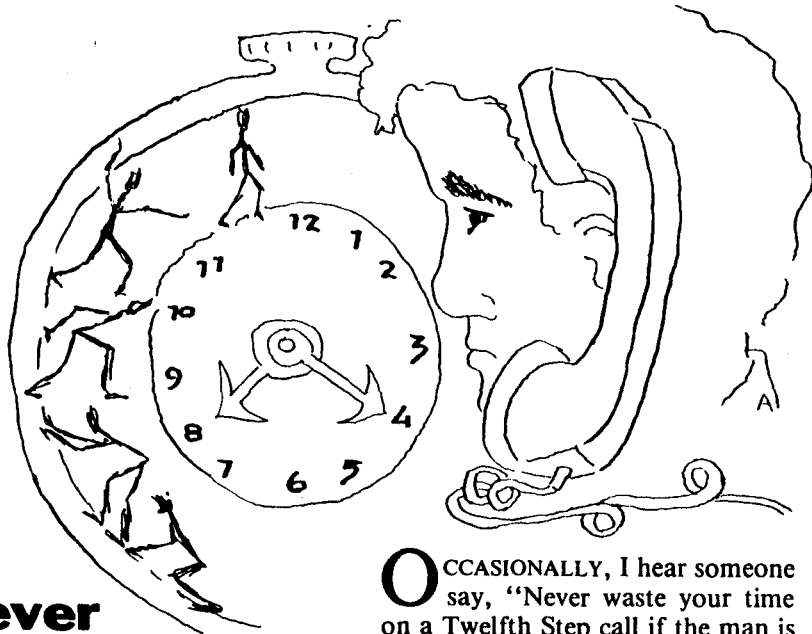
how it grew, and how it will survive. And they sometimes miss being taken by the hand and led through fellowship, meetings, and coffee afterward, to learn to share with one another.

Twelfth-stepping is a vital part of AA's program. Where does the responsibility lie? With the treatment center? With the intergroup? With the group? Or does the responsibility fall directly in my lap? I was twelfth-stepped into AA, and many of my friends were.

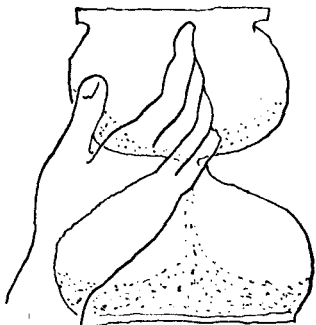
The treatment centers do not twelfth-step, nor do they show people how. Are we old-timers passing the buck? I am guilty of this. I feel that, as an AA member and as a sponsor, I should share the experience of twelfth-stepping with the people I sponsor. How else are they going to acquire the knowledge, experience, and desire to twelfth-step on their own? I feel this is the time to get back to the basics of the program and work the fundamentals that have been successful in the past and will continue to work if we use them.

I. P., Glendale, Ariz.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.



Never Waste Your Time on a Drunk?



OCCASIONALLY, I hear someone say, "Never waste your time on a Twelfth Step call if the man is drinking." I can't go along with that; but then, I'm prejudiced. A couple of AA members "wasted their time" on me when I was drunk.

It was one gray Sunday morning when I first called AA, sick and hung-over and willing to do anything to get my wife off my back. After taking such a drastic step, I couldn't bear the prospect of confronting these people face-to-face; so by the time they arrived, I was again feeling no pain. They had a wonderful message — what I remember of it. I do remember

laughing and crying and telling them what great guys they were. They stayed maybe a half hour, and didn't even flinch when I threw my arms around them and blew my boozy breath in their faces. They left some pamphlets, which I read and put in the bottom drawer of the desk. And that was the end of it. But five years later, considerably sicker in body and spirit, I knew beyond all doubt — AA was the place for me.

These fellows were so anonymous that I never saw them again, even though I told this story many times in the hope somebody would stand up and say, "That's us!" I wanted to thank them for their tolerance for a sloppy drunk and to tell them that some sobriety had eventually sprouted from that call.

There are many ways we can "waste our time" on drunks in AA. In any big-city AA office, a lot of the calls that come in are simple drunk-hauling jobs. Some guy is in the bus station and wants to get to the detox center, or is holed up in a crummy hotel room and wants to get to the VA hospital. Lots of them are drifters, longtime drunks, and professional panhandlers. They're likely to have the remnants of a bottle of wine, hard stuff, or cough syrup that they want to polish off en route. We take on these hauling jobs just because there isn't anyone else to do it. These people seldom have any interest in AA, or even in sobering up. A waste of time? Well, at least we can carry an infinitesimally small

part of the AA message: "I'm in AA, and I care enough about this sick specimen of mankind to give him a hand." Or maybe that's a big part of the message.

I've "wasted my time" carrying the message to people in a recovery center where the views of the staff about AA ranged from mild interest to active dislike. If anyone had kept a box score on the AA results, it would not have been impressive: two or three people known to be sober in AA a year or two later, a little more respect for AA on the part of the staff — that's about it. But I'd do it again.

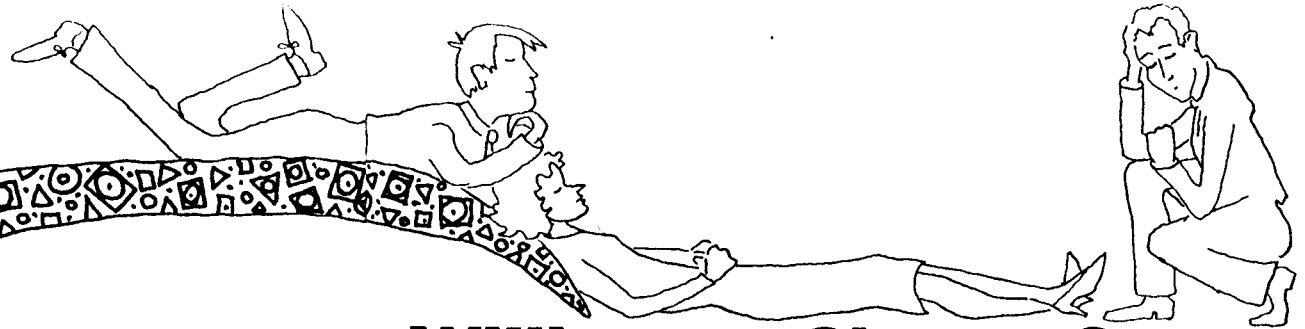
Another way to "waste time" is to keep track of a friend who is drinking himself to death, refusing to admit even the possibility that he is an alcoholic. Or to put in an hour or so on the phone in the post-midnight hours with someone who is drunk and lonely and wants to talk.

It is often said in AA that our sobriety is miraculous because being drunk is an alcoholic's natural state. If we exclude the drunk alcoholic from our feeble attempts to carry the message, we may never get a chance at him when he's sober. My opinion — and this is strictly personal — is that no one is too far gone to soak up a little bit of the AA message.

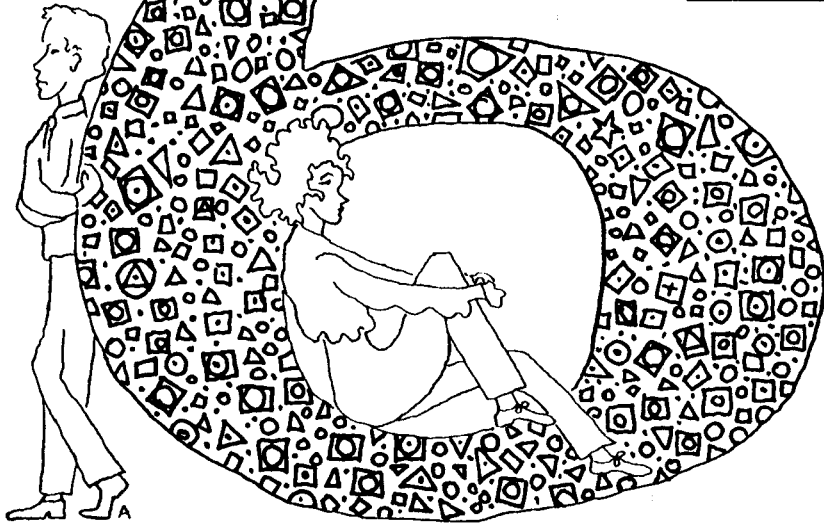
This is my note of thanks to you two anonymous members from sixteen years ago. I hope you carried the same message to a lot of other drunks.

R. J., Salt Lake City, Utah

Were entirely ready to have
God remove all these defects
of character



Are We Really Really Willing to Change?



THE FIRST STEP was a cinch for me. I had run out of options, and the results of my drinking had been devastating; so self-debate about drinking simply didn't exist. I knew I couldn't drink safely. I did the First Step at the moment I entered a hospital for detoxification, and I have never questioned it since.

It then took several weeks to get to the Second Step, but it became ap-

parent that I hadn't stopped drinking on my own. A Higher Power had obviously intervened, so the Third Step was understandable and necessary.

My sponsor pushed, shoved, and tugged, and I eventually did the Fourth and Fifth Steps. From that point onward, I made immense progress. Even the Ninth Step was faced with resolution and courage. I

made the appropriate amends and experienced the feeling of liberation that my sponsor had promised. The other Steps were the logical extension of the program for me. I became active in Twelfth Step work and enjoyed the rewards.

Still, something was missing. There remained lingering feelings of vague discontent. The personality flaws I had uncovered in doing the Fourth and Fifth Steps had diminished — but were still there. And they started up the same old process that had produced feelings I had when drinking — impatience, irascibility, quick temper, and an unforgiving attitude toward others. I didn't like the way I felt, so I had dinner with my sponsor and discussed my situation frankly with him.

He gave me one of his knowing smiles, but said nothing. "Well," I demanded, "what's your solution to this problem?"

"You really think you've done all the Steps, don't you?" he asked. I assured him, somewhat indignantly,

that I had. Hadn't I done the Fourth and Fifth with him? Had he not seen my Twelfth Step activity with his own eyes? Wasn't he aware of how faithfully — in my mind — I was doing the Tenth Step?

"All very true," he said, "but what about the *Sixth Step*?"

That came like a bolt from the blue. Of course, I was willing to change and have my Higher Power remove my defects of character, wasn't I? . . . *Was I?*

If I was sincerely willing to change, why did I remain so much the same? I realized that I had been paying lip service to the Sixth Step. Compared to most of the other Steps, the Sixth is apparently simple. I believed this, because no overt action seemed required. There is none of the dramatic confrontation that exists when we do the Ninth Step, nor is there the feeling of accomplishment that comes with the Twelfth. The Sixth is not dramatic. There are no enthusiastic witnesses to rush up and shake one's hand. It's

a rather solitary affair and hence seems simple.

The Sixth Step means facing ourselves, and that is often more difficult than being honest with another person. I have found it difficult to lie to others but still easy to lie to myself. When I say, all too swiftly, "Of course, I'm willing to change," I now ask myself, "Really? Who's kidding who?" The fact that I am now questioning my willingness to change has increased my ability to be increasingly willing. I simply don't take the process as lightly as I did before. I can't learn anything unless I'm sincerely willing to learn. Nor will making myself promises to change have any significance until the willingness factor is developed.

My sponsor intervened again with a few of his pointed questions. "You played football in college, didn't you?" he asked — knowing full well that I had. He reminded me that I had told him I absolutely hated the

practice, "getting all those lumps and bruises for no good reason." And he also reminded me how I had said I loved the actual game, especially the applause when I did something very well.

"You know," he said, "no one gets all excited about the practice. It has no flash to it. It's the game that counts. But a good game performance requires hard practice. And the Sixth Step can be compared with football practice. If you're going to continue to make progress in the program and with the other eleven Steps, you have to really work on the Sixth Step. Don't stand around on one foot waiting for applause. There won't be any. But you'll play a far better game."

What my sponsor told me carries an important moral lesson. It's one I'm working diligently to learn, because I now — finally — see the true value of the Sixth Step.

R. B., Manhattan, N.Y.

Sixth Step

Defects

*She realized
she was still
trying to manage*

WHEN I FIRST came into the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, almost eight years ago, via a treatment center, I was aware of my overabundance of shortcomings. Having taken the first five Steps of our program while in treatment, I

was eager to get busy with the Sixth and Seventh Steps as soon as I got home. A daily inventory sheet during the first few months provided me with the clues to my most glaring defects of character. These were the ones I felt needed immediate atten-

ing my path to spiritual growth. One of the largest boulders was impatience. First, God broke it down into more manageable chunks, then into smaller rocks, and now into gravel. I'm grateful for gravel! My tremendous boulder of resent-

*"I think of them today
as huge boulders
blocking my spiritual growth"*

tion ("First Things First," I reasoned). At bedtime each night, after thanking God for my sobriety that twenty-four hours, I would list specifically the shortcomings I wanted Him to remove. I was willing.

I thought I was being humble. In retrospect, I realize I was still trying to manage — in this case, by telling Him what defects I wanted removed. Such arrogance! I am fortunate to have a Higher Power who truly understands me, even though it has taken me a while to understand Him. He simply proceeded to do it His way, in His time, and when He felt I was ready.

The only way I ever know where I am today is by looking back. I find this to be true in all areas of my AA growth. In regard to the Sixth and Seventh Steps, I must mentally return to the defects of character I brought with me into AA. I think of them today as huge boulders block-

ment shattered under the power of forgiveness. Self-pity turned to gratitude. Extreme sensitivity changed to empathy.

I still bump into self-justification, self-importance, and all the other chunks of ego with great regularity. I stub my toes on good-sized rocks of laziness and procrastination, turn an ankle on criticism and negative thinking. But the large outcroppings of anger, hostility, fear, guilt, and remorse that blocked my path completely while I was drinking no longer exist. My Higher Power removed those when I finished the first five Steps.

I believe that as long as I remain willing for Him to continue working on the removal of the boulders, humbly allowing Him to do it His way, in His time, and when He feels I'm ready, then everything will continue to progress just fine — one day at a time.

S. K., Naples, Fla.

'A Higher Power I Don't Understand'



THE ONLY PART of the AA program in which I can claim expert status is in postponing the Third Step. For several years, I wouldn't even talk about the problem in meetings, for fear of sounding a jarring note amid the positive statements of faith. Now, I know that many others have had this same problem. The only way to help myself has been to get it out into the open, to share my

difficulties and my small successes.

My entry into AA and acceptance of the First and Second Steps were simultaneous. My powerlessness over alcohol and the unmanageability of my life had been too painfully demonstrated to allow any reservations. And the belief that some kind of higher power could restore me to sanity was based on a solid fact: It had begun to happen, and it was not

of my own doing. I saw that much.

From there on, it got rougher. I was too confused to be even a good agnostic. And the turning of my will and life "over to the care of God *as we understood Him*" implied that some sort of understanding had to come first. Organized religion, I thought, had failed me; the truth must be buried somewhere in the writings of the greatest thinkers.

Back to original sources — the Bible, the Greek philosophers, *I Ching*, Marcus Aurelius, and skipping on through Meister Eckhart to William James, C. S. Lewis, and Teilhard de Chardin. The cultural shock of shifting from Mickey Spillane to this stuff was just too much, and I wound up even more confused. So much for preparing the ground.

Meanwhile, back at the AA ranch,

those people were telling me to keep it simple (okay for simple people, of course): "Keep the plug in the jug, and keep on coming to meetings." It worked. In fact, it worked so well that I got a very thorough grasp of the entire AA program — all except the "spiritual side."

I demonstrated this grasp of the program at the first meeting I was asked to chair, when I had been dry about three months. Spurred on by a strong sense of obligation to share my profound knowledge with my *compadres*, I prepared a series of about twenty flip charts and gave everybody the true word. It went very well, except that I noticed a couple of the members seemed to be having trouble with coughing fits. Two or three even told me it was a good meeting, and the others no doubt chalked it up as an exercise in tolerance.

Some of the people told me that the Steps had to be taken in order, that it was impossible to take any Step properly without completing the previous ones. It didn't work that way for me. I had to go on and muddle through the rest of the Steps as best I could, working them badly to learn how to work and live them better. I believed even then that the Twelve Steps of AA were a magnificently logical sequence of guidelines for living, a sequence hammered out of bitter experience by people who had no book to guide them. And I still believe that One-through-Twelve is the best way. But nowhere

in the Big Book or in any other AA writing do I find that the Third Step, or any other Step, is labeled "Go back to GO" if the hurdle is too high.

So I kept the plug in the jug and kept on going to meetings. Things started to get better (those people were right again). Apart from the obvious improvements in health and job security, I found that I could begin to reestablish relations with the rest of humanity, starting with the AA people, the home group, those who cared. And along with this went more activity in AA, carrying the AA message to those who wanted it, some who weren't sure, and some who just wanted a hand-out.

As for the other Steps, I tried — took a Fourth Step and a Fifth Step of sorts, made some efforts to become willing to have a mysterious power magically remove my defects of character, and made some genuine amends.

After five years in AA, I began again to read the directions, this time with a little more attention than in my marathon reading spree during those first months. And finally, the ultimate concession — I began to listen to what people were saying in meetings. It all added up. There really is just one way to work this program, and that is to work all of it. I was almost ready, but I still didn't understand God.

About this time, I read a little book by J. B. Phillips called *Your*

God Is Too Small. It told me that whatever understanding of a higher power I might achieve by my best flights of reasoning, it would fall short of the reality. This made sense. I don't really understand why things fall down instead of up, why maple trees put out new leaves of exactly the same shape every year, or why steel is hard and butter is soft. There are reasons, yes — but the final "Why?" has no answer. If I can't understand these simple facts of life, my feverish pursuit of the Ultimate Purpose of the Universe must have given a good laugh to whatever was watching. Now, phrases kept coming back to me from the past: "The peace . . . which passeth all understanding"; "Now we see through a glass, darkly." I was ready.

But it took the long arm of coincidence to give me the final nudge in the rear. I was camped out in the sand dunes north of Portales, N.M., 800 miles from home, trying to get my brains back together after the breakup of a thirty-year marriage and the loss of a son. At the end of a week of solitude, I felt the need for some companionship besides the little turtle that came to visit, since he was totally unresponsive to my questions about the Third Step.

The Portales connection in the AA directory led to a dead end, but a kindly soul at the police station sent me to the right man. AA in Portales had been dormant for some time, but they were starting up a new group that very night. Somehow, I

thought, they must have known that I would be in Portales on September 23, 1976, in need of a meeting. The clincher came when I walked into the meeting, a few minutes late, and heard a familiar voice coming out of the amplifier — a tape of a talk by a gal I'd known in AA a few years earlier. It was a good meeting. They didn't have a cake baked for me, but then they probably knew it wasn't my birthday.

I went back to my turtle, who was there on schedule the next day. He deserted me at night, but the coyotes let me know I wasn't alone. Something had happened, but I didn't know what. One night, after the fire had died down, while I was looking at the usual overabundance of stars, I took the Third Step. It was that simple.

In retrospect, I see that all of those first seven years in AA were necessary before I could take this Step. Even the grandiose search for understanding was needed — I had to be convinced that the existence of a higher power was not only logical but inevitable. Then, my feeble attempts at working the AA program had shown that my life could be improved by some sort of connection with that power, no matter how weak the link. Other people's lives had shown me what that power could do. But it took the power itself, a power that I do not understand, to push me over the brink. This is my higher power, and it doesn't matter whether I choose to

call it HP, the Ultimate Purpose of the Universe, God, or coincidence.

Now, four years later, I wish I could say that everything snapped into place and that I immediately became the compleat AA member. But my higher power is obviously telling me that this is only the barest of beginnings. My character defects

apparently have something more to teach me before they will be removed. There is work to do. But everything is easier now that I have a higher power that I don't understand. And those people in my first AA group were right all along when they said, "Keep it simple."

B. J., Salt Lake City, Utah

The Distance Made Good

*How far we came from
where we were*

THERE ARE few subjects that arouse more feeling and controversy than when to take the Fourth and Fifth Steps. An AA member may hover defensively in a corner during the discussion ("I'm still on Step Three"), and blossom out a month later with triumph and goodwill, waving the dragon's horns (or whatever part of dragon anatomy is the trophy) in victory over having taken those Steps.

We all know that there is no one way to do any part of our program and that timing is a personal matter. There is virtually complete agreement, however, that being in the AA

program of recovery means taking all of the Twelve Steps and practicing them to the best of our ability in all our affairs, day by day. That's how it works.

The "Doctor's Opinion" section in our Big Book says that unless a person "can experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of recovery." (Note that it says "entire.") The section on the Fourth Step refers to an inventory as "an *effort* to discover the *truth* [italics mine] about the stock-in-trade." In the "Twelve and Twelve," we find the statement "Without a searching and fearless moral inventory, most

of us have found that the faith which really works in daily living is still out of reach."

That tells me that if I am not entirely confident about my "mastery" of Step Three (or even One and Two), it might help to just pack up what I've got and move ahead (cautiously, but *moving*). Step Three is a *decision*. You've charted your course and made the commitment, and you're hoping, "Everything is going to be all right, and even if something isn't quite right, everything is still going to be all right."

It is true, some overachievers rush in and, before they've gotten the booze out of their brains or had time to hear much wisdom and experience, whip out their Fourth Step over a weekend and promptly corner someone for a Fifth (or a half pint, or whatever). Admittedly, growth and "psychic change" take time (even with a spiritual awakening), but they also require action and continuous practice.

The Fourth Step is not a rite of initiation (nor are the Steps that evolve from it intended to be punishment and penance). It is the means by which we seek truth, and "The truth shall make you free." Our past misdeeds are not moral wickedness; we are not hateful. We are misguided and confused — trapped by our fears, guilts, and resentments, despairing over our ineptitude and failures.

I heard someone say, "We're not

bad people trying to be good; we're sick people trying to get well." *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* says we are tyrannized by natural and good instincts that exceed their proper function. Our emotional problems are the result of *misdirected* instincts, which have become liabilities.

How can we redirect these instincts if we don't make a personal appraisal of the whole guidance system? How can we bear postponing a close look at the truth when our happiness and even our existence depend on it? How can we get a grip on our usable assets if we don't confront the liabilities? Not all of them, mind you. Just the "grosser handicaps," the Big Book says. We don't have to be perfect, not even perfectly awful.

To change entirely, we don't have to cut out big chunks of ourselves; we just have to do some reshaping (drastic in places). We need to alter the proportions — go on a regime of spiritual and emotional "diet and exercise," working off the "ugly flab" and building up the "muscle." "It ain't whatcha got, baby, it's whatcha do with whatcha got that counts."

Our books provide very good guidelines for the inventory. Our Twelve Steps program works better than anything else ever has (as attested to by borrowers who apply the principles to other problems). If you haven't done the Fourth and Fifth — and even if you did them once — try

reading the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" on these Steps at regular intervals. If you're like me, you'll find new direction and insight every time you read them.

Sobriety is a journey, an adventure. Whether it's dark or whether it's light, the people who "make it" are the ones who keep moving. I've heard it compared to the old sailing

days, when the captain logged the "distance made good." He tacked against the wind, back and forth — but what he logged was how far he had come from where he was. Some days when there was no wind, they "sailed on an ash breeze" — towing the becalmed ship with a rowboat — but they kept moving!

H. F., Reno, Nev.

Ideas That Work



ATOPIC frequently discussed at AA meetings is "surrender." This word, when I first got sober, had a sense of "Grit your teeth and bear it." Now, ten years later — in the light of the Third Step — it means something entirely different. The question as I see it now is: "Surrender to what?"

Some years ago, my whole outlook on AA changed as the result of something I heard at a meeting. A man said that when he came into AA, he read the First Step and just could not accept it. Then he heard the Step said aloud, misunderstood one word, and was able to accept that. The mistaken version was: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had be-

come unbearable." This was the story of my life, too. It had become unbearable.

The Twelfth Step speaks of "a spiritual awakening." This awakening is defined in Appendix II of the Big Book as "the personality change" necessary to change our lives from unbearable to comfortable, from desperately miserable to at least reasonably happy.

Now, it occurs to me that my big toe had no personality to be changed; my shoulder had no personality. My entire personality is in my head, and the only things there are ideas, value systems, and attitudes. What does Chapter Five of the Big Book tell us? "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the

result was nil until we let go absolutely."

Step Two talks of being restored to sanity. My big toe wasn't insane. My shoulder wasn't insane. My insanity was all in my head. "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely."

Steps Four, Five, Six, and Seven deal with character defects. Once again, my character wasn't in my big toe or in my shoulder. It was all in my head. "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely."

I have concluded that my life had become unbearable because of a life-long habit of turning my life and my

will over to the care of old ideas that didn't work — making gods of them and, in true Archie Bunker fashion, refusing even to consider any other way of looking at life.

The decision called for in Step Three is simply whether to continue to turn my life and my will over to the care of these old ideas that don't work — or to surrender to ideas that do work. The Higher Power may be many other things to other people — I won't argue with anyone about that — but God as I now understand Him seems to express Himself to me as ideas that work to make my life more comfortable and happy.

The best source of ideas that work, I have found, is AA meetings. So far, God has not spoken to me

from a burning bush or a dark cloud, but every time I go to an AA meeting, He talks to me, using the voice of Ed or Fred, Harry or Mary, Sue or Lou. To hear God, all I have to do is bring my body to a meeting. To understand what I hear, my brain must not be fogged by alcohol or any other mood-changing chemical.

Any time I find myself hurting, it is because I have gone on automatic pilot, turning my will over to old ideas that automatically take me back where I've been all my life. Working the program, to me, is simply a matter of choosing which ideas I surrender to.

J. A., San Francisco, Calif.

Made a Decision to What?

WHEN I CAME to the Third Step, it was pretty frightening for me. It sounded so unsettling and yet so permanent. But I knew I needed to work all of the Twelve Steps in order to gain lasting sobriety. I had tried for nearly twelve years to gain sobriety without working all the Steps and had always found that it just couldn't be done.

I got as far as the third word, "decision." There, I was stopped cold! What *was* a decision, anyway? I didn't really know, so how could I make one? For all too many years, I

hadn't really decided anything — I had rolled with the tide and blamed everyone else for the messes I got myself into. And now I was asked to make a decision.

The closest thing I could come up with to describe making a decision was: making a total commitment and following it through with action. Commitments hadn't been my long suit, either, and I had always considered myself a "reacter," not an "acter." But I wanted sobriety, and I thought I might be able to make my decision — at least for the

next twenty-four hours, if I could do it that way.

The next problem came with the words "turn our will and our lives over," because I didn't know what my will or my life really was. I had always referred to myself as a strong-willed person, when I really meant that I was stubborn and bull-headed. But I was almost sure that wasn't the kind of will the Step was talking about or asking me to turn over.

After doing a lot of soul-searching and asking others, I decided that my will meant all of my thoughts, inner feelings, behavior, impulses, and desires, and maybe even my subconscious. My life meant my surroundings, my daily living routine, situations, events, and other people. To me, it meant I would be turning over everything in my life — not just the part of it that I was eager to give up, but all of it!

That sounded like a mighty big order. I wasn't sure that I could even attempt it, much less do it. But once again, I thought I might be able to if I could do it on just a twenty-four-hour basis. I knew I couldn't do it alone. I would need the people I knew in the program; I would need prayer; I would need meditation. Most of all, I would need to learn that it was okay for me to need!

Finally having some understanding of what the Third Step was saying, for me, I began to work on it in this way: I committed both the inside me and my outside life to God, as I

understand Him. The "God" part of this Step seemed the easiest part for me. I hadn't lost my God while I was drinking. In my blurred mind, He had become a little less loving and a bit more judgmental; but I hadn't lost Him.

In only a short time, just a few twenty-four hours, I again had the loving God of my childhood, and things were beginning to improve. But, like other recovering alcoholics, I have a tendency to take back my will every now and then. It usually isn't too long before I realize my mistake. I find myself thinking about things that go against my own conscience, or my stomach lets me know that I'm not comfortable. And I have to call on God and let Him have the control again.

I like to run things; I like to control others; and I seem to enjoy making a mess out of my life. So turning it over to God sometimes takes constant effort on my part. But with time and awareness, it seems to take less and less effort, as I let life happen — instead of trying to make it happen.

My twenty-four hours are beginning to accumulate a little now. As I attend my meetings regularly, talk with my sponsor, and work my program, I find more and more time and opportunity for me to practice being myself. When I allow God to keep the control that was once so hard for me to concede, I am at long last free to be myself!

M. S., Minneapolis, Minn.

Hearing, Not Just Listening

*“Having yesterday
out of the way
has set me free to enjoy
the incredibly wonderful
possibilities for
a sober today”*

I HAVE NEVER met an AA who said he got right to work on the Fourth Step as soon as he got sober (although it may have happened). Most of us apply our skill in procrastination until something happens to make taking the Fourth Step mandatory, rather than suggested.

The first time I attended AA, four years ago, the mass of the Twelve Steps overwhelmed me. None of it seemed possible, and I failed to see the value of such a chore. Needless to say, I drank again. The second time, two years ago, I determined I would work the first three Steps and would definitely *not* work Step Four, and that was that. I drank again.

In April of 1980, my third (and I hope final, successful) attempt found me with a different attitude. At first, I held on to my old ideas and often repeated, “The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.” But I increased my attendance at meetings,

usually making at least one each day. I also started *hearing*, not just listening to, what was being said around me. It had been bluntly put by one old-timer: “If you don’t work the Steps, you’re going to drink again.” Period. Over and over, the winners were telling how it worked for them, and their success stories always included the Steps, especially Four and Five.

Crediting myself with above-average intelligence, I had to ask how much wisdom there could possibly be in continuing my old stand. Everything else was working that had been suggested to keep me sober. Why not the Steps as well?

Even after I resolved to work Step Four, I managed to postpone any serious attempts until the night I found myself at a Step study meeting. This was, of course, the one weekly meeting I had tried to avoid as often as possible. Naturally, they were on Step Four that night. It was a powerful meeting for me. Self-deceit was stripped away, and I saw myself as I never had. I realized that the work I had done on Step Four so far was anything but fearless and searching. It was a lie, however unwittingly it had been told.

I began again. I wrote down what I had learned at the meeting and put the notebook away. One month later, I began once more. Something strange happened to me that night. I believe it was the beginning of what was to become the most profound spiritual experience I had ever

known. When I began writing, I literally could not stop, until I just had to get some sleep. I was similarly “afflicted” the next morning and worked for seven hours at a stretch and on into the night. A bit more work the next day, and I felt a wave of relief. I smiled and called my sponsor.

The next night, my sponsor and I took Step Five, walking through the muck of my past. As the hours went by, a curious feeling slipped over me. There was a sense of warmth and light and joy unlike anything I’d ever experienced. There was a sense of a great burden being lifted gently away.

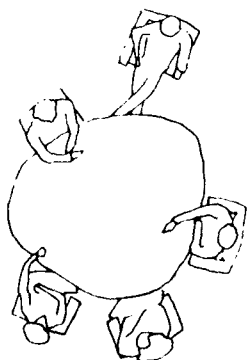
I, who years before had told God to get out of my life and leave me alone, now felt the presence of Something inexpressibly near and beautiful. It was the miracle of rain on a barren desert. The Big Book described the feeling as one of “walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.” I had not believed it could happen to me. I, who had courted death with such determination for so long, now began to understand something about life.

I cannot find words urgent enough to encourage others to get to work on Step Four, and then to waste no time getting to Step Five. Having yesterday out of the way has set me free to enjoy the incredibly wonderful possibilities for a sober today.

B. T., Juneau, Alaska

Around the Tables

Practice the Principles



AROUND THE TABLES, when we talk about the Twelfth Step, more often than not it is in terms of twelfth-stepping — that is, helping newcomers to AA. Naturally, *some* attention is focused on the other aspects of the Step, namely, the spiritual awakening and the practice of AA principles in all our affairs. But do we go into those aspects as deeply as we should?

I have recently been receiving a number of pointed reminders about the practice of principles. It is easy to practice principles at AA meetings and in meditation times at home; but once out the door, it is another matter.

I must admit also that I sometimes stumble about the principles right at an AA meeting. As a matter of fact, even in the quiet times, early in the morning, I can catch myself reflecting on someone else's defects and shortcomings. Fortunately, as sobriety lengthens and more meetings are attended, I am getting better — just as promised if I didn't take that first drink.

Each morning now, and often during the day, I ask for help in my efforts to make the quiet meditation times a basis for practicing AA principles in all my affairs that day. Simply asking for help seems to be a help in itself; with this seeking, life becomes more beautiful and exciting. Others may not realize yet that I am trying to practice AA principles in all my affairs, but *I* know I am trying. Most important, I realize I need help to do so. That means I am coming to grips with my ego. When I do, I go out the door — and find people much easier to deal with.



Goodwill Run Riot

This newcomer carried the message to everyone — whether they wanted it or not!

BEFORE I CAME into AA, I was a good (or bad) example of what the Big Book refers to as “self-will run riot.” In personality development, I had not advanced beyond the “terrible twos.” I suffered from the “I want what I want when I want it” syndrome.

I loved my family, but their needs had to come after mine. I respected my employer, but his work had to

come second to my satisfaction. I was devoted to my friends, but only so long as I did not get too thirsty. My needs must be met, my thirst must be quenched regardless of wife, family, friends, and job.

After I became an active member of AA, all that changed — or, to be really honest, some of it changed. Here was a program that gave me life, health, sanity, and freedom, but only at the cost of sharing, at the cost of working with others.

I wanted what you folks in AA had, and you told me to “go to any length to get it.” But ah, that’s where you made a big mistake. For on the strength of two words, “any length,” my “self-will run riot” turned into “goodwill run riot.”

The zeal of the neophyte took over. I wanted what you had! And I was willing! I was sober! My heart

was in the right place! Not only did I want to “give it away,” I wanted to give it to everyone — whether they wanted it or not.

I remember writing to the secretary of my former college class, telling her that I had joined AA and asking her to publish it in our next newsletter so that all my old classmates would get the message. (I was sober perhaps a month at this time and was around AA rather than in it; it took about five more years before I got *into* AA.) I remember being hurt and disappointed when my “recovery” was not mentioned in our next newsletter. God bless our class secretary; she had far more sense than I had. (And I’m sure she’d never even heard of AA’s Traditions.)

There were other examples of my goodwill run riot — like neglecting

my family to sit up all night to “keep a new member sober” (he got drunk in the morning as soon as we left).

AA is a very patient and caring fellowship. It is a big association in many ways. There is room for people of all races, all denominations, all levels of society. There is also room for the zealots, those who think (as I once did) that carrying the message means saving the world.

In time, most of us mellow and mature. I believe I have. I had my last drink in May 1968, and I am gratefully and contentedly sober. I still want what you have, and I’m still “willing to go to any length,” but I’ve gained a bit of “the wisdom to know the difference.”

I love the “slippers” and the zealots and even the bleeding deacons. AA has room for us all.

Anonymous, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

July 1981

AA and Prison

'Where I Found My Sobriety'

I WENT BACK to prison this time under new circumstances. I went back as an AA speaker. Four years ago, I was an inmate. In prison, I kept hearing over and over at AA meetings that just abstaining from alcohol wasn't the answer to staying out of trouble; I had to sober up my thinking, and that meant sobering up mentally, morally, and most of all, spiritually. When I started doing that, things began to happen. My

values — what I wanted out of life — started changing for the better.

I wanted sobriety and peace of mind. To live in a place where I would be welcome, comfortable, and treated like a normal human being. To find a job and get to work, so I could be and feel independent. To have understanding counselors and friends to help me stay sober and assist me with my everyday problems. To live in an atmosphere

designed to help me stay sober. To associate with people like me who had, or formerly had, problems the same as mine.

Those were the things I wanted when I was released from incarceration, and I found them in the halfway house I went to. I became an equal part of a group of men who shared the same responsibility, counseled together, and learned to respect one another. In my daily living, I started to use the AA tools I had learned about in prison, and I started feeling peace of mind and contented sobriety. I can only thank my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God, the prison alcoholism program, and the men in my group for helping to sober me up mentally, morally, and spiritually.

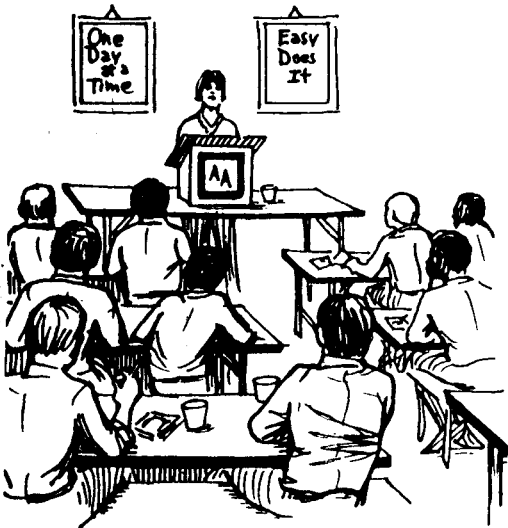
I have been living alone for over a year now, but only a couple of blocks from the halfway house and less than a mile from my clubhouse (for AAs), so I still associate with those who have the same kind of problems that I have. In case I get stinking thinking, I have those places and friends close by.

This past year, I was invited back to prison, and I went back — to where I found my sobriety, my tools for my new way of life. It was indeed a great blessing for me to speak before the men, to share with them some of my experiences since my release. But most of all, while I was in that huge room, it brought back a lot of good memories of the serenity and understanding given to me by AA in a correctional institution.

R. H., Wichita Falls, Tex.

AA and Prison

A Gift From Prison



I HAD BEEN in AA for a little over a year when I was asked to attend a meeting at the Federal men's penitentiary in our area. I accepted, and then began to wonder why I had said yes.

The person who had asked me didn't know that my best friend had been raped and murdered five years earlier. Immediately after her death, I kept myself in a drunken stupor in order to erase the images that kept crowding everything else out of my mind. For years afterward, I harbored feelings of hate and resentment toward the whole legal system for allowing such things to happen. I

ranted and raved, not only against criminals, but against lawyers, police, judges, psychiatrists, any and all criminal institutions and rehabilitation centers. I judged everything and everyone. I thought God, supposing He did exist, was nothing but a bloodthirsty, unfeeling, vengeful tyrant. Yet here I was, five years later, getting ready to go and meet some of these people.

I had come to accept my friend's death, had grieved for her, and had gradually relegated her to the closed chapters in my life. I sometimes thought of her, but the fear and the hate were not there. With AA, I had found my God, a God of love, compassion, and understanding. I have accepted my powerlessness, not only over alcohol, but also over my pride, my intolerance, my impatience, my desire to control people and events. I have given God complete control. I was a little surprised that He was asking me to visit a prison, but as usual, I dismissed it with "I know You'll tell me why eventually."

After the initial nervousness at slamming, locked, and barred doors, the echoing walk down the long corridors, and my first contact with the prisoners, I relaxed. At the end of

the meeting, I was asked to say a few words to the prisoners.

It is an experience I shall cherish for the rest of my life. As I sat facing these men, a calmness such as I had never known warmed my heart, and I suddenly had the feeling that I was with old, dear friends. I was able to tell these men in a steady and clear voice that I wasn't there to pity them or judge them. I was just there to tell them that I loved them.

That's what AA has done for me. It has given me love for my fellow human beings.

Only when I returned home did I understand what had really happened. There had been one little bit of unfinished business in my accep-

tance of my friend's death — my attitude toward the man who had killed her. I didn't hate him anymore. However, it was only with my visit to that prison that I forgave him and was finally able to love him. Not to hate is all right, but to love is so much better.

When I went to the penitentiary, I thought I was going to help someone. But God had better ideas. I shall carry with me forever the warm handshakes and shy smiles of these convicts. They are not aware of the great gift they have given me. It always seems that when I think I'm going to give something, I end up on the receiving end of marvelous things. AA is like that.

M. R., Ste.-Foy, Que.

Steps to Awareness

BEFORE I CAME into AA, I answered to about ten different nicknames. I had as many names as I had roles and masks. But I had no identity. I was whoever you wanted me to be, a sailboat out on a lake with no destination, blown in first one direction, then the other.

When I quit drinking, my very soul cried out to be known, to be together, whole, unified, under one name. And gradually, through working the Steps and with the loving guidance of the Fellowship, I began to get to know myself. It was like groping around in a darkened room, bumping into half-familiar pieces of furniture, seeking, searching for orientation.

The First Step gave me my first step in identity. I had always looked outside myself — for my name, for the answer to all my needs. I looked

to people, places, and things and, of course, to booze. Ironically, the alcohol I used to find answers gave me the first step in identity — I am an alcoholic.

I had no trouble trying God. I was grateful that a Higher Power would help me. So, with Steps Two and Three clutched to my heart, I went on to Four and Five. It was there that the door to self-awareness opened wider. I took my Fifth Step with a wise and kind counselor, and he looked at the fragmented pieces I brought him, and we pieced together at least an outline.

I have many defects still, but I have a better idea of how I can stay away from that first drink and stay comfortable. And as I make amends, I can see mirrored in faces the acceptance that I had to first learn to grant myself.

Step Ten, taking a daily inventory, is valuable, too, in my search for identity. I take a positive, clarifying inventory now. What have I done or left undone that reinforces the clues to who lives under this skin? I'm learning to recognize, then accept, then trust my feelings.

Probably, the biggest help to me in identity comes from Step Eleven. When I get quiet, am still, and try for a conscious contact with God, amazing insights float into my mind. Both knowledge of God and love seem to grow with self-understanding.

I used to think identity was static,

a fixed thing. But by carrying the message to other alcoholics and trying to practice these principles in all my affairs, I see changes in those others — and in myself. The changes are chances, and we get a new one each day.

First, people in the program influenced me by believing in me. Then came trust and belief in the self that I am. And last comes responsibility for myself as a person — a worthwhile person.

AA has helped me to do something unexpected — it has helped me give birth to *me*.

T. J., Houston, Tex.

Beyond Step Three

I ONCE CONTRIBUTED to the American Atheist Society. It was a time when I was concerned with what I called intellectual honesty. Since I'd never spoken directly with God, face-to-face, I assumed that the only honest position to take was atheism. However, atheism was accompanied by hopelessness and despair, and despair brought on miserable physical complaints. My body ached all over nearly all the time.

Because a spiritual awakening had once been given to me, I would occasionally lapse into what, strangely, I called spiritual delusion, and this was accompanied by emotional health and physical comfort. However, I was unable to get the message, did not comprehend the association between good health and so-called delusion. Invariably, I would insist on what I called intellectual honesty. So I would cast off "spiritual delusion" — and lapse into despair accompanied by physical pain.

Spiritual progress means working the whole program

With three years of sobriety and "intellectual honesty," my recovery was a painful charade. I was sober, yet living in pain with no discernible cause.

Paradoxically, during that time, I was actively seeking spiritual growth, actively trying to maintain, create, develop, or be given another conscious contact with God. Assiduously, I read material covering numerous religions. I prayed. Yet I remained in a state of painful sobriety.

What, then, could I do? I had already received a spiritual awaken-

ing, yet I was unable to maintain belief in my own experience. So I suffered. My suffering culminated in a desire for an end to my life. The most available poison was alcohol. I relapsed. Page 66 of the Big Book describes exactly what happened to me: The insanity of alcohol returned.

Some of us are sicker than others, but AA had made its mark; during withdrawal, I returned to meetings. That's where I belong. Resigned to an unavoidable destiny, I took up the Steps where I'd left off.

And that's where I discovered the solution to my physical pain. In my recovery, I'd left off at Step Three. I had not only left off, but frozen on Step Three. I'd failed to work on

through the Steps. I'd obtained a spiritual awakening; I had been given sobriety; I'd had my compulsion taken away; but I hadn't paid the full price. I hadn't worked beyond Step Three, and that was where the solution lay.

As the Big Book says in Chapter Five, "Half measures availed us nothing." For me, every Step became necessary. For me, it was necessary to go beyond Step Three.

As it stands now, I am attending meetings where the full Twelve Steps are studied and talked about and worked. I have come to believe in my own spiritual awakening, and my pain is gone. I've found painless sobriety, beyond Step Three.

K. S., Wenatchee, Wash.

September 1981

Basic to Freedom

*“Without a searching and fearless
moral inventory, most of us
have found that the faith which really works
in daily living is still out of reach”*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

THE DISCUSSION was on Step Four. One of the members stated she didn't write anything down and there were many things she just didn't care to bring out. Others showed a strange reluctance to be bold about the Step, insisting that we needed to examine our assets more than our defects. I recalled the portion of *AA Comes of Age* devoted to the development of the Twelve Steps. Bill notes that there had been a procedure comprising six steps, and the second was: “We made a moral inventory of our defects or sins.” Now, that tells us in nice, simple, straight language what the early AAs had been doing before the Twelve Steps emerged in written form.

Bill reveals his mental state just

prior to writing the Steps: “Our Steps would have to be more explicit. There must not be a single loophole through which the rationalizing alcoholic could wiggle out.”

There should be no doubt as to what the Step Four inventory is about. Just as clear is the language in the fifth chapter of the Big Book and in the “Twelve and Twelve” — the inventory is intended to list our defects and shortcomings. Steps Five, Six, and Seven have little meaning if we think the Fourth Step is about our assets.

The Fourth Step is basic to freedom, and I like my freedom. I'm still working on my Fourth Step, because I haven't attained spiritual perfection yet.

D. R., Lathrup Village, Mich.

A Time-Tested Program of Recovery

*The Twelve Steps
are the best
treatment for
our disease*

GOING TO meetings and not drinking do not treat my alcoholism. Working the Twelve Steps treats my alcoholism. If all I do is go to meetings and not drink, eventually I'll suffer from untreated alcoholism. Untreated alcoholism comes out as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, apathy, boredom, despair, and other unpleasant symptoms.

With unfortunate frequency, I've seen men and women with varying amounts of sobriety beset by those crippling conditions. Some of them have had ten, fifteen, twenty, or more years of going to meetings and not drinking. Some wind up drunk. Others end up in the hospital with "nervous breakdowns." Some kill themselves. Many try to solve their problems with mood-changing drugs provided by doctors who should know better but obviously don't.

In the foreword to *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, we read: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature,

which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

In my experience, that is 100 percent true. Precise, specific, and definite, the Steps offer a path to growing mental, emotional, and spiritual health. They provide direction for lives of expanded joy and usefulness. Anytime I take a drug to treat my depression, anxiety, fear, or inability to sleep, I'm wrong. Those symptoms are signs that there's something within me that's not right. I've seen enough AAs led back to drinking by the prescription pad to be sure the answer is not to try masking the symptom with a mood-changing drug. The answer is to look within myself and then do what's necessary to correct the problem.

Perhaps, my sleeplessness is caused by something as simple as too much coffee. Possibly, my anxiety or uneasiness can be relieved by a program of exercise designed to drain off tensions accumulated during the day. On the other hand, my symptoms may be the inevitable result of untreated alcoholism. Once again, going to meetings and not drinking do *not* treat my alcoholism. The Twelve Steps treat it. Meetings and sobriety create a climate where my alcoholism can be treated by working the Steps. If I don't use the Steps, I'm eventually going to develop all those painful and unhappy symptoms because of my failure to do enough with the pro-

gram to get what AA offers.

Six years ago, an AA I knew was deep in depression and riddled with fears from untreated alcoholism. He put himself into a treatment facility. He had been sober eleven years and had never worked the Steps. That's right! Eleven years of sobriety—and suffering so severely from untreated alcoholism that he put himself in an alcoholic treatment hospital. He went through the three-week program for a few thousand dollars, got

*"...the answers for a drunk
at any stage of sobriety
are to be found
in the Big Book"*

out, entered another treatment facility, and went through its three-week program, taking part in psychodrama, group therapy, individual therapy, counseling, testing, evaluation, etc.

Both of those facilities speak highly of AA and describe its important role in their treatment approach. However, no one in either place told this man that if he worked the Twelve Steps, he'd get rid of his depression and fears. Although the facilities employ AA members as counselors, no one seemed to understand that the answers for a drunk at any stage of sobriety are to be found in the Big Book. Not surprisingly, when the man began to take Fourth and Fifth Steps and make amends,

he found freedom from his symptoms.

Another man I know was sober sixteen years and had been acutely depressed and afraid during the last six years of that period. Then, he ran

*“I suffered from
untreated alcoholism,
because I hadn’t
done enough with the Steps”*

into some people who explained to him that, while sober sixteen years, he had managed to miss most of the AA program. He had never worked the Steps. Now, he began. He, too, found his fears disappearing and his depression lifting.

“When you’ve been sober for years, it’s hard to believe that your answers still lie in the Big Book,” explained a man who had a similar experience after a number of years without drinking. “I started to think I needed psychotherapy or hospitalization. I suffered from untreated alcoholism, because I hadn’t done enough with the Steps. When I got busy with them, it was like walking into a large room with only one small light. As I continued to take inventories and Fifth Steps and made more amends, the light gradually became brighter.

“One of the problems of getting fouled up with a substantial amount of sobriety is that a person finds it

almost impossible to understand that his answers still lie in working the Twelve Steps. I didn’t drink during this time, but ultimately would have without the freedom that came from using the Steps. This is the point where pills become attractive; we’re willing to do almost anything to get rid of the psychic pain within us.”

Both the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* point out with powerful clarity that the AA program is not just for staying sober. Sobriety is the beginning, not the end. The AA program is a transforming prescription for a life of growing health, usefulness, and joy. By working and reworking all of the Twelve Steps on a continuing, lifetime commitment, we experience the promises spelled out on pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book and the guarantee quoted earlier from the foreword of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

Those guarantees, telling what you and I may expect as a result of working the Steps, speak of wholeness. They don’t describe alcoholics who traded drunkenness for sober terror or dry despair. The Big Book and the “Twelve and Twelve” promise us the capacity to live soberly, confidently, usefully, and joyously — *if* we treat our alcoholism by working the Twelve Steps. If I haven’t experienced the program’s promises, it is because I haven’t fulfilled the program’s conditions.

P. M., Riverside, Ill.

'...As We Understood Him'

ONE SUNDAY afternoon, I was talking to a nonalcoholic friend, telling him my story and how God had removed the compulsion to drink from my life. He marveled and said that he couldn't begin to conceive what it must be like to be addicted and held in bondage to a substance for twenty-five years and then to be freed by the power of God. I told him that it was possible for any drunk who wanted to stop drinking to do so by following the AA Twelve Steps program. I then had him read the Steps, and he asked why it was written in two of the Steps "God as we understood Him" instead of just plain "God." I answered as I usually do when either an AA or a non-AA asks that question — by explaining that some drunks are atheists or agnostics, and those added words give them the choice of forming their own concept of God and using whatever power they feel is greater than themselves.

I explained that in the infancy of AA, there were objections to the unequivocal use of the term "God," and that the founding fathers

wanted AA to be there to help *all* drunks, even if they didn't believe in God. So the clause "*as we understood Him*" was added, and that satisfied the objections.

The answer satisfied my friend, and it also satisfies some nonbelievers who come to AA. However, it did not completely satisfy me, and it never has. By a "coincidence," the topic of a recent Sunday-night Step meeting was the Third Step, and as I sat there reading that Step for the thousandth-plus time, it brought to my mind what my AA brother had said three months earlier. He asked, "Couldn't that be interpreted to mean 'as my understanding of God is growing'?" I remember thinking, "That's a neat way of looking at it," and then dismissing it from my thoughts. But that night, it bothered me. I read it again. "Made a decision" — that's clear; I know what that means. "To turn our will and our lives over to the care of God" — that's clear, too. "*As we understood Him*" — that's not so clear.

Then, suddenly, I *understood* what I was reading. At the same

time, I realized that this Step need not be the stumbling block it has been to many in AA when they felt that they weren't able to turn their wills and lives over to the care of God. Step Three does not ask us to turn our will and life over to God immediately — only to *make a decision* to do so. Then, after some understanding of God has come to us, the decision has already been made, and it becomes a matter of letting go and letting God, of implementing our decision. Looked at this way, it becomes "*insofar as we understood Him*," so even if we haven't gotten any direct messages from God, we can simply go on with Step Four, which helps us find out where we are *now*. Continuing the Steps, we reach Eight and make a list of all the people we've harmed; then, it becomes easier to let go of control over our lives.

I had quite an awakening that night. The addition made by our founders did not change the meaning of the sentence, I realized, but simply acknowledged that some would understand more of God sooner than others. They gave us

slowpokes time to come to *some* understanding without getting discouraged because it didn't come all at once. It appears to me that it has nothing to do with the conception of what God *is* to each of us, but instead refers to our ability to understand what God is trying to communicate to us as alcoholics.

So far, all I have been able to understand of what God is trying to tell me is (1) don't use alcohol, (2) tell others what has happened to me, and (3) let go and let God run my life. Those messages have come through loud and clear.

This realization — that there is another way of interpreting the Third Step — has been of great spiritual help to me. I have come to believe, along with the Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker ("The Spiritual Angle," printed in the October 1955 Grapevine and reprinted in November 1978), that "God is what has made AA and today inspires it and keeps it growing." God runs AA (along with the rest of the universe), and His hand is clearly seen in the inspired wording of Step Three: "*as we understood Him*."

F. H., Santa Fe, N.M.

Making Amends

*The Twelve Steps
give us a way
to repair and rebuild
the past*

DO ANY OF the following remarks sound familiar? "The one I hurt the most when I drank was myself." "I make amends by staying sober." "When I wrote the list of people I had harmed, I put my name at the top of the list."

Those remarks turn up often in AA meetings when Steps Eight and Nine come up for discussion. However, like much of the conventional wisdom in our Fellowship, they have no connection at all with the AA program.

Significantly, the Steps say nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. They say nothing

about "making amends to myself." Nowhere is there talk about "forgiving myself." Far more to the point, the Twelve Steps provide me with specific instructions on a way to repair and rebuild the past so that I feel forgiven.

And that works!

Forgiveness is a commodity I heard about frequently in the religion of my youth — divine forgiveness, that is. To my growing despair, however, no one showed me how to experience forgiveness. I never learned how to feel forgiven. There was no method that would remove the growing load of guilt and acute discomfort I carried.

Believing in nothing by the time I arrived in AA, I heard, for the first time in my life, about "God *as we understood Him*." With a nearly audible sigh of relief, I saw that nobody in AA argued about whose Higher Power was higher. My new friends said, "Just approach God on the basis of *your* understanding."

Moved by their interest and love, I began to live with a newfound hope and direction and slowly started to

work with the Twelve Steps. A written inventory after a year of sobriety, then a Fifth Step, and I experienced an awareness of God that was new and strengthening. Halting efforts with Steps Six and Seven seemed to make some improvements in me. My relationships with God and with other people were on different ground, and my life was demonstrably better.

Waiting as long as I possibly could, I finally went from there into the amends Steps: Eight and Nine. Apologizing has never been my favorite activity. Rather, I've been influenced by the person who exclaimed, "I may have my faults, but being wrong is not one of them."

Pain, my most effective motivator, finally moved in and made the decision for me. I made a list of those I had harmed. In my opinion, that list should be written and should include *everyone* ever harmed, whether they are alive or dead, whether or not it is possible to find them, whether or not amends "would injure them or others." I think we should write the complete list first, then begin deciding what to do in each case.

On the question of someone who deserves amends but can't be found, an AA friend of mine in Chicago has a precise answer. He asks, "If he owed you money, do you think you could find him?"

Early in my sobriety, I made a substantial production of looking up some people in other parts of the

country I owed money to from my drinking years. I paid them and basked in their complimentary responses to the repayment. As with many things in my life, I created a mild tumult about this and managed to mention it to most AA friends of mine, regardless of what we were discussing.

In making my amends list, however, I assiduously overlooked those who were close to me, those who had put up with me when no one else would, those who had bought me out of trouble, who had been shriveled by my sarcasm, frightened by my anger, and appalled at my complete lack of concern for anyone else. I was so busy "making amends to myself" and "being good to myself" that I ignored the most important amends of all.

Eventually, after two years of not drinking, I was unable to continue lying about my failure to work the program in this critical part of my life. Inner pain overpowered my talent for self-deception. I gave up, once again, and began to follow directions. With immense reluctance but with no other options, I made those amends, and wonderful things began to happen. I started to experience the promises on pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book.

Another important change appeared. Where before I could pray but never quiet my thoughts for meditation, I could now sit still and meditate for twenty minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes at

night. In a few months, this grew to half an hour in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening. Healing those relationships had dissolved a block that had prevented meditation.

While I might talk endlessly about my contact with God and my spiritual growth — and I frequently have — the best measurement for my relationship with God is the condition of my relationships with other human beings. If they're in bad shape, then my lofty spiritual talk is just empty conversation. At that point, what I need to do is repair my part in the damaged relationships. Without that, my chances of growing closer to God are nil. It's all connected.

A Big Book discussion of amends (page 82) spells it out: "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relation-

ships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. *We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.*" (The emphasis is mine.) "He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, 'Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?' "

Precise and specific, the message is clear. I don't make amends by staying sober. I hurt many other people badly and far worse than myself when I drank. Unfortunately, I've done this sober, too. Steps Eight and Nine are not limited to what I did while drinking. They are concerned with bad behavior, drunk or sober.

Nowhere in the AA program do we read that we're supposed to make

amends to ourselves or put our names on the Eighth Step list. The program says nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. It simply guides us in the direction that enables us to feel forgiven. *We experience forgiveness by using the Steps to make amends for the past. We are healed by our effort to repair the damage we caused others, and this, in turn, repairs the damage within us, damage created by our heedless, totally selfish actions.*

We *can* change the past. The Twelve Steps give us a highly effective technique for rebuilding the past as we repair damage caused by our dishonest, self-centered living. It works. In my experience, the spiritual life has little to do with talk about God and everything to do with working the Steps. Each Step of the twelve is equally spiritual.

Again and again, AA members

sober for years and suffering from such symptoms as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom, and apathy lose those crippling conditions when they clean up the past. Time after time, AAs who have been unable to stay sober find the strength to refuse the first drink as a result of rebuilding the past.

Through the wisdom of the program, we have a simple, powerful prescription for freeing ourselves from the consequences of dishonest, selfish living. It's simple and basic. Without this kind of cleaning job with the Steps, the past still controls us. On the other hand, when we face and admit our wrongs and make direct restitution wherever possible, we're suddenly free. With today no longer a hostage of yesterday, we begin to live with the freedom and joy God intended for us.

P. M., Riverside, Ill.

Crown of Sobriety

IN MOST AREAS of life, the best way to hold on to what one has is to use it and seek to improve it. Runners develop their skill and endurance by daily exercising and running. Artists, lawyers, doctors, and all others who would excel at what they do work hard to upgrade their knowledge and abilities. It is part of the challenge and price of commitment.

One can see writers, teachers, preachers, and persons in other vocations grow as they invest their talents and powers. In the doing, the investment gains strength and importance. So they keep what they have and add to it. On the other hand, those who fail to use what they have lose its potential value.

Just the effort to improve one's lot brings much-needed discipline. This fact is even more pronounced when applied to sobriety gained by a faith in living by AA principles. By exercising the principles regularly, we learn to know better our God as we understand Him, and we become more mature alcoholics.

We hold fast to the message when we commune with the still sick and

*Using our sobriety
for service to others
is the best way
to keep it bright*

practicing alcoholic in the service of the Twelve Steps. We find nearness to the Higher Power in the greetings and warm handclasps of fellow alcoholics. We exercise our faith daily in reading the Big Book.

But if that is all we do, we are not doing enough.

Our private meditations, like our first spiritual awakening, are only a prelude to something more. They help us prepare for the tests and emergencies we encounter as daily we seek to live in *service* to others. This is where real unity lies — unity with the Fellowship, unity with our Higher Power.

If we have a living faith, we will

discern our Higher Power in the hustle and din of city streets, in homes, and around meeting tables, as the world sadly rushes by. We will see Him in every situation of need. To find what we seek for ourselves — sobriety and peace of mind — we become involved for others — for our fellow alcoholics. In order to hold fast what we have, we work diligently to help them find a new and better way of life. This is faith translated into immediate and practical action. It always expresses itself in helpful service.

In word and deed, sober alcohol-

ics live their lives to serve others less fortunate and still sick. Any deed, to be pleasing to our Higher Power, must be done in a spirit of love and acceptance; heartfelt concern for others is the only worthy motive when we seek to do things on their behalf.

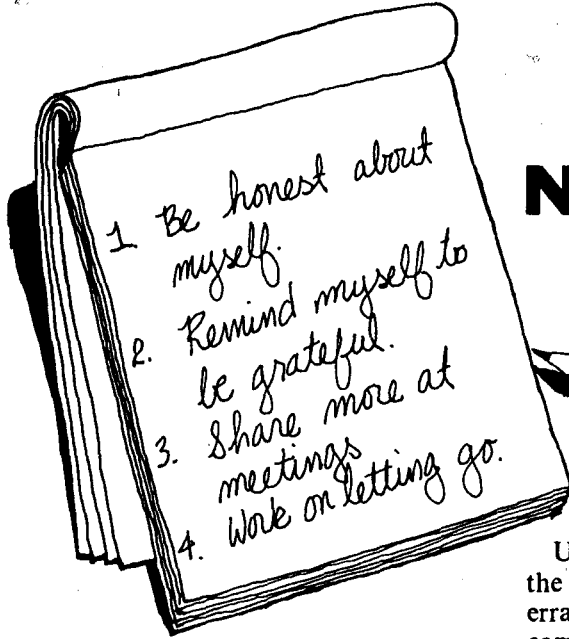
Service is the guardian of our crown of sobriety.

As we hold fast to such faith, and invest it constantly in love for other alcoholics, our sobriety is safe in each twenty-four hours and in our lifetimes.

G. D., Olympia, Wash.



"Twelfth Step work requires tolerance, persistence, understanding, and resisting the urge to take the phone off the hook when going to bed!"



Nuggets of Truth

Having trouble with Step Four? Capture your insights as they occur

I WAS SHAMED into the program nearly four years ago. Since then, our family has experienced a number of positive changes that I would not have believed possible. I am now aware of the influence in our lives of a benevolent Higher Power who is pulling the strings. I have become reasonably comfortable with the first three Steps. Those realizations have encouraged me to press on with the Fourth Step and further recovery.

Until recently, my progress with the moral inventory was halting and erratic. I had little sense of accomplishment in establishing a personal profile of beliefs, attitudes, values, needs, and talents. Yet I know that self-understanding, integrity, and the ability to love all depend upon meeting this challenge.

The specific limitation seemed to be that the entries I made in the inventory list looked unrelated and unimportant to me when I reviewed them weeks or even days later. I often could not really identify with what I had previously written about myself, and I began to believe that there was a credibility gap between reality and the neat summaries on paper. I began to be concerned about my ability to be honest about myself, especially in view of the Big Book's statement (fifth chapter) that failures in recovery are related to a lack of honesty.

I lived with this dilemma for months — until I noticed that I could in fact be honest, however briefly, under certain conditions. Meetings were and are the most conspicuous promoters of self-truths. The light may come on when I am listening to a lead, or when I am searching myself for something to say during a discussion, or while alone with my sponsor.

Being totally involved in some kind of manual activity also apparently leaves my mind a fertile ground for revealing insights. In general, these personal revelations are unpredictable in content, but they all share the one characteristic of happening when my mind is relaxed. Specifically, I cannot be meeting deadlines, dealing with criticism, or putting on an act and expect to learn about myself. I now believe that my personal honesty will develop as long as I continue to keep myself in a loving environment (meetings in particular) on a regular basis.

The problem remained, however, of preserving these flashes of percep-

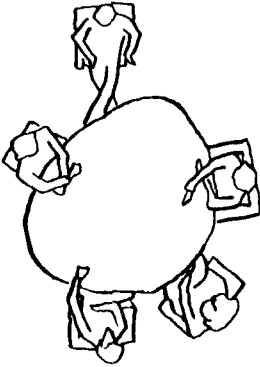
tion as the basic stuff of an inventory, since they seemed to come so spontaneously and slip away so easily with the least distraction or interruption. I couldn't remember them later when I sat down with my inventory list.

The technique that is actually working now is to carry with me at all times a tiny notebook and pencil, and write down the gist of these flashes as soon as possible after they happen. Never mind the details; I can fill them in later. It requires discipline to carry the tools and to record things as they are, but the result has been more significant personal findings in one month than in the whole previous year without a little notebook and pencil.

Capturing the nuggets of personal truth as they are revealed almost daily has turned into a kind of adventure. They don't slip by nearly as easily as before. Now, I merely have to accumulate and sort them. The Fifth Step will take care of the appraisals later.

Anonymous, Pennsylvania

Around the Tables



Twelfth-Stepping

AROUND THE TABLES, when we talk about twelfth-stepping, my mind goes back a few years. I was invited to speak at an open meeting, and the only statement I remember now is this: "I'm going to be moving soon, and I hope I move next door to an alcoholic." Actually, I meant next door to a sober AA.

Well, I moved next door to an alcoholic, all right, but he was still drinking. I had been here about two weeks and was putting up some shutters on my house when over came my new neighbor. "Man, do I feel rotten!" he said. "I got stoned again last night."

"Didn't you tell me you're a diabetic?" I asked. "I had a very

good friend with your problem, who let booze kill him." I went on: "To be perfectly honest with you, pal, I've had a drinking problem all my adult life, but I haven't had to drink for some time now. I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous."

"No kidding!"

"Yes," I said. "There's a meeting tonight at eight o'clock in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church."

To this, he just stared into space. Yet somehow, I felt I noticed something.

I usually go to as many meetings as I can. That night I went, and there, sitting at a table with coffee and three AAs, was a newfound fellow of Alcoholics Anonymous, my neighbor.

I was first amazed and soon awed. I thought, "Wow, I really carry a potent message!" But I know now I was only a channel for God's message. The time, the place, and the right words will help convey an idea to anyone, but only God can sober up any of us, and it's always when *He* wants it done.

V. P., Decatur, Ill.

religion. Even Bill W. found therapy appropriate after a period of sobriety. I hope P. M.'s article will not fuel the already-disturbing tendency to practice medicine that many AAs show.

P. R.

From San Rafael, Calif.:

The article "Pill-Consciousness" (September Grapevine), by R. S., was very meaningful to me. I am a mentally ill alcoholic. First, I do not take the first drink. Second, I maintain a certain level of the mineral lithium in my body. Both are necessary to maintain my sobriety. Before I could recognize my alcohol problem, I had to overcome the mental illness. By the grace of God, I was led to a psychiatrist who was knowledgeable in the medical causes for mental illness *and* in alcoholism. With the mental illness arrested, I could grasp the AA program with an enthusiasm and willingness that were overwhelming.

I am very grateful to the people in the medical field and in AA who are recognizing the special needs of the mentally ill alcoholic. It is my prayer that someday I can reach out to another like me and share my experience, hope, and strength as a mentally ill alcoholic.

C. A.

From Manhattan, N.Y.:

I certainly have shared the conflict between the scientific and the spiritual that R. S. revealed. Who would want to diagnose mental illness within the environment of miracles

of an AA meeting?

Maybe the dilemma is simply that Western physicians are trained to search for illness and to treat their findings with the tools of science — drugs. The AA member becomes riveted on the wonders of healing and reaches them through the spiritual tools of the program — the Twelve Steps.

F. M.

From Pittsford, N.Y.:

I read "Pill-Consciousness" with interest and recalled my trip to a psychiatric ward in 1979. I had allowed people in the program to talk me out of the medication I needed then. Thank God for R. S.'s article; it is needed and will help people in the program who are on medication.

I can only share the way it worked for me. Today, I no longer require medication or psychiatric visits; however, I did need both for a period of time. I explained to my psychiatrist early on that I wanted to be free of medication and visits at some point when *we* both decided.

Do not discuss your medication problem at meetings. People wanting to help will only confuse you. Discuss it with your doctor, with your sponsor, and possibly with other AAs on medication.

I honestly believe just about everyone working the program (meetings, Steps, etc.) can function comfortably at some point without medication and psychiatric visits.

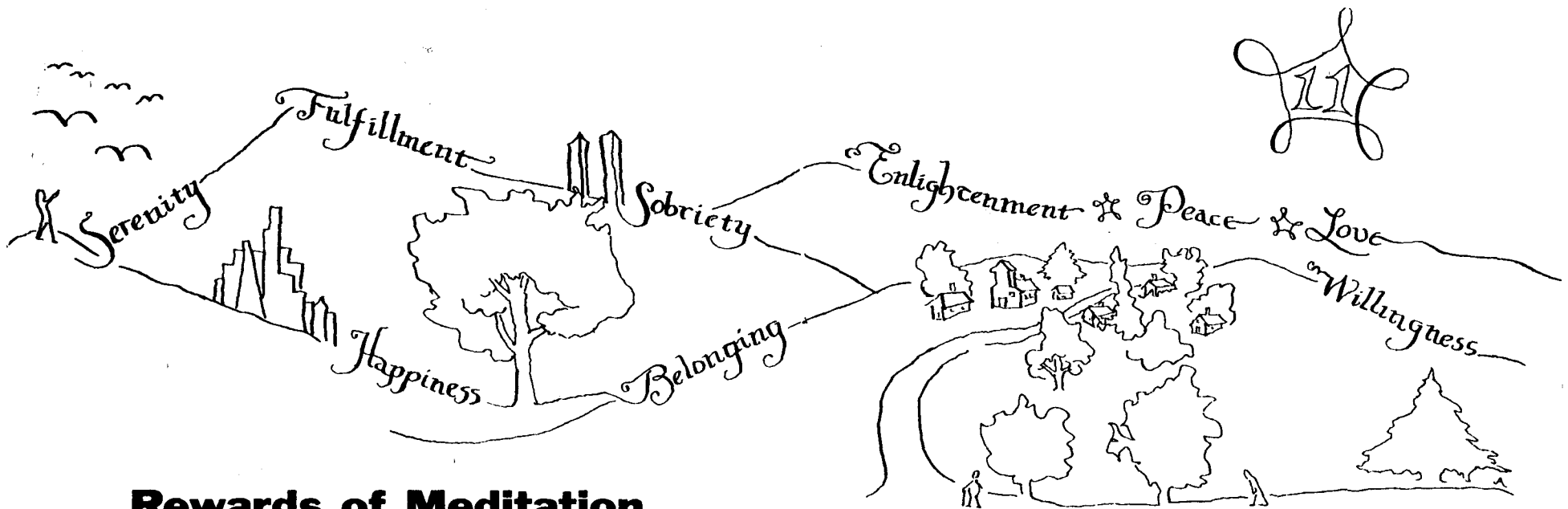
G. V.

Are the Steps a cure-all?

From Fort Worth, Tex.:

In regard to "A Time-Tested Program of Recovery" (October 1981 Grapevine), I concur with P. M.'s thinking for a large number of AAs, but I strongly object to what I consider a dogmatic, judgmental, and all-inclusive attitude in this article.

There are most certainly alcoholics sober in AA for whom the Steps are not an absolute cure-all, regardless of how hard such members work with them. Therapeutic intervention is preferable to a slip, a "nervous breakdown," or suicide. Our Big Book stresses the need to cooperate with medicine, psychiatry, and



Rewards of Meditation

FROM WORKING Step Eleven myself and listening to the experiences of others, I have learned that the ten preceding Steps must be worked before the meditation in Step Eleven can be done with any measure of success. For instance, we should review each day, good and bad (Tenth Step), and make spot-check inventories for moments of emotional tension. After this work is accomplished, meditation can be done — although consistent effort on our part is required.

Immediately upon awakening, I kneel down and pray for sobriety in the coming day and for God's mercy and grace. Then, I say the Third Step prayer (Big Book, page 63). In repeating the Seventh Step prayer (Big

Book, page 76), I add my own individual character defects, and I also say the Serenity Prayer and a few of our AA slogans.

Now, I am ready to meditate. I select a spot as quiet as possible. Sitting in a comfortable, straight-backed chair with my arms resting on its arms, my feet flat on the floor, and my eyes closed, I begin to repeat to myself over and over again a phrase or a word such as "God is love," "truth," or "Thy will be done." After a while, my mind becomes bored with this repetition, and my thoughts wander to activities planned for the day or what I did yesterday or fears or resentments I may have at the time. I watch these thoughts, so to speak, and eventual-

ly get tired of them and automatically return to the phrase or word I had been repeating in the beginning. I say "automatically" now; however, this habit was developed only after repeated practice and effort, a day at a time.

I continue the repetition of the word or phrase to myself. I become bored again and my mind wanders again, and so the process goes. I try to meditate effortlessly. I try to relax. If I itch, I scratch where it itches. If my position in the chair becomes uncomfortable, I change it. If noise occurs, I accept it calmly and just continue my meditation. I may intersperse some of the prayers repeated earlier into this meditation. Whether, in my opinion, I am medi-

tating well or not, I continue. My willingness to try to seek God's will and gain more sanity is the most important thing. As Thomas Merton said in his last book, *Contemplative Prayer*, "A hard and apparently fruitless meditation may in fact be much more valuable than one that is easy, happy, enlightened, and apparently a big success."

After almost six and a half years of sobriety, my meditation amounts to two thirty-five-minute periods, one upon awakening, the other in late afternoon. When I started meditation, four years ago or so, I had great difficulty sitting still for even five minutes. I wasn't disciplined enough. I was nervous and fidgety and couldn't slow my mind down.

Only through repeatedly trying to meditate twice a day every day (missing only a few times) was I able to achieve the self-discipline to sit still longer.

I continue to practice Step Eleven throughout the day. I often repeat the Third and Seventh Step prayers silently or out loud, to myself or on the phone and in person with other AAs who do this kind of work. I talk to God. I *practice* His presence in my life, trying to improve conscious contact with Him. When walking to and from work and at other times during the day, I may repeat the words "Thy will be done" for every four steps I take — one word for one step. This is a convenient discipline and provides another opportunity for conscious contact with my Higher Power.

The result of all this Eleventh Step work is a greater willingness to accept life for what it is, to deal with reality instead of rationalizing the way I want it to be. Periods of serenity occur more often, and so do thoughts of others. Overwhelming self-concern is reduced. The feeling that things will work out as long as I

stay sober becomes stronger. The thought that God's will really is the answer for my life comes to mind more frequently.

As the "Twelve and Twelve" says (page 105), "Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of *belonging* that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God's will, the moment we begin to see truth, justice, and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us, here and hereafter."

This practicing of the Eleventh Step, along with reworking all the other Steps, has given me greater integrity and strengthened my sobriety. This is the kind of dependence I need: a healthy and sure dependence on the Twelve Steps. Step Eleven has shown me real benefits. It will continue to do so if I just work at it, a day at a time.

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

February 1982

*Working the Steps
is the key to our*

Adventure of Recovery

ACTIVE ALCOHOLISM for me became a negative, passive, daily experience. The only active role my mind and body performed was in obtaining the next drink, the one that was going to work and turn everything around for me. In retrospect, I see that my thinking was all passive fantasy; I was incapable of assuming an active, "here and now" position.

The day I decided to admit that I was sick, finished, done was the only day in many years that I reached a decision and followed through on it. I made a request for help to a group of people unknown to me, the members of AA.

Some months later, my sponsor explained that my negative attitudes were keeping me from enjoying the kind of sobriety that most members experienced by following the Twelve Steps of recovery in the order they were written.

I did not know how to begin. I was told to keep it very simple. Each day, I was to get up, ask God to keep me sober, plan to go to an AA meeting

that night, and do what I was supposed to do that day. I was to make a commitment to God (whom I really did not believe in), to my sponsor (whom I did believe in), and to myself (who was not playing with a full deck). There were good days and bad days after that, but the experience of trying to live up to my commitments gave me good feelings, which I shared with my AA friends.

Gradually, each day became an adventure. As commitments were met, I liked myself better. A little gratitude entered my thoughts, and I began to thank God for each sober day. God and I were beginning a relationship: anger on my part and a patient ear on His.

That is the way the Steps began for me. Today, each one is a living Step, a guide to make me feel better about myself — the adventure of recovery. Once started, the Steps cannot be turned off, I have found. Working them has become an active, joyful, positive experience.

B. O., Wilmington, Del.

February 1982

Put away the microscope

From Chelmsford, Mass.:

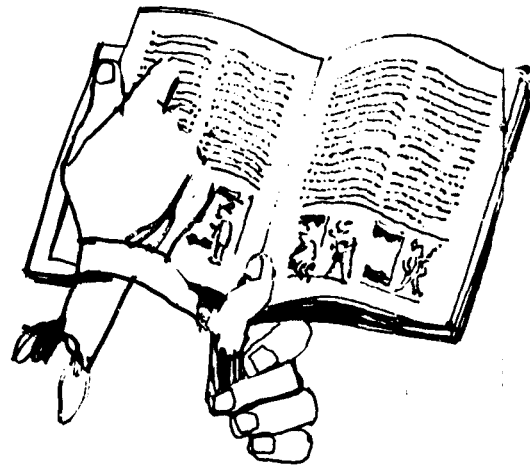
It is good for me to remember Dr. Bob's advice about keeping it simple, and his belief that the Twelve Steps are perfectly clear, requiring no special interpretation.

In the article ". . . As We Understood Him" in the October Grapevine, the Third Step is once again subjected to a microscopic examination. "God *as we understood Him*" means exactly that. The phrase is designed to accommodate those members of AA whose beliefs do not conform to normally accepted conventions.

The writer seems to grasp this entirely logical meaning in the first paragraph. However, the article then proceeds to introduce "another way of interpreting the Third Step." Perhaps this interpretation is satisfying to the writer, but it certainly will not help a person who is an atheist or agnostic.

Is it becoming unfashionable to accept the Twelve Steps as they are written? I do not believe they have any hidden meanings. They were put together by drunks for drunks as a way of living without alcohol. J.L.

Bus Stop



*An AA meeting in transit
brought a wanderer
back to the Fellowship*

I AM A RECOVERING alcoholic and have been active in Twelfth Step work and group service work, and I thought until recently that I was well informed on how to carry the message. . . .

I found myself in Kansas City, Mo., on business. After the business was concluded, I had three hours to wait in the bus terminal for my return home. I resigned myself to the wait, got a cup of coffee, and went to an out-of-the-way section to drink it. Before I left that morning, my wife, who is also a recovering alcoholic, had placed two copies of the AA Grapevine in my briefcase. I took one of the copies out and began to read. I got so engrossed in my reading that I hardly noticed a gentleman who walked up to my table. Eventually, he asked if he might sit down. My answer was "Of course. Take a load off your feet." And he did.

He said, "Is that the Grapevine you're reading?" I told him it was. He asked if I was a member of the Fellowship, and I told him I was and had been for some time. He said, "I was a member for two and a half years — the best two and a half years of my life."

For the first time, I began to really look at this man. He was clean-cut, rather handsome, and immaculately dressed. But in his eyes, I saw great pain. In his hands, I noticed a slight tremble. I said, "Two and a half years, huh? What made you stop?"

He answered that he had experienced the defenselessness after that first drink that we have all read of in

the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. He had started to drink in Texas. When he came out of a blackout, he was in Kansas City. He said he wanted to get back into the Fellowship as soon as possible. He also said that he was almost penniless and had no way to get back to Texas. Yet all the while he never once indicated that he was trying to get money from me.

I asked him why he had not found meetings in Kansas City. He said he did not know his way around the city enough to get to a meeting walking, let alone driving. Suddenly, I remembered that I had a phone number given to me by an AA member in Kansas City almost two years earlier. I asked him whether, if I could arrange through someone else a means for him to get to a meeting, he would go. His answer was a very quick yes. I went to the telephone, dialed the number, and told my fellow member of this man's plight.

Within thirty minutes, two Kansas City AAs were there.

We had an impromptu but very short AA meeting on the spot. Then, I sat back and watched AA at work. Within ten minutes, these gentlemen had found a halfway house for our fellow sufferer, a place where he could work, attend meetings, and accumulate enough money to get back home.

As they were ready to leave, he clasped my hand and, with tears in his eyes, asked how he could ever repay me. I told him that he owed me nothing, that I believed his Higher Power had put me exactly where I was supposed to be, reading my Grapevine, when he noticed me. After handshakes, the three made their way out of the bus station, and I began to thank God that I had been where my Higher Power wanted me to be at that critical moment in a man's life.

T. E., Neosho, Mo.

Sponsorship

'He Was My Favorite Sponsor'

*...And on the following pages
four more AAs tell about
sponsoring and being sponsored*

HE HAD A comfortably wrinkled face and reminded me of a character actor from the movies of the 1940s — one of those guys you saw in three or four movies a year and whose name you could never remember. Men listened to him. Women flocked to him. And he was very patient with members convalescing from active alcoholism at their first meetings. He was my favorite sponsor.

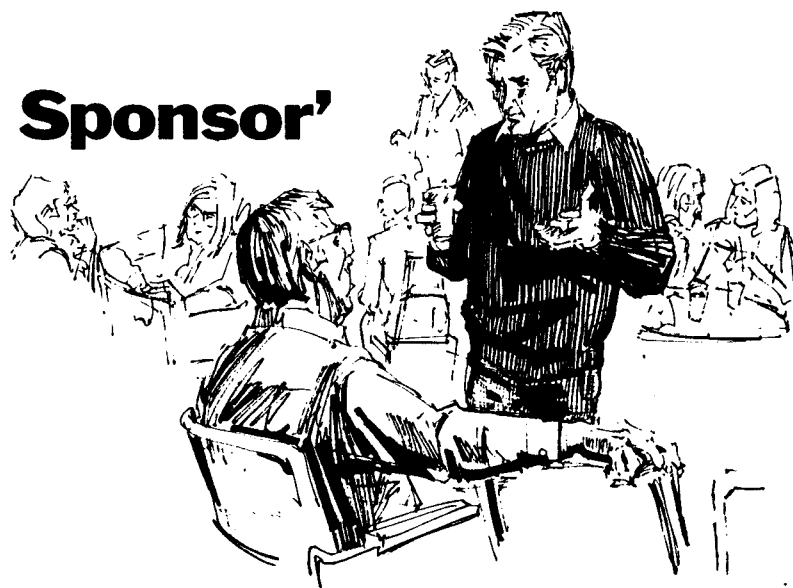
The meaning of the word sponsor has changed. When I was new, a sponsor was someone who got you to meetings for a while, then turned you over to the group. Nowadays, I hear people talk about different sponsors for different problems. Mine was an all-purpose person for me; once I'd met him, I never felt the need of any-one else.

I have noticed that some of us are great with brand-new people, while others of us prefer to help people at

the point when they realize that there is more to sobriety than merely staying off booze. I met my favorite sponsor at that point — the start of the reality stage in the progression of my recovery. I'd had an enthusiastic guy who had gotten me to meetings, but I needed more time to talk, and my sponsor was able to do this with me. He laughed the first time I described my sober hurting, and he said, "It looks like you're ready for the Twelve Steps, kid."

I wanted to rush into all sorts of other things to find more answers. If one recovery program was good, I felt four would be even better. He suggested that I catch up with the Steps first, and I was stunned. I had already read them — twice! He wrinkled his nose and smiled and advised me to get to know one thing well for a change, instead of a lot of things superficially.

Pausing to absorb the Twelve Steps



was the start of emotional maturity for me. It was the first time I realized that there was a gap between my intellectual curiosity and my emotional ability to function as an adult. Intellectually, I was a mountain; emotionally, I was a mound. That division had to be healed.

I had shied away from self-understanding. I feared calm. The search for myself looked like an enormous task that would take a lifetime. It meant work and discipline, and the goal would only be glimpsed when I reached old age. I thought it was easier to stay young and restless like Zelda Fitzgerald, the first flapper. Who needed to be old, fat, and content?

My sponsor reminded me that I was getting old and fat anyway, so I might as well work for the contentment. I knew I needed a code of ethics, and the Steps were right there every night at meetings, winking at me.

I admitted I was powerless. I knew I was insane and needed God. I turned myself over to God and searched within. I talked about myself honestly with my sponsor and God. I wanted uncomfortable personal traits to fade away. Alcohol had humbled me completely. I searched within regularly and prayed and meditated. I demonstrated the spiritual change in me by trying to help other alcoholics.

I lived at extremes. First, I thought AA was a program of clever sayings and a fellowship of frightened children holding hands. Then, I tried to wrestle with the Steps and demand magic on orders from God. I did a very alcoholic thing and equated program with perfection, and I ended up with another alcoholic swing.

Again, sponsor to the rescue: "‘Easy Does It,’ kid — don’t be so hard on yourself." A woman I had met by then laughed one night and said the hardest thing in the world for alcoholics to achieve was not stop-

ping drinking, but achieving balance.

Now, I go to meetings and chuckle the way my sponsor did at me. I am sometimes amazed at the non-AA talks I hear at AA meetings. I could not be more amazed if I went to a cathedral on Sunday and heard a general discuss war tactics. I do not feel it is being too judgmental to admit I want to hear *the Steps* discussed at AA meetings. I treasure discussions about our program of recovery and get bored with members’ diatribes about other members or with adults’ anger over parents.

Bill and Bob, the co-founders of AA, were accomplished men with huge egos. I had accomplished little and had a zero ego when I was hurled into our Fellowship. My sponsor would sit across from me at meetings with his perennial beige cardigan, and I knew *he* approved of me. It helped get my ego up from the floor. I had been depressed for so long that I thought it was natural and that everyone else felt the same.

I soon began to see that the hurt I felt was part of my journey into the adventure of sobriety. My sponsor

talked often of this spiritual journey. Finally, I was close enough with him to ask him how he’d found God.

He discussed his private conception of God. We talked about the supernatural. He attended the church of his parents, but he was open to many spiritual approaches. He said that although he prayed a lot, it never worked well until he decided what God looked like. Since he felt that he had been made in the image of God, he decided that God must look like him or that he looked like God.

(continued on next page)

Personalizing God that way was a vital spiritual key for me. It unlocked the Steps. I needed an image. When a satisfactory interior picture of my Higher Power came into focus, the depressions eased, and I began to feel whole. I felt harmony in my nature. I began to feel normal most of the



time. One journey had ended, and another had begun.

It was odd that I had to search. A perversity of my nature had allowed me to forget the spiritual presence that I had already felt. I had sensed it one hellish night during the Korean War. I had felt protected at my very first AA meeting, in a psycho ward. I knew I belonged to something grand right there in Bedlam. Why, then, did I have to fight to experience the spirit again?

Perhaps life seemed too rushed. But now, I find that I can be busy at work and pleased with my personal life and still maintain a feeling of the Power in my life — by adhering to the Steps. If I awake in the middle of the

night, I never feel despair.

The principles in the Steps reveal more to me about myself as time glides by. In the beginning, they helped me to remove obvious faults. Now, they help melt away forgotten, subtle resentments. They remind me not to hurt my fellow human beings, now that I could do that so much more easily than I could long ago.

In some of the groups I attend, much of the sharing is done by newly sober members. Long-timers don't seem to speak a lot. I like to comment, because I enjoy trying to help people and it enables me to receive ongoing inspiration. I want to give what I got from my sponsor.

My sponsor passed on when I was sober thirty months. He still is with me, though. I feel his presence at times and hear myself quoting him when I tell people about spiritual healing through the Twelve Steps. I have expanded on what he said, but much of my growth began with his suggestions. I shall always remember him for the idea that God resembles all of us, or that we, each in our own way, resemble God. That idea helped center me and allowed me to grow into my own person.

So I listen as new people brag about misery and occasionally even blame it on us. I listen and tell them about God as my sponsor understood Him and about how I understand Him now. And I say, "It looks like you're ready for the Twelve Steps, kid."

E. S., Manhattan, N.Y.

April 1982

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

"Sobriety . . . is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening has to go on."

As Bill Sees It

'A God Personal to Me'

WHEN I CAME into AA, I had genuinely surrendered. By age twenty-six, my drinking had taken me to the point of a lost career, broken relations with my parents, DTs, and no hope of ever having anything decent and clean in my life. I had no doubt that I was an alcoholic. At my first AA meeting, I found a bunch of people who were not only decent and clean, but sober. They were willing to share their sobriety with me.

Obviously, my drinking had made my life unmanageable. The Fellowship had more power than I had. Its members were staying sober, where I couldn't. They became my higher power. I came to believe that their wisdom could restore me to the sanity of not drinking. I decided to turn my drinking will over to them and let them teach me about not drinking. That was how I took the first three Steps.

At the end of six months, I surveyed the situation. I had been sober longer than I had been at any period in the past ten years! AA was working for me. At nine months, I took an inventory and shared it with a minister. Using a minister was a token gesture

to those other people's Higher Power, whom I did not — would not — believe in.

By my first anniversary, I had completed the first nine Steps. With my drinking neatly tucked in the hands of my higher power, which was still the Fellowship and the meetings, I was free. I had started on the quest for all the things my upbringing and my drinking had so unfairly cheated me out of. By my second anniversary, I had a marriage, a stepdaughter, a career in my own company, and cars, and I was in the process of buying a house. I could settle back!

I had fallen into a deadly trap I've seen many fall into since: I had no need for a Higher Power personal to me; the Fellowship was my god and my guide.

Today, I can thank God for the next two hellish years. Without drinking or using drugs, I watched the whole world I had built fall down around me. Divorce, separation from a child I had grown to love, and economic ruin were all made worse by the fact that I was sober and supposedly working the program. On the rare occasions when the shame of

failure did not prevent me from sharing, even my AA friends, with all their love, could not keep me from sinking deeper into the pit of despair.

I had cleverly avoided searching for a God personal to me. But as thoughts of suicide crossed my mind, I reconsidered. When my higher power was the Fellowship, I sought through conversation to improve my relationships with these loving people. Our Eleventh Step says "prayer and meditation," not conversation. I tried to improve my "conscious contact"; but since I had never had one in the first place, I was led back to Step One.

This time, however, my suicidal depression had gotten me to the point of being as desperate as a man drowning. I became open-minded. As I walked through the Steps with the help of my sponsor, I came to know myself, the futility of life run on my terms, and my need for more than the Fellowship. When I be-

came willing to believe, even as those other people believed, God's power flooded into my life. He became mine.

Today, God is my Higher Power. By His grace, I have not had a drink since December 5, 1971. The "Twelve and Twelve" says, "Nothing short of continuous action upon these [Steps] as a way of life can bring the much-desired result." Now that I trust God, I can continue without fear. My life is worth living. I believe the desired result is "to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

When someone asks about problems in sobriety, I say, "Yes, we have them." But in our AA Fellowship, we have a program of living called the Twelve Steps. When we persist in them, we will "presently love God and call Him by name." He will give us the power to get through problems and experience the joy of living a sober life.

M. S., Baltimore, Md.

Spiritual Experience

High-Wire Faith

A SALTY MEMBER of my home group once quipped, "If you were at the circus, watching a performer on a high wire push a wheelbarrow across, would you have faith

that he would make it?"

Energetically nodding my head, I replied, "Sure. Those guys are professionals. They do it several times a day."

"Well," he said smugly, "that's not real faith. Faith is when *you* get up there and ride across *in* the wheelbarrow."

Since that evening, I have often pondered the quality of my own faith and wondered whether I would, indeed, be willing to climb into my Higher Power's wheelbarrow. At my sponsor's suggestion, I have repeatedly used the Eleventh Step to improve my conscious contact with my Higher Power and thereby strengthen my faith. This also improves my ability to work the Third Step.

Trust seems to be the key here. I have often heard around the tables that God will provide opportunities for us to grow spiritually. I have also heard that hardship and pain can become a pathway to peace. Well, I recently had just such an opportunity.

After suffering a heart attack, I was faced with coronary bypass surgery and also the distinct possibility of death. My surgeon could offer no guarantees before or after surgery. However, there was One who could offer strength, and that One was God. Could I put myself in His wheelbarrow and have real faith and trust? Not just words. Real faith, real trust. Could I work the Third Step in that crisis? Otherwise, our old enemy fear would be right there to control me.

Fortunately, the Eleventh Step paid off, and my faith became stronger. I realized that of myself, I was nothing. I was here to do God's will. As they wheeled me under the operating lights, a strange peace and

strength stole over me as I simply prayed, "I can't; You can; I think I'll let You."

The next thing I remember is regaining consciousness in the recovery room and being grateful that I had another twenty-four hours. I was fighting the respirator at first, but my Higher Power was with me, and as I relaxed and let Him take over, things smoothed out. I had new, greater spiritual strength. I had grown spiritually. The experience, albeit painful and frightening at times, had



improved my ability to work on the Third Step. I had a further spiritual awakening, a better spiritual condition. The Big Book tells me these things will help keep me sober.

I shudder to think of the nightmare my recent experiences would have been if I had still been drinking. Cop-

ing would have been impossible. My old barroom cronies certainly couldn't have taught me inner strength, nor were they there at all. My sponsor and AA friends were there, though. My Higher Power was

there. They and all the wonderful people around the AA tables helped me climb into that wheelbarrow without fear, and actually learn to like it up there on that higher wire.

J. W., St. Louis, Mo.

Spiritual Experience

Paradox of Power

*"Letting go" means
discipline, and joy
comes through pain*

FOR SEVERAL years before I began my new life in AA, I taught American literature in a university. One of the writers whose work I enjoyed reading and discussing with students was Emily Dickinson. She captured in a few words the peculiar definitions of experience that I had felt but could not articulate.

One of her poems had a special appeal that brought me back to it over and over. It begins: "I can wade Grief / Whole Pools of it / I'm used to that / But the least push of Joy / Breaks up my feet / And I tip — drunken."

Those brief lines describe clearly what kept my drinking habits active. I could wade whole pools of grief and depression; over the years, I had psychiatrists to help me through them. I was used to that. But the least

push of joy broke up my feet and tipped me, drunken, every time: a vacation, a raise or a promotion, an anniversary, Millard Fillmore's birthday. Those were occasions to drink. Soon, I was finding a reason to turn every day of the year into a festival. When that happens, none of them is special or very festive.

After being around AA for a while, I went back to the poem one day and found an entirely new way of reading it. I had never realized that all my drinking had begun with the carefree moments of celebration and joy, only to end in those desperate years when I had tried to keep up the pleasure and the fun. The program was giving me an understanding of my dependence upon alcohol, and as a fringe benefit, a new reading of a favorite poem.

But that wasn't all. Several lines

further on, Dickinson comments that we must guard against those unprotected times of cheer when we are open to hurt and anguish. I then began to grasp the full meaning of two crucial lines: "Power is only Pain — / Stranded, through Discipline. . ."

I had often used that definition of power to start classroom discussions of its possible meaning for students. But now I seemed to be reading it for the first time. It expressed what I was beginning to understand about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Power is a key word in this program, and its importance is underlined repeatedly in the Twelve Steps. We admitted in the beginning that "we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." Then we "came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." And in the Eleventh Step, we pray "for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

I began to see the emphasis this program places upon force and drive. I realized that anyone who regards AA as only the passive giving up of alcohol has not carefully read the Steps. Our continual dependence upon a Higher Power demonstrates further the importance we place upon action and accomplishment.

The source of power, Dickinson adds, is pain. In my AA experience, I have never met a member who has not experienced some degree of pain. I have never met anyone who decided

to come into the program on a beautiful morning in spring when everything was going well. Most of us entered on our knees, and the sharing of this mutual pain is a large part of what brings us back to meetings.

"Strand" means to form by twisting together, as in the strands of a rope. So it is implied that the achievement of power comes by way of mixing pain with discipline. And discipline, the word that all of us dread from our years in school, was the part of AA that frightened me most.

In those early days, I hoped that with harsh discipline and self-will, I might be able to stop drinking. I was prepared to sit through meetings holding on to my chair with the grim determination to see this thing through, no matter what. As a child, I had been taught that if I worked hard enough and disciplined myself, I could accomplish whatever goal I set. Maybe that principle would hold true for my desire to stop drinking.

But the members of AA surprised me with a new definition of the term. Instead of holding on, I was told to let go. Instead of using self-control, I was encouraged to turn my will and my life over to God. And at the end of Chapter Six in the Big Book, I read that "we alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined."

That was a definition I had never heard before. "Letting go" had always meant self-indulgence: polishing off the rest of the bottle, eating the whole cake, sleeping until noon.

Now, I heard that letting go meant acquiring discipline. I had to redefine the term in light of what AA members were telling me.

“Power is only Pain — / Stranded, through Discipline . . .”

I have been around the program for a few twenty-four hours now, and

I’m beginning to understand the meaning of those lines. The renewal of discipline is a process that I must set in motion every day. But I’m learning to wade each pool of grief, to take each painless step of joy, with the power given me through the discipline of Alcoholics Anonymous.

D. H., Delmar, N.Y.

Spiritual Experience

Love With No Price Tag

AFTER FIVE years on the program, many of the old wounds and fears that have been buried so deep for so long are surfacing. I have run into a silence — a point in my life where words no longer satisfy my need to understand. As I did on that day five years ago, I have reached out, in my confusion, to a God that I have not understood.

But a certain understanding has come, and I have been given a greater freedom from myself. In the light of my experience, a *loving* God is the only concept to give lasting meaning and purpose to my life. The principles of love and service are truly paths to the principles of God, but they do not in themselves fill my need. I recognize that need in me that only a *loving* God can satisfy. Without His love, my life does not make sense —

especially when I have all that I think I want, and still yearn and struggle with an unexplainable restlessness.

It is, and always has been, my choice as to whether I accept that principle or reject it. I will not put a price tag on free will, so I will not blame God for man’s behavior. Only unconditional love can fill the need for unconditional love. However, my resistance to that principle has been rooted in my lack of understanding what I believed was being denied me. I was taught to resist by indifference and rejection, but need brought me to AA and its source of power.

Many old ideas of good and evil also have made my approach to a loving God difficult. (“What is evil but good tortured by its own hunger and thirst.”) Though distant from the goal, I have found an approach

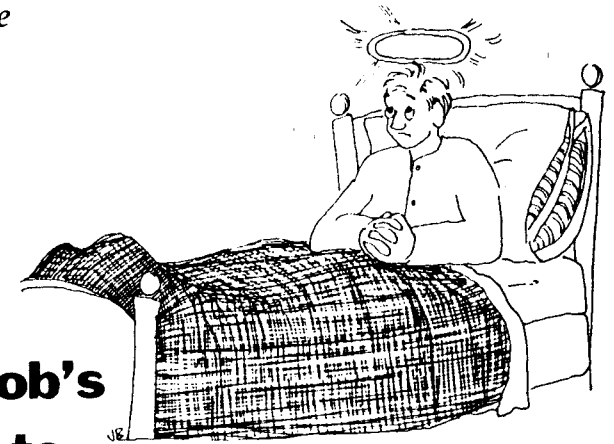
through the Twelve Steps. They have irresistibly drawn me outward from myself. My need for approval made me a taker. But when we are taking, there is soon little left to take from. When I have time for compassion for others — then, I hope, there will be some for me when I need human compassion. I am responsible, but I

am powerless without love from Him and from you.

Once again — only love can fill the need for love. In that light, a *loving* God makes more sense than any other concept I have embraced. And I surrender to that love. I can no longer resist it. It is my need.

D. J., Alameda, Calif.

Spiritual Experience



A Slob’s Guide to Spiritual Growth

IT’S A SQUIRMY word — “spiritual.” It makes me uncomfortable. It reminds me of the time I spent as a child sitting in a church and trying to look holy. “Spiritual” is confused in my mind with a kind of hymn and has connotations of mediums, levitation, and ghosts.

Worse, “spiritual” implies pretensions of sainthood, a hypocritical

posturing, and pretended preoccupation with wonderful thoughts — when I and everybody else know that ninety percent of my day is spent trying to keep the wolf from the door and the horse before the cart.

My spiritual inventory doesn’t help much, either. This very day, as I lay in bed staring piously at the ceiling, I took the Third and Eleventh Steps

firmly, fondly, and resolutely. I thought warmly of all the great tasks I would accomplish today with the aid of my trusty Third and Eleventh. Then I got out of bed.

In midwinter, with the window open and the heat turned down, getting out of a warm bed apparently is, for me, an act of will of the highest spiritual order. This monumental achievement seems to exhaust my store of spiritual strength for the day.

By ten o'clock, I have a number of creative suggestions to offer my Higher Power on how my life and will might be gainfully employed. I have a serene acceptance of God's will for me as long as it happens to conform to mine.

By 2:00 PM, I have decided to mix a little of my will for me with His, since knowledge of His will is a little slow in coming and there are problems in need of immediate attention — like meeting the payroll, hardly a matter of celestial concern.

This line of self-examination leads to certain humbling realizations that are unwanted but nevertheless gnawing little realities — potholes in the path of smooth spiritual development. For example:

1. I won't believe tomorrow what I am saying today. Many of my hard-won convictions are just expedient reactions to the situation at hand.

2. I have never seen any profound wisdom in "Everything works out eventually." Of course it does. If my car is stolen tomorrow, I can meditate on how smart I was to put off

cleaning out the ashtray.

3. There are far more things I try to find the courage to change than there are things I seek the serenity to accept. Going through the day in placid acceptance of everything that happens just ain't my style.

4. I sometimes get tired of all this self-improvement and would like to just sit back and relax and enjoy life.

5. I really enjoy solitude occasionally, as opposed to constant contact with my fellowman. There are times when I prefer curling up with a good book with lots of sex and violence to putting the Big Book under my arm and sallying forth to carry the message.

Those are not proud admissions, just the truth. I lead an odd and noisy life; little happens slowly or quietly. When I read my Big Book and "Twelve and Twelve," and I assess my spiritual growth, I am filled with enormous feelings of inadequacy. Honesty, compassion, acceptance, understanding, faith, love, caring — I don't even *think* about those most of the time. My progress toward spiritual strength is a zigzag trail filled with hip-shooting reactions.

Sometimes, I have thought of creating a Slob's Guide to Spiritual Growth, for those of us who can't walk around with our hands folded and a slight, mysterious smile on our faces. It might go something like this:

1. It is better to watch the game in your undershirt with a can of cola in your hand than a can of beer.

2. When you holler at somebody,

you always feel lousy afterward — like a hangover.

3. Life is a steady drizzle of small things — carry an umbrella.

4. Tomorrow is another day.

5. Never give up.

6. Concentrate on what you're doing — it beats thinking.

7. If you let the other fellow alone and don't get so upset about how he's living his life, you can watch more TV.

8. It is more fun to be happy than angry.

9. Don't take anything too seriously, including all of the above.

10. This, too, shall pass.

That's a start. All that wisdom leads me to suspect that the path of spiritual progress is perhaps not so steep and dark as I had imagined. At least, I can *try* to understand it without getting all smug and lofty.

For starters, I know that I am a walking miracle. Literally overnight, I went from years of twenty-four-hour crash drinking to total sobriety, after everything had failed except total surrender to the AA program. That is a fact I can stand on.

From that foundation, I am able to see certain glimmers of progress. For example, I can realize that I have not done anything dishonorable in at least a week. Maybe more.

Also, I have learned that using utter candor in approaching whatever progress I have made lets me feel a lot more comfortable with that progress, however slim and unspectacular it may be — it's all mine and I'm proud

of getting even that far.

I have known all along, after all, that my underlying problem was not drinking but living, and only through a change of attitudes, through unquestioning acceptance of the AA program — a program of spiritual growth — could I hope to live life as forcefully, aggressively, and enthusiastically as I have. Something must have happened.



And as I peel away the layers of day-to-day expediency, I realize that my zigzag, erratic, and inconsistent course was in the general direction of progress all the time. That's good.

What right do I have to expect perfection and efficiency in my spiritual growth when the rest of my life is so full of ups and downs, ins and outs, and backs and forths? Through-

out this whole adventure, the only consistency I have maintained is an absolute and total faith in AA, come what may.

Happiness happens when results exceed expectations. Maybe this is working after all. Deep down, there is also a warm, small ball of faith, always there, never dimmed, unex-

plainable, asking nothing, but giving much. To define it or try to bounce it would distort or destroy it. It just is, that's all.

As St. Augustine said, "God is closer to me than I am to Him." I don't know exactly what that means, but it sure is true.

C. H., Fairfield, Conn.

Spiritual Experience

A Quiet Awakening

AFTER TWENTY years without a drink and about eighteen years of sobriety (it took a couple of years before I realized that there was more to sobriety than just not drinking), after listening to many speakers talk about their spiritual experiences, and after reading the Twelfth Step countless times, I began to wonder whether I'd had any spiritual experiences.

Looking back, I couldn't (and still can't) recall any single traumatic or spectacular happening. But things were getting better. I had achieved some serenity, some peace of mind, some tranquillity of soul. My whole life had been turned around; my thinking was positive instead of negative; my order of priorities had been rearranged; there was an honest and open communication between my Higher Power and me. Prayers

were being answered — not always the way I thought they should be, not always the way I wanted, but they were answered. Even when the answer was no.

I was being given everything I needed, was learning to distinguish my wants from my needs. I was learning that I had thoughts and rationalizations, fantasies and gut feelings. And I was finding out that I had to act on my thoughts and feelings to get best results.

In short — I became able to work the Twelfth Step because, to the best of my ability, I was working the other eleven. No lights flashed. No angels came and sang. No bells rang. Nothing spectacular happened. It was just God giving me what I could handle when I was ready for it.

G. B., Columbus, Ohio

May 1982

*Acceptance, change, and
sustained sobriety can be*

ours when we work

All Twelve Steps

THE TWELVE STEPS — all twelve — have been my salvation for almost thirty-four years of continuous sobriety. I'm concerned when I hear members say they have been sober for nine years and have not gone past the Third Step. One man I know states he has made no effort to go past the First Step in seven years in the Fellowship. He follows that up by saying he simply relies on his higher power to sustain him — a higher power he found in AA meetings.

I suspect that most of the people who have not bothered to formally "take" all Twelve Steps have actually been applying most of the principles, or else they wouldn't be sober.

When I first came to the program, I don't recall that we had anything but the Big Book. We discussed the Steps in every meeting. The person who read the Steps usually gave his or her interpretation. The Steps *were* the program to most of us.

I was extremely fortunate to have the sponsor I had. Without him, I doubt that I could have grasped the program. His patience and understanding of the principles were outstanding. When I came, there was only one person who had not admit-

ted I was an alcoholic. Of course, I was that person. When I was able to admit it and accept it, I began to make progress.

My sponsor's explanation or interpretation of the Steps was simple but of such great help to me that I pass it on. He told me the first three Steps set up the objective: to find a higher power. The first two or three words of each Step were the key words: "We admitted," "Came to believe," and "Made a decision."

Many members refer to the Third Step as turning their will and their

lives over to the care of God as they understand Him. The Step doesn't say that. It says we "made a decision" to do so.

It was further explained to me that the action Steps, Four through Nine, were the tools with which we implemented the decision we made in Step Three.

The last three Steps were described as the maintenance Steps. These are the things we will continue to do to

maintain a comfortable sobriety. I can't imagine trying to survive without the last three Steps, especially Step Eleven.

In the final analysis, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking." But I was told that ours is a selfish program, and I am selfish enough to want all of the benefits from using all of the tools, not twenty-five percent of them.

Anonymous, California

June 1982

Under New Management

THE NIGHT I broke down and made my first call to the AA desk in my area, I took at least part of the First Step. It wasn't hard for me to admit that my life was unmanageable.

I didn't have a lot to show for twenty-five years on this earth, and I was finding it increasingly difficult to live with that fact. I had topped off a long series of driving mishaps (in which, for the most part, I had gotten off easy) by wrecking my new car three times in two months. I was suffering from increasing guilt and remorse, because I was unable to accept a small portion of the respon-

sibility involved in parenting a young son. In fact, continued attempts at geographical cures during the last two years of my drinking had resulted in my being away from him for almost a year. Trapped in one of the many unsatisfying jobs that I had taken because they didn't require any footwork, I was no closer to making any kind of career decision than I had been when I was fresh out of high school eight years before.

Depression, frustration, and anxiety had begun taking their toll, manifested physically in the form of chest pains and shortness of breath. After I had paid a lot of money for a com-

*We no longer try
to control our own destinies*

plete physical, what I now know to be alcoholism was diagnosed as a "goal identification crisis." The final indignity came when, even after I made a decision that I *had* to give up drinking *entirely*, my willpower and superior intellect were not enough to carry it out.

Because I believed that unmanageability had something to do with outside circumstances and conditions, at that point my life felt truly unmanageable.

Today, this part of the First Step has taken on a broader significance for me. Manageable means capable of being handled or controlled. I

realize now that most of the problems in my life were a direct result of my attempts to handle my own life, to be in control of my own destiny. I am grateful that today, sober, I can still say my life has "become unmanageable." The Third Step of the AA program tells me that I no longer have to try to manage my own life; I can turn that job over to my Higher Power. Today, I am able to leave the managing to a proven Manager. As long as I remember that my life *is* unmanageable — not capable of being managed by me — I know that I will remain on solid AA ground.

L. R., College Park, Md.

ONE, TWO THREE, FOUR

*The Fourth Step
worked best
when he did it
after the
first three*

I WAS TOLD that each person had to do the Steps his or her own way. I'd been doing things my own way all my life. So, just once, I decided to try it their way — as it was done by those who contributed their experience, strength, and hope to the Big Book. But not until I had tried it my way first.

I came into AA with a deep-seated guilt complex that went back to the days when I would be sent to my room to await the strap. It seemed to me that when I enjoyed myself I was punished, and the waiting for that punishment to occur was worse than the strap itself. As I was growing up, I came to believe that if I enjoyed myself, punishment must follow. Most of this punishment was self-inflicted, because I couldn't stand waiting for the ax to fall.

So you can imagine how I felt when I first came to AA. I started to feel better, but I wondered how long it would last. I began to feel uneasy

with my newfound sobriety — the waiting game again. When my sponsor told me I must do a Fourth Step, I grabbed the advice — and it was a disaster, nothing but self-flagellation. My Fifth Step only made me feel worse. Self-pity set in. But I didn't drink. I kept coming back. And when they asked me to be secretary of a Step group, I willingly did so.

One night, we were talking about the Fourth Step. My eyes wandered from the speaker to the slogans. All of a sudden, I knew why my first year in AA had been so hard. Here is what I learned about the slogans and the Fourth Step.

“Easy Does It”: Don't be in too much of a rush, but do it.

“Think”: Have I done Step One? Step Two? Step Three?

“Live and Let Live”: Look at myself, not the other guy.

“First Things First”: Whatever's good for my sobriety, which must come first, is good for me.

And, finally, “But for the Grace of God.”

The last brings me to the reason I had to go back to Steps One, Two, and Three before I could properly do a Fourth Step. I had to begin liking myself enough to want to *search* to get to know myself better. I had to turn my will and my life over to the care of God, as I understand Him, before I could become *fearless* in the face of self-inventory. And I had to want to change so I might better do His will, not so I could feel better.

Today, I know that His will for me

is working better than my will ever did. I am starting to have a fulfilled, happy life and can use my problems for instruction rather than destruction. The learning experience is never easy, but it is exhilarating, and as it says in the Big Book, my imagination is beginning to be fired.

Thank you, AA, for all of this. To all of you out there who are as confused as I was: I hope my experience has helped you as much as it has helped me. May God bless you — and happy fourth-stepping!

S. D., Montreal, Que.

A Good Place for an Inventory

IN THE BEGINNING, these statements did not apply to me: "No one is too sick for AA"; "Some are sicker than others." Later, they certainly did apply.

The police had not been a big problem during my drinking days (a blackout can do wonders for speaking abilities), but sobriety brought with it a slowing of the pace, and tracks were harder to cover. After a year and a half of sobriety, long-standing business practices came to light, and some of them turned out to be illegal. As a result, I soon found myself standing in front of a Federal judge, who thought it would be a real good idea if I went to prison for a year. That seemed to be a very nar-

row-minded attitude, but I was in no position to object.

Today, I am grateful that AA had gotten to me before the Justice Department did. (I was tricked into going to my first AA meeting. By the grace of God, I kept coming back and not drinking, one day at a time.)

We must be willing to go to any lengths. I had to go to prison to become free. It seems only in that way could I be freed of the lies I told myself to keep from seeing myself as I was. Lying and rationalizing had started long before the drinking, and they didn't die quickly with sobriety. Getting honest with myself was slow and painful, and prison was a key part of the process.

Prison is a good place to complete an inventory (though I recommend you try to find another place if you can). In such a place, certain facts are hard to hide from. For most of the time I was there, I managed to tell myself I was an honest businessman who had made some errors of judgment — I hadn't deliberately cheated people, but somehow they did get cheated.

Part of the camouflage was being scrupulously honest in small ways. I couldn't understand how I could be so honest in some ways but not in others. Finally, the day came — within two weeks of release — when I saw some truth: There had been a progression of dishonesty. In the

early years, when stakes were small, I practiced rigorous financial honesty. Later, when the stakes were greater, greed overcame honesty, and I did and said what I knew in my heart was not right.

That was two years ago. Now, I can see I needed the pain and the embarrassment to become honest with myself about myself. Otherwise, the lies might have gone on forever and led to the next drink and to death. On days when things don't seem better, I have reminders of worse days gone past — the early days of sobriety as well as the drinking days before that — and of worse days ahead as the penalty if I fail to live the AA way of life.

J. M., Fort Worth, Tex.

July 1982

'Just Like Me'

THE FAMILIAR words "But for the Grace of God" overwhelmed me as I sat between inmates at my first AA meeting in a women's penitentiary. "My God, they're just like me!" I thought as I looked around the room at the "women in white."

I'm a twenty-four-year-old woman, sober in AA over twenty-eight months. I've never been arrested and have seen a jail cell only once, while working as a reporter. I came to the sixth-anniversary meeting at the prison primarily out of curiosity, secure in the belief that I would not be able to "relate."

My preconceived notions about women in prison were quite similar to those I had about alcoholics before I came to AA — dead wrong. I thought the prisoners would be hard, brazen, defiant, and cynical about the "God

part" of the program. Perhaps some of the women were, but I didn't seem to see those. Instead, I saw women with genuine humility and courage, eager to hear every word I had to say about using the AA program as my design for living. I saw women with beautiful faith; incarcerated for several years, they had accepted their situation yet had changed their worlds by seeking and developing an intimate relationship with a greater Power.

Some inmates were serving time for crimes committed during blackouts. Blackouts just like I'd had! Never before had the realization of how easily I could have hurt myself or someone else while in a state of drunkenness become so clear to me. "But for the Grace of God."

It was both gratifying and surpris-

ing to find I had so much to share about being a sober alcoholic in "the free world." Never before had I felt so like a channel; my Higher Power guided and encouraged me to share freely and unafraid, and to speak to as many of the women as I could in the short time I was allowed.

For a few days after leaving the penitentiary, I kept seeing the faces and the light in the eyes of some of the women I'd met. Their experiences gave me the gift of the discovery that

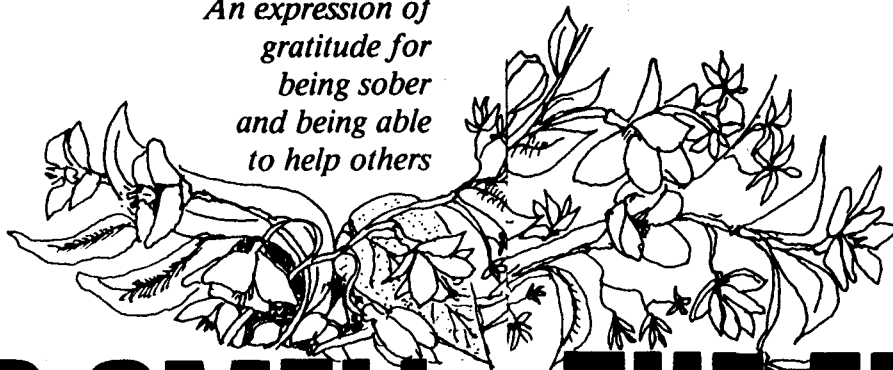
the real "free world" has nothing to do with the absence of physical confinement. The "free world" is the world of the spirit, in which your mind and heart are free to roam in search of the God within you.

I look forward to returning to visit the "pen," and I am grateful to know that the joy of freedom is in fact being experienced this very moment by many people like me, both in prison and out, all free through the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous.

T. M., Dallas, Tex.

BOY, WAS IT fun getting sober! I had been drinking daily for two years. I had slept through my husband's falling out of love with me and through one daughter's formative years. I still do not know who was President then. I was worried a lot about the kids in Biafra, while my own were walking around neglected, with wool skirts in July and stringy, unkempt hair.

*An expression of
gratitude for
being sober
and being able
to help others*



ever think of taking just one sip, trying to prove I can handle controlled drinking, I will remember that lady.

Whenever I'm called to help an alcoholic, I am the one who is helped. My Higher Power directs those calls. I can go for months without one, and then God sends me a fresh reminder exactly appropriate to whatever I'm going through. Most don't make it.

TIME TO SMELL THE FLOWERS



New in AA, I was so anxious not to drink again that I actually listened to someone's advice. "What do I do with the time I used to drink?" I asked.

"Get out of yourself and think of what you can do for someone else," the AA told me. I was so excited to be awake, I volunteered to work in a blood bank, signed up for graduate school, and got a job selling real estate all in the same week.

Another sober alcoholic advised me to drop all those activities for the time — just take care of my children and take it easy. Again, I listened.

The world started looking different. I had never noticed the various hues of green in the trees before. They were three-dimensional, lush, and gorgeous. Even the bricks on my house looked alive. I could smell

flowers, feel breezes as I never had before. I felt brand-new, as if I had just been born, and I cried at least once each day with a quiet joy and a gratitude that felt unbelievably beautiful.

One night, an AA friend called and said, "We have a drunk lady to help. I'll come pick you up." Three of us knocked on her door at night. There was no answer — just barking dogs. Finally, we let ourselves in. She was lying on a couch, dazed. On a mirror, she had written "Goodbye" in lipstick. The dogs had defecated all over her bed. She had been drinking for God knows how long, not eating, and she cried in our arms.

"I'm a nurse," she said. "I've even

published papers." I prayed and held her and told her all about myself and how I understood how she could get better if she wanted to. We hospitalized her that night.

I had a feeling I can't describe. Seeing what I could be like made me more than grateful for my life. When I got home at midnight, I thought of the filth in her house, and I pulled everything out of my cabinets and started scrubbing in pure gratitude that I could do it.

The next day, I visited her in the hospital, hoping I could continue helping her. She didn't even remember my name. She never made it. Last I heard, she had left town, drunk again. But she sure helped me. If I

Some do. I have to give back to AA what I took from it, and since it saved my life, I'll need a lifetime to repay.

The real bonuses always come to me. When I see miserable, depressed people who almost lost family, money, and life get sober, I feel like a Peeping Tom in their spiritual experiences. I relive my own with them, just as I relive a friend's first birth experience with her. We can empathize only with what we have experienced. I have never experienced physical poverty, so I cannot help people with that. But I do know how good it feels to fall in love, to have a baby, to feel the perfect smack of a tennis ball against your racket, to feel an inner warmth and security, to know that life is good, and to be a born-again Jew at thirty.

S. B., Virginia Beach, Va.

July 1982

The 1,200-Mile, 29-Year Twelfth Step Call

Twenty-nine years ago, as a young Navy man, I attended AA for the first time, at the old Alano Club in Santa Ana, Calif. I have always had a love for poetry, and at that time I originated a little poem, which I had printed on a business card with my telephone number. I then handed the cards out locally.

Since the birth of that card, my experiences have taken me many thousands of miles and on countless more drunks. But on August 17, 1979, I crawled back to AA and, through God's help, have been sober ever since.

Recently, in Arlington, Tex., a total stranger presented that same poem on a card to my wife. She handed the card with the number to me and asked that I call the young man. He knew nothing of me, or the origin of the card.

We may never know whom God will touch in some way through our individual efforts at Twelfth Step work.

D. M., Arlington, Tex.

ABOUT TWO years ago, I made a fortuitous discovery while experiencing a disturbing episode during my recovery. As a result, the Seventh Step became my tool for everyday coping and living. The emotional impact of this happening was like that of finding a new religion — the feelings of exhilaration persisted for several weeks.

Immediately prior to the discovery, I had worked myself into a near frenzy over distressing evidence of my inability to handle my own financial affairs. My income was adequate, and I knew there was no good reason for running out of money. Of course, this was not the first time it had happened. Once more, I had yielded to impulses to buy things, and my expenditures for the month had far exceeded available funds — or, for that matter, prospects for borrowing money to cover the deficit. My carefully laid budget plans had again proved fruitless.

I was very displeased with myself. Feelings of inadequacy rose. I soon began to doubt that I had any ability at all to cope with life. In a matter of hours, I became despondent and almost desperate. At that point, the thought struck me that I had indeed uncovered a serious character defect. I had never seen this problem in quite that light before, and I knew I had better turn to God for help.

I was sitting in a room all by myself. So I fell to my knees — literally, as AA co-founder Dr. Bob always counseled newcomers — and

Little Surrenders

*Through the
Seventh Step
he realized
that we "carry
our worlds
within
ourselves"*

said aloud, "God, help me with this problem. I simply can't handle it." It was really a Seventh Step and also a surrender experience. Almost immediately, I felt relief from the intense anxiety that had built up within me. My mind began to clear. Soon, new thoughts helped me to extricate myself from the dilemma. Weeks later, I developed techniques to prevent me from again committing serious errors of that sort.

A couple of days after the initial discovery, I paused to consider two surrender experiences of mine during my early days in AA. The first had opened the door to wholehearted acceptance of the AA program, resulting in the disappearance of my craving for alcohol in a matter of hours. The second occurred much later and led to a resolution of a serious inner conflict that had stood in the way of reliable sobriety. I realized that although the recent event had been less crucial than the first two, it was still very important.

Furthermore, I saw that this Step approach could be applied whenever I reached a similar impasse of my

own making, whether it be of outer circumstances or inner emotions. Whenever I find myself uptight, I fall on my knees, literally or figuratively — depending on my surroundings — and ask God's help. It comes easier to me now. In fact, during the past two years, my life has been marked by a series of these "little surrenders."

As the months have passed and surrender has followed surrender, I have come to a higher insight concerning this application of the Seventh Step. It is this: If I were able to retain the attitude that I achieve during the hours immediately following these crisis experiences, life would be continuously euphoric — I would forever be immersed in the kind of feelings I achieved for only brief periods with alcohol at the beginning. Let's call it a "surrendered attitude." It is the avenue to "the peace... which passeth all understanding." I perceived that whatever happens to me is not nearly so important as the way I look at the happening — the way I feel about it. We really do carry our worlds within ourselves.

D. J., Columbus, Ohio

August 1982

Over and Over Again

IT WAS A beautiful January day. I was sixteen and going skiing with my boyfriend for the first time. The ski area, close by our little town in New York State, had a beginners' slope and a rope tow. On the drive up, my friend gave me specific instructions on how to work the tow. "Grab the rope loosely," he said. "Let it flow through your mittens. Then tighten the grip."

As he spoke, I imagined the entire process and quickly discounted it. "That's okay for him," I thought, "but I'm the kind of person who has to attack something hard and fast, or I just can't do it at all!"

As we stood in line waiting for my turn, he smiled at me. I smiled back. I watched one person after the other go up the steep hill easily and quickly. Naturally, I did what I had planned to do. I grabbed that rope with all my might and instantly hit the snow.

"No, no!" he said, thinking I hadn't clearly understood the directions. "Don't squeeze it. Let the rope slip through!" Even as he brushed the snow off my face, I felt my mouth

tighten as I attacked that rope again. Straight out I flew, landing with another mouthful of snow.

For the rest of the day, I walked the slope, taking little bitty steps. Other skiers came down the mountain twenty or thirty times to my once or twice. At the end of the day, I was exhausted. I had learned a lot about walking sideways but very little about skiing, and I deduced I wasn't athletically inclined.

In AA, I'm told that insanity is doing the same thing over again, expecting different results. Each time I ignore the directions — "yes" my sponsor to death but do things hard and fast — I fall flat on my face. It isn't easy to listen, to trust, or to change old, defeating ways. In my early AA days, I felt exhausted from *talking* the Twelve Steps and deduced I was incapable of changing.

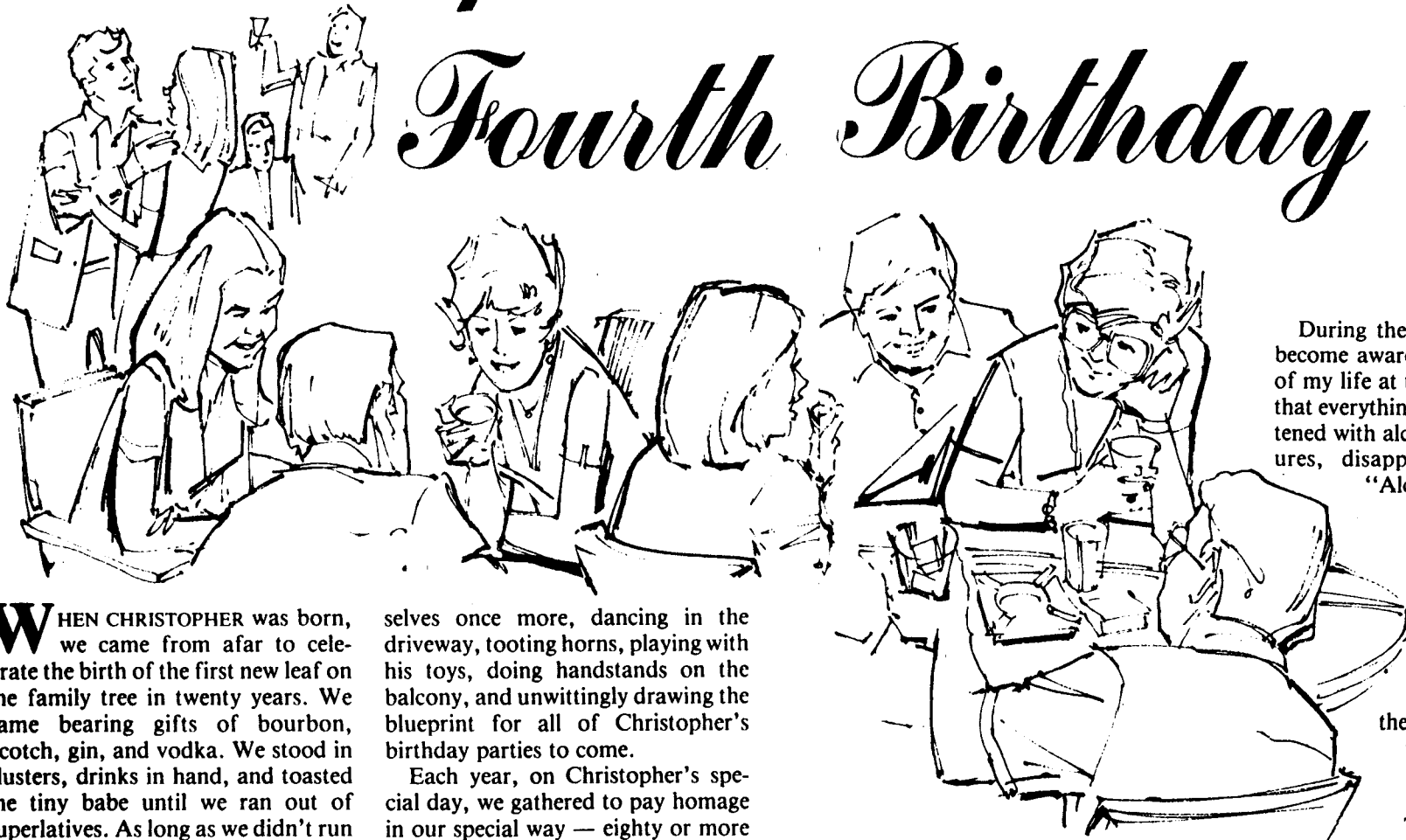
"Not so," my sponsor said. "If you understand that statement, then it doesn't apply to you."

I have a stubbornness story you wouldn't believe... or would you?

D. H., Fairfield, Conn.

September 1982

Christopher's Fourth Birthday



WHEN CHRISTOPHER was born, we came from afar to celebrate the birth of the first new leaf on the family tree in twenty years. We came bearing gifts of bourbon, Scotch, gin, and vodka. We stood in clusters, drinks in hand, and toasted the tiny babe until we ran out of superlatives. As long as we didn't run out of booze, the celebration was a success. We became children our-

selves once more, dancing in the driveway, tooting horns, playing with his toys, doing handstands on the balcony, and unwittingly drawing the blueprint for all of Christopher's birthday parties to come.

Each year, on Christopher's special day, we gathered to pay homage in our special way — eighty or more of us. And so it went until the third birthday.

During the preceding year, I had become aware that I was leading all of my life at the kiddie-car level and that everything was thoroughly christened with alcohol — successes, failures, disappointments, tragedies.

“Alcohol gave me wings to fly, / And then it took away the sky.” But I found the Fellowship of AA, and there followed, in me, a new life and new wings, which I was just trying out for the first time when Christopher's third birthday party rolled around.

To go or not to go? That was the question!

I was not afraid I'd succumb to the open bar but was

newly aware of how deadly boring are clusters of people who have slipped over the border of sanity and can no longer communicate. I found myself, for the first time, in the same boat with Christopher. But before I could catch his eye, his godparents had caught mine. J. J. and his darling wife had noticed I wasn't drinking. They asked why, and for reasons I didn't understand — until today — I told them. While I didn't go into the many complications that had led to my joining AA, I shared some mutual experiences and, most certainly, my joy at finding hope for a fresh start. J. J. wandered off soon after that. Though his wife had seemed sympathetic, I wondered why I'd mentioned it.

Today was Christopher's fourth birthday. I didn't go. Tonight, I had a phone call from J. J., of all people!

"Hey, we missed you at Christopher's party," he said in a happy voice. "You missed a real live one. Must have been at least eighty-five people."

"Just couldn't make it this year," I responded.

"Well, we missed you," he went on. "Remember last year?"

"Can't forget last year," I said unenthusiastically.

"Remember when my wife and I cornered you 'cause you weren't drinking, and you told us why — how much AA had helped you?"

"Yes." I remembered, but I was surprised that he did.

"Well, I turned around and tried

not to listen to you that night. It really bugged me, and I had to walk away. Remember?"

I was puzzled. "I remember talking about my experience and wondering afterwards why I'd bothered."

"I'll tell you why — because I needed to hear it. That's why." J. J.'s voice was loud and clear. "I walked away because you were telling my story. My wife knew it, too, and that night we had a long talk about it. She knew you'd found the solution and I was walking away from it. Anyway, I joined AA and I'm almost a year sober. We could hardly wait till Christopher's fourth birthday to get you off in a corner and talk AA. But you weren't there, so my wife said, 'Why don't you call her up as soon as we get home, and tell her?' So here I am!"

The joy in his voice was proof enough that he had found what I'd found to be true: This program works.

I had no idea that alcohol was ruining J. J.'s life when I felt compelled, a year ago, to tell him how it had ruined mine. And the miracle was another reminder that sometimes the best Twelfth Step call is the one you were led to by some unseen hand. That chance meeting or coincidental happening or unexpected visitor could be evidence of a power greater than ourselves at work in our lives and the life of another. This was one birthday J. J. and I could really celebrate together.

J. T., Covina, Calif.

THE FIRST time I took Step Three, I took it alone and did not use the prayer on page 63 of the Big Book. Four months sober, I was still too muddled to follow any guidelines.

My preparation, after I tried a 1,500-mile geographical cure and then joined AA in Texas, consisted of pursuing the job I wanted and never got. (I was, in fact, emotionally unemployable for anything more taxing than stacking cans.) Money ran low, and I ended up with \$14.77. I spent my first six sober months sharing a house with a progressively heavier drinker, and I could not even afford to move. I went crazier from that other person's drinking than I ever did from my own. (My first sponsor later said, "Now you know what the disease looks like.") But I stayed sober.

Finally, backed into an emotional corner one weekend in mid-October, and accepting my own powerlessness at last, I made something *like* a decision and said a short version of the prayer in the Big Book: "I quit!" The alcoholic "I" was ready to throw in the towel.

Later, Step Three became a somewhat calmer awareness that I lacked control over other people's actions. At meetings, I talked about my office (I finally did land a job) on the twentieth floor of a building overlooking a freeway. From that perspective, it was clear that I could not control all that traffic. If I needed further proof, I told myself, I could

Step Three

Throwing In the Towel

always try jumping up and down and shouting at the cars. Besides, talking about "giving up control" was really talking about giving up the *illusion* of control. I never really had the control in the first place.

Knowing what I could change (myself) and what I could not (everything else) kept me going for a while, until a series of events sent me into a tailspin. In a few weeks' time, one friend lost his job, several others in the Fellowship got drunk, a couple of marriages broke up, and two members of the program learned that they had terminal illnesses. I knew that I

had not caused any of these events, lacked the power to change them, and wasn't even afraid that they would happen to me. Yet I went into a depression. Why?

A phone call to a lady in the program gave me the answer. After I had described my mood and the surrounding events, she said, "I know what's wrong. You're like me. You empathize so much that you lose the belief that God is operating in those other people's lives. And then the fear comes back."

As soon as she said it, I knew she was right. By letting myself become too caught up and thus losing perspective, I had replaced faith with fear — but not the fear that I was responsible for what was happening or that it would happen to me. It was that other, older, shapeless alcoholic anxiety that takes over when we cease believing in "the care of God *as we understood Him*."

It is not always easy. Since that phone call, one ex-member has died drunk, but two members have died sober. Another sober member has become permanently blind. People I have sponsored have stopped attending meetings. My second sponsor (I'm on my third) has been drunk for three years. As a speaker at a recent conference reminded me, "I learned

that I didn't have to love everything that I had to accept."

One cannot tell someone terminally ill, "This, too, shall pass," when all medical evidence points in another direction. The saying just won't fit. It is not possible to love such moments; it is possible to accept them. If, at such moments in the lives of others, I cease to believe in the *care* of God because I do not like or understand it, I leave myself open to similar disbelief if similar events ever begin affecting my life. With that larger perspective of "the care of God *as we understood Him*" in mind, any problems I face today become as important as flat tires and runny noses. Only my inordinate self-importance suggests otherwise.

The best proof of my powerlessness and need for acceptance is always a Twelfth Step call on a still-drinking drunk. Those of us blessed with the gift of sobriety are obliged in justice and charity to carry the message. I am responsible for the effort of carrying that message; I am not responsible for the outcome. The drunk may keep on drinking, as that former sponsor of mine still is.

And if I need further proof, I tell myself, I can always go back to shouting at those cars.

R. F., Missouri City, Tex.

Follow the Directions

I HAD READ the first sentence on page 58 of the Big Book: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." Yet I took no action, for I had no understanding. I was without a drink from my first AA meeting on, but it took me twenty-seven months to begin my first attempt at Steps Four and Five. I realized at the completion of these Steps, ten months later, that they were written for a defiant, grandiose, sensitive, childish, stupid, and stubborn drunk like me.

Having skipped these Steps for so long, I almost picked up that first drink. I even had it poured out into a glass. I had read, reread, and underlined the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve," yet at that crucial moment, I could remember not one spiritual principle they contained. I had memorized a few passages of the Big Book so I could grandstand my great memorizing ability. I showed off in some of my entertaining pitches at the meetings in Hollywood and on skid row downtown. I was a comedian who almost got drunk because of my grandiosity, while at

the same time feeling inferior.

I forgot I was the drunken mailman who lost a U.S. mail truck at Christmastime. But I did remember one thing when I was about to take that first drink: I had been told at my first AA meeting, "Get phone numbers. Call someone before you drink the drink." I had Bob's phone number and called him. He told me to read pages 58 through 76 of the Big Book and said, "Follow the clear-cut directions." He did not waste time and words with me. He said goodbye and hung up quickly. I was peeved no little! But I poured the drink back into the bottle and began on the AA path.

It's nine years and some now without a drink. That drink was going to be a "deliberate drink" aimed at my wife. We had been separated eight years. At the end of the first year of my sobriety, we were reunited. After a three-month second honeymoon, "the stuff hit the fan." Fortunately, my wife is in Al-Anon. "But for the Grace of God," AA, and Al-Anon, we could not have made it this far. Had I thoroughly followed the AA

path in the beginning, I could have saved both of us much mental and emotional stress and strain.

It grieves me to hear more experienced members of AA tell newcomers they need not hurry along the AA path of the Twelve Steps. I sometimes hear statements to new people like "Take your time," "God will tell you when," "Don't let your sponsor rush you." Hell, when I first came through the doors of AA, I knew it was time to do *something* — and quickly! ("Quick" and "quickly" are used many times in the Big Book, "Twelve and Twelve," and other AA literature.) But in those days, I was often guilty of telling the new prospect he or she did not have to hurry. Being a rationalizer, justifier, and qualifier, also a manager, arranger,

and regulator, I couldn't see that I was a liar, cheat, and thief — an alcoholic affected spiritually, mentally, and emotionally by the disease of alcoholism. I was in no shape to lead a prospect onto the true path of AA.

To know a principle of the AA path, but not realize what it means and fail to take action, can be disastrous for a recovering alcoholic like me. The words know, realize, and understand embodied in the principles of AA are very meaningful to me and my growth in sobriety. They tell me that my Higher Power, God as I understand Him, works in a mysterious way performing wonders among us in our Fellowship. All I need do, one day at a time, is to follow the AA path quickly and thoroughly.

F. C., Hawthorne, Calif.

September 1982

Why Step Ten?

AROUND THE TABLES at Step discussions, I used to wonder, "Why Step Ten?" After I'd cleaned up my act and gone in for righteous living, what use was Ten?

Well, I've learned that "old ideas" are cunning. They'll be troublesome and cause difficulties unless we recognize them when they appear in new forms. These baffling old desires are really testing us, to determine the improvements in our lives as a result

of trying. As long as we *are* improving in AA, we're home free.

Step Ten also helps us to reconsider today's thoughts about anyone who *today* might have seemed unkind to us. Suppose someone falsely said I'd been drinking lately. That wouldn't matter as long as *I* know I'm practicing the program. Instead of being angry, I could simply be glad it's not true!

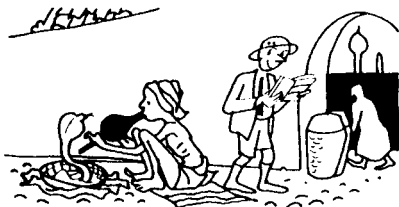
D. R., Lathrup Village, Mich.

September 1982

Twelfth Step on a train

From Secunderabad, India:

To a large number of Americans, India is the land of naked fakirs, elephants, and snake charmers. Yet



with our industrialization, there has been a rise in alcoholism. I was lucky to be introduced to AA in a small but effective group where the wisdom of the Steps and Traditions is scrupulously followed. We have solved the problem of the lack of adequate material by mimeographing extracts from the Grapevine, and we use "Closed Meeting Topics."

I make it a point to carry an old copy of the Grapevine. During a train journey, a beautiful lady in an ornate sari came into my compartment. Her French perfume could not disguise the aroma of whisky, which this old, sober hound dog could sniff from a

considerable distance.

I put on the not-so-subtle act of reading my Grapevine, planning to show her the pamphlet "Is AA for You?" (I always carry that, too.) But she beat me to the punch. She told me that she had been a member of AA but did not read the Grapevine, which her husband, also an AA, got regularly.

Our conversation continued throughout the night — on why she had not given her problem serious thought, how the Twelve Steps had helped me — and I could see the Higher Power's benevolence seem to change her flippant attitude.

When I last heard from that charming lady, she had been blessed with sobriety for seven months. K. G.

Can AA Be a COP-OUT?

*"Turn it over" and "I am responsible"
are two sides of the same coin
in sobriety*

WHEN I DRANK, my whole life was a cop-out. I made people and places and things responsible for all my miseries. I took little or no responsibility myself for the mess my head and my body was in. As long as I did, I drank...

Until that day (too long in coming) when I said, "I give up." Until that day when I read those important

words "I am responsible" and knew it would no longer do (if I wanted to live with any degree of comfort and sanity) to cop out.

That knowledge gave me courage and strength but was also a source of confusion for a while. I heard more than one speaker say, "I am powerless over everyone and everything — including myself." I had to

examine that, and here is what I found.

Like every other alcoholic, I am powerless over alcohol the moment I take that first drink. Once I do that, I have absolutely no way of knowing what will happen — except that, in one way or another, it will be likely to cause me pain and disaster. And that I do not need.

But I do not believe I am powerless *before* I take that drink. I have the marvelous power of choice; I have any number of tools that this Fellowship has provided to enable me to put down the obsession or the desire to drink. Those same tools give me another choice: whether or not I will be overwhelmed by those destructive emotions, self-pity, anger, fear — all constant companions of mine when I was on the sauce. While I may and still do experience them at times, since I am human, they do not hang on if I use the tools you have given me. I *have* that choice.

So I have power that, God knows, I never had when I was drinking. And so can every other alcoholic, I believe. What I no longer hold is the insane conviction of my drinking days that I am *all* powerful. But I *can* exert a significant, healthy effect on my destiny, just so long as I stay in continuous contact with AA and with its beautiful thinking.

What of those who truly believe they are powerless in every area? If they can stay sober that way, God bless them (and He undoubtedly has). For me, that would be another cop-

out. If I am totally powerless, why bother to do anything? Why not leave it all up to God and His personal plan for me?

I cannot do that. I believe that God still helps those who help themselves.

By the same token, I was for a long time troubled by those whom I heard say, "I know I cannot change anyone or anything, so I no longer try." It is completely true that I cannot *ultimately* effect a change in any other human being, no matter how hard I try. But does that mean I do not try? I have heard and seen people in AA using that simple cop-out to do a minimum of (or no) Twelfth Step work. If you truly believe you can have no effect on anyone's thinking, why bother to tell them about our program?

We are, in my opinion, obligated to *try* to change the practicing alcoholic's thinking, though we know the final decision is his and we are not God. What it boils down to for me is this: In the final analysis, I cannot change anyone else or get another alcoholic sober; but I sure as hell can try to help him make the change. And I do.

My tendency to cop out, to find rationalizations for passivity or for sloth, has not disappeared merely because I no longer drink. It behooves me to beware of the easy cop-outs. Turning it over to God is beautiful, but nowhere is it written that the act absolves us of all responsibilities.

B. I., Studio City, Calif.

TODAY, I AM grateful for my place in the world. I don't have to roam around getting nowhere. That's just one of the great rewards I have received from participating in the Institutions Correspondence Service, through GSO (the AA General Service Office).

I became involved three years ago. At that time, I was in a deep depression that lasted fourteen months. I felt like hell all the time, with thoughts of getting out of it all. But I stayed with it and didn't take that first drink. I constantly thanked the God of my understanding for the privilege of knowing that someone, in an institution somewhere, wanted outside AA contact. That alone, even in the midst of pain, kept me feeling that I was not only needed but wanted. I had never felt needed or wanted.

Action was the key for me. The early AAs tell us in the Big Book that when all else fails, working with another alcoholic will save the day. It has been my experience in these three years that it is just as they said it would be. Here in the Institutions Correspondence Service, I find the magic of action. This form of service has been and still is miraculously rewarding for me, and I want to share this experience particularly with those who may not know this wonderful service exists. My correspondence list has doubled in three years; in fact, I am corresponding both nationally and internationally. Through this medium, I have made friends all over the world, sharing the language of the

Friends All Over the World

heart as we know it in AA.

In sobriety, I have hurt worse than I would ever have allowed myself to hurt while drinking. But today, all is well. I have a deep concern for anyone who may identify with my depression. Action works, friends. Should you become involved in this service, I feel certain you will not regret it.

A. M., Los Angeles, Calif.

Whole Measures

*Working each Step is
more than a one-shot deal*

OFTEN, WHEN a group is discussing one of the Twelve Steps, someone around the table says, "Oh, I took that Step a couple of years ago." Clearly, the statement implies, he or she need not think about the Step again.

At these moments, I often feel envious, because none of the Steps has been a one-time experience for me. And I've had to take some of them many, many times.

The first part of Step One was relatively easy. By the time I found AA, I had tried consciously controlled drinking for two or three years — and experienced the dismal failures that always followed such episodes. So I was ready to accept powerlessness over alcohol.

But admit that my life was unmanageable? I still had a job; I had never been hospitalized or tossed in jail. Clearly, I was in control. I was managing my life, I thought.

Only after many months was I able to examine all areas of my life honestly enough to drive out any illusion of manageability. Unfortunately, this

realization didn't quell my inclination to run the world. From time to time, I still get smug and start thinking I have it all under control again. Inevitably, I end up in trouble, concede that I can't handle everything alone, and take Step Two when I admit that only a Power greater than myself can keep my life on an even keel.

Immediately, I take Step Three and turn my life over to that Higher Power. For a few hours or days, I feel super. Then, for inexplicable reasons, I forget how lousy I felt wrestling with the dilemma, and I pull it back again. After I've made myself thoroughly miserable, I take another Third Step. And sometimes another and another . . .

I've also had to take Steps Four and Five several times as I've been able to look at the past more honestly.

The first time I took Step Four, I found one character defect. Because I wanted to use the office's typewriter and paper, I took the Step on my lunch hour. Completing my task in less than ten minutes, I read a maga-

zine for the rest of my break and wondered why some members found Step Four difficult.

A year later, I took Steps Four and Five again. Vowing to be more assiduous, I completely bogged down in Four and spent several days rehashing my many character defects.

Later, suspecting that neither of those approaches met the intent of the Steps, I tried again and achieved a more balanced inventory.

When I hit Step Six, I thought this was the easiest one yet. Of course, I was ready to have God remove my defects of character, wasn't I? Unfortunately, time has proved I'm not.

When I'm unhappy, I don't immediately ask a Higher Power's help. Instead, I nurture resentments and self-pity — sometimes for days — playing over and over in my mind the tape of exactly how I was right and the other guy was wrong. Only after I've made myself thoroughly miserable once again do I take Step Seven

and ask God to remove the shortcomings.

In response to Step Eight, I made a list of all people I had hurt to whom I could easily and painlessly make amends. From that list, I scratched off the names of anyone who, I judged, had hurt me more than I hurt him. With a sigh of relief, I took Step Nine and raced on.

Much later, after hearing Step Eight hundreds of times, I noted that it didn't read quite the way I had interpreted it. The fact that I couldn't easily (or ever) make amends to a person didn't exclude his name. Neither, I was shocked to learn, did the fact that he might have hurt me, too. So I tackled Steps Eight and Nine again.

Clearly, Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are intended for continuous maintenance — not as one-time experiences. My problem with those Steps is a little different. I forget to take them.

Actually, forget isn't the right word. I remember, but then I procrastinate, so the Steps don't get done. Evenings, it seems to me, are the best time to take Steps Ten and Eleven. When everyone is in bed and the house is finally quiet, I can look back at the day, pray, and meditate without interruption. Unfortunately, when that magical time finally arrives, the Steps still get crowded out by other activities. I need to fix a snack first. Then, I'm going to read one more page of this book before I begin. Soon, I'm half asleep, and the Steps get short shrift. The next night, I neglect Steps Ten and Eleven altogether.

When, shortly thereafter, I get into emotional trouble, I realize I've been omitting those Steps, vow never to forget them again, and then proceed to fall into the same pattern within a couple of months.

Step Twelve gets similar treatment. I forget it or procrastinate. When I

arrive at meetings, I'm often so glad to see my friends that I disregard the new person sitting alone. Or, if I do notice the newcomer, I think, "Well, I'll approach him later. Right now, I want to tell my friend about..." Later, of course, is often too late.

When I first came to AA and read the Twelve Steps, I thought I would rapidly check each one off as I bounded on to the next. But that has not been the case.

Sometimes, I've felt discouraged as I've had to take Steps — or at least parts of Steps — time and time again. But then, I remember that "half measures availed us nothing." As I grow, I'm given the capacity to view the Steps differently and respond to them more honestly. And each time I take a Step again, I make some "spiritual progress." Perhaps I'm never intended to reach that level of "spiritual perfection" where I can be done with the Steps and rest on my laurels.

K. W., Fairborn, Ohio

From *AA Today* (1960)

AA Steps for the Underprivileged Non-AA

by Edward J. Dowling, S.J.



MORE INFLUENTIAL on history than the Nile or the Mississippi is another river — the Gulf Stream. Without it, the British Isles would be as bleak as Labrador or Siberia.

AA is like a Gulf Stream in the ocean of today's life. It is indistinguishable from its banks — but its winds, like burnt incense, whisper hope and life to human Siberias.

"It's like AA" has been the passport to acceptance among the dignosclerotic (hardening of the dignity) for such stigma-pilloried movements as Narcotics Anony-

mous, Crime Prevention, Recovery, Inc., Divorcées Anonymous, Divorcées Unanimous, WANA, Adiposics Anonymous, the Mattachine Society, Average People, Nicotinic Nobodies, Daughters of Bilitis, Gamblers Anonymous, Check Writers Anonymous, Security Cloister, Politicians Anonymous, and other self-help groups in areas of varying degrees of seriousness and helplessness.

Definitions of Twelfth Step words in the Twelve Steps suggest the extent of the application of these Steps to nonalcoholics.

"Sanity" in the Second Step agrees with psychiatrists' classification of alcoholism as a psychosis. If these Steps can arrest one psychosis, why not other psychoses and neuroses? At least two groups, Security Cloister and Average People, use AA's Twelve Steps as a filter for spiritual and religious helps in arresting neuroses and psychoses.

Alcohol is a narcotic. Narcotics Anonymous members use the Twelve Steps.

Alcoholism is, when unchecked, gluttony for alcoholic drink. AA's

success with this type of gluttony opens new hope for the better-known gluttony which is killing many people — respectfully autopsied as obesity or overweight.

My 240-pound gluttony gave me two heart attacks. An alcoholic doctor got me down toward 180 when he advised a total AA abstinence from starch, butter, salt, and sugar. He said these four foods were probably my "alcohol." Abstinence was so much easier than temperance. The "balanced" diet often prescribed was loaded with these four "craving-creating appetizers." I was like a lush tapering off on martinis. Only after the discovery of the AA approach to craving-creating intake did I realize that the Jesuit Ignatius' first rule for diet in his Spiritual Exercises was to go easy on craving-creating food and drink.

AA's success with liquid gluttony opens up a hope, not only for solid

gluttony, but also for the larger class of body compulsions of which gluttony is a species. Gluttony is a species of sensuality or inordinate body drives. Unarrested alcoholism is sensuality. Sensuality covers such situations as too many cancer-threatening cigarettes and qualitative or quantitative sex problems. I have seen a compulsive infatuation (with its sensual concomitants and addiction) yield to the AA Steps. Some ten years ago, I arrested my own nicotine addiction with the help of the AA Steps.

In moving their therapy from the expensive clinical couch to the low-cost coffee bar, from the inexperienced professional to the amateur expert, AA has democratized sanity.

As Columbus, Marquette, and Lewis and Clark pushed forward the terminals of our frontier, so AA has advanced the frontiers of hope even in situations otherwise "powerless."

The psychiatrist has alerted the

nonpsychiatric doctor to the psychic dimension of somatic disorders. AA alerted both to a third dimension, the spiritual or religious, and pioneered an ethical-psychosomatic therapy. That means that the cure for the shakes is via the shaker's belief in God.

Psychiatrists alerted the clergy to the "cause and cure significance" of the spiritual or psychic. AA helped them even more by demonstrating the "cause and cure significance" of religion. The agnostic smog of urban materialism had corroded religious heirlooms of many spiritually impoverished people. Yet it was in the sophisticated urban saloons that those religious values were recovered by many. Roger Babson's dictum "The greatest of our undeveloped resources is faith" suggests the profound contribution that the AA Second Step has made to many. The dramatic ethical focus in many lives

that resulted has salvaged many ergs of wasted effort.

Sometimes, non-AA members of an AA family are quicker to understand the Twelfth Step application of these principles to all our affairs than is the AA, who is transfixed in the absorbing contemplation of his new sanity, social life, and psychiatric-sacerdotal role. Possibly, if the AA spent less time and energy in the breadth dimension of spreading AA and more in the length and depth dimensions, the breadth of its spread might not be limited to such a low percentage of the world's alcoholics. The length dimension means the application of these Steps to *all our affairs* — sedatives, tensions, compulsions, and so on. The depth dimension is suggested by the Eleventh Step, "Sought through prayer and meditation... for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

November 1982

What is the AA program?

From Watertown, Conn.:

I am amazed by the number of people who think "Don't drink, and go to meetings, and everything will get better" is all there is to the program.

If I did just that, I would be drunk today. For me, the program is the Twelve Steps. There are many times I cannot attend a meeting. That is okay; I have the Steps to help me keep my life in balance.

When I was sober a year, I was not very happy in my sobriety. My sponsor pointed out that I could not be the same person sober as I was drunk. I had to change, and the way to do this is through the Steps. I have become aware of my character defects through the Fourth Step; my emotional dependency has been removed

through the Seventh Step; and I have had many spiritual awakenings. If it wasn't for the Steps, I wouldn't be sober seven years.

G. T.

November 1982

Spirit-building exercises

From Brandon, Man.:

Around here we refer to the Eleventh Step as the morning and night exercises, which newcomers are advised to go through even if they don't understand what they are doing. This advice is sometimes given even when the newcomer hasn't worked up to the Eleventh Step. However, people who follow it usually stay sober.

Personally, when I was too scrambled to even think it possible to work the Steps, I started praying that God grant me the knowledge of His will for me and the power to carry that out, which I learned from hearing the Steps read. This prayer followed my list of requests dealing with how God should deal with me. I refer to this list now as Santa Claus prayers. However, I believe I was granted the knowledge of God's will for me, which was to catch on to the AA philosophy. And the power came through the wonderful people in the Fellowship.

M. I.

Made a searching and fearless
moral inventory
of ourselves.

*Three AAs tell us how they worked
these vital action Steps*

At the Turning Point

LAST NIGHT, I attended my regular Thursday night meeting, which happened to be chaired by my husband, also a recovering alcoholic.

The subject he chose was taken right from "How It Works," and it was simply the words "We stood at the turning point." I had to reflect then on my own early days in A.A. and my personal turning point.

On the day of my last drink, at the end of a three-week drunk, I had what I can describe only as a crucial awakening: the revelation that if I took one more drink, I would die. For the first time in thirteen years, I did not want to die. This time,

though, I knew I would if I did not stop drinking.

Being very sick and very frightened, I called for help, and I was helped at our alcoholism unit in a local hospital. The doctor in charge and the counseling staff were recovering AAs, and outside AAs came in to help us patients learn the AA ways.

I heard some of these AAs talking about the Fourth and Fifth Steps, not necessarily recommending them to us newcomers, just telling us how and why they worked so well. The Steps sounded frightening and foreboding.

I had gone to the unit with enormous amounts of fear, guilt, and

Admitted to God, to ourselves,
and to another human being
the exact nature of our wrongs.

remorse — secrets I had hidden for years, no longer trusting anyone with any part of myself. And I knew that no one trusted or accepted me, either. I had become too ashamed to even tell anyone that I hurt, because I thought they would not care. Somehow, I knew that if I went home with all my secrets still secret, I would not stay sober. Now, I wanted to be sober. So, frightening as these two Steps sounded, I decided I would try to work them.

I went to my room and wrote. I put on the paper every piece of guilt, fear, and transgression I could remember. It took a few hours. Not realizing I should look for pluses, I wrote only the terrible things.

I then took my paper and went to tell it all to one of the counselors, who, as I stated, was an AA member. I did tell her everything, and she shared parts of her life with me, pointing out common traits and feelings. Especially, she showed me how we had both coped with life by running from it through alcohol.

When we were through, she looked at me with the same acceptance that

she had given me before I had said a word. Her acceptance of me opened the door to acceptance of myself and told me, without words, that I really was all right. I know today that her nonjudgmental attitude is a quality shared by most AAs, and that she had learned it through her own use of the Twelve Steps.

What I could see then was that my first, crude Fourth and Fifth Steps had set me free from my lifelong guilt and unrealistic fear. They began a new way of life, with honesty as its essential base. They created hope out of my hopeless disease. Since that time, six and a half years ago, I have worked many Fourth and Fifth Steps. Today, the good stands out clearly; in most cases, it outshines the bad. Today, the only secrets I keep belong to others or are facts that could be harmful to someone. I have nothing of my own to hide. I share both with my AA husband and with my friends in the Fellowship.

But it was my original sharing with a very special lady that was my own turning point.

J. J., Pine Island, Fla.

Step Five

A 5,000-Mile Discussion

HOW TRUE it is that we really feel ourselves grow spiritually after honestly carrying out Step Five. My sponsor always said that unless we have done this Step, we can never fully realize how far on the broad highway to serenity we have gone. He also said that most of us find it comparatively easy to admit to God and to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs, but if that is all we do, we might gloss over some touchy and

purplish chapters in our lives.

There is a normal inhibition: We cannot brace ourselves to discuss every detail with a person we know well. I have solved this by choosing a mature and wise sponsor with whom I had been in correspondence. I admired his letters for their perspicacity and perspicuity, and I could really bare my soul to him in writing. By the mere process of writing at length on the wrongs I had committed, including those that had sunk into my subconscious, I found an exhilarating catharsis — a purification of my mental conflicts.

I did this in slow phases, and he counseled me from 5,000 miles away, giving me the benefit of his wisdom and his long experience in AA matters. How eagerly I looked forward to his letters, and how earnestly I took his advice — which I still follow now — to end each day with a brief period of silent meditation. I review my actions of the day and thank God for the wisdom of His will in guiding my actions. I try to be sincerely contrite for any wrong action caused by rashness on my part, be it with anger, procrastination, pride, envy, or the many other shortcomings that my human flesh is heir to.

I cannot adequately describe how light I feel since I took the Fifth Step, and how soundly I sleep. It has almost helped me share the gift of levitation that the birds of the air are blessed with.

It took time and effort, but the Big Book tells us we must constantly strive for progress, through the Twelve Steps. When I finally molded this delightful habit, my sobriety was permeated with a growing sense of well-being, in which I have experienced more than mere glimpses of serenity. I have shared this thought with my AA friends, and they tell me that they, too, have found great peace of mind through really having carried out the Fifth Step.

I am intensely grateful to AA and my Higher Power and my sponsor for having guided me in this difficult Step. The modus operandi was devised to suit my own personality; but I would urge readers to give the Fifth Step a genuine try. The Higher Power, as you understand Him, will surely guide you to another human being whom you can trust and rely on to guide and counsel you without raising his eyebrows over the purple patches.

K. G., Secunderabad, India

Step Four

'My Separation From Guilt'

WHEN I STARTED drinking, in the early 1960s, I slid into having a regular affair with guilt, but our relationship became really serious only when I drank. At that point, not everything I did was under the influence of alcohol. But right from the start when drinking, I never failed to spend at least part of the evening rerunning imaginary film clips from the great embarrassing moments of my young life, for the purpose of feeling guilty about them all over again.

By the end of my drinking, in early 1979, I was married to guilt. I was still legally single; no woman would have me, because of my drinking; indeed, I got bored, angry, or scared when any woman did seem receptive to real closeness. But I embraced guilt with habitual passion. And the more I drank, the more I had to feel guilty about. We clung together because I didn't know any other way to live.

When I came to AA, shaky but determined, willing at least to try AA before declaring myself hopeless, I didn't yet know that I had begun my separation from guilt. As soon as I stopped drinking, regained partial

use of my wits, and could pay attention to my emotions, a feeling of humiliated shame was no longer my roommate. For one thing, my time was devoted to the immediate challenge of acquiring sober habits. For another, meetings helped dispel my past bitter recriminations against myself, kept fresh in memory by guilt. I had found a new way of life and was infinitely relieved.

The Fourth Step was the start of my divorce proceedings. I had tried to take the Step in the same way I used to flagellate myself when I drank: recall uncomfortable moments and dwell upon them. Naturally, I was unable to write a Fourth Step in that way. Then, I took the desperate measure of consulting the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I organized my Fourth Step around the people who had made me feel rage, humiliation, and fear, and around the people in whom I had probably induced those emotions. I got it written in time for my first anniversary, and promptly took the Fifth Step with my sponsor during that week.

The key to my understanding the

Step well enough to work it lay in the words "searching and fearless." Because of my frequent consorting with guilt, I thought I knew everything about moral inventories; I thought I had been casting up my moral accounts during all those years of self-flagellation. Clearly, a Fourth Step inventory could not be conducted on the same principles that made me miserable for so long. So once again I had to change my old ideas.

The inventories I had conducted with my nose over a glass were neither thorough nor impartial. I would fix on one incident and replay it over and over, not learning anything from it, just wallowing in how bad it made me feel. And I was always pointing fingers, trying to find scapegoats, instead of dispassionately determining the patterns of my own behavior.

AA taught me to look at my habitual methods of coping with the world,

to see these patterns in a spirit not of recrimination, but of detection. I was not really searching as long as I followed the thought paths I trod while drinking. And I was not fearless as long as I refused to face the facts of my past calmly, and sought instead to find some villain or circumstance to account for my personal tragedies.

I still receive occasional visitations of guilt; but these are more fleeting and much less searing than when I drank. Nowadays, guilt is an invitation to the Tenth Step, a warning signal that something is out of line in my daily life. Now that I'm divorced from guilt, I'm free to love myself. Therefore, I'm free to love all of the friends in AA who helped me through my difficult time of leaving an old reliable companion. Though I used to live with guilt, we don't wake up together anymore.

J. Y., Takoma Park, Md.

... And a Partridge in a Pear Tree



TWO TURTLEDOVES... five golden rings... nine ladies dancing... and a partridge in a pear tree!

Sounds great today, but none of those lovely things would have slowed me down a bit when I was drinking, because my twelve gifts of Christmas (and any other time) were always twelve fifths of booze. What better gift for a dedicated, high-flying drunk? — especially during the holidays.

I always began the Yuletide season along about the middle of October, just to get a running start, picked up speed around Thanksgiving, and finally crashed down with a sickening thud the day after Santa's trip. "Is that all there is?" That was my question as I looked at the gifts under the tree, rejoicing only in those related to drinking, such as equipment for my well-stocked bar.

Then, through a remarkable series of events, I was catapulted into Alcoholics Anonymous, and my life began to change.

Now, after a number of years of sobriety, I can see that the gifts on all twelve days of Christmas are really our golden Twelve Steps, which have restored me to enough sanity to experience being happy, joyous, and free.

Today, I can see the tree of life (the people tree) decorated with those twelve precious gifts. I can see their luster changing my dark past into a better today and a brighter tomorrow.

With our Twelve Steps of recovery, Christmas comes every day of the year, so I can now enjoy two turtle-doves, five golden rings, nine ladies dancing, and a partridge in a pear tree — if my Mastercard can handle it!

Anonymous, San Antonio, Tex.



Rocking Chair Sobriety

A SHORT TIME ago, I was asked to lead a meeting on the Seventh Step. I decided to refresh my memory and took out my copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and began reading. I came across the statement concerning the Higher Power's being used as "a sort of bush-league pinch hitter, to be called upon only in case of emergency." I realized that was what I had been doing. I was no longer praying daily for God's will but was relying on my own will.

This brought about an examination of all the Steps, and I referred to a bunch of articles in past *Grapevines*. In the March 1973 issue, I came across an article by Dr. Sam Shoemaker entitled "Those Twelve Steps as I Understand Them." It was a big help. The next article was "I've Done the Twelve Steps — Now What?" In it, the writer speaks of "rocking chair sobriety: a great deal of motion, without going anywhere; a lot of activity, but not much action." That was me. When I spoke of the Steps, my experience was always well into the past. There were no current references.

True, I was speaking and doing Twelfth Step work, but I was not reliving the Steps or even reviewing them on a regular basis. I was living on past performances. The man who won the five gold medals in speed skating in the recent Olympics was unable to win the next several events. He had let down on his training. He was no more able to live on his past performances than I was.

Forgetting Steps Four and Ten, I had sugarcoated and renamed the seven deadly sins. False pride became recognition of my true worth. I would sit there and beam as someone quoted me at a meeting, and I would nod approval. Greed was easily transformed into ambition. Lust became love. My anger, a bit more subtly, was translated into righteous indignation and was in-

spired by those others who envied me. Gluttony was the result of having done without proper food during my drinking period and thus needing to make up for the poor diet. Envy was just seeking the things that would have been mine if only I had not wasted my time in pursuit of alcohol. Last, sloth was merely applying the slogan "Easy Does It" to my everyday life.

Dr. Shoemaker used the following prayer in his discussion of the Seventh Step: "Lord, I'm not much. You aren't getting much of a prize. It's mostly broken pieces I'm giving You. But I ask You to mend them. You can take the pride and the lust and the anxiousness and the fear and the resentment. Please do take them, and me with them."

G. S., Southampton, N.Y.

'When We Were Wrong'

*Step Ten
gives us the
right to be wrong*

OTHER PEOPLE'S being mistaken, or saying or doing dumb things, I can stand. It is a bit upsetting and off-putting sometimes, but I can go right on loving them and admiring their other, excellent qualities.

What I couldn't do, before AA and for quite a while in AA, was extend a similar tolerance to myself. All the rest of you could indulge your normal human foibles and frailties as much as necessary, with my blessing. But not me. From myself, I demanded a standard of perfection unattainable by any human being. I never got perfection or anything resembling it, but I never stopped demanding it. From me, there should be no mistakes, no half-witted remarks, no errors of fact or judgment.

What made this especially frustrating was that I, more than average, just was not cut out for perfection.

While it is not literally true that I have five thumbs on each of my left hands, that is the impression I create. If you doubt it, look at my handwriting or my pitiful dabs at artwork or needlecraft. On second thought, don't. Too depressing.

You shouldn't believe the story that my feet are on backwards, either. They aren't. It's only that the amount of tripping and stumbling I do makes it seem that way. As I say to startled AA friends I have just clutched in a death grip to save myself from a header down the stairs, "If I'm this awkward sober, think what I was drunk." They turn pale.

There must have been some kind of slip-up when the link between my tongue and my brain was put in. I have stood in red-faced horror at hearing what came out of my mouth when I had intended to utter the most innocent remark.

It was from this general mess that I demanded perfection! In the course of the struggle for it, my alcoholism developed. You are welcome to any opinion that appeals to you about whether my insistence on impossible standards had anything to do with the onset of alcoholism. My own opinion is that it didn't, but I could be wrong. I'm frequently wrong, and I can live with that thought quite comfortably — now.

It took the AA program, hundreds of AA meetings, and a startling discovery about the Twelve Steps to get me to that point. Making the transition from obsessive, compulsive

drinking to total sobriety was not easy for me. Trying at the same time to extract error-free performance from myself was such an exercise in futility, I wonder the sobriety survived. Perhaps a Higher Power was involved.

My first years in AA brought on massive upheavals in my thinking. I had to discard old values and discover new ones. I had to reexamine everything I believed and everything I thought I knew.

In trying to bring my unrealistic expectations of myself into line with the other changes taking place, I was whipsawed between "I can't do anything right!" and "I have to do everything right!" Trying to have it both ways, I went through a period of starting every observation with: "I may be wrong, but..." and going on from there.

At this time, a dogmatic AA member joined my group. She was very positive in her approach to AA, extremely sure her position was correct about everything. She promptly took me to task for my "negative" attitude. "You shouldn't say you may be wrong," she admonished me. "Be positive! Be sure of yourself! Know you are right!"

For a few seconds, I said nothing, while wondering what in blazes this dame did about Step Ten. Then, I produced my favorite way of getting myself off the hook when I think I've been handed a hunk of baloney but it would be impolite and unkind to say so. "A very interesting idea. I'll cer-

tainly give it some thought.”

In this case, I gave “it” a lot of thought — not her idea, but Step Ten: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.” It didn’t say, “*if* we were wrong”; it said, “*when* we were wrong,” as though we were certain to be wrong sometimes. I hadn’t noticed that before. Step Ten expected me to be wrong occasionally, and was perfectly calm about it. Unlike me.

As many times as I had read and studied the Steps, examining them in reference to my passion for perfection had not occurred to me. Now, with Step Ten so plainly telling me something about myself, it was time to submit my problem to all twelve.

What do the Steps that led me into sobriety and a much improved life have to say about my being wrong, mistaken, awkward, tactless, and generally imperfect? Which of them mention it?

The first three Steps do not. It might be said that an admission I was “powerless” includes “powerless to achieve perfection.” However, as worded, these Steps do not refer to mistakes or wrongdoing.

Step Four? Yes. A moral inventory certainly must include wrongs and errors, past and present.

Step Five? Yes. “The exact nature of our wrongs” assumes there are bound to be wrongs. It doesn’t add, “in case there are any.”

Step Six? Again, yes. “Defects of character” were just what I could

never tolerate in myself. AA placidly expects them.

Step Seven? Yes. If we asked to have “shortcomings” removed, they could hardly have been nonexistent.

Step Eight? Most definitely yes. This Step says that every one of us, including me, has wronged others and should become willing to make amends.

Step Nine? Yes. If wrongs have been done — and they have! — amends should be made.

Step Ten? Yes. Oh, yes! Not only have I been wrong in the past, I must expect to be wrong occasionally for the rest of my life.

Steps Eleven and Twelve? No. Since it has been established in earlier Steps that perfection is forever impossible, these last two address larger issues.

Seven of our Twelve Steps state unequivocally that I have been, am, and will be wrong. I have shortcomings and defects of character. I never have been and never can be perfect.

As that realization became a part of me — and it took time — it brought me one of the greatest of the many blessings that have come to me from AA. I learned to accept myself as a fallible human being.

I do not have to strive for perfection. Mistakes are permissible. I have the right to be wrong.

And what a comfort that thought is to me, as I make my bemused way through life, one foot in a bucket, pushing on doors marked “Pull.”

E. E., Tulsa, Okla.

Steps Toward Good Relationships

*Before AA,
he couldn't get along
with God, himself,
or anyone else*

AS I DID with "a few" other character defects I've nurtured through the years in sobriety, I protected this one by regarding it as a virtue. But time passed, and the novelty began wearing thin when I was lovingly referred to as "the Step Nazi" and "Attila the Sponsor." It occurred to me that it was once again time for Step Ten.

In working with new men who wanted to "get into action," I caught myself telling them, none too gently, "Work the Steps and work 'em now, and here's how you're going to do it." Thank God, most of them were willing to overlook this flagrant case of "old-timeritis." Upon closer introspection, I realized that I owed it to these new members to pass on my experiences in the matter of *why* we place so much emphasis on working the Steps, as opposed to discussing,

debating, and then dispensing with the Steps. So I took a closer look at myself as I was when I had my last drink, in 1962.

The grace of God, the members of my home group, and my mother (then sober two years herself, and still sober) made up my support system, allowing me to stay away from the first drink long enough to realize that drinking alcohol had been my solution to relationship problems.

I had only three relationship problems, but months after I stopped drinking, they were still plaguing me. I knew that it wouldn't be long before I would engineer these three relationship problems into a slip.

My sponsor saw that look in my eye, and we talked about my dilemma. Lack of alcohol was the cause of my dilemma. It had always been there to obliterate those relationship problems, and now it had been taken away from me.

Those three little problems?

1. My relationship with God was a travesty. Essentially, the symptom of that relationship problem was a little confusion when I thought about God. I thought I was him!

2. My relationship with myself could be summed up in my recogni-

tion that each drink I had taken had been a death wish. People with good feelings about themselves don't try to kill themselves.

3. I couldn't get along with anyone I knew.

So there I was. I couldn't get along with God, myself, or anyone around me. Those *are* relationship problems!

That, my sponsor told me, was why I had to commit myself to working all Twelve Steps under his direction and God's protection. You know the rest.

When I worked Steps One, Two, and Three, I made a good beginning in reconstructing my relationship with God. Steps Four, Five, Six, and Seven taught me who I was and what my pattern had become. It seems that each negative episode in my life had been triggered by fear. That's what my written inventory showed me. It also let me see that I reacted to that

fear by plunging into self-will. Once into that self-will, the downward spiral had begun. I was heading for the pits of alcoholism. I'd stay in that self-will phase until the pain became unbearable. Then I'd innumble my *Let's Make A Deal* prayer: "God, get me out of this one, and I'll never do that again."

That was the pattern: a downward spiral taking me from fear down to self-will down to pain down to manipulative prayer. In time, God would bail me out, and I'd await the next surge of fear that would plunge me back into that pit again.

I came to see that when those feelings revisited me in sobriety, there was a way to climb up out of that pit. After asking God's help without strings attached, I would surrender. It was — and is — easy to acknowledge that of myself I can do nothing good.

After surrender, I could get into

action, Steps, service, and all the other things God gives us in the AA program. I was getting out of the pit now.

After a while, I noticed that being active in AA had produced a feeling I hadn't known before. That feeling was commitment. I felt part of this Fellowship, and I loved it. Now I was really putting some distance between myself and that pit.

Finally, still working this program for all it's worth and loving the knowledge that I belong to it and it belongs to me, I feel the elation of the very thing I lacked when first I felt that fear. And I'm all the way out of that pit, because now I'm experiencing acceptance.

That's my pattern. The steps down are labeled fear, self-will, pain, and bargaining. The steps up are surrender, action, commitment, and acceptance. One of the great payoffs of sobriety in AA is that I'm increasingly

able now to go right from fear to acceptance, since I know how inevitable the result would otherwise be. Steps Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve have enabled me to rejoin society and stay there.

So now I tell those new ones, "Work the first three Steps to find the answer to your problem with God, the next four Steps to answer your problem with yourself, and the last five Steps to learn how to get along with those around you. It works!"

AA is where I learn faith. If I don't take that first drink, if I stay close to our principles and Fellowship, and if I ask for — and do — God's will for me, I *know* everything will be just fine. It always has been. Thank God for the grace of new members, so I can remember that and renew my faith in God, in my sobriety, and in my fellows.

K. O., Los Angeles, Calif.

*Helping a suffering alcoholic
for the first time was
rewarding—and hectic!*

An 8^{hr} 12th Step Call

THE SOUTHERN California sun was shining brightly as I returned home from grocery shopping. My mind was busily anticipating the Saturday noon AA meeting (one of my favorites) and all of my friends I would see there.

The jangle of the telephone greeted me as I opened my door, juggling sacks of groceries. The gentleman announced himself as being a central office worker for the AA hot line and asked whether I could go immediately to a motel nearby and see a lady who had called AA for help. I got the name and address from him and said I would go after putting the perishable groceries away.

I grabbed the Big Book and a container of orange juice and raced out the door. All the time, I was thinking: "I wish I had time to read Chapter 7. I wonder if I should have phoned someone to go with me. After all, this is my first person-to-person Twelfth Step — am I capable of doing it right?" But the gentleman who called

said it was an emergency and I should go immediately, so I couldn't take the time to call someone else or read a chapter of the Big Book, could I?

I recognized the motel as I approached it, and cold chills ran through me. It was in this very same motel that, on two occasions while I was still drinking, I had the awful awakening with the hideous four horsemen — terror, bewilderment, frustration, and despair. I still, after over two years of sobriety, have no idea how I got to that motel on those two occasions; my blackouts were always complete. But nothing can erase the feelings I had the mornings I awoke and wondered how I had gotten there, and where the dickens my car was, and who I had been with, if anyone.

I summoned the courage to knock on the door and see the lady who had called AA. The odor of stale booze, coupled with my freshly awakened bad memories of days gone by, actually made me nauseated. But I

pasted a smile on my face and told the lady I had come to help.

When she jumped back into bed and said she was in no condition to go to a meeting, I felt relief that she already knew about the AA program. We talked awhile, and she said she had been drinking there for three days without eating. I immediately put on my "God suit" and my "mother suit" and decided to get that lady out of that stinking room, take her home with me, clean her up, feed her, and "fix" her. The desk clerk said her bill was paid, so I piled all of her luggage into my car (I've never seen one person with so much luggage; turns out it was everything in the world that she owned), and helped her into the front seat. Thank God, she is a tiny lady.

Upon entering my apartment, she immediately went to the sofa, lay down, and passed out. Then I knew real fear! What if she went into seizures and was really sick? Well, I could call the paramedics, couldn't I?

What if she woke up and got violent with me? What if — what if — she died? What was I thinking of, bringing a strange person into my home? All I knew about her was her name.

At that point, I realized I needed help, so I called my sponsor. After telling me what I shouldn't have done (it was too late for that), she agreed to come over and help me out. Together, we were able to talk with our lady and learn some essential things, like whether or not she had a family, a home, a job, any insurance, any assets at all, etc. At her request, we called her ex-husband long-distance, but were able to talk only with his present wife. From her, we gathered a few bits and pieces of our lady's drinking history.

The lady gave me and my sponsor permission to go through some of her luggage and her travel cases to see if she had any assets. We found some cash, some pills (which we checked out through a pharmacist and then threw out), a passport indicating that

her last trip to England had been seven months prior to that day — whereas she had told me she had just arrived from England. The lady finally became truthful with my sponsor (a wonderful woman with many years of sobriety and lots of experience in twelfth-stepping). A decision was made between us to try to get her into a social detox center for a few days, since she had no home, no job, and no hospitalization insurance.

We drove her to the detox center and checked her in, but they wouldn't accept that mound of luggage, so my sponsor took it to her home for safe-keeping, as my apartment has no storage space. Eight hours after first

meeting this lady, I returned home emotionally wrung out but with an enormous feeling of gratitude. There, but for the grace of God, go I!

So far, this story has a happy ending. I visited my lady in the detox center three times, and when she decided to go to another town, I got her luggage, picked her up, and drove her to the airport. She has written once and said she is going to AA meetings every day and feels very happy that she has found God again. He is always with her, she wrote, and He sent us to her that day.

This Twelfth Step call was a great learning experience for me. It also paid another premium on my sobriety insurance policy. I'm very grateful.

J. C., Inglewood, Calif.

January 1983

Service and the Twelfth Step

From Fremont, Calif.:

We are here by the grace of a power greater than ourselves. Though we're cradled in loving arms, we are not here to continue running away by inaction. Although AA is an indescribable spiritual program, it is held together by people. We hold it together for our own safety and to ensure, as did those before us, a place for the ones still searching.

It takes many thankless hours to do this — to form committees for literature; to respond to thousands of letters and phone calls to the AA



General Service Office and local central offices and intergroups; to do hospital and institutions work; to make sure our public information is carried with regard to our spiritual principles; to put Loners and other members in touch to complete the circle of love and understanding; to elect general service representatives who keep the groups informed about AA around the world.

The member who dismisses service as having no relationship to recovery has missed the point of what AA service is and does. *It is our Twelfth Step.* There is a place for each of us to serve, if we choose.

D. S.

Steps Three and Eleven

I'VE LEARNED that the better I can "practice these principles" in all my affairs, as the Twelfth Step suggests, the better my life works. To help me extend the program into my everyday life, I use a particular set of prayerful attitudes that incorporate the Third and Eleventh Steps.

Before entering any situation, be it business, social, or otherwise (and especially before one about which I may be a little nervous), I first try to realize that each of the people involved, myself included, has his or her own Higher Power. This is true on a Twelfth Step call or at an AA meeting and is just as true on the subway, at a business gathering, or on jury duty. It is my conscious realization of this truth that helps me, just as the conscious realization of my alcoholism helps me stay sober today.

Second, I try to give up any idea that I am somehow a victim of circumstance, and to realize that every experience I have is a necessary part of my life and is something from which I can learn. The lessons are often of a spiritual nature, such as

patience or tolerance (to help me accept the things I cannot change) or fortitude (to help me change the things I can).

Next, I use the Eleventh Step, asking only for the knowledge of God's will for me and the power to carry that out. I simply pray for "the courage to know and the strength to do Your will."

Finally, I must demonstrate my trust in God by using the Third Step to let go of the outcome of the situation. I turn my will and my life over to the care of God by trying to remain open to the ideas of others and by trying to be flexible enough to change my ways of thinking or acting if it seems right for me to change. This is

another way of practicing HOW: Honesty, Openness, and Willingness. I must honestly try to practice my AA principles, to be open to God's influence as it expresses itself through people and ideas, and to be willing to change and grow in this life.

The idea of prayer before action is, for me, closely tied to the concept of ego reduction, a concept I must apply to myself in order to be comfortable in sobriety. When I allow my ego to become My Ego, I'm heading for trouble. There is room for only one almighty in this universe, and that is the God that helps me stay sober one day at a time, a God of which I am part.

F. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

**When
My Ego
Becomes**

MY EGO

*When he stopped
working the Steps,
he was an*

Elder Statesman Without a Country

AFTER FOURTEEN and a half years of sobriety, I found myself in an all too familiar place: tired of living, bored with AA meetings, full of self-pity, and wondering, "Is this all there is?"

I had been very active in AA in the early years—secretary, chairman of conferences, H&I (hospital and institution) work, forming the local intergroup — but as time went on, I began to step aside for the purpose of allowing others to participate. I became an elder statesman without a country. Nobody seemed to want what I had, including me. I developed other interests with AAs who were of my stature and seniority, and let the young ones go, even though they weren't doing it right. "They'll learn in time."

My attendance at AA became a duty I performed for my own survival and also to help guide others. The experience of sharing, I apparently lost. I would walk out after many meetings feeling I had gotten nothing out of them and hadn't really helped anybody, either. I wasn't needed anymore. It was a waste of time, but I continued going. What I heard in AA

irritated me. I became very judgmental about everybody and everything, and was distressed at where AA was going; but there was nothing I could do about it.

I had done the Steps and more or



less continued to observe them. I was very good at telling others to practice them in all their affairs and to get sponsors. But I had been through it, and what AA person could tell me anything I didn't already know? . . . Sound familiar?

I hit a particularly low period a year ago. Having no sponsor, I decided it was time to do something and asked a man to be my sponsor. He said he would if I was willing to start over with Step One, come once a week, and discuss the Steps in succession with him. If I had to, I had to. Each week, we read together from the "Twelve and Twelve." Between sessions, I studied the next Step three or four times, so I could show how intelligent I was. In doing the Steps with another person, I found there were many things I hadn't discovered in my attempts to read them by myself. Even the Step study meetings hadn't provided the understanding and appreciation for the program I now have.

Shortly after obtaining a sponsor, I heard a conference speaker outline much the same predicament for himself that I had fallen into: confusing activity with action. After hearing him, I came back home resolved to follow all the instructions in the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" with the help of my sponsor.

In the six months since then, five people — varying in AA "age" from one month to seven years — have approached me to sponsor them; previous to this, none had. I gave them

the same answer I was given: "I will if you are willing to come once a week and read and study the Steps." They all agreed. How it turns out is in God's hands, but they seem to be doing well and are enthusiastic about our work on the Steps. One of them had never stayed sober more than two months in the two years he had been around AA; and he now has five months.

Many people had told me that once you've done the first nine Steps, the only continuing work you need is on Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. I believed that. But when my life began to come apart, I decided that maybe I had better quit making decisions for myself as to what I needed, and ask for help.

We have started a Step study meeting, not to replace doing the Steps with a sponsor, but to encourage it. We have attracted a number of people, from newcomers to old-timers. All of them are crying out for help, as I was, and seem encouraged that there is an answer.

I know now that there is always the danger of falling into my old ways. There is so much to be discovered through the Steps that no matter how often I read them in working with somebody else, I keep discovering something new. AA has become exciting again, as it was earlier in my sobriety. Meetings have become a place for me to listen and contribute when called upon. And the newcomers seem to have grown a great deal!

B. B., Santa Rosa, Calif.

February 1983

How to Succeed

A few years ago, I heard a speaker say he had been on 1,000 Twelfth Step calls—all of them successful!

As you can imagine, that statement brought everyone at the meeting to the edge of their chairs. The more charitable ones thought, “He must have been around a long time, and been very active.” The more cynical ones said, “What a full crock of cranberries! Nobody’s that good.”

The speaker then elaborated on his eye-popping statement: “I don’t know how many of those thousand are still sober, but that is not important. What’s important is that *I* am still sober. All I can do is carry the message. If the person continues to drink, then that’s okay, I guess. But at least I tried, and I’m still sober because I made the effort.

“Oh the other hand, if the message does get through and the other guy goes on to stay sober, even better. That’s what’s known as the cream-on-the-strawberries syndrome.”

R. S., East Kelowna, B.C.

Are We Forgetting

Twelfth Step Calls?

I WAS LUCKY! One of the first women I met in AA knew no limits when it came to reaching out to still-suffering alcoholics. Shortly after I joined the Fellowship, she became my sponsor, and her message was clear. She said that I was self-centered, that I was wallowing in self-pity, and that I could overcome this — by trying to help other alcoholics.

I had seen the movies *The Lost Weekend* and *Days of Wine and Roses*, so I was familiar with Hollywood's version of carrying the AA message, and it appealed to me. I've always liked high drama, so I enthusiastically agreed to go along with her on Twelfth Step calls early in my sobriety. We went on many calls together, armed with "care packages" — soup, honey, tea, juice, and handfuls of AA literature. The women we called on were a far cry from Lee Remick, and Hollywood forgot to mention that most alcoholics seem to

have dogs that haven't been outside for days.

Alcoholics also change their minds; there were many times when we were welcomed less than graciously in spite of the fact that the alcoholic had called for help and we had canceled plans in our efforts to "go to any length." A few of the people we called on did get sober. Most did not; I hope they reached out for help later and found AA.

But my sponsor was right. It was hard for me to feel sorry for myself when my energies were focused on helping another drunk. Most important, I stayed sober. Twelfth Step calls taught me about myself and my illness. I'll always remember the help I received from an indigent woman in the alcoholic ward of the city hospital. She may have been only forty-five or fifty, but she looked very old. I was there because it was my night to make coffee for the

weekly AA meeting. She was lying on her bed exposing her toothpick legs, which were covered with wine sores. She was so weak that she could barely walk, so I offered to take her to the meeting in a wheelchair. She responded, "No thanks, honey. I've never been so bad that I needed the AAs."

I heard myself answer, "Thank God I was bad enough to need AA, and it sure has helped me."

It's been several years since I've been on what we think of as a Twelfth Step call, and I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I've neglected to let the intergroup office know that I would welcome an opportunity to carry the message.

With AA growing at a rate of fifteen new groups daily, Twelfth Step work is still taking place, but perhaps in different forms. The AA General Service Office lists 540 area and local public information commit-

tees and more than 300 additional public information contacts. By talking to non-AAs in schools, churches, and service clubs, by providing literature displays at health fairs, and by placing AA public service announcements on TV and radio and getting articles about AA into local newspapers, these twelfth-steppers are reaching thousands of alcoholics hidden in the general public.

More than 200 committees on cooperation with the professional community are carrying the AA message to physicians, medical students, members of the clergy, psychologists, social workers, educators, and people in labor and management.

Approximately 200 institutions committees are carrying the AA message to hospitals, treatment centers, and correctional facilities.

With the proliferation of treatment facilities that took place in the 1970s,

aren't seeing many alcoholics holding half-empty cups of coffee at their first meeting because they are shaking too hard to hold full cups. Thank God, it's been at least ten years since I've seen a new member go into an alcoholic convulsion at a meeting. But there is still plenty for us to do if we want what co-founder Bill

"... My sponsor told me I would get better if I stopped thinking about myself and reached out to help others..."

W. described as the "undreamed rewards" we receive as we try to help another alcoholic — one who is "even blinder" than we.

We can let local treatment centers know that we welcome opportunities to introduce alcoholic patients to AA, that we are available to serve as temporary or interim sponsors upon their discharge.

We can be available to meet a fellow member who found sobriety inside the walls. With 1,100 AA groups in prisons and jails, there is always a need for outside members to provide that crucial AA contact the day an inmate is released.

Corresponding with inmates, sharing with an AA Loner, making

coffee, talking at a meeting, sponsoring a newcomer, serving as the link between your group and AA as a whole — there are many ways to make Twelfth Step calls.

Old-timers talk about the days when early AAs literally went to any length to help other alcoholics. There's the story about a traveling salesman from New York who once rode a bus 450 miles out of his way because the AA General Service Office had received a plea for help from someone with a drinking problem. Even today, Loners write about receiving help from another Loner who has traveled a day or more over rarely used dirt roads. Those AAs understood the meaning of "reaching out" to another alcoholic.

I think of those stories, and I feel concern about recent discussions in my home group. Much emphasis is put on reaching out — but the stress is on reaching out *for* help rather than *to* help. Many of the newcomers, and some who are not so new, talk about how AA members are letting them down. One feels "abandoned" because her sponsor is going on vacation. Another is hurt because no one invited her to go for coffee after last week's meeting. They feel unsatisfied and turned-off by AA because they reached out *for* help to deal with every conceivable problem, and did not receive the attention they were seeking. I am uncomfortable as I listen, and I know that I said those things, too. Again, I was lucky — my sponsor told me that I would get

better if I stopped thinking about myself and reached out to help others, and it worked!

The primary purpose of every AA group is to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. Maybe it's time to make some old-fashioned Twelfth Step calls in my own group, so that nondrinking but still-suffering alcoholics I see every week can know the joy of truly living sober.

Twelfth Step



Just Being There

ANYTHING BUT AA! That was my attitude in those last days of my drinking. The morning I finally surrendered, called central office, and drove to my first meeting, I had a feeling of self-imposed sentence. If only there was another way. All other disciplines had failed — this probably would, too — and I didn't think I would really get from the parking lot

Yes, we do have central/intergroup offices to answer calls in most of our cities and hundreds of committees on public information and cooperation with the professional community to spread the word. But let's not forget that our Fellowship got its start because a drunk named Bill sought help *for* himself by reaching out *to* help another drunk named Dr. Bob.

L. F., Manhattan, N.Y.



into the meeting room without changing my mind.

The little group gathered there that morning offered to love me back to health if I would let them. Could I? I tried to listen to the reading of "How It Works," but I could not comprehend much. My hands shook and my head throbbed. I was filled with remorse and humiliation, and I

wanted a drink desperately. I don't give me platitudes, I thought. It was too simplistic, too loaded with pat answers. How could they con themselves into believing this "one day at a time" business?

After a year of taking from the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I felt I should do something in return. But I was afraid. In my morning prayers, I asked to be of help to others and to have the courage and strength to carry that out. From the time I came into AA, I had been told,

*"My distorted idea
of the Twelfth Step
caused me to view
it as requiring
great valor."*

"If you want to keep it, you must give it away." But how? I had fears. Occasionally, I would give my telephone number to a newcomer, then hope he wouldn't call.

Some people are naturals when it comes to helping others. They volunteer to go on Twelfth Step calls. They answer the phone for central office. They donate time in hospitals and institutions. I was gripped with a feeling of inadequacy.

My distorted idea of the Twelfth Step caused me to view it as requiring great valor. Saving others seemed an

awesome responsibility. I was afraid to "get involved." Similar fears had been a dominant factor during my drinking. Anything needing courage didn't get done. I got drunk instead. Sometime during my second year of sobriety, a friend and I were reminiscing. He recalled being present at my first meeting at our AA club. "You helped me so much that morning," he said. "I remember how depressed I was and how you brought me out of it."

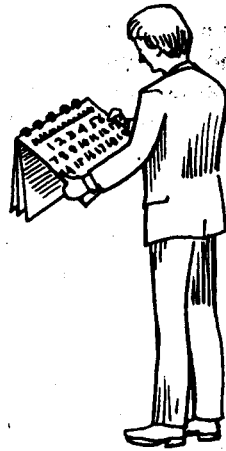
Obviously, the guy was mistaken. I remembered that meeting, and I had not said a word. I had not wanted to be there that morning, and there was no way I could have helped anyone. I told him he had me confused with someone else.

"No," he replied with a smile. "You are the one who helped me. You were sick and scared, and you seemed lost. All I could think about was trying to reach out to you. It brought me out of myself, and I forgot my own problems."

I remembered. He had talked with me after the meeting, offered advice, suggested some reading in the Big Book, and given me his telephone number.

Finally, it dawned! I had actually "twelfth-stepped" someone without even being aware of it. The only thing I had done was be there. The Twelfth Step doesn't ask me to be perfect. It says we "tried" to carry the message. Sometimes, we try just by showing up.

H. D., Phoenix, Ariz.



Staying Away From One Defect One Day at a Time

NOW AND THEN, I hear a recovering alcoholic refer to the AA program as a selfish program. I fear that such a statement may hinder rather than help our efforts to stay sober and to find the peace of mind and contentment that, as the Big Book says, each of us can enjoy by working the Twelve Steps to the best of our ability one day at a time. I need less selfishness, not more!

Frequently, what is meant by calling AA a selfish program is that you and I and every other member must work the program for ourselves. This is certainly very true. If we try to work the program for our spouse or our children or our boss or our friends or anyone else, we are almost certain to wind up with a drink in our hands.

But in many cases, the statement about AA's program being selfish is made without any explanation. Other members — particularly newcomers — can easily interpret it as a license to

behave, not as the God of our understanding would have us act, but as we did when we were drinking.

The Big Book tells us that selfishness and self-centeredness are "the root of our troubles," that "the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he [or she] usually doesn't think so. Above everything," the book continues, "we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible."

As we progress in the program, the Big Book tells us, we will become less and less interested in our own wishes, desires, and plans — and ever more concerned with trying to carry out God's will for us as it is revealed through prayer and meditation.

Far from constituting a selfish program, the Twelve Steps are a blueprint for love and service. For example, referring to Step Four, the Big Book says we must begin our recovery by searching out the defects

in our makeup that have caused us and those around us so much pain and heartache; those flaws (such as resentment, self-pity, and fear) have caused our downfall.

"At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order," the Big Book says. "But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

And in discussing Step Eleven, the Big Book tells us that two of the most important questions we should ask ourselves each night, as we review the day just ending, are these: "Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?"

A related source of difficulty may be that we generally fail to place as much emphasis on being mentally and spiritually sober as we do on being physically sober. I'm proud to talk about how long it has been since my last drink, but I am not equally anxious or pleased to reveal the date on which resentment, jealousy, criticism, anger, or one of my other character defects last had me in its grip. Far too often, my answer to such a question would lead you to believe that dinosaurs were still roaming the land when last I blew my stack. I would be rather ashamed to tell you that I went into an uncontrollable rage just a few days, or perhaps just a few hours, ago.

I believe the true measure of my progress, or lack of it, in working the

AA program is not the number of years or months or days that have passed since my last drink, but the extent to which I have succeeded or failed in trying to practice the principles of AA in *all* my affairs — particularly in those relationships involving the people that my drinking hurt the most.

Staying away from the first drink is, of course, extremely important. It is the foundation on which our lives as recovering alcoholics rest. But physical sobriety does not in and of itself bring us the happiness and serenity we want so badly. Abstaining from mood-altering chemicals is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end.

As someone has said, the AA program is a lot more than just a way of overcoming our drinking problem — it is really a set of guidelines for building a whole new life. In the June 1982 Grapevine, J. N., of Albany, Ga., put it this way: "Sobriety is not a destination; it's a way to travel today."

An often-quoted passage from the Talmud says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" But very rarely quoted is the second part of this same passage, which asks an even more pertinent question: "But if I am only for myself, what am I?"

For this alcoholic, the answer is: If I am only for myself, I will soon be miserably unhappy, spiritually bankrupt, and drunk — mentally, physically, or both.

P. B., Burnsville, Minn.

*We admitted we were
powerless over alcohol
— that our lives had become
unmanageable*

ONE GIANT STEP



I WAS A GREAT word man. Knew all kinds of words, even had a certain facility with them. Glibness came to my rescue more than once when I needed a drink.

Still, when I arrived at Alcoholics Anonymous, there were a few words that knocked me for a loop (with a few more yet to come). The very first was one that hung on the wall of practically every AA group I attended. Neither my physical eye nor my mind's eye could shut it out. It offended me, meeting after meeting, and made me intensely angry. The word was "powerless."

As if that was not enough, there was another in the same line — "un-

manageable." Those words were the source of my first resentments in AA.

In the chapter on Step One in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the very first line goes right to the heart of the matter: "Who cares to admit complete defeat?" Certainly not me. When I came in, I brought reservations with me. In AA lingo, a reservation is wishful thinking about a possibly successful return to drinking. Just about every day for the first six months, I thought I would wake up from sobriety, as from a dream, and be able to reenter the drinking world.

Admitting and accepting are a pair of fundamentals that give some of us

AAAs trouble. There is a difference between the two. I can readily admit that I am unable to fly by the mere flapping of my arms. Since I am not obsessed with the idea of self-propulsion, it is very easy to accept the fact that I cannot fly. But when it came to drinking and the fact that I could no longer drink safely, acceptance of that fact proved to be quite another matter.

Acceptance of my powerlessness over alcohol is the beginning of acceptance of myself as I am, not as I imagine I am. Dr. Harry M. Tiebout's writings refer to the "omnipotent" attitude of youth — the same kind of attitude that characterizes the drinking alcoholic. That word sums up my own approach to life, from the time I left childhood until my entrance to AA. The old habit of thinking myself in control at all times and not accountable to natural or man-made law was a very hard lesson to unlearn. I am still in the process of unlearning.

Acceptance of my vulnerability as a mortal man entails a one-day-at-a-time reviewing of the First Step. No matter how thoroughly or brilliantly I may practice the remaining eleven, if I fail to ground myself in surrender, my thinking and my actions must eventually deteriorate into mere exercises of intellect and will.

Another habit pattern that was difficult to break was a frame of reference that took my natural God-given sense of self and exploded it into what we AAAs call "uniqueness." That per-

vasive defect of character kept me apart from fellowship, and made it all but impossible to understand the simplest truths about recovery in AA. That sense of uniqueness kept me isolated from myself, by telling me that I need not be much concerned about the Steps, beyond the admission that I could not drink safely.

I have known AAAs who said they stayed sober on the First and Twelfth. I, too, tried to stay sober on parts of the First and Twelfth, but I had to abandon that "cafeteria style" approach to recovery — after a while, it didn't work anymore.

Incidentally, I don't hear that expression too often these days. It may be that the cafeteria, as it used to be, is no longer a commonplace eatery. The idea was that you walked the length of the counter (and it was long) and loaded your tray. If it was only goodies you wanted — no meat and potatoes — desserts were yours for the taking. Same with the Steps. I was not about to put meat and potatoes on my tray, when my appetite was only for goodies. But, as I said, my appetite had to change.

There is one common mistake that many of us seem to make when we begin to take conscious action on the Steps. I looked at them from a very literal point of view — first I *took* One, then I *took* Two, etc., whatever length of time was involved. How often, at an AA meeting, do we hear someone say that he or she has been trying to *take* a given Step for the last nineteen months and is hoping for an

imminent breakthrough. I was one such person, but the breakthrough I was expecting from out of the blue never came. I had to take action, by moving on to the next Step, completing the cycle, and starting over again.

In my view, the Steps ought not to be isolated from one another. For years, I insisted that the First was the only one I would have to think about daily for the rest of my life. Time and experience, however, have taught me that, while I cannot stay sober without it, the First Step is not the only Step. It is only the First.

I had to get honest with myself about me and alcohol. Yes, but what to do about that honesty? The next two Steps give me clear and explicit directions on what to do about my honesty and about my life.

I see a comforting analogy between our First Step and our First Tradition. My common welfare should come first — that is, the well-being of my body, mind, and spirit. Where I was fragmented, I must now pull myself

together. If I am to recover so that I may function productively and enjoy all that life has to offer, I must see to my personal unity. What may follow then is recovery on a variety of levels — for example, fiscal, social, sexual, and professional.

It is an old axiom that the first step in any endeavor is tough. Getting honest with ourselves about us and booze can be the most difficult confrontation ever. When I am complimented on my recovery, I make sure to remind myself that the alternative to taking the First Step was pretty grim. On the other hand, I do not want to be too hard on myself. A little compliment once in a while won't hurt. It is good to hear from my fellow humans (alcoholic and nonalcoholic) that they, too, can see the results of my constructive action.

Alcoholics Anonymous is an action fellowship, and action seems to be the key word in the successful practice of the Steps.

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

Something Extra

HOW MANY times we have heard, in and out of meetings, this simple expression: "my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God."

I am now almost eight years sober. Being somewhat mathematical, I'm inclined to think in terms of formulas. My basic formula for sharing during the first five years was: Speak up once a week; qualify every ninety days; and do a Fifth Step once a year.

My Fifth Step varied from year to year in format, content, and hearer, depending on what I saw to be my principal character defects at the time. In my fifth year, the leading contender was my lack of connection to a higher power — a shortcoming that was making it impossible for me to relate to the spiritual part of the program. "You can't make an omelet without cracking the eggs"

was the way I put it to myself.

So I chose for my hearer a clergyman in the program, because clergymen know all about such things. "I have no connection with a Higher Power; I don't really believe in a personal God." That was my opening gambit, and I expected a fifteen-minute lecture on the ontological and cosmological proofs of God's existence. But that's not what I got.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "You have more of a connection than you think. He's walking along the fence beside you.

"You don't have to believe in God," he continued. "Believe in whatever got you sober and has kept you sober."

We talked about this for a while, and he said a few other things. But I was no longer listening. I was off into

my own space. The image "X+" flashed into my mind. *This* was my Higher Power — X because it meant an unknown quantity, and + (plus) because it was something extra!

I recalled my early sense of the miraculous in contemplating the fact that I had gotten sober at all. The miraculous is not so different from an unknown quantity. And, of course, the Second Step refers to a "Power greater than ourselves" — something extra.

I surfaced a few minutes later, and we drifted off into other subjects. But

I now had a Higher Power, and He had a name.

The past three years of my sobriety have been very good — mostly, I believe, because of heavy involvement in sponsorship and other Twelfth Step work. But I also give a lot of credit to my Higher Power. I think of Him often, and I now sometimes call Him God, because it's easier to say and easier for others to understand — and because I no longer have as great a need to be unique.

S. L., Manhattan, N.Y.

"It is when we try to make our will conform with God's that we begin to use it rightly."

Will or Will Not

IN NOVEMBER of 1977, after five years in the AA program and two previous hospitalizations for treatment of my disease, I prepared to enter my third alcoholic treatment center. I hadn't had a drink in those five years, but I was miserable, lonely, resentful, and frightened to death of what seemed to lie ahead. I was estranged from my family, at great odds with the people I worked with, and at cross purposes with the world. The fear of suicide was part of my state of mind. It looked to me as if this center was to be a last resort for one of those "constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves."

During those last days prior to entering the facility, I was groping for some straw to hold my head above the troubled waters of my life. Somehow, I chanced upon a suggestion that I determined to act upon during my stay in the treatment center. At some time or other, I had read — and I believe it was in the

Grapevine — an article about the Third Step ["Overcoming Depression," August 1977]. In it, the author suggested reading Bill's explanation of the Step in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* twice each day for a period of thirty days. She promised nothing but that "something" would happen during or just after the thirty-day reading period.

I was in a place where almost anything that might happen to me seemed preferable to the daily plague of fears and resentments I was experiencing. The thirty-day reading period was certainly available, so with my entry into the center, I began regular, twice-daily readings of Bill's interpretation of Step Three.

At first, the reading seemed redundant and foolish. After two weeks of it, I was reading almost by rote, getting nothing from the Step and seemingly as little help from my counselor and fellow patients.

I can't recall when or how the change in me occurred, but I know

that through this combination of loving care and study, I was returned to the First Step of the AA program — to my powerlessness and to my unmanageable life. Most important of all was the sure knowledge that from then on, I must put the suggested Steps of recovery first, accept my alcoholism, begin to act on that acceptance, and instead of just mouthing the program, make it the center of my life. And not until that happened did a sense of serenity and an awareness of my Higher Power begin to take over.

While I was preparing a talk on the Third Step several weeks ago, Bill's often-read statement on page 40 of the "Twelve and Twelve" struck me again with its simplicity and its truth: "It is when we try to make our will conform with God's that we begin to use it rightly."

Could I take that statement and actually come up with one or two firm statements about my own life that I really believed were God's will for me? And inversely, could I find one or two types of behavior that I was quite sure were *not* God's will for my life? That seemed to be the way to start.

I began a list in two columns, though I believed that only a few thoughts, at best, would see the light of day. As I started to jot down notes on this simple list, a door strangely seemed to open up. With a rush, I wrote quite a number of statements that I knew were right and honest for me. I'll list them here as examples,

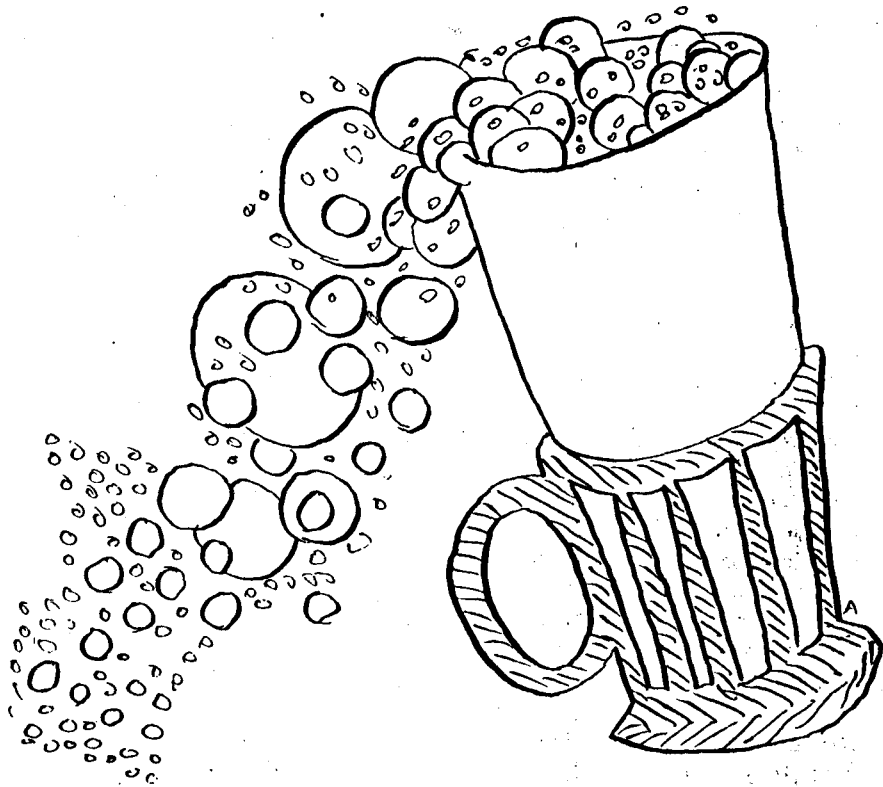
certainly not complete, and even more certainly aimed at just one recovering alcoholic — me.

First column — His "will" for me: I will (1) go to meetings regularly, (2) read the AA literature, (3) pray and meditate each morning, (4) stay in contact with recovering winners in the program, (5) live one day at a time, (6) try always to say yes when asked for help — anytime, (7) pray for the courage to be honest, (8) be grateful for all I've been given.

Second column — His "will not" for me: I will not (1) take the first drink, (2) seek out slippery places, (3) take the inventory of others, (4) lie or expand my story, (5) allow room in my life for loose sexual habits or acquaintances, (6) look back in guilt or remorse, (7) try to play God, (8) be pessimistic about situations or others, (9) forget where I came from, or what my prime disease is, (10) become complacent about my recovery, the AA program, or life.

As the Big Book says, "What an order!" No, I can't "maintain anything like perfect adherence" to that list, any more than I can to the Twelve Steps. However, it is a revelation to see that some fixed points have emerged from my years in the program. I know now that there are some absolutes regarding God's will for me, as simple and elementary as they are. My hope is that I'll find more such guideposts as I continue to "trudge the Road of Happy Destiny."

P. A., Excelsior, Minn.



Milk-Shake Magic

MY FULL experience with alcoholism can be expressed in a single formula: instant gratification followed by prolonged remorse. A pattern had established itself early in my drinking career at the University of Virginia. With increasing severity, it continued its dreary and predictable path through the next seemingly end-

less seven years. I tried geographic cures, only to discover that I could not get away from myself. I tried the wagon and willed control, impossible tasks!

Finally, nearing bottom, I was contemplating suicide. I was miserable, too shaky to shave in the morning, too aware of my rank bourbon breath

even to go to the dentist, too despairing to seek any kind of professional help. On the surface, I had everything to live for — professional success, friends, a wallet full of credit cards. But deep inside me there was only complete bewilderment about the course my life had taken.

Things began to turn around dramatically when I made my first AA meeting, in New York City. I fell into an anniversary meeting, where speaker after speaker concentrated on the joys of sobriety. Shaking, bloated, and sick, I needed to hear what they said. After the meeting, several of us went up Broadway to a coffee shop, and there I absorbed the first of many milk shakes, along with my first experience of AA love in action. That night in 1973, I had a meeting book, five or six telephone numbers, and also the first installment of true hope I had experienced since 1966.

The next week, I was less shaky but still squirrely as I confessed to my secretary — who was just back in town from a vacation in Greece — about my problem and its apparent solution. Dorothy smiled and informed me that she had been sober in

“... I was always asked to come back to whatever meeting I attended, and the people were interested in me rather than in my career, bank balance, or neighborhood”

AA for more than a year. There is no describing the relief I felt at knowing that I had someone from the program to be close to. The two of us together learned a great deal about the common sense of living sober from the mini-meetings we held in the office before the other staff members showed up.

On the outside, I was always asked to come back to whatever meeting I attended, and the people were interested in me rather than in my career, bank balance, or neighborhood. The only possible response was to begin looking at myself in the same way. Without desiring it or being fully aware of it, I began to develop a new picture of myself as a person worthy of living, an orientation and attitude I had lost shortly after I picked up my first few innocent drinks.

As time went by, I acquired a few fringe benefits — a percolator which came in handy when my new friends dropped by, a television set to help me through insomniac nights, some clothing. Unlike the fruits of my reckless financial outlays in the previous months and years, these new toys did not evaporate with the dawn or cause hangovers. I discovered a

serious sponsor who was also a film buff and music freak, and we began to go all over Manhattan together. Then there was an old coffee shop in Greenwich Village, where for hours at a time late at night, I laid out my fears and hopes to interested and concerned fellow alcoholics.

At about that time I read something in Step One: "Our admissions of personal powerlessness finally turn out to be firm bedrock upon which happy and purposeful lives may be built." For the first time, I started to fathom the not very mysterious secret that has brought success to AA where all other forms of treating our disease have failed: The Twelve Steps do not offer mere absence of alcohol; they also promise a way of living that brings fulfillment and happiness to anybody lucky enough to find and follow our simple path.

Nine years later, after a one-night Scotch slip (Scotch tastes the same, but the program gets better), in a different area of the country, the pro-

gram works for me the same way it did in my first church basement. Of course, these days it is my turn to buy the milk shake while offering a telephone number, and to listen in some coffee shop until the small hours of the morning. This is not at all a bad way for a former human bankrupt to spend his spare time.

I discover that I know next to nothing about the disease, even after reading all the reputable literature in print on the subject. But I do know something about the process of recovery. I am never hesitant to share our principles with a newcomer who got to his first meeting the same way I did, by dialing a telephone number and asking for help. This simple act in itself is the beginning of what I have heard referred to as ego deflation in depth. That process initiates the gradual recovery of genuine self-worth, which the grim self-centeredness of alcoholism imperceptibly wore away.

Anonymous, Tempe, Ariz.

The Choice Is Ours



WHEN I ARRIVED at AA, Step One told me that I was powerless over alcohol — and, at that point, everything else including myself. I was a textbook case of total unmanageability.

Step Two told me that I lacked the power to heal myself, that I must reach outside to something or someone that did have healing power. At first, it was a newly opened AA meeting place and the people I saw there regularly. During those early days, they gave me concerned — but tough — love. They said: Don't drink; go to meetings; stick with the winners; read the Big Book; and most important, get active on the Twelve Steps. I reached out as best I could to follow their example and the Higher Power behind it. One day at a time, it worked.

Later, once some fog had lifted, I saw Step Two differently. At meetings, I heard insanity defined as repeating the same actions but anticipating different results. The clearest example? Picking up that first drink while telling myself, "This time it will be different." So Step Two came to include learning to safeguard myself

against the distorted emotional patterns, the stinking thinking, the dry drunk that will precede the first drink. A friend put it simply: First we go crazy; then we drink again.

For that reason, I must continue using the Steps, especially Six and Seven, to chip away at my character defects, those of which "liquor was but a symptom."

As I began working on those shortcomings, Step Two acquired still another dimension. I came to appreciate how vigorously my spiritual sickness (which included schizophrenia fifteen years before alcohol became involved) would resist my efforts to change. Emotional patterns followed for thirty or forty years do not surrender easily. At times, they almost seem to possess a life of their own.

It became clear that the process would be difficult — and rewarding — when I saw a film depicting a young woman's struggle against schizophrenia. Unable to confront a world she believes hostile, she retreats to an inner, self-created fantasy world where she is "safe," yet increasingly out of touch with reality. It was a pattern I recognized from my own childhood.

The healing process begins when her therapist tells the young woman that her sickness is very real, but treatable if she will reach outside herself for help. She must make a choice. After much pain and watching others slide further still into their illness, the young woman makes her choice: She

abandons her fantasies and reaches out to the real world.

For me, the film paralleled what old-timers said at meetings: I was sick, not evil; and AA offered a way out of the insanity of active alcoholism, if I would reach out for its help. I had a choice. The day I saw the film, I went to a nearby shopping mall, purchased a T-shirt, and had the words "I Want to Get Better" printed on it.

Since that day, I've watched others reach out in the wrong direction and once again accept alcohol as a power greater than themselves. Some have returned to the program; some have died drunk; some are still drinking.

I must always remember that my recovery is an ongoing process. Alcohol remains "cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much" for me. Accepting help, even today, means reaching outside myself at meetings, with my sponsor, and most of all with my Higher Power.

The film, in its final scene, underlines the alternatives. The young woman hears the fantasy voices call out to her one last time, reminding her that she can summon them at a moment's notice: "We could be with you now and always — only call." She chooses not to listen.

At any moment, I can summon the old fantasies, the old resentments, my former self. Or I can reach out for the tools AA has provided and use them to continue my recovery. The choice, one day at a time, is mine — and yours.

R. S., Missouri City, Tex.

That 'Formal' Step Five

IN MY FIRST weeks of sobriety, I read through the Twelve Steps quickly and decided that anyone with half a wit could follow those simple suggestions without any trouble. But on approaching the Fifth Step, I began to have second thoughts. I could never tell another person some of the things I had done while I was drinking. If these newfound friends in AA really knew me, they would have nothing to do with me. So I'd just keep my mouth shut about the horrors of my past, I decided, and fake it.

Within months, I attempted my first Fifth Step. Inventory notebook in hand, I recited a list of venial offenses. Of overwhelming fear, gnawing guilt, and self-hatred, I said nothing. Faking a Step is not the same as taking a Step. Consequently, nothing extraordinary happened that day. I experienced defeat.

Failure is an integral part of learning, albeit a painful part. Just as alcohol had brought me to my knees and force-fed a drop of humility into my life, so did my first encounter with the Fifth Step. The introduction of humility deflated my alcoholic ego once again, and therein lay the key to success. Forced to surrender *my* idea of how the Fifth Step should be



worked, I began to listen more closely at meetings. Hearing other members talk so freely, honestly, and realistically about their shortcomings made it easier to begin sharing my own. As a swimmer tests the water with his toe, so I began to share my defects

slowly, cautiously. Always expecting rejection and disgust, I was relieved to find only understanding, acceptance, and support.

Within a year, most of those abominations had been brought out of the closet, with the help of a good sponsor. We looked at them together, discarded the guilt and remorse, and decided where amends were due. Some months later, I took the big dive: that "formal" Fifth Step I had heard so much about. For five hours, my sponsor and I sat in his living room and talked. This was not a session of breast-beating or self-

flagellation; rather, it was an honest sharing of hopes, fears, past mistakes, and realistic plans for self-improvement. Of course, there was talk of resentment, guilt, lust, jealousy, and the like; but there was also sharing of happiness, joy, gratitude, and love.

None of the Twelve Steps is an exercise in self-destruction. An honest Fifth Step is ego-deflating, yes. But only through the essential humility it provides can I begin to grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually into the person my God would have me become.

J. B., Toledo, Ohio

In this section, four AAs tell us how it works, inside and outside

AA and Prison

NEEDED: 'Real People'

I WAS IN the Colorado State Penitentiary, my third, when AA found me. Neither I nor anyone else had any idea that alcoholism was my problem, although now, with my current understanding of the disease, it is obvious that I was in my first prison at age nineteen as a direct result of alcoholism: I was twenty-three days AWOL on a spree while my unit was moved to a war zone.

To become a member of the New Life Group in the Colorado state pen, there was one requirement beyond a desire to stop drinking. The group met each Friday night, and outsiders, "real people," were allowed to attend. To go to this meeting, the new inmate or new member had to attend

a five-week "Twelve Steps study school." Each Saturday and Sunday afternoon, we gave up our movie and went to AA, where sponsors read to us from the Big Book, guided us through the Steps, and shared their experiences in recovery with us. I was carried through the Steps the first time, then given my first Twelfth Step job: I was to sponsor the next group. Thank God for the Big Book to read, and the experience of the Steps I had just had.

Our group had about ninety men in it, and possibly ten meant business. I stayed close to these men, but I learned a lot from the phonies and

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"politicians." They had to quote from the Big Book in order to have anything to say. I learned that though only a few were serious, the only one I needed to be concerned about was me. Was I serious?

I hear AA members say they don't want to go to prison meetings because they have never been to prison, so they feel they have nothing to relate. Let me please change that feeling. I knew how to live in prison. What I did not know was how to live successfully on the outside. My peers did not know, either, so the person I needed most to hear from and learn from was the member who had not been locked away, who knew how to live in the free world. And please remember — they would not let me out to see you.

I hear AA members say they don't like going to prison meetings because they don't relate to the "criminal mind." I lived with a criminal mind for years. AA led me to a spiritual awakening that did for me what is indicated in the Big Book: a huge emotional displacement and rearrangement. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes were cast aside, and new conceptions and motives began to dominate me. I was changed, by God's grace. I did not treat my drug problem. I did not treat my criminal problem. I did, through the Twelve Steps, deal with my alcoholism. The other problems ceased to exist.

For those who apply the principles of AA to their lives, this change seems to take place. But even if our

message only causes a drunken thief to become a sober thief, I think we have done what we are asked to do — carry the message of sobriety to another alcoholic. Our job is not to rehabilitate criminals. Our job is to carry AA's message to alcoholics, so all we need to understand is ourselves. The Big Book reminds me that, properly armed with facts about ourselves, we can often gain the entire confidence of a new person and so help him onto the road to recovery.

Working with inmates can be tiring and frustrating. Sometimes, we drive miles to a prison meeting to find that it has been canceled. Sometimes, we establish a relationship with an inmate and are not allowed to correspond. Our friend may be transferred, or become discouraged and stop coming. One of my early sponsors "quit" AA about every three months.

Inmates do and will use us, if we allow it. I have found some firm guidelines for me. I will not carry messages in or out; there are other legitimate channels. I will not bring anything — cigarettes, candy, etc. — in; there are other legitimate channels. I simply share myself, what I found, and how I found it. As time goes on, I will sometimes help someone I have come to know work out a parole plan, and even commit myself to temporary sponsorship. But the caution in the Big Book guides me — we should not put *our* work on a service plan, because that would make it possible for our prospect to use us for money or

contacts and might jeopardize his chance at recovery.

I have learned that while there will always be some things that the administration does that I do not agree with, it is none of my business. I am not there to tell them how to run their institution, only to carry the AA message to the alcoholics in custody.

Sometimes, I must submit to indignities such as searches, fingerprinting, photo ID cards, security checks, and even deliberate rudeness and sabotage by the type of prison personnel that does not understand. Most often, we have been welcomed with open arms. Each institution is, by its nature, run by security, and I must respect this or not go, and to not go could mean someone does not get the message.

To be effective in institutions work calls for commitment and continuity. It was important to me to see the same faces show up on a regular basis. I knew those people were there for something other than a one-shot ego trip. It took me a while to trust anyone. I began to know and trust people like Reed and Sparky. I asked Reed the week before I was released how I would be accepted. He said, "Come and see." Reed told me if I would make an AA meeting my first night out, I would probably never have to go back to prison. He told me if I would show up at the club, someone I knew would be there to meet me. Reed was at the top of the stairs when I got there.

Reliability is important to the in-

mate groups. We have a unit that allows AA meetings, but if no outside members show up, there is no meeting. A county jail insists that one group commit itself to hosting the meeting for six months at a time, or no meeting. Sadly, there have been times when there was no meeting.

Returning inmates talked about "hanging their AA on the gate." This can be avoided if there is an AA contact the first day out.

When I was paroled, my inside sponsor said to me, "I wish they were not letting you go. You are not ready. You don't know how to live in the free world." He saved my life, because I knew he was right. With this knowledge and Reed's personal invitation, I made AA my first stop, and it worked. I was welcomed, of

*"... if no outside members
show up,
there is no meeting"*

course, but of most importance to someone as scared as I was, I was welcomed by someone I already knew and trusted from his long attendance at our prison meeting.

I believe it is vital for a person being released to have in mind a place and a person for that first night out — not just the admonition to "go to AA." A newly released prisoner is at best nervous and scared and feeling alienated.

Because someone cared enough to

show regularly, to share honestly, and to be there my first night out, Reed's promise to me is a reality: I have not had to go back. The parole man gave me six days at the outside, based on my past record. It has been twelve and a half years free and fourteen years sober now.

My loyalty to my prison group is best shown by my never being an active member of the New Life Group in the Colorado state pen, but by remaining an outside member, one of the "real people," staying sober and living free.

D. P., Aurora, Colo.

AA and Prison

Walking the Walk

AS A NEWCOMER to AA, I was fortunate to be surrounded by old-timers who were actively carrying the message to alcoholics in institutions and had been doing so for many years. These wonderful people took me by the hand and guided me through the doors of many detoxes, jails, Bowery residences, and rehabs. Wherever they went, I willingly tagged along, still shaky in my new-found sobriety.

My Higher Power put me in the right place from the beginning. The AAs who molded my sobriety and were my "powers of example" were continuously helping fellow drunks who had not yet found their way to our Fellowship, or had suffered relapses and were trying to recover from this disease that kills.

It was impressed upon me that commitment to "giving it away" is not just a "when I feel like it" thing. It means discipline; it means ongoing action; and it means showing up to chair an institution meeting when your speaker doesn't show, or when only one or two (or none) attend the meeting. I thank God for showing me

early in sobriety that I can't talk this program. I must make a commitment to walk the walk if I am to stay sober.

During most of my sober years, I have tried to follow the path of the old-timers who taught me the ropes of institution work. It's kept me sober. My experiences in detoxes, prisons, and rehabs and on the Bowery have been at the heart of my recovery.

I am not a crusader, but I am filled with despair when AA members refuse to speak in institutions. I realize that fear paralyzes them — I knew that fear, too. When my sponsor asked me to examine that fear, I discovered that I was really afraid of drinking again. Active drunks brought out my own fear of relapsing. But I continued to go to institutions and share, and the fear dissipated as I grew stronger through the Steps and "giving it away." (I shudder to think what would happen to me if I let fear be my master.) Although I am still one drink away from a drunk, God has given me strength — the strength that comes from giving — and there is nothing to fear now as

long as I have one hand in my Higher Power's and one hand in AA's.

Through the years of sharing in institutions, I have had the privilege of meeting wonderful, dedicated fellow AAs who go to any length to carry the message. They are my true heroes — no positions, no popularity contests, and no applause for them — just willingness to continue to do God's work.

I thank them for being such powers of example and for walking the walk.

Today, I measure the quality of my sobriety by the willingness I have in my heart to reach out to the still-suffering alcoholics who haven't made it to the meeting rooms yet, who are dying in the streets, and who need to know that AA works. God bless you, old-timers!

D. G., Manhattan, N.Y.

I SPIRITUALLY crawled into Manhattan's old second clubhouse (an abandoned church at 41st Street and Ninth Avenue) the first weekday in January 1945, and did my first twelfth-stepping the second day.

But that first day, I felt so ashamed, so worthless, so hopeless, so scared that I could barely speak. I had not had a drink for two days.

Of course, it turned out I was not expected to say anything. I was pretending to read the cluttered bulletin board in the vestibule when, surprisingly, only one question was directed at me, almost in a whisper, by a beautifully groomed, smiling, gentle woman. She said softly, "Are you having trouble with your drinking?"

That was one query I had no lie prepared for. Before I realized it, I nodded yes.

Cheerfully, she said, "Well, I'm a drunk myself. Come on in and let's talk it over."

I would have trudged to Siberia behind her. Never before had I heard a serene, pleasant woman say with ease, "I'm a drunk." Had she asked me, "Are you an alcoholic?" I had a prefabricated lie ready and would have answered, "Oh no. I'm a sociologist here doing some research."

Shivering in below-freezing weather, this "sociologist" had a wardrobe including no coat — just the suit and shirt I had borrowed or stolen somewhere.

She did not ask my name, although I had a phony one ready, nor my address or telephone number, nor



Built in 1898, this church was transformed into an AA clubhouse in 1944.

Manhattan AAs gathered here, west of the Times Square area, until 1949.

It's Never Too Early to Carry the Message

He made his first try at the Twelfth Step when he was sober only two days

even references. I had been fired for being drunk on or absent from my last three jobs. What could I have said to that one? I had absolutely no credentials for membership in any decent human society, I knew. I had long wanted to die.

My new friend brought me, thoughtfully, a *half* cup of hot coffee (with no saucer to rattle it on, bless her) and told me about her own alcoholism.

"It's a disease, not a disgrace," she explained. "None of us *want* to do things we sometimes do when drinking, or to get a drink. That's our illness doing those things, not our real selves.

"Further, it is a progressive illness. It is a permanent condition for which there is no cure. Its cause is unknown. No one knows why some drinkers get it, while even heavier drinkers don't. But unless those of us with this disease do something about it, we find we are condemned to go insane, or to die."

She told me just enough about her own sick drinking for me to see she understood mine, too. Then she held out hope.

"As you can see, though, we have found a way to recover." I saw lots of folks chatting, laughing, drinking coffee. None of them reminded me of the glum teetotalers I had known.

They swore, too, so they couldn't be holier-than-thou, goody-goody reformers.

"We're not against drinking at all — for other people," my new friend told me. "It's just that we seem to be allergic to alcohol. So we are happy for those who can drink to go ahead. Who are we to be anti-drinking? Heaven knows, we certainly did enough of it!"

She continued, "We have found we can stay absolutely free of our drinking problems by helping each other not take that first drink, and just for one day. We make no promises and don't swear off forever. After all, we may all get drunk to-

From the G. O. Archives Collection

morrow!" But she said it with a grin.

By then, she had me completely hooked. Whatever she and those others had, I wanted — no, *needed* — with the fiercest desire of my lifetime.

Then there arrived another brand-new prospect, a seedy, beat-up woman, older than I, who had clearly seen palmier days. I was delighted to hear my twelfth-stepping angel repeat all she had told me, for the newer arrival. But it troubled me that the new woman didn't respond with the relief I had felt. She did not even seem to hear or understand lots of it.

When our twelfth-stepper had to take a phone call, the newer prospect assured me, "I'm not this kind of person, you know." She opened her cheap, ratty handbag and pulled out a wallet stuffed with yellowing old newspaper clippings of former days when she had been a wealthy society leader in another city, with a debutante daughter who had had a lavish

church wedding.

It was pathetic. But then, aren't all of us who live so much in the past that we hold on to those old clippings even unto our Bowery days?

But dammit, my *ex-grande dame* evidently hadn't heard one-half of what our twelfth-stepper had said. For the rest of the day, we were both twelfth-stepped intensively, but I kept worrying that Mrs. G. wasn't absorbing much of it. She seemed to want either charity or magic, not the pearls of love and wisdom AA was pouring out at our feet.

We heard that AA had only recently moved to 41st Street, but that its previous quarters, the Old 24th Street Clubhouse, were still in operation, a club for AA seamen now, and we were welcome to go there for coffee and a visit if we liked.

That gave me my clue. I asked Mrs. G. if she would like to see it, and would she meet me there the next

morning when it opened? She promised she would. After all, I had tried to be gallant to her all day.

I walked home (I had no subway fare — a nickel then) wrapped in joy, slept soundly, and walked rapidly to the 24th Street address the next morning to be there before it opened and meet my new lady friend. Maybe, I thought, I could go over all I had learned and help her grasp it.

When a fellow opened the door into "the last mile" at 334½ West 24th Street, he invited me to come in out of the Arctic air for some hot coffee. But I was afraid Mrs. G. might not see that somewhat hidden door number, so I waited outside.

I waited all day, in vain. That night, I went back to 41st Street, but no one there had seen her, either.

That was my first Twelfth Step heartbreak. But it was not until years later that I realized what a roaring success, what a blessing, it had been.

It signaled a dramatic change in my own life.

I had been so concerned about another alcoholic all day that it had never occurred to me to take a drink! The Twelfth Step is for *my* sobriety, isn't it? That realization still awes me.

And there is a happy ending. Ten years later, I recognized Mrs. G., my first "twelfth-steppee," at a Manhattan meeting. She looked great and had a few years of sobriety behind her. She did not remember me, which is fine. My gratitude to her is so fervent, it's almost overwhelming. If I had tried to express it, she would no doubt have been embarrassed.

"Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics," begins the seventh chapter in our Big Book. "It works when other activities fail."

Yep. Sure does.

Anonymous, Manhattan, N.Y.

Working the Steps

NOW

The Ever-Present

SEVERAL YEARS ago, a Grapevine article caused quite a stir inside me when I saw it. It was titled "The Priceless Present Moment." I immediately realized that no matter what else the article itself said, the title alone was full of wisdom. It told me that the present was eternal, that life was just a series of present moments, and that the present moment was the most important thing I could give my attention to.

Many of our Fellowship's sayings and slogans emphasize the now. "Don't drink now." "A day at a time" or "a minute at a time." "Sanity is paying attention to what you're doing right now." "Plan plans, not results." All those statements tell us to focus on the present. The Tenth Step of the AA program tells us to *continue* our personal inventory, and when we are wrong, to *promptly* admit it. That Step emphasizes the im-

portance of taking regular action in our everyday lives. At the beginning of the day or before bedtime, a personal inventory will give me insight and greater understanding of my relationships with others each day.

When I am aware that I was wrong and can promptly admit it, I will remain closer to the reality of the present. Admitting I am wrong gives me greater acceptance of the necessary give-and-take in my daily dealings with people. At times when I am not aware I was wrong or am unwilling to admit it, I enter a dangerous area where ego, resentment, and phoniness cause pain and remorse. When that happens, a form of mental drunkenness takes over ("self-will run riot"?), and I am unable to see the good things in life.

In order to effectively live in the present, as an alcoholic, I will treat my alcoholism best by continuously

working all the Twelve Steps of the AA program. This includes quiet times, morning and night, admitting my powerlessness over alcohol and over all my character defects. Saying the Third and Seventh Step prayers (Big Book, pages 63 and 76) alone and with other members of the Fellowship several times a day is a sincere effort to obtain freedom from the bondage of self, in order to be able to deal clearly with the ever-present now.

Writing out Fourth Step inventories, as suggested on page 65 of the Big Book, promotes freedom from the character defects. A list might include resentment, dishonesty, false pride, greed, fear, anger, lust, self-pity, intolerance, sloth, gluttony, and envy. Sharing this Fourth Step inventory in a Fifth Step with another person gives me greater acceptance of these defects. This frees up my mind and energies all the more and allows greater attention to the ever-present now.

A written list of amends owed to others for harm done in the past shows acceptance of responsibility for past misconduct. This list would include people harmed before, during, and after our drinking days. Close relatives, schoolmates, employers, friends, and enemies have made up the various lists I have written out.

By going to the people on the amends list and admitting past harm, I am granted additional freedom and sanity, because I am clearing away the debris of the past that drew my at-

tention from the ever-present now. A general amends — such as "I have been thinking of our past relationship, and I apologize for any harm or injury I ever caused you" — completes Step Nine, in that it covers all my wrongdoing in the past involving that person.

Daily practice of prayer and meditation, asking only for knowledge of God's will and the power to carry it out, further enhances my ability to see clearly what is really going on in the ever-present now. One main benefit is simply in the trying ("sought," Step Eleven says).

"Just work the Steps, and let the results follow" is an expression I have heard over and over again. I have also been told that the benefits derived from working the Steps are not determined by my reaction. The good results that come from working all the Twelve Steps may be much more far-reaching than we realize.

By doing what the Steps suggest, I am freeing myself as much as possible to concentrate on the ultimate reality — the ever-present now. This increases my ability to change what I can and accept what I can't. Whatever circumstances exist at any given moment, I am better prepared to deal with them if I am following the directions in the Twelve Steps.

Life is moments, and this is one — the ever-present now. By the grace of God, sobriety continues a day at a time. Thanks for my life, AA, thanks for *now!*

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

The Wisdom of Letting Go



“**I** LIKE THE Third Step,” said a sixteen-year-old new member at a recent meeting. “The idea of ‘turning it over,’ ‘letting go and letting God,’ appeals to me, because I’m lazy. I don’t want to have to do much.”

His comment made me think of an incident that happened eleven years ago when I had not had a drink for almost four years.

My husband had had a heart attack that kept him confined to the hospital for one month and grounded at home for another. At the start of the third month of his recovery, we set out for

Europe — against the doctor’s advice — on a French freighter that carried twelve passengers and no MD. Part of our idea was that the thirty-day trip to Le Havre would provide the rest that my husband still needed.

The day we boarded ship, our convalescent had several *bon voyage* Scotch-and-sodas with friends. That evening and on subsequent days, he took full advantage of the French lavishness in the use of wine, to the tune of three or four glasses per meal, except at breakfast.

By the time we emerged from the windy Caribbean onto a tranquil At-

lantic, the “patient” was definitely not well, and looked it. While I had no compulsion to drink myself, I was experiencing a syndrome any Al-Anon would recognize instantly. I was nervous, frightened, angry, and frustrated, pointing out daily to my companion the dangers inherent in his overindulgence in both alcohol and food. I did this at times reasonably and kindly; at others, dogmatically and harshly. But nothing I did or said changed his dietary ways.

One evening about ten o’clock, my “problem” lay in his own bunk, pale, hollow-cheeked, and breathing so

heavily that my anxiety mounted with each of his inhalations.

I wanted to bawl him out, *order* him to start taking care of himself, to drink less wine, eat less cheese, spend more time in bed.

In addition to fear and honest concern for the loved one’s welfare, I knew that anger was present among my feelings and might at any moment take command of them. From painful experience, I was well aware of the emotional havoc this could produce — for both of us. If I continued to feel as I did at that moment, I was likely to start telling him off. He would resent that and would retaliate with rudeness, whereat I would cry, whereupon the ensuing hours would become hellish.

Suddenly, in my mind, something came together into words: “You don’t have to do anything. You are not required to prevent him from killing himself if that’s what he’s up to. It is perfectly permissible for you to leave him to his fate.”

And would you believe, I finished getting ready for bed, lay down, and in a short time, to the usual incessant throbbing of the engines, went sound asleep.

Afterward, rumination about that evening revealed to me that something had been going on in my mental processes that I had not been aware of. Pressing me toward hysterical protest had been more than a simple desire to rearrange my environment so that it would be more pleasing to me. That meant preventing my hus-

band from injuring himself, and thus depriving me of his healthy companionship. There was more than fury over not getting my own way. There was more than grieved concern for his health.

I became aware of a previously unrecognized inclination in myself, one that told me I was *supposed* to stop anything bad that was happening in my environs, that I was indeed *required* to get in there and make things right, whether I wanted to or not, even whether or not it would do any good to try to “fix” them.

That night, once the idea “You don’t *have* to take care of this dangerous situation” surfaced in my thoughts, I was apparently able to choose — whether to attack this man further in an attempt to stir him into doing something about his illness, or whether to rest on the efforts I had already made in the form of warnings and advice. Unhesitatingly, my tired mind and body had chosen to drop out, to lie down and sleep, knowing that if my roommate died during the night, I would need to feel only sad, not guilty because I hadn’t found a way to prevent the debacle. My insomnia-making vigilance relaxed as I realized that I was not obliged to keep trying to make everything go as I believed it ought to.

What I learned emotionally that night I try to apply to other areas of life. When I tighten up with anxiety and rage over injustice, political stupidity, or any other egregious form of human depravity that quite rightly

arouses fear and disapproval, I try to remember that since I am not personally responsible for the existence of these evils, I am not morally obliged to get in and try to eliminate them, especially if I know that at that moment the attempt will be futile.

No, I can lie down and rest until I am in a fit condition to make some rational contribution to the general welfare on whatever scale I am able to handle. And if humanity still collectively persists in going to hell in a basket, I need not feel guilty, for I have done what my strength and my opportunities allowed me to do.

Recognizing that I have not been especially designated by the laws of nature to dispose of any wickedness that looms up within my field of vision is a form of taking the Third Step. It leaves me willing to accept the effects of the workings of forces and powers other than those of my own individual will.

And that brings us back to our new member’s remark. He has already accepted that some things are simply beyond his desire or capability to accomplish at the present time, whether from laziness or from some other deficiency in himself. In the framework of our AA learning experience, the speaker was obviously performing a number of feats that *are* within his present capabilities. For one thing, he was at the meeting and participating; and for another, it was apparent that he had not taken that first drink for some days.

B. M., Saratoga, Calif.

Step Ten

FOR A LONG time in my AA program, I took the one Step that should have put me into the now of things and made another restitution Step out of it. For a long time, I looked at the Tenth Step as a means of telling someone I was sorry as promptly as possible after doing wrong.

Today, I have a different understanding of this particular Step. Sure, I'm supposed to make amends for harm done to others, and make them as promptly as I can muster up the courage and good judgment to do so. However, this is done in the continued practice of the Eighth and Ninth Steps. The Tenth Step is my guide for the prevention, to the best of my ability, of doing the harm in the first place.

I received consciousness early in my AA program. The First Step gave me an AA conscience. After I made the admission in that Step, I could no longer take a drink and not know I was doing wrong. The Second and Third Steps awoke my God-consciousness. After I came to believe and made that decision, I could no longer give in to my character defects and not know I was doing wrong.

In order to put the Tenth Step to work for me, I had to learn as much about myself as I could, and I had to accept the consequences of my past life. I did this from the Fourth Step

An
Ounce
of
PREVENTION

through the Ninth Step. Up to the Tenth Step, I had been reviewing my life up to the present. The Tenth Step enables me to take all that I have learned thus far and put it to use for myself right now.

To me, the basis of the Tenth Step is self-restraint: to stop and remember what I found to be my weaknesses in the Fourth Step, and then try to refrain from submitting to them. If anger was one of the shortcomings I found in the Fourth Step, then, when I start to become aware of becoming angry, I must promptly admit to myself that anger is wrong for me and try not to let it fester any further. What AA is telling me to do is to think before I act.

Remember what it says in the back of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*,

at the end of "Spiritual Experience": "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and

which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance — that principle is contempt prior to investigation."

J. S., Bolingbrook, Ill.

Step Ten

A Rude Inventory

AS I WAS entering an AA meeting, an Al-Anon lady stopped me and remarked, "I've heard you before, and you sure don't think much of yourself."

Reeling from her criticism, I left the meeting a few minutes later muttering to myself, "What the hell does she know about 'the alcoholic personality'?"

Her comment stung me deeply. I went home and decided to write down a list of positive things about myself, because I was feeling very low. After an hour of writing, I came to a startling conclusion: The woman who had so rudely taken my inventory was right; even after nearly three years in AA, my daily Tenth Step inventories at that stage still read more like indictments than objective efforts to check on my daily progress.

A careful analysis of my AA day revealed to me for the first time that my contact with God was fairly

strong, that I was trying to see the best in others, that I was trying to practice "Live and Let Live," and that I was attempting to let God direct both my thoughts and my actions.

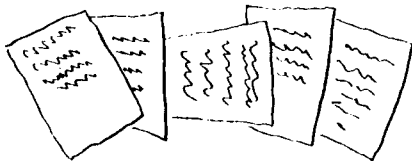
Since then, my daily life has been richer and more joyful than it ever seemed before the woman took my inventory for me. My past preoccupation with fame, money, and romance never once brought me anything like the happiness I know now, when my life is empty of the "old ideas" and filled with God's thoughts of love and service.

Her verbal slap was really a blessing, one of the many ways God gets my attention and wakes me up to more gratitude. One day at a time, God has freed me from a fatal obsession with alcohol and from severe hatred for myself. He has given me the grace to enjoy this moment for what it is.

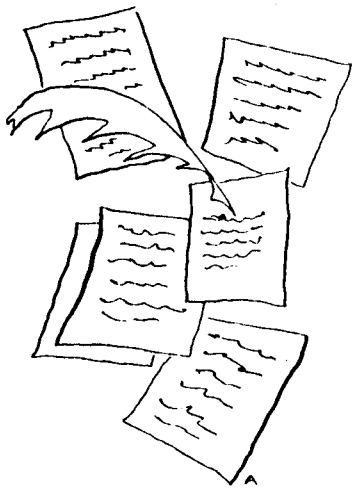
B. P., San Jose, Calif.

Step Four

The Path to Self-Awareness



Through a Step Four inventory, "we quit being aliens to ourselves"



FOR SOME TIME, I couldn't understand the purpose of Step Four. It appeared to me that it would do more harm than good. I felt my past would be better forgotten, since I had committed acts that opposed things I held sacred, and had often compromised on principles that I believed in fervently. To intentionally delve into the garbage of my past would only create a lot of unnecessary stress, it seemed.

After attending a great many AA meetings, I began to grasp the value of this Step, the effect it could have on one's life as the result of doing it honestly. So I began to take a close look at my past behavior.

When I was in treatment, a situation arose where I did not get my way because of my primary nurse. Until this time, I had believed I had the nurses conned and could manipulate them to my choosing. In this instance, however, I failed to do so. I was hurt, angry, and seeking revenge. At the next opportunity I had to talk with my psychiatrist, I explained that I had been wronged and that the nurse was incompetent. I told him that she should immediately be advised as to her error.

He said something that he might not recall; but without doubt, I will remember it the rest of my natural

life. His reply was: "You have the staff confused. They don't know how to treat you. One day you act like an adult, and the next day you act like a child."

It was not until after my release that I realized he had spoken the truth, identifying a pattern very familiar to me. The defeating part of the matter was that he knew me better than I knew myself.

That, to me, is what Step Four is all about: We quit being aliens to ourselves; we identify and accept truths about ourselves that aren't so pleasant. Denying the truth will not change it, but only keep me in igno-

rance. Once I have determined what my shortcomings are, I can begin to make positive changes. Otherwise, I will remain stagnant. The better I know myself, the more capable I am of governing my behavior and the less likely to be easily moved by foolish impulses.

If I do Step Four the best I can at the time of undertaking it, although the attempt may seem feeble, I am beginning to build an exemplar of self-honesty and starting to develop within myself an awareness that will continue after this inventory has been finished and forgotten.

B. D., Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Step Four

Inventory the Big Book Way

MY SECOND sponsor was the first person to show me how to draw up a proper inventory of resentments precisely as it is outlined in the Big Book. I confessed to him that my first-year pink-cloud flight had ended, as I had been told it would, and that sobriety was drab and frightening at times, though I kept a lengthy inventory, checking off my one-to-ten ratings of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and

many other such words on a beautifully printed sheet.

My sponsor laughed. "No wonder you have the early-morning blues. You're rating yourself on abstractions, instincts that even the holiest men are equipped with at birth. In AA, we don't deal in words — we deal in meanings." He glanced at a vivacious actress from London's West End and said, "If a good look at her doesn't blow all the ratings

you've given yourself right off the chart, then I would say you haven't yet taken Step One — or you're stone dead."

He continued, "You've been so busy fighting off so-called sin that you haven't had time to learn to love. To learn to love, you have to identify all your resentments precisely the way

*"Resentment is the
number one' offender.
It destroys
more alcoholics than
anything else"*

Alcoholics Anonymous

it is described in the Big Book. From those resentments, you extract a list of defects of character. Then, by processing these through each of the succeeding Steps, you turn your weaknesses into a spiritual strength that will soon blow all those nameless fears and early-morning terrors out of your mind."

My reply was the same as that I later heard from the hundreds of newcomers I have taken through the Steps. I said, "But I don't have any resentments!"

To that, he said simply, "Nobody has — until they have been properly educated in the Big Book, and had a good sponsor identify the resentments, with a little help from the newcomers about the main events of their

lives. The average alcoholic has ongoing daily contacts with a lot of people. Surely, you don't mean to tell me there has been absolutely no conflict in any of those contacts? And remember, self-pity is ungrateful resentment against God."

"Why is it that the Big Book deals only in a list of people that I have grievances against, and an analysis of only those resentments?" I wanted to know. "Isn't it *my* defects, not the other man's, that should be listed?"

"There are many good reasons," he said, "and they're based on biblical truths and psychological insights, from the Sermon on the Mount — 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself and thy God with all thy heart' — to the statement by Dr. Carl G. Jung that the only way an alcoholic would recover was to know himself and find faith, hope, and love.

"The whole key to our recovery is to find a power greater than ourselves to depend upon by simply repeating the 'surrender prayer' on page 63 of the Big Book, and to learn to love our neighbor by simply listing our resentments against him and then eliminating them. We get rid of the grievances through prayer in Steps Six and Seven, and take care of the amends in Steps Eight and Nine."

At subsequent discussions, my sponsor taught me the techniques and strategies (simple set of tools) in the Steps described in chapters five, six, and seven of the Big Book.

"The whole success of your recovery stands or falls upon taking the in-

ventory correctly. If you don't, there is nothing to process through the succeeding Steps. Listen to these words on the inventory: 'people really dominated us'; 'the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill'; 'we saw that these resentments must be mastered'; 'resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease.' The Big Book tells us categorically that every neurosis stems from resentment, from not following the Golden Rule of love."

As we concluded these studies into resentments, with the Big Book, I came to see that no way would I ac-

cept responsibility for my own life, until I had listed all my grievances against God and man, and eliminated them one by one. Only by coming to love my neighbor as myself and my Higher Power with all my heart could I develop a strong enough self-image to love myself and eliminate the excesses of my so-called inventory of deadly sins.

I thought our co-founder Dr. Bob oversimplified things when he said the AA program consists simply of love and service. But happiness and sobriety do come to us in direct proportion to the amount of love and service we can give to our fellowman.

I. R., Port Elizabeth, South Africa

I Twelfth-Stepped My Son

SOBER FOR several years, comfortable, sometimes feeling satisfied — then bang, my Higher Power threw a Twelfth Step call into my lap. I couldn't refuse, ignore, or forget about this alcoholic. He was my twenty-three-year-old son Pete (not his real name). When I say "threw into my lap," I mean it almost literally. It happened right in our kitchen. He was bombed out of his mind, sick, shaking, not able to stand, not remembering how he'd got home (from another state where he'd been living), broke, scared, and saying, "I don't need help!"

In a flashback, I saw in him what I'd been like: scared, needing help but refusing it, needing love but refusing it. He had held me down in this very same kitchen when I was in DTs. I relived a few more things and realized I was not grateful enough for the sobriety I'd found in AA.

After we got him into a hospital, I wanted to wash my hands of him. Hadn't he caused me enough pain? Also, I felt I was to blame for his

problem. A wise AA friend said, "Even if you feel this way, help him." I couldn't or wouldn't go see him, but his good old Al-Anon dad hung in there, went to see him, and went to the family meetings.

Finally, Pete forced my hand, and thank God he did. He began to write me letters, lots of letters. I had so much to learn about forgiveness, about my own surfacing feelings of doubt and fear. But this boy wanted and needed my help. Where did I begin? First, I had to become willing. It had been different talking to newcomers I didn't know. But this was Pete, my son, the kid who had been with me throughout my drinking and getting sober. I couldn't bluff, lie, pass him on, or pretend I didn't know how to get sober.

I prayed for help, and it came. I could honestly share with Pete. I realized that I was learning again all the things I needed to know about this program, the Steps, and the Big Book. I mentioned the promises to Pete, and he wanted to discuss them.

Had they come true for me? When? Was it hard for me to ask for help? How long did I wait before taking the Fourth Step? How did I know when I was ready? Did I feel better after I took the Third Step? How do I keep my conscious contact?

This mom did some soul-searching to answer those questions. I found myself admitting things about myself to Pete, not as a mother, but as one alcoholic to another. The wall of ice I had built between us began to melt, and the resentment I had felt for years began to disappear. I felt love for this kid, love I'd said I didn't have. It was a gift from my Higher Power.

Pete was so eager to learn about living sober, he began to give it his full attention. I, on the other hand, had gotten so comfortable and busy, I had lost some of my early enthusiasm for the program. Thanks to my Higher Power, I got questioned back into being alive in AA. I asked myself: Had the promises come true for

me? Were they still being fulfilled for me? Yes, as never before!

I shall never forget the first closed AA meeting we attended together. When Pete spoke up, I listened — not as a sober authority to criticize him, not as a mom to cuddle him, but as an alcoholic to learn from him. This has helped me listen and learn from many other newcomers and from old-timers as well.

Pete lives in another city now, and — you guessed it — he and I write each other many letters. He's still asking questions, and I'm still trying to learn the answers. One night, he called me. I said, jokingly, "Boy, are you still sober?"

He said, "Yep. Are you?"

"I'm working on it."

I remember hearing at a meeting long ago: "As an alcoholic, if I stop learning, I stop growing. If I stop growing, I'll start drinking. And if I start drinking, I'll die or go insane. Lord, keep me teachable."

M. E., Huntsville, Ala.

Step Three

Turn It ALL Over

I WAS WHAT is called a high-bottom drunk. When I got to the AA program, I had not been beaten down enough to have anything even remotely approaching real humility. I was smug, arrogant, self-satisfied, and certain that every area of my life except my alcoholism was firmly and securely under my control. The trouble was that I did not understand what alcoholism really was, even after experiencing it for all those years. I thought that alcoholism consisted of drinking too much and without control. I didn't understand that it is a disease of the whole person: physical, mental, and spiritual.

I worked the Third Step by turning my drinking over to God, and I expected the rest of my life to flow smoothly. After all, I was an intelligent, competent, responsible woman, well educated and well able to take care of myself and to handle all areas of my life, wasn't I?

It wasn't long, however, before the other areas of my life began, one by one, to come unraveled. For the next five years, I found myself in one un-

manageable situation after another. Each time I discovered something that I thought needed fixing, I would attempt to deal with it myself, fighting and struggling to make people and circumstances conform to my will. Only after I had tried and failed over and over, did I admit I was powerless and turn that particular area over to God.

Each situation I gave to him was eventually cleared up, sometimes quickly and sometimes over a long period of time; but it was always necessary for me to surrender it before the improvement began. Once I had done that — whether the problem was getting my kids to stop fighting, reviving my interest in my work, or working out a difficulty in a relationship — the specific situation I had turned over always improved.

Soon after my fifth AA birthday, I became very angry and depressed and spent about six months berating myself, God, and the world because my life was not what I wanted it to be, and because I was not what I wanted to be. I had given God my kids' quar-

reling, but not my whole relationship with them and not the kids themselves. I prayed for help with finances, but never sought his guidance about the debts I was running up, or admitted my helplessness over them. Painful situations got my attention and eventually were given to God, but the overall picture was still clutched tightly in my own hands.

Gradually, it became clear to me that my unhappiness was directly related to the amount of my life that I hung on to. So, in my sixth year of sobriety, I worked the Third Step. For the first time, I understood what the Step meant, and I made a decision to turn my life and my will over to the care of God as I understood him. I understood that the decision is made once and for all, but that the actual turning over is carried out on a daily basis.

The days immediately following

were filled with a beautiful sense of peace. Gone were the anger, the feeling of pressure to succeed and to improve, the sense of struggle. This is true serenity, I thought. I've got it made.

Of course, the world has intruded, as it always does. Little by little, that sense of quietness and certainty has slipped away. However, the struggle doesn't seem as difficult; the tensions are not as taut; there is less need to control, and less fear. When the crazies start, I realize that I have taken it all back and must once again put everything into God's hands.

This is spiritual progress and not spiritual perfection. Being an imperfect human being, I am not capable of working any other Step or handling any area of my life perfectly. I am content with that today. And that, too, is progress.

J. W., Santa Monica, Calif.

Trouble at Three and a Half

Having problems in sobriety?

SINCE I'VE been in AA, I've heard many speakers say, "I no longer have a drinking problem; I have a living problem." I heard it over and over and thought, "That's *their* program. I'm in AA because I have a drinking problem." But an experience I had recently allowed me to see just what they were talking about.

For three and a half years, I had been attending meetings religiously. I had become active in AA service work and was doing Twelfth Step work, as well as working for a local alcoholism program. Everything was great as far as I was concerned. I was sober and had been since 1979. But I was ignoring what this program and the Steps were all about. I wouldn't share my pains and troubles in the meetings, because of the impact I feared it would have on newcomers. What would people who were beginning sober lives in AA think if they heard that someone who had been sober for over three years was still having problems? God forbid! I certainly did not want to scare anyone off.

*Try honest sharing
and more work
on the Steps*

Therefore, over the years, I made sure I talked only of gratitude, victories, good things, good AA — while my life slowly fell apart. Each day, my fears, anxieties, and pain grew while I gradually closed myself off from the world, just as I had done while I was drinking. I acted sober, but I certainly wasn't enjoying the benefits of sobriety. I talked to no one. I had no sponsor, no program of working the Steps, no recovery from the living problems that accompany our drinking problem.

I was lost in a fantasy world where I could handle everything. I needed no help, and I certainly was not going to ask for it. I could handle it all by myself. You know, you can talk a pretty good AA line for an hour during meetings. Just read the Big Book, the "Twelve and Twelve," and other

AA publications, and quote them. Sounds good — but it isn't real recovery.

As I had heard so many times in meetings, it caught up with me. I fell apart. All sanity that I thought I had acquired slipped away, to be replaced by the unknown fears, paranoias, and pains that I had had drinking. I was totally confused and had no idea where to turn. I could do only one thing: go to a meeting and tell someone!

I'll never forget that meeting. For the first time in three and a half years, I spilled my guts to members there. I told them how my life was falling apart and how afraid I was of drinking again. Their reaction stunned me. There was no mass exodus of newcomers who heard an alcoholic share pains and troubles after three and a half years. The reaction was the kind of support and love that only we in AA know.

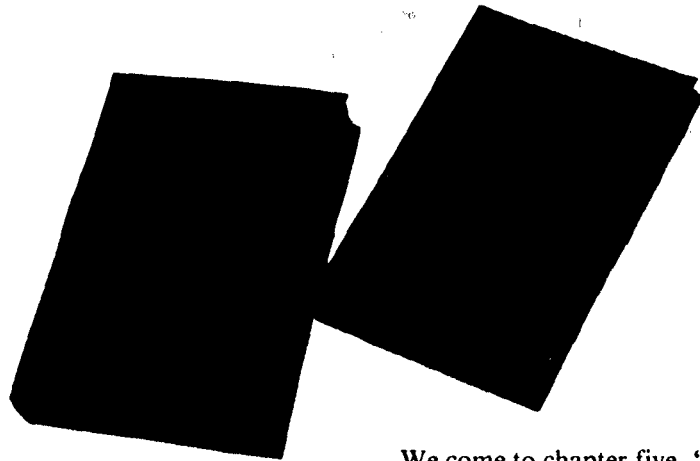
Since then, I have received the help I needed, and the results have been staggering. I can share my experiences — good as well as bad — honestly with others. The fears are beginning to subside, and my perception of life has changed dramatically. No longer do I have to be a superhuman recovering alcoholic who knows the program inside and out. I can be a regular alcoholic trying to recover one day at a time, like everyone else.

What made all this possible? A program so simple, it seems incredible that it works: talking in meetings about my problems; asking for help; being open to new principles, ideas, and suggestions from fellow AA members; *working* the Steps — actually, not just mentally. I used to think it was ridiculous to write down a Fourth Step inventory — that was for the really sick people. I was wrong. The founders of our Fellowship knew what they were talking about when they laid it out for us in the Big Book. Using a sponsor — what a great source of experience! Opening up — above all, opening up! It works, as you know. It works remarkably well.

For those who are in meetings and hear the sentence in "How It Works" that states, "Half measures availed us nothing" — believe it! A life of drinking is something none of us ever wants again. But a life of mere dryness can at times be even worse.

I'm grateful to AA that an alcoholic like me could have a second chance at recovery without returning to the bottle. I hope that this time I'll listen a little more closely when my fellow alcoholics share their experiences with me, and I certainly hope that as each day passes, I will be able to share my experiences with them. With God's help and AA, I think I will.

J. A., Durham, N.C.



Only Suggestions?

IN THESE times of seeking the “easier, softer way,” we hear quite often, “Oh, I don’t have to take the Steps — they’re just suggested.”

Yes, just suggested for those who “want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it.” They are “suggested as a program of recovery,” and the ingredients of that program are the Steps. No Steps — no program.

In the very beginning of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we are told, “To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book.” So we proceed toward sobriety and into the very meat of the instructions on how to obtain and maintain a sober way of life.

We come to chapter five, “How It Works.” From the title, I would gather that someone is trying to tell us something, yet we often hear it said, “I don’t know how it works.” I suggest that these people read chapter five, study chapter five, and follow the instructions given in chapter five. It starts with “Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path,” and continues to give complete instructions for alcoholics on how to “completely give themselves to this simple program.” Later, the book says, “. . . then you are ready to take certain Steps.” We are asked to be “fearless and thorough” and told that “half measures availed us nothing. . . . Here are the Steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.” As one of our friends says, “And if you want to get sober, you better took them.”

I have tried to determine why so many people delay and procrastinate over taking the Steps. I think it comes down to ego — the fear of someone’s

seeing us as we really are. Another thing that causes fear is the huge overall size of the job when we look at the Steps in their entirety, instead of one Step at a time. If we stare at our entire past all at once — or try to — it is a fearful sight. But again, “one day at a time” calms it down.

It has been said that the hardest part of taking a written inventory is finding a notebook and a pencil. We never get through if we don’t start. We start with Step One — where else? — and proceed into sobriety one Step at a time. “If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half-way through.”

The mental worth of sincerely

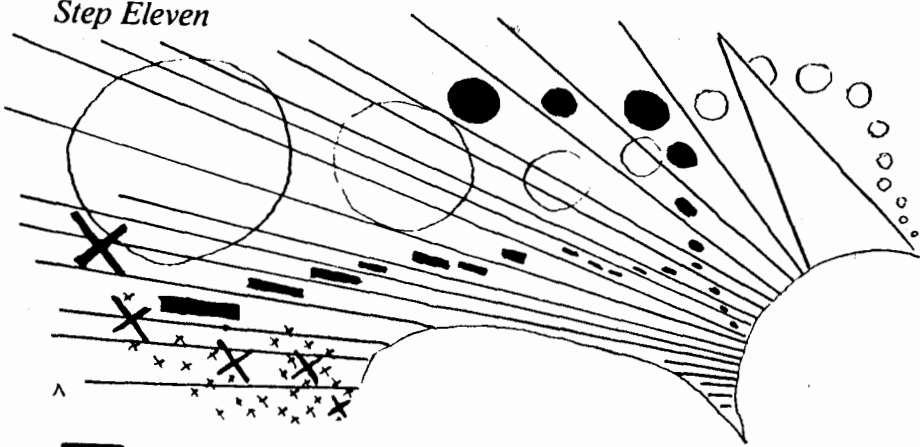
taking the Steps cannot be overestimated, and the good feelings that we get with completing our first trip through the Steps cannot be bought; I never found them in a bottle. The results are well worth all the effort, fear, shame, procrastination, doubt, soul-searching, ego deflation, and prayers that we put into our being reborn into a new life.

Our mentors, with their God-given wisdom, tell us, “If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it — then you are ready to take certain Steps.” When all else fails, follow directions.

Simple, isn’t it?

K. W., Sierra Vista, Ariz.

Step Eleven



Freeing the Spirit

ONE OF THE key ideas, it seems to me, in the successful practice of the Twelve Steps as a recovery program is contained in the words "conscious contact." The only way I could arrive at any degree of consciousness regarding the physical and the mental/emotional aspects of my recovery, and of my alcoholism itself, was through application of the first ten Steps. Also very helpful was jumping over the fence and making excursions into the Twelfth.

Approaching the Eleventh, then, I already had a good working knowledge of the limitations imposed on me by my threefold disease. That degree of awareness provided a comfortable lead-in to an understanding of the third aspect of alcoholism, the spiritual. Time was, whenever I'd be

called on at an AA meeting to share on this Step, I'd become a guru and soar into guruland. I didn't share my experience; I taught a lesson on spirituality, a how-you-too-can-become-spiritual lesson. (In my early AA years, it was called "pontificating" — but only if someone else did it!)

I see my drinking years, for the most part, as a prolonged effort to improve my conscious contact with reality and with a Power greater than reality. Occasional insight told me that drinking was not the best way. Yet I could cite bands of men and women down through the ages who had practiced severe mortification of the flesh in their pursuit of contact with something beyond ordinary attainment. That was their way, I told myself, and drinking was mine. Alco-

hol seemed to open doors to a high spiritual life that remained beyond my mortal reach.

Before coming to AA, I spent upwards of two years in psychoanalysis, a therapy that helped a great deal with many of my problems. With my one major problem, however — alcoholism — it offered no practical help whatsoever. My analyst once made an observation that was beyond my understanding at the time but stayed with me, perhaps because of the mystery it posed. In response to my frequent complaints about a fire in my innards, she asked me whether I had ever poured kerosene into a lighted stove. The result, she said, would be similar to pouring spirits on a spiritual fire — conflagration!

What was the source, or cause, of that spiritual fire? I don't really know. Down through my sober years thus far, I have been satisfied to think of it as a manifestation of longing for reunion with something — in AA, we call it a Power greater than ourselves. Some of us call it God.

Once, at a Step meeting, a woman told of her return to church in the belief that it was the only way her prayers would be heard. On her first visit, she was quite surprised to find people there. She had long ago concluded that nobody went to church anymore. Now, she had become a regular churchgoer. For her, church was the most comfortable place for praying.

I was unable to accept churchgoing in my early AA years; so I sought other kinds of help in working this

Step. There are certain books promoting peace of mind that I enjoy reading. Perhaps the most attractive book as an aid to meditation is our own Conference-approved reader *As Bill Sees It*.

Recently, I spent a ten-month period eleventh-stepping myself. My objective was to find out whether I was working at the right job, or whether I should be using my God-given talents in another capacity. I felt I knew what I wanted to do, but because I had been trapped in one job for a very long time, I was no longer sure I could distinguish between wishful thinking and intuition.

During the day or as I lay in bed at night, I'd repeat the words of the Step, each time emphasizing and dwelling on different ones.

What came of that eleventh-stepping adventure? From an unexpected source, I was summoned to a job interview. No, I didn't get the job; but that interview led to another, and this time I did get the job. It was the kind of work I had long believed I wanted to do, with the very organization I most wanted to work with. Happy ending, with the Eleventh Step to thank? No. I was fired. How come? I wasn't equal to the job. Apparently, I had misread God's will for me. Then, it became a matter of praying for the power to accept what I've heard some AAs refer to as not a spiritual awakening but a rude awakening!

Just as the earlier Steps had granted me physical freedom from alcohol and mental/emotional freedom from the

stigma of alcoholism, so did my introduction to Step Eleven represent an unprecedented experiment in freedom of the spirit. No longer would I have to say, "Get me out of this mess, and I'll never do such and such again." No more bargaining, no more dictating, no more all-or-nothing! Thy will, not mine, be done!

Incidentally, there are ways other than prayer and meditation by which I can continue to improve my conscious contact with a Power greater than myself — for example, sharing in the maiden talk of a newcomer, rejoicing at the return of a member who had relapsed, and (not to be underestimated) the continuing wonder of waking up each morning sober.

"Quiet times" are of huge value to me. As recounted in *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, AA's co-founder practiced a quiet time of from thirty minutes to an hour every morning, when he read from inspirational books and meditated, a practice he continued into his later years.

In a piece that our other co-founder, Bill W., wrote for the Grapevine (June 1958), he said, "I've just finished rereading the chapter on Step Eleven in our book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. This was written almost five years ago. I was astonished when I realized how little

time I had actually been giving to my own elementary advice on meditation, prayer, and guidance — practices that I had so earnestly recommended to everybody else!"

It still amazes me that those two men who bore the burden of our pioneer years continued to believe and to work at improving their conscious contact with a Power greater than themselves. And all the other early members who carried the AA message the length and breadth of the land — before the Eleventh Step was written, they, too, relied on a Power greater than themselves. They, too, prayed for knowledge of his will and for the power to follow through.

The Step worked for them in those days, and it works for me today. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that it will work for all those alcoholics yet to come through our doors. But as always, "First Things First." Before we can release the spirit from its imprisonment, we must first imprison the spirits in the bottle. We place the bottle on the shelf, place ourselves in the hands of AA as we understand it, and prepare for the adventure of sobriety. For me, it's an adventure unthought of and undreamed of in all the years of my drinking life.

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

Working the Steps

At Peace with Myself

I AM WRITING this on my fortieth birthday. I am thrilled to be forty. I wouldn't change a day of drinking or sobriety, because all those days got me where I am today.

When I came to AA, I was a thirty-year-old drunken bum. My life was over. I drank away my values, morals, and principles, and most piteously, I drank away my hope. I was a daily drinker who had not gone twenty-four hours without a drink for at least two years prior to AA. I was a public drunk — in bars, making a spectacle of myself. I wanted to die and could not, yet I could not live with what I had become. Never had I tried to stop drinking. The mere idea was unfathomable to a person who drank the way I did. I wanted the trouble to stop, the pain and confu-

sion to go away, but I could not comprehend life without alcohol. Not only was I powerless over alcohol, but my friends and family were equally powerless. They would have helped me if they could.

I attended my first AA meeting on August 15, 1973, in Anchorage, Alaska, and I have not had a drink since. I would like to share with you how I have attained freedom from the wreckage of my past.

I have the kind of past that should haunt me every day of my life, and yet I have incredible relief from guilt, remorse, and morbid reflection. When I work with active alcoholics, the sordid details become my greatest asset. I can tell them all about me, so that they identify and know hope that they, too, can experience recovery.

As a newcomer in AA, I thought I was a very sophisticated person with many good qualities, except for my uncontrollable drinking. I thought the Twelve Steps were for the poor sick and suffering souls who needed them. Thank God, I was guided into the Steps and stay there today. No matter what my problem, the Steps provide a solution. At times when I am unable to make contact with another sober alcoholic, or a meeting is not scheduled, I can fall back on the foundation of my life, which has come from personal experience with the Twelve Steps.

I did not get beyond Step Three until my tenth month of sobriety. Then, I found the sentence in the Big Book that states: "Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us." So I was guided into a Fourth Step inventory. With all the honesty I could muster, at length I wrote "a fearless and searching moral inventory." Then, I worked Steps Five through Twelve. One year later, I wrote another inventory, in which I truly cleared away the wreckage of my past by "illuminating... every dark cranny" and dealing with "the exact nature" of my wrongs.

About that time, one year and ten months sober, I heard a real old-timer (one of the original 100 members) say he relied on Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve for maintenance.

I believed him. I proceeded to work Tenth Steps — going a little further by writing them out and reading them to my sponsor. I believed that I did not have to write a Fourth Step, per se, again. After three years of using that method, I heard another member talk about the inventory he had just written, not the inventory he had written thirty-one years earlier. I knew he was talking to me.

I went home and wrote a Fourth Step inventory in which I dealt with the whole person. In my Tenth Steps, I was usually dealing with a specific problem, not with my entire character and being. As the result of this new Fourth Step, I experienced relief such as I had not known since my first written inventory. I made a vow to myself that I would not allow one year to go by without writing a Fourth Step. Since then, the intervals have been less than one year — usually, every three months. I still don't jump gleefully into an inventory — but I have lost my fear of finding out the truth about myself.

I work the entire program of Twelve Steps on a regular and continuing basis. I am not surprised at what I find anymore. The nature of my wrongs has changed as I experience recovery; I am no longer doing the horrendous and repulsive things I did when drinking, things that caused me anguish. My lists of amends are not long. When I am wrong today, I can promptly admit it. I find it is easier for me to make amends soon than late.

Not only does my present sponsor know all about me, but many other people know my deepest, once-secret truths. They know me because I tell them in detail what I used to be like and what I am like inside today — the absolute, unvarnished truth about me. I don't have anything to hide today. When I expose my shortcomings and defects, and only then, I have a chance — with God's help and personal awareness — to try to do something about myself. Today, I don't care who knows me or about me.

A friend told me that the worst thing anyone can say about me is the truth, and I've dealt with that in inventory. Anything else that's said doesn't deserve a response, because it isn't true.

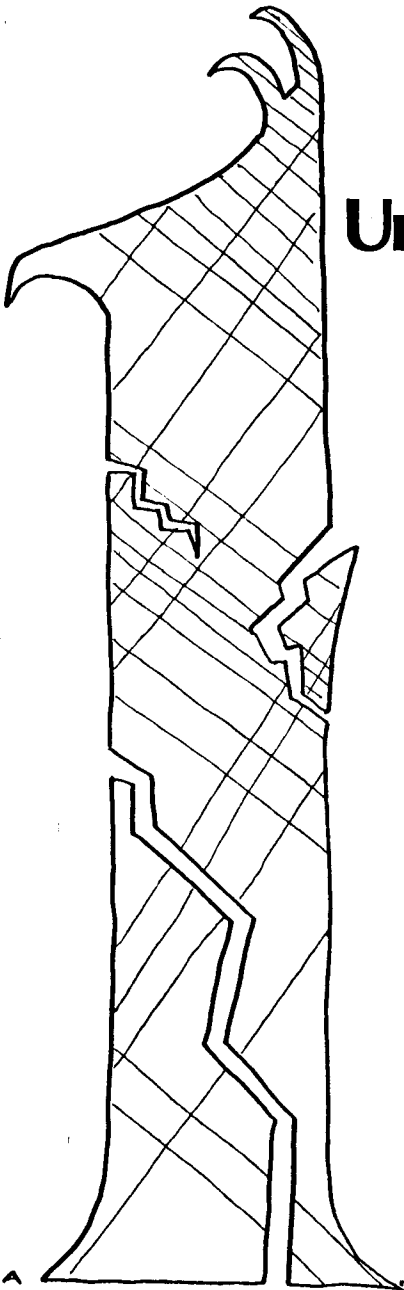
Before I got to AA, I had an insa-

table appetite for booze, money, prestige, sex. Now, my earnest desire is for all that the AA program has to offer. I am as excited about being a member of Alcoholics Anonymous today as I was as a newcomer. I have experienced the promises and truly know a new way of life. I have a personal God, freedom from the obsession with alcohol, innumerable friends all over the country, lots of laughter, and what another AA friend talks about — a quiet heart and peace of mind. I am at peace with my God, myself, and my fellows.

Each time I work the Steps, my life is enriched beyond explanation. For me, there is no other way — recovery is the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I've never had it so good!

K. J., Soldotna, Alsk.

You Mean It's Still Unmanageable?



AFTER ALMOST six years of coming to meetings and thinking that I was doing just fine, I am starting to understand the second part of the First Step. Maybe it is that I am an exceptionally slow learner, or that I am not a good listener, but six years somehow seems a long time to begin understanding what the First Step means.

For all of that time, I knew I was powerless over alcohol, but I thought my life was unmanageable *because* I was powerless. Now that I had quit drinking, I believed I could again begin to manage my life and control what happened. But my life is just as unmanageable today as it was when I was in an almost daily blackout.

The Big Book told me that many of the things other people did to me were the result of things I did. My alcoholic mind did not grasp the meaning of that thought, either.

After three and one-half years in the program, I had never felt better — emotionally, spiritually, or physically. Those first years in the program were more than I had dreamed life could ever be for me. It was great! We talk of the honeymoon period in

the program, and I thought that the marriage was going to get better and better forever.

Then, my past began to catch up with me. I became involved with a huge antitrust lawsuit concerning a former employer. The publicity was enormous. A major political candidate that I was working for made some statements that I disagreed with, and I resigned my position and called in the press. Again, attention was drawn to me. Boy, was it something to be quoted in newspapers and on TV from coast to coast. Important me!

All of a sudden, I was no longer making things happen in my life; things began happening to me. I became unemployed and could not get a job. I became depressed and felt that I was a victim of some unjust plot.

Today, after almost twenty-one months without a job, I have lost all my material possessions. But I have come to realize that there is a difference between self-importance and

self-esteem. I need not feel important to feel good about myself. I cannot manage much of what goes on in this life. About all I am able to manage is my own actions, and even that is hard to do. I lived so long feeling that I was easily hurt, that I bore suffering poorly, and that if you hurt me, I would retaliate. Today, I am trying to learn and live a life that does not include retaliation, resentments, and anger, and to live without hurting myself or others.

After thinking that I had “gone through” the Twelve Steps, coming to realize that I did not understand what even the First Step meant was a lesson in humility. Ego deflation in depth is what the Big Book says I need. I pray today that I can accept and not try to manage, that I can simply be a participant in life. Maybe there is hope for me. I am still trying to work the program, and I know that willingness and acceptance are the key.

A. F., Bloomington, Ill.

*On the following pages,
six AAs tell us how they
"came to believe"*

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

'... As the Result of These Steps'

MY HOME GROUP met last night, and the topic was "spiritual awakening," a quite timely topic for me. I had experienced a rather significant personal disappointment that day. What was particularly distressing was that I had built up a lot of *my* plans for achieving serenity in this situation.

Like most other alcoholics, I had searched for spiritual awakenings long before I got to AA. However, I realized last night that I'd had my own awakening on October 21, 1980 — only I didn't know it at the time. On that day, I had finally surrendered to my Higher Power my powerlessness over alcohol. From that surrender came a freedom that I have never otherwise experienced in my life.

Before I came to AA, I knew I had

an alcohol problem. I had tried to quit several times with varying degrees of success, managing to stay dry for weeks or even months. Even after I came to AA, I stayed dry only four months. The last drunk ended in that surrender. Though I left that last hospital with a new sense of serenity, I still wasn't sure that this program would work for me. Weeks passed. I turned over my alcoholism one day at a time, and I didn't drink. But I had done that before; I wasn't convinced. Months passed, but I was still skeptical. Six months passed, nine months, a year; I began to believe that something different was happening. Finally — I don't remember exactly when — I knew I was going to be okay. Yet it took me until last night — two and a half years after that October 21st —

to realize that I'd had a spiritual experience that day! I could point to a place, a time, even a moment in my life when I was certain that my Higher Power was doing for me what I could not do for myself. All along, I knew God had been keeping me sober — I just hadn't realized I'd had a personal experience with him in the process.

My spiritual awakening was something I never would have had, much as I wanted it, except "as the result of these Steps." I hadn't wanted to stop at just staying dry. I hadn't wanted the kind of life I'd been living — a mere resignation to the will of God, a daily struggle. So I had set off on *my* plan to grow beyond sobriety and "find" serenity.

Sure, I got up each morning and asked God to keep me sober and prayed for his will for my life and "the power to carry that out." Then, I promptly went out and tried to plan my life, not only for the day, but for the future as well. If things happened

the way *I* wanted them, then I knew God's will was being done; if not, then an old, angry God came out of my past, and I knew I was being punished — for something.

Yesterday, after that significant disappointment in my life, I *tried* to keep one thought in mind: My program had to work now. My relationship with God — as I understood him — had to work; I had to trust that he knew what was best for my life, even if I didn't understand it. If I could rely on my Higher Power and my program only when things were going well, what good were they?

I asked myself over and over what I should be learning from the experience. At the meeting last night, the answer began to materialize. I needed to surrender. I had never really surrendered the unmanageability of my life to God. I had been trying to manage my own life, to find serenity, to set my own purpose and direction — without enough faith or trust to see that God would provide all those

things each day, even if I couldn't see them. I realized that I would never find serenity by looking for it; it had to come to me, as my freedom from alcohol had come. By admitting my powerlessness over alcohol, I gained freedom from it; by admitting the unmanageability of my life, I gained serenity. In this total surrender of self-will — just for today — I can find a new freedom and allow my

Higher Power to touch all the other areas of my life, in addition to my alcohol problem.

I believe I have found the way to that inner peace I was searching for, that serenity I had been trying to arrange through career, financial security, dependence on an emotional relationship with another person, or the possession of things. My spiritual awakening apparently continues.

R. S., Norfolk, Va.

Spiritual Experience

'Psychic Change'

WHEN I STUMBLED into AA several years ago, I think most of you would have called me a fairly typical newcomer — confused, intolerant, afraid of the future, and ashamed of the past. Although I was one of the lucky ones who manage to stay sober beginning with the first meeting, my program was slow to blossom into the wonderful way of life it has since become. Why?

It seems the alcoholic mind seldom changes quickly, and what Dr. William D. Silkworth calls "an entire psychic change" usually occurs slowly over a period of time. Dr. Carl G. Jung calls this change a "vital spiri-

tual experience," which he describes as "in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements." He goes on to say, "Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begins to dominate them." Most of these experiences seem to be what the psychologist William James calls the "educational variety," because they develop slowly — sometimes, as in my case, taking several years.

Many of us who have been involved in the AA program for any

length of time have observed this "psychic change" in others but have failed to notice the alteration in our own reaction to life. That was my experience. I puzzled endlessly about Step Eleven. Why, I wondered, didn't God speak to me — in a dream, perhaps, or maybe as a voice from a cloud — and tell me exactly what he wanted me to do? What was God's will for me? How was I supposed to know?

Quite recently, after more than eight years in the program, I recognized a "vital spiritual experience." God's will for me suddenly became abundantly clear. God's will for me is Step Twelve — all of it. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, I will try to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all my affairs. How beautiful, how wonderful, and how simple!

T. S., Bella Vista, Ark.

Spiritual Experience

9,500-Mile Journey to Faith

"BUT YOU have more faith than anyone at this AA meeting," another member said to me during one of our continuing discussions about spirituality. In fact, he told me the same thing at five consecutive meetings, because I complained over and over that I was having so much trouble with faith during my fifth year of sobriety in AA.

Early this morning, in a rare bout of insomnia, I finally understood what my friend had been talking about. I do have faith!

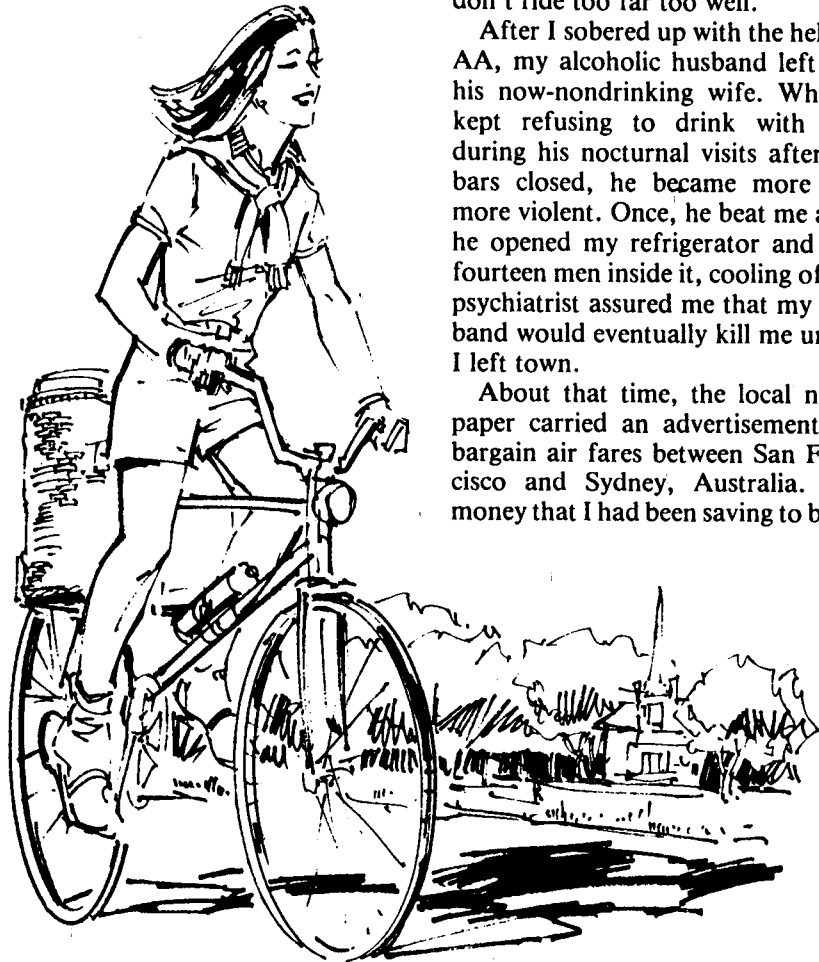
It all began with my fear of a DWI charge during my drinking days. I used to ride my bicycle to bars, leaving my driver's license behind. After having to walk my bicycle home once, because I was too drunk to ride it, I concentrated on drinking at home. Also, I wanted to avoid the sickening cigarette smoke of the bars. It was easier to take pills at home, too. I rode my bicycle to the grocery stores to buy beer and even went to the trouble and expense of fitting my bicycle with special, oversized baskets for carrying cases of beer. And so I

would bicycle home with one hand on the handlebars and the other around a paper bag containing a can of beer. I went to any length to drink!

Since I always loved to bicycle, I even dreamed of bicycling across the United States, beer can in hand. But I had already learned that alcoholics don't ride too far too well.

After I sobered up with the help of AA, my alcoholic husband left me, his now-nondrinking wife. When I kept refusing to drink with him during his nocturnal visits after the bars closed, he became more and more violent. Once, he beat me after he opened my refrigerator and saw fourteen men inside it, cooling off. A psychiatrist assured me that my husband would eventually kill me unless I left town.

About that time, the local newspaper carried an advertisement for bargain air fares between San Francisco and Sydney, Australia. The money that I had been saving to buy a



gun to defend myself was used to buy a proper touring bicycle. Australia was as far as I could get from my drinking husband. And so my bicycle and I, with my one and a half years of battered sobriety, flew to Australia. I proceeded, one revolution of the pedals at a time, counterclockwise around Australia, a total of 9,500 miles in five months. Before leaving home, I had read every book in the local library about the country and had properly planned my trip weatherwise; I avoided the hot summer and wet season and profited from tail winds at the beginning of the trip when my forty-one-year-old muscles needed all the help they could get. Not only did I have a good time sightseeing, photographing, and bike racing, but I saved both my life and my sobriety by attending AA meetings in Australia.

That friend in my home group learned about my trip when I gave him a copy of my self-published book about the experience. He called this trip faith. It took me so long to realize that, yes, I had faith that my legs and bicycle would get me from one water source to another in the dry, isolated Australian outback, and that someone would help me when I had the dreaded craving for alcohol.

The Australians were so generous, kind, and helpful that I feel I can never properly repay them, except perhaps by writing about my gratefulness and cleaning out the coffee-pot at my favorite AA meeting. I can't make the coffee before the

meeting, because I am always out riding then on the same bicycle. (I'm glad bicycles can't talk — it would have too many embarrassing stories to tell.) It has been to almost as many AA meetings as I have, and I have faith that it will perform well for many more miles.

Perhaps faith is like the Higher Power of our individual understanding in AA. It comes in all forms, shapes, and sizes. Although it took my friend much repetition to convince me that I had faith, this is what AA is all about: helping us to help ourselves and others through hearing things over and over at meetings. Some heads are thicker than others — or perhaps I have bicycled too long without a helmet. I put up an argument: "Death in Tampa was the only alternative to Australia."

"But you had faith," my friend said, "just like you have faith in AA to help you stay sober."

"But my only alternative to sobriety is death from alcoholism."

"That proves you have faith," he said.

It might have taken me five and a half years to realize that I have faith, but I do have it. Right now, I want to ride my bicycle all over Tampa at 3:00 AM, yelling, "I have faith!" But AA has taught me that I have a choice, so I'm pounding the faith story on my typewriter. That doesn't disturb the neighbors; they live far enough away.

While bicycling 117 miles in one day on Australia's Nullarbor Plain in 1979 and praying for the small town

to come, I never thought I was developing faith along with my leg muscles. I never dreamed that I had so much of what I was searching for. I seem to be as blind to my assets as I am to my debits.

And all along, I just didn't drink, rode my bicycle to meetings, and had a good time with activities I enjoy.

By the way, I finally bicycled across the United States, sober, with a water bottle instead of a beer can in

my hand. A car hit me in California, and I wanted a drink to ease the pain, but a marvelous AA couple saved my sobriety. By the time I got to Phoenix, the swelling was gone, and in El Paso, the scab finally came off.

I've been back in Tampa for three years, working only part-time (it's the only work I can find). My now-ex-husband hasn't bothered me. I have faith.

J. J., Tampa, Fla.

Spiritual Experience

Who's in Charge Here?

AFTER HIDING for some years in the delusive world of distilled rye and juniper berries, I find sobriety full of unexpected surprises.

A change of attitude has made me realize that situations I previously considered coincidence are actually the intervention of my Higher Power.

Emerging from the world of alcohol, I have found my fear of people and places difficult to overcome. After many months of practice, I hesitantly took a big step and enrolled in a college course. It was to be my first classroom experience in twenty-three years, and my introduction to

the world of higher education.

My intrusive feelings of inaptitude and incompetence accompanied me to my first day of class. Surely, everyone else would have a degree. I would, without a doubt, be the oldest one in the room. What if the professor called on me? (I was just beginning to get comfortable speaking at AA meetings.) Was I even teachable?

Only another alcoholic could imagine the tremendous relief I felt when I discovered that my Higher Power had provided a "doorman" to make me feel welcome. The learned man of linguistics standing at the

head of the class was also a recovering alcoholic, with ten and a half years' sobriety!

The many hours I had spent worry-

ing were proved to be wasted time, and once again, I realized that I was not in charge.

L. S., Prairie Village, Kans.

Spiritual Experience

An Agnostic Turns It Over

Excerpts from a letter to a newcomer

IF YOU WORK the Steps as suggested, but without a Higher Power, the day will come when you feel as if you've done it all for nothing. Let me quit saying "you," and tell you about *me*.

I told you before that I'd had a hard time with this HP stuff. Then, when it finally happened, I floated for a long time, going to meetings, saying "good stuff" at the tables, staying sober, but nothing else. I didn't work the program, didn't worry about an inventory. I figured my God would let me know when to start writing.

One morning, I woke up in the pits of despair. I had no thought of drinking, but I couldn't see the advantages of sobriety, or even of my existence. I wasn't suicidal or contemplating a drink, simply questioning the reason for my being. I felt that I was worth-

less, that I hadn't really given anything to the world, that, indeed, I had nothing to give. I felt like a blank page in the book of mankind.

At the same time, I've always had this sixth-sense idea that I was born with a mission — unrevealed to me, but *there* nevertheless. It has made me feel like a special person all my life. Maybe this is my survival tactic. If you ever hear my story, you'll know why I had no reason to feel special. And it's a basic human need.

At any rate, the day came when my "mission" faded into the fog of depression. It stayed there until I did my searching and *very* fearful inventory. The fear was triggered by a bigger fear. It wasn't the inventory; rather, it was the commitment to change. Once I did the inventory and had all my character defects on paper, the next step would be to work at their

minimization. (We strive for progress, not perfection!) Most of my defects had been used for survival. How could I not use them and come away sane and breathing regularly?

The "Twelve and Twelve" talks about God's will and self-will. (I just discovered this last night, and was so glad!) It says about newcomers and the Third Step, "... it appears that there are certain things which only the individual can do. All by himself, and in the light of his own circumstances, he needs to develop the quality of willingness. When he acquires willingness, he is the only one who can make the decision to exert himself." Here's the good part! "Trying to do this is an act of his own will."

Later, it says, "It is when we try to make our will conform with God's that we begin to use it rightly. . . . We had tried to bombard our problems with it [willpower] instead of at-

Spiritual Experience

In God I Trust

THERE IS MORE to being sober than just not drinking, thank God! This feeling of gratitude is a new experience. It brings with it a peace of mind and heart that is truly indescribable — a oneness with my

tempting to bring it into agreement with God's intention for us."

And so, when you do your Fourth Step, arm yourself with phone numbers. And I can't tell you strongly enough the importance of starting now, especially if you've been entertaining thoughts of drinking.

Use the social system (the pure theory, not the real world's version) as God's intention for you, and conform with the philosophy of Plato if you must. Pick a true and good theory. Turn your will (and indeed, your life) over to the care of the winners in the program. *The winners.* They're easy to spot — they're usually intimidating as hell on first impression!

But listen to what they say, and follow their directions. And above all, exercise that part of self-will that is willingness.

S. D., Modesto, Calif.

Higher Power that I yearned for during most of my forty-five years, and especially the last three of sixteen years of being merely dry.

As I reflect on those three years, I distinctly remember the crisis in my

life when I came to believe that what I had learned in this Fellowship was a lie. God had allowed things to happen in my life that I could not handle. Therefore, out of resentment, anger, and self-pity, I consciously told God to get lost: "You've abandoned me, so I'll abandon you."

From then on, I "managed" all my affairs, and believe me, "the result was nil." My marriage of twenty-five years was on a grease-slicked hill of decline; fear of failure was ever-present. I believed that the light at the end of the tunnel was a train coming at me. No matter what I did, it didn't work. The only thing I had going for me was not drinking. Although there were many days when I didn't like living, I sure didn't want to die drunk.

My mind would race through the past, rekindle hate, resentment, and fear, and project doom. I had no one to turn to. It had been my decision to travel this road alone, and alone I was! Miserably, I began to sense that I needed help. But pride kept me from getting honest. For nearly a month, I couldn't sleep, eat, or function rationally.

Finally, I started to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. I sought out people I could trust and began to level with them. When asked, "How are you?," I no longer answered, "Fine" or "Sober today." One Friday, talking with a friend, I cracked. Tears started. Tremors racked my body. For nearly an hour, I shook with fear and anxiety. At the end, I felt

whipped and hopeless. My friend suggested that I needed more help than he was capable of giving. Would I be willing to talk to a psychiatrist that he trusted, who understood this disease? I remember saying, "God, I'll do anything! I just can't run anymore."

Later that day, I checked into the psychiatric ward of a local hospital and remained there for the next week.

*"I hope and pray daily
that I'll not forget
what it was like
when I allowed my
self-will to run riot"*

In a session with my doctor on the second day, I told him about my life as honestly as I could. He suggested that the first answer to my problems lay in the acceptance of the Second Step. But how could I use this Step? I didn't trust my Higher Power. He had let me down! As the days passed, I began to ask for enough faith to trust my Higher Power. It did not come easy. Pride and unwillingness to let go of the past slipped in and out. However, many friends from the Fellowship visited and repeated in their own ways the necessity to surrender, to "let go and let God."

A week after my admission, I finally began to let go. The Lord's Prayer was the key to my freedom. As I knelt in the silence of my room, I got to "Forgive us our trespasses as we for-

give..." I realized that I was still using old resentments to keep me where I was, that if I wanted to live in peace, I had to forgive without reservation, without expectation. And I did. I asked God to take into his care the person I hated — the person I was allowing to control my life — the memories and pain I continued to nurture with my sickness, the feelings I had misused to manipulate the people I loved. "Please, God," I cried, "deliver me from my self-will. Forgive me for my arrogance, my hypocrisy, my presumption that I'm the creator instead of the created. I surrender, God, without reservation. I trust in you to guide me through this self-inflicted depression and despair." I gave up!

With the dawn of a new day, peace

of mind and heart enveloped me. Hope was present. A confidence never before felt had come to replace doubt.

My life has changed since that spiritual experience. "One day at a time" really makes sense now. The desire to trust has been restored. Faith has replaced fear. Love is real. God is caring for my life. Communication with my Higher Power and my family is a reality. The foundation of my life has been restored through the grace of God and this Fellowship.

I hope and pray daily that I'll not forget what it was like when I allowed my self-will to run riot; what happened when I practiced what I preached; and what it is like now that I've accepted the Second and Third Steps.

M. S., Clearwater, Fla.

POWER FOR LIVING

THE MIRACLE of sobriety continues a day at a time. They told me in the treatment center, when I sobered up eight years ago, that Alcoholics Anonymous was the best way to try to stay sober. They were right. Through the program and fellowship of AA, I have lived sober in good times and bad, in spite of myself.

A lot of times when I drank it was because of something — my job, my wife, my bills — anything but me. I was the victim. It wasn't my fault. It was theirs. I was being unfairly hurt. I deserved to drink. Excuses, excuses! Toward the end of my drinking (to

date), I didn't need any excuses — I *had* to drink. I had "a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession." No matter what I did or said on any particular day, I would drink before the day ended. I had no choice, no freedom.

And in those last days of drunkenness, I would have given anything to be able to not drink. But I couldn't do it on my own. Not-drinking wasn't part of my nature. My strength had to come from outside myself.

When I completely surrendered to my absolute powerlessness over alcohol, something mystical happened. It

was pure gift. I can't say it would ever come again, because I did nothing to cause it. I had tried so many times before to stop, and had always thought myself back to drinking. Sobriety had to be *given* to me by a Higher Power.

I don't know how or why I was given the gift of sobriety. But now that I have it, I want to keep it — more than anything else, more than family, friends, job, possessions. Without sobriety, I will lose all those other treasured things. Without sobriety, I will eventually die or go insane.

I have learned and experienced in the last eight years the best way for alcoholics to stay sober and protect their sobriety a day at a time.

The best way is *belonging* to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and continually working and reworking the Twelve Steps of the AA program. Belonging to AA means

following the suggestions of the Twelve Steps as set forth in the fifth chapter of the Big Book. "Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery." Earlier on, it says, "With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start."

Why bother with the Steps if you belong to the AA Fellowship? Over the years, I've seen alcoholics lose the gift of sobriety sooner or later because they didn't actually practice and work the Steps. Working the Steps, all the Steps, on a continuous basis has given me freedom from selfishness I never got anywhere else.

Back when I was drinking, I thought things outside myself made me drink. I now believe it was things inside myself, specifically my character defects, that made me powerless over the first drink. I am also powerless over my character defects

without help from my Higher Power. Any freedom from my character defects has come from conscious contact with God, as I understand him, through working all the Steps. I have experienced change, gradually. I have become able to do things I could not do before.

I learned from others who had done this type of work on the Steps. They showed me what to do — one drunk helping another. “Just do what the Steps say to do (when all else fails, follow the directions), and let the results follow.”

Practicing the Third Step involved saying the Third Step prayer from the Big Book. “Say this prayer with other AAs,” I was told. Also repeat it out loud, alone, and on the telephone with others. Use the Serenity Prayer in the same way. Turn it over — get out of the driver’s seat. Let go and let God. Practice the presence of God.

Next it was suggested that I write

out a thorough Fourth Step inventory, using page 65 of the Big Book as a guide. The most important thing was to put everything into it, especially making sure to include things I wouldn’t want anyone else to know. A list of character defects was suggested that included resentments, dishonesty, false pride, greed, fear, anger, lust, selfishness, self-pity, sloth, intolerance, envy, and gluttony.

Trusting what I was told, I wrote out the inventory. Just by inventorying my thoughts and actions on paper, I gained a certain freedom.

I was then advised to share the inventory with someone I trusted, and that possibly he would share his inventory with me. It’s called swapping a Fifth Step. It was described as being similar to taking the lid off a boiling pot: Pressure is released; freedom from selfishness, dishonesty, and guilt occurs. Overpowering thoughts become harmless, for I can see

through the dishonesty that is always a part of them. Thoughts of others come more often. Genuine peace of mind begins to occur.

All the Steps are ego-reducing when we work them, and Step Five is one of the best at that. It takes a certain amount of effort and courage to do Steps Four and Five, but the benefits are well worth it. A greater hold on sobriety is achieved, because we admit to the character defects we all have as humans, which caused us to drink when we desperately denied having any defects at all.

Step Six involves willingness to have the defects removed, not by my power or ability, but by God as I understand him. The best way to show this willingness, I was told, is to practice all the rest of the Steps on a repeated basis a day at a time.

Step Seven leads us to another prayer, the Seventh Step prayer from the Big Book. We humbly ask God to remove all the defects that stop our usefulness to God and our fellows. I was taught to work Step Seven by sincerely repeating this prayer.

Steps Eight and Nine bring additional concrete work on the program, which gives continued sobriety, freedom, and sanity, a day at a time. For a long time I believed that I was making amends just because I was sober. Then I heard an AA relate his experience in working Steps Eight and Nine.

Step Eight has us make a written list of *all* people and institutions harmed at any time in our lives. Peo-

ple who have died since the harm was done are included on the written list, even though the amends cannot be made. Names of others harmed are placed on the list even if harm would occur to them *if* I made amends. The name is listed, but the amends is not made, because of the harm it would cause to others. This written list also includes people who harmed us more than we harmed them. The key is that I harmed them. I am not part of the “others” mentioned in Step Nine. I wouldn’t be able to make all the amends I should make if I was always considering whether I would injure myself.

Next it was suggested that I go out to the various people or businesses on the written amends list, in person if nearby, on the phone otherwise, and say something like: “I have been thinking of our past relationship and apologize for any harm or injury I ever caused you.” Any material debt should be repaid, all at once if possible, and by installments otherwise, telling the party what arrangement is necessary and of the sincere intent to follow through.

Step Ten is the practice of daily inventory of my conduct toward others and quick admission of fault for wrongs done. This means not only examining my words and actions myself, but honestly telling others in the Fellowship (like my sponsor) what is going on in my life.

Step Eleven involves prayer and meditation. Saying the Third and Seventh Step prayers many times

throughout the day, along with the Serenity Prayer and others, demonstrates a willingness to let the Higher Power into our lives to provide knowledge of his will and the power to carry it out. For me, saying these prayers with other AAs promotes the practice of praying and adds greater meaning to the prayers themselves.

After the major amends on my Step Eight list were completed, my ability to meditate increased greatly. Before making these major amends, I was able to sit only with difficulty for a short time. When these amends were done, I was able to sit for much longer periods of time with less difficulty. Some effort and discipline were required, but meditation was easier.

Meditation means sitting still in a quiet place with the eyes closed and repeating a word or phrase over and over again silently in the mind. This process is continued until the mind gets bored and wanders to other thoughts. These new thoughts go on for a while, and then the mind is directed back to repeating the original word or phrase again. Practicing meditation for five to ten minutes is a reasonable amount of time in the beginning. The time can be increased as the practice goes on.

The real benefits derived from regular prayer and meditation are not determined by the results of our efforts. The main benefit is to continue these practices, as what we may

consider a "bad" meditation may actually benefit us to a great degree just because we have made the effort. Step Eleven doesn't automatically promise conscious contact with the Higher Power, but the experience of others who have repeatedly worked the Step shows us that we achieve freedom from self and from insanity to the degree we *seek* God's will by actually practicing this Step.

The more time I spend meditating, the greater is my freedom from worry, anxieties, and depression, and the clearer my thinking. It's like taking a spiritual bath; the process of meditation, just about to the degree I actually spend time on it, washes away a lot of my insanity.

When meditation is combined with sincere repetition of the Third and Seventh Step prayers, plus the Serenity Prayer, I am moving toward God's will simply by the willingness my actions demonstrate.

Step Twelve involves talking with

others about working the Steps in the way I have described. Do this over and over, and the result is increased freedom from the bondage of self and greater ability to deal with ongoing relationships. Peace of mind occurs more often and lasts longer. Everyday mistakes are sometimes laughable, believe it or not. Every passing moment isn't so gut-wrenchingly serious. The phrase "Easy Does It" takes on greater meaning. Problems still exist, but are not overpowering or insoluble. The thought that life is worth living is renewed more often.

The Twelfth Step also includes talking to other AAs about how to stay sober, and talking to active drinkers who want to quit.

The miracle continues. The gift of sobriety remains a day at a time, through *belonging* to the Fellowship of AA, working all Twelve Steps thoroughly and continuously, and letting the results follow.

S. M., Joliet, Ill.

Step Seven

Short — but Not Sweet

THE SEVENTH is the shortest Step. It should be so simple to practice it and be granted true relief, leading to serenity. However, I have found this Step to be extremely painful and frightening.

If I want a shortcoming removed, what price am I willing to pay to effect its removal? Need I merely consult my Higher Power and have instantaneous, positive action? Not in my case. I have to encounter pain and suffering to achieve the growth that ultimately leads to removal of the defect. Often, I do not learn the first time, and must repeat this painful process one or more times before growth takes place.

Some examples to clarify my point follow:

The defect: being unable to accept help from others. The growth opportunity: breaking my foot and having it stitched up, so I was forced to accept help.

The defect: not feeling love. The growth: losing a loved one.

The defect: impatience. The growth: going through periods of craziness and anxiety.

The defect: being unable to accept defeat. The growth: being told I could not now or ever obtain the particular job I was applying for, because I had used hard drugs.

The defect: dishonesty. The growth: being honest at the cost of my job.

The list grows as the period of my sobriety lengthens. I came to a point where even the thought of practicing the Seventh Step would send shivers of fear down my spine. What was the answer to my dilemma? I wanted an easy way out, so I turned to the Big Book and started quoting in prayer an appropriate passage: "Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of thy power, thy love, and thy way of life." Again, these words were simple to say. But then, I started thinking: What would I have to go through to have my difficulties removed?

The answers to my fears are contained in the Twelve Steps and the AA program. I have been taught that God never gives me more than I can handle at any one time. That has proved to be true no matter what the situation has been in my life of sobriety. I have been taught, "Thy will be done, not mine." Practicing the Third Step has brought sanity and order into my previously chaotic and unmanageable existence.

I am told that in all likelihood, the more pain I go through, the more I will grow. If that is God's will (and I

know I am in much better shape if he is in control), then I have faith I can handle that pain for ultimate good and removal of my character defects. My strength to handle pain will come through continued application of Step Eleven, together with the Serenity Prayer.

The Steps, the fellowship of AA members, and the strength I gain through listening at meetings help me to be happy and keep smiling, one day at a time. I thank my Higher Power for the difficult and painful Seventh Step.

H. V., Kodiak, Alsk.

Step Seven

Stepping on the Seven Deadlies

BEFORE MY sobriety began, five years ago, the Seven Deadly Sins accurately described my basic character. After my last drink, I discovered to my amazed awakening that the Seven Deadlies accurately describe basic *human nature*. Was Step Seven going to change my basic human nature? I doubted it. So it took me four years to get to the Seventh Step prayer. But then I was in for some surprises — seven of them.

Slowly, very slowly, at a caterpillar pace, I realized (I love AA realizations) that God is in the transformation business. Before I was even fully aware of it, a change was taking place in my behavior.

As a drinking author, I took great pride in my work. My pride far surpassed my accomplishments. My ego was always fatter than my bank account. Through AA and sobriety, I

have learned to write what I like and to like what I write. I no longer reach for the proverbial brass ring or yearn to write the nation's next best-seller. I have lowered my sights and have found my true niche. I am content. And I like myself more this way. Surprise! Step Seven has changed Pride into self-esteem.

Did I mention yearning for literary fame and fortune? Well, I never worked toward such a goal. I wrote for money. My sole motive was personal gain, no more, no less. Today, I write from a new heart, with the reader's mental and spiritual welfare in mind. Surprise! Caring and sharing have displaced Avarice.

When I was a drinking drunk, the imperious urge had me by the you-know-what. I firmly believed that lust was a natural part of the human makeup, and I often wrote highly of it, using acceptable euphemisms like

“eros,” “passion,” “fervent love,” and “burning desire.” It wasn’t until sobriety and my third marriage that I could — rather than “worship,” “crave,” “fear,” “adore” or “obey” — “twelfth-step” a loving woman. My imperious ego is no longer imperious. I now enjoy what I once thought was a contradiction in terms: moral sex. Surprise! Love has conquered Lust.

Anger was my middle name. Getting even was the name of my game. My bywords were “I’ll show them!” and “Who do they think they are?” and “They aren’t going to get away with that!” This violent need to punish others blinded me to the rights of others. Sober, I learned that all people are as human as I am and no more deserving of my self-righteous anger than I am of theirs. Surprise! Anger has given way to tolerance.

I was a glutton for everything sensual, including the “pleasure” of intoxication. As it turned out, I was really a glutton for punishment, drinking anything from beer and wine to whiskey and (on one pitiful occasion) after-shave lotion. I wanted *more* of everything in sight, no matter what it was. I was worse than an underprivileged kid let loose in an unguarded candy store. I was an insatiable sponge. Today, thanks to Step Seven, I no longer pray to have what I want; I pray to want what I have. Surprise! Acceptance has displaced Gluttony.

“Don’t do today what you can put off till tomorrow.” Remember that

kind of barroom advice? I do. I lived by it. Even in sobriety, I found myself procrastinating with the Steps, slow to read the Big Book, fainthearted about attending meetings — in other words, dragging my feet. That’s why it took me four years to get to Step Seven. Yet that is when I discovered that I would rather make a meeting than watch TV, that I prefer the Big Book to novels, that I’d rather pray than think. Surprise! The joy of sober living has replaced Sloth.

Today, I understand Envy as the incredible sadness that overwhelmed me when others were successful. I was hypercritical and insanely jealous of the “greats,” never once looking at the time, energy, and work they put into their success. I simply resented their “good luck,” “connections,” or “secret.” Today, I find myself admiring hardworking people who make it. There was a time, by the way, when I resented the winners in AA. I now let them serve as examples for me. Surprise! Envy is being replaced by emulation.

Today, I live in a daily state of surprise as Step Seven works on me. I have surrendered to the spiritual *process* that removes character defects. Someday, maybe mine will be removed. As I said at the beginning, I move at a caterpillar pace. But that’s okay today. As a slow-moving caterpillar spinning my cocoon to the design of the Twelve Steps, I will emerge free as a butterfly. That’s a promise God always keeps.

T. L., Torrance, Calif.

STEP FOUR

It's an individual program, and on the pages that follow, four AAs describe their personal approaches to this vital Step and tell us how working it helped their sobriety

Weeding Out the Crabgrass

LONG AGO and far away, I was a young alcoholic. After booting the AA program around for five years, I sat down to take my first sober inventory. That was thirty years ago, and there was not much help available. Worse yet, much of that was contradictory; I was offered the choice of a confession, a case history, or a half-baked self-analysis. It didn't seem to me the founders of AA could have meant any of those

things, and Bill W. himself later expressed some dismay at the shades of meaning the members were putting into "nature of our wrongs," "defects of character," and "short-comings." He said all those were just synonyms for the problems we found during inventory. Fortunately, I had guessed right on that.

It seemed to me that what was needed was the sort of inventory a merchant takes after a disaster,

counting up: "*This we can use. Those must go before they pollute everything. Sort the rest after the smoke clears.*" Some members seemed to be neglecting the first of those categories, and became so sad about all their liabilities that they went out and increased them. I thought there must be *something* right about me, or my Higher Power wouldn't have fished me out of the trash can just before the lid came down.

Since then, I've fifth-stepped quite a few newcomers, trying to help them sort out their garbage, which always seems to fall into three classes: things we did when we were children and then stopped doing; things we did while we were drunk but are not doing anymore; and things we still do that drag us down.

We can make short work of the first, as ancient history, unless we persist in brooding over them; then, we can put down "wallowing in guilt" as a current defect of character. Dealing with the second came easy to me, since I had been a patient in the "Maryland State Home for the Bewildered," as we used to call it. Having been declared medically insane taught me that I was not *morally* responsible for my drunken antics, any more than a mad dog is "bad." (That does not serve as a *legal* defense, and if your past catches up with you in court, call it "making amends.") I try to teach newcomers that they can feel regret without feeling guilt.

The third class is the real meat of

this discussion. You will find, unless you are a very unusual AA, that your daily life falls rather short of the standards of honesty and integrity we discuss in the evenings. I ask at the end of each day: "What should I have done better, not to win more money, but to feel more at peace with myself?" Whatever it was, I can put it on the list as a clue to a defect of character. Despite all my experience, I do not find my list getting very long; what I see is the same faults creeping back in like crabgrass.

Another clue to defects is over-reactions; they are my most reliable guide to unrealistic attitudes and expectations. Are those really defects of character? Not exactly. But they can be the sources of many very real defects, such as false pride, oversensitivity, and intolerance. Again, these remind me of crabgrass; my Higher Power may have cleaned them out once, but it is *my* responsibility to keep them from taking over again.

A wonderful source of information about ourselves is our hassles with other people. I always consider the possibility that I may have caused the problem. Like any sober alcoholic, I can be pretty abrasive; any pattern that I keep repeating, I have to recognize as "arrogance" or some other lack of humility. We should look closely at anything that impairs our serenity, not simply as a threat, but in terms of "Am I reacting to this in a childish way?" If the answer is yes, then we have another entry for the inventory. I see as my goal living at

peace with my Higher Power, with other people, and with myself, and to me, any behavior that threatens one or more of those is a symptom of a character defect. What I most dread seeing in newcomers is an obsession with "getting even." Some societies regard that as a virtue; but for an alcoholic, it is a terrible drain on peace of mind.

Perhaps, the best way to summarize is to say that any behavior or other habit pattern that endangers my serenity is a danger to my sobriety, and can be considered a defect to be identified, tagged, and mowed frequently. I used to say "dug out"; but as time has passed, I've learned that perfectionism itself is one of those "things."

Step Four

Taking Stock

AFTER SIX months of sobriety and almost daily meetings, things were getting better. I could see improvement in small ways. Reactions to irritations were markedly better. The strength of the desire to talk about myself had lessened, and I listened. Nevertheless, I was becoming increasingly aware of the strength and breadth of my character defects.

No doubt, some purists will say that I'm confusing the Fourth Step with the Tenth, but I don't see it that way. When I finished my Fourth back in 1952, I thought that was it, and I hung up the shovel. But the gradual findings from the Tenth became the building blocks from which I built a better Fourth in 1957. It has gone that way every five years since, and I'm still learning.

When a newcomer brings me a Fourth that looks like a list of the Seven Deadly Sins, I have to tell him that everyone has those, so it is worthless to him. What we need is a list of the rotten attitudes that have led to making the same mistakes over and over and over.

A. B., San Diego, Calif.

From discussion and Step meetings, I learned two things: first, that doing the Fourth and Fifth Steps was painful; second, that the relief afterward was great. That was made especially obvious by one member of my home group, who never stopped smiling after he did the Fifth Step. I promised myself that I would do mine during the school summer vacation, since I knew it would be time-

consuming and unsettling.

Procrastination, fear... finally, one morning, I said: This is the day! So I promptly rose, dressed, and got ready to go to the summer sale at Saks. But my Higher Power had heard me earlier. When I checked my leaky radiator, it was obvious the car would have to be towed to the service station. That was it; I made the arrangements, took off the clothes put on to impress the salespeople, got out my sharpened pencils, and sat down with a Fourth Step guide, the Big Book, and the "Twelve and Twelve."

The Big Book way seemed easiest, as I floundered trying to decide whether vanity was a subcategory of false pride, and false pride a category of low self-esteem. Four legal pads of people, resentments, and effects later, I was face-to-face with fear, low self-esteem, false pride — you name it, I had it in spades, plus one that I hadn't even been aware of, overweening social ambition. Wow, there was hardly any member of my family or my ex-husband's family that I didn't have some resentment against, not to mention the rest of the world.

As the Big Book says, "Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes." It became obvious that in almost every instance, the cause of the resentment was in me. That made it better. It was hard to continue to resent a mother's embarrassing you when if you hadn't been twelve pre-

tending to be seventeen, she couldn't have blown your cover. Finally, it was finished, and I felt good about it. Sure, I'd learned some nasties about myself, but most of these I had become aware of in the six months on the program anyway, and the rest wasn't anything that working the program wouldn't take care of. As advised, I *had* listed some assets: sense of humor, persistence, kindness to animals, good cook.

Then, I took what I had written over to my sponsor. After long discussion, she suggested I add courage to the list of assets. I felt good about that, too. We talked about the Fifth Step to come, and I admitted my surprise that the experience of the Fourth Step hadn't been too upsetting. I guessed that it was because I had done considerable agonizing over my defects already. She smiled and made coffee.

In prayer at 5:00 AM the next day, I presented my Maker with my assets: courage, persistence, and a sense of humor. There I was, as I was — not a word about love, charity, faithfulness. What an epitaph! — maybe good qualities for pushing a railroad through Indian territory, but what about those I loved? Would that be how they remembered me? And then I recalled the analogy I had heard at a meeting: that we take our inventory, not for ourselves, but for our Employer. It is up to him to decide what to do about it. Well, the building had burned down; the stock was gone! Could my Employer restock with

better, more lasting merchandise, build a new reputation, gain customers who could rely on quality? Some of the new goods might have to be specially ordered and be a long time coming. It would take disappointed customers a while to realize their warranties would be honored.

Loans would have to be solicited from faithful friends.

The answer was yes! To our Employer all things are possible — even the final inventory and the response “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

C. T., Boston, Mass.

Step Four

Burning Resentments

RESENTMENT, like alcohol, is a poison that few of us can afford to taste for long. I can easily squander a beautiful afternoon by resenting the person who couldn't go on a picnic with me. My flares of temper and sulking over which members I wanted to have coffee with after a meeting began to lose me as many invitations as my drinking used to. I found myself keeping a mental tally of all the people who had harmed me and why — all the people who didn't do what I wanted them to do. On top of that, I wasn't feeling good about myself and the way I was acting, because I seemed to be angry all the time. Where was the joy of sobriety if I was still acting like a drunk?

I stacked up resentments wherever I went, and was sure people were stacking up resentments against me.

My own bad feelings about myself increased with each new resentment, and I got more angry and rebellious. Now, I understood why resentment was “the ‘number one’ offender” that could lead me back to drinking. I was like a time bomb, ready to explode at the slightest provocation. My resentments had me so disturbed, I couldn't think about anything else. My sponsor suggested I do a Fourth Step. I knew I wasn't ready for that — at least, not right away — but I had to do something to get rid of these disturbances, no matter what their cause.

One day, I bought a candle to burn away every resentment as it came up. I allowed only a certain amount of time for each burning before setting both the candle and the resentment aside by not allowing myself to think about them. If the disturbance crept

back into my mind, I would relight the candle for a certain time and concentrate on the resentment for that time, then put it aside again. In the resentments I set fire to, I began to notice a pattern. Every resentment was connected with a self-esteem, finance, personal relationship, or ambition problem. I was burning my way into a Fourth Step.

Gradually, it took less and less time to burn away each resentment. I prayed when I lit the candle and thought about self-restraint instead of the person, place, or thing I thought had harmed me. If my resentment was toward a person, I prayed for that person right before extinguishing the candle. Sometimes, of course, I had to relight the candle

until my thoughts eventually became habits. By not acting on a resentment until I at least had time to burn it, I learned to postpone resentful actions, as I had postponed the next drink when I was getting sober.

I discovered I could be disappointed without being rude, angry without quarreling, sad without sulking. Not all my resentments went away; but by allowing a little “burn-up time,” I found I could make better decisions and not give others a reason to resent me. Finally, some of them did eventually become part of my Fourth Step. Today, I still keep a candle by my bed, but each day brings fewer resentments and more smiles.

K. S., Houston, Tex.

Step Four

What Goes Up Must Come Down

HAVE YOU noticed that alcoholics generally come equipped with a lot of unrealized potential? Whether they are still drinking or have been sober for many years, most

of them talk of golden career opportunities they bungled because of drinking bouts or “bad breaks.” In fact, many AAs in their autumn years still entertain secret hopes of



pursuing shining careers to which they believe their talents entitle them: "After all, Colonel Sanders did it. Why shouldn't I?"

I'm that sort, too. Every so often, I figuratively launch out into water over my head — at least in thought.

*"Once I am aware of
a problem, what
action do I take?"*

The syndrome usually begins with mild overoptimism and develops into grandiose plans for a brave new world fashioned according to my own designs. When the malady has reached a certain stage, I am likely to visualize myself as engrossed in a brilliant career, succeeding against staggering odds and overwhelming pressures. I then become obsessed with the fantasy and neglect everyday considerations — and that creates other problems. With the growth of obsession, all perspective is lost, and I become unaware of the unrealistic nature of my plans. If you think I should know better, you don't understand the mind of an alcoholic.

If this cruise into a fantasy world is allowed to run its course, a painful emotional collapse will certainly result, leading to depression, a deep sense of inadequacy, and feelings of frustration and hopelessness. This has happened to me. And when it did, I knew that a wet lapse in so-

briety was but a short step away.

After spending some years in AA, I have discovered some things about myself: specifically, the nature of many of my self-destructive thought and behavior patterns. I now stand a better chance of detecting telltale signs of sick thinking on my part and am usually able to take action to return to firm ground before disaster strikes. Without such awareness, it would be easy to rationalize that my grandiose notions were in accord with God's will. As to the manner in which I pick up on clues of mounting sick thinking, it is often a result of hearing and relating to remarks made in AA meetings. Sometimes, an honest friend in the program ventures to point out the dangers of my thought or behavior patterns.

Once I am aware of a problem, what action do I take? A good technique I have discovered for bringing myself back into the real world and seeing myself for the person I really am is looking over my old Fourth Step notebooks. I keep them hidden away in a drawer. As I read over them, I begin to see the frightened child within that is the real me, the one with the troublesome defects and defenses. This action soon trims me down to size. Thus, the moral of this little article is: Save those Fourth Step notes; they can be useful. If you are concerned that someone else might see the notes — what's the risk? You probably didn't do anything that nearly everyone else hasn't done, too.

D. J., Columbus, Ohio

August 1984

I HAD BEEN SOBER a little over six months (my second time around) when I had to have major surgery. After three and a half days of heavy medication, it was cut off cold turkey. That was on a Friday. By the time Sunday came, I was having awful withdrawal symptoms. I felt as though my eyelids were tied around my toes. Every fiber of my being hurt, and I had a really good case of the cold sweats. I held on to my pillow to keep from shaking out of the bed.

The attendants started changing my sheets as I continued to hurt. I tried to reach some fellow AAs on the phone, but on a Sunday, no one was to be found. "Just my luck," I thought. Little did I realize that God had the whole situation well in hand.

After four changes of sheets, I made a desperate attempt to get some help: I called for the RN. She came in and asked what she could do to help. I asked her if it was at all possible that I could be having withdrawal from the medication. She asked if I had ever had any problems with drugs in the past. I explained to her that drugs had not been my problem, but that I was an alcoholic.

She smiled, sat down, and asked how long I had been in the AA program. I explained that I had been

The Hand of AA

sober this time only a little over six months, after a year and a half of running drunk. She took my hand and began to share some of her experience, strength, and hope, out of her nine years of sobriety in AA. After she left, I was able to let go of my pillow and sleep all night in a dry bed.

God truly does work in strange yet beautiful ways. I used to believe they were coincidences. Now, I know better. Today, with four years of sobriety, I thank God for that angel in white in the program.

S. B., McAlester, Okla.

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable"

POWERLESS EQUALS FREE

DURING THE quiet time of my regular Friday night meeting, I prayed, "Dear God, I need a miracle to keep from drinking tonight."

When it was my turn to comment, I could only say what I was thinking. I announced that this was my last AA meeting. I was tired of fighting the desire to drink. I was miserable, and I was giving up.

If anyone addressed a comment to me, I didn't hear it. I sat through the rest of the meeting feeling sorry for myself because I had tried for four months, and now I would fail, just as I had always known I would.

When the meeting was over, I scurried to the literature table and pretended to be absorbed in reading. The

woman who had brought me to the meeting found me and told me that she would like to go to the restaurant where the group usually gathered after the meeting. Since she was driving, I guessed I had no choice. I considered asking her to drop me off at a bar, but I decided that if I had waited four months to drink, I could wait until she wouldn't be involved.

I tried to become invisible as I walked into the section of the restaurant that we AAs took over on Friday nights. A few people tried to talk to me, and some even teased me about the lemon-sucking look on my face. I attempted some wan smiles and thought that soon they would never have to see me again. Out of the

corners of my downcast eyes, I noticed a man pulling up a chair to our table. I remembered seeing him at a different meeting a few weeks earlier. He had said then that he lived in Boston and came to Chicago on business occasionally. Although it didn't seem to bother him that he didn't know anyone, I felt a little sorry for him. I said hello and told him I remembered him from the earlier meeting. Then, he started to speak to someone else, and I went back to staring into my coffee cup.

A little later, it got quiet at our table, and I saw that he and I were the only ones still sitting there. Everyone else had gotten up to circulate among people they knew at other tables. He asked me what was wrong, and I told him.

"What Step are you on?" he asked.

"I'm working on my Fourth Step," I replied, proud of my progress despite my present condition.

"Sounds to me like you never took the First Step." He was smiling, but I knew he was serious.

Who did this man think he was? I had been attending five or six meetings a week ever since my first meeting. I had zipped through the first three Steps and soon would be finished with the Fourth — and this man was telling me I had never taken the First Step! I tried to control my anger as I told him that I certainly wasn't on the First Step, and that Alcoholics Anonymous just wasn't going to work for me, because I was different.

Other people seemed real happy to be sober, but I was unhappy.

He remained calm. "If you're thinking drinking, you never took the First Step in your gut. You need to get brutally honest with yourself and admit that you're powerless over alcohol. You may have said it up there" (he pointed to my head), "but you never admitted it down there" (he pointed to my stomach).

I opened my mouth to defend myself. Suddenly, I was seeing a little movie of myself riding home from work on the bus. Every night, the fantasy was the same. I would gaze longingly at each bar we passed and imagine how it would be next time. Next time I drank, I would be nicely dressed, and I would look positively elegant as I lifted the narrow-stemmed glass of white wine to my perfectly lipstick lips. And I would always drink only in "nice" bars, not the kind of hole in which I used to chugalug beer.

The audio portion of this advertising-induced idealization was a sort of litany I chanted in my mind: "I have learned my lesson. I have paid my dues. I am able to work now. I am not yellow anymore. I can fit into my clothes today. I can eat breakfast today, and never again will I forget to eat. I will always look good and sip slowly. Never, ever will I again sit alone in my filthy apartment and swill a case of beer. Today, I know how to drink."

I came back to the present with the thought that this was the first time I

had seen my daily reverie from outside myself. It looked pretty dumb from that perspective, especially if I took into consideration the fact that I had never in my life known when I would stop drinking once I had started. The cutoff usually came when I passed out. I couldn't point to a single instance in my life where I had controlled my drinking and it hadn't controlled me.

If it had always been the same sad story in the past, how could I possibly think the future would be different? At that moment, I saw the truth: If I had actually admitted — in my gut — that I was powerless over alcohol, I wouldn't be wasting my time fantasizing about the next drink.

The woman who had brought me was waiting to leave. As I slipped on my coat, I was still trying to think of something to say to this man. He waved a finger at me. "If you can't

surrender, just accept. Just take that First Step in your gut, and you won't be miserable anymore."

I thanked him and left.

By the time I got home, I was singing out loud. I felt lighter than I could ever remember feeling. I *could* surrender. I *was* powerless. And being powerless was great, because I could stop thinking about drinking and start thinking about sobriety — and living.

I had asked God for a miracle, and He gave me one by sending someone to tell me that he had already given me one if I would just accept it.

I never saw that man again, but I have been able to accept my powerlessness over alcohol for six years now, one day at a time. And God has continued to send me many miracles since the first one that occurred the day he gave me courage and willingness to go to my first AA meeting.

M. O., Oak Park, Ill.

Throwing In the Towel

ONE NIGHT, instead of trying to beat "writers' block," I let my mind go back to the date of my first acceptance of the Twelve Steps — the day I stopped drinking. That was more than twenty-five years ago, and it came after almost five years of occasional AA meetings (just drifting in and out), off-and-on binges, a bout with the DTs, and sundry other beautiful happenings that resulted from my refusal to work the simple program.

It was after my last and most horrendous drunk that I learned admitting I was an alcoholic was not the same as taking the First Step. I had recognized for a long time that I was an alcoholic but still thought I could be like the "man of distinction" in the whiskey ad. I almost made it to "man of extinction."

I finally realized that the First Step said nothing about admitting that I was an alcoholic; it called upon me to admit that I was "powerless over alcohol" and that my life "had become unmanageable." The concession that I was an alcoholic wasn't the surrender that the First Step mentions. I could have admitted my alcoholism from then to doomsday; but until I admitted that alcohol was my master, there was little or no hope for recovery. When I finally took the First Step and threw in the towel, I was on my way. It took absolute surrender to bring victory.

After the First Step, I found I needed another power greater than myself to keep me sober. I went on to the Second and Third Steps without reservation, and the strength came. God had always been there, just waiting for me to ask for help; and when I did, it was not wanting. The insanity of drinking fell away. When God took over my will and the management of my life, I found a peace and stability I'd never known.

As I moved up the ladder of sanity (the Twelve Steps), I gained serenity and peace of mind. The vicissitudes of life didn't shake me, and I was able

to handle several tragic incidents without searching for oblivion. I learned to love life, AA, people, and God. Living became a pleasure, because I had learned to cope.

But my alcoholic self is not dead — he's just in limbo, waiting for complacency or stinking thinking to open the door for his reentry into my life.

"... I learned admitting I was an alcoholic was not the same as taking the First Step"

That I must never forget. I am an alcoholic and powerless over alcohol. There are some musts for me: I must make meetings; I must have faith in the God of my understanding; I must work the principles of the program each and every day in all my affairs; I must never take that first drink; and I must love my neighbor as myself.

Also, I must never forget the holocaust of my life before I surrendered to my rigorous master — alcohol. Others may say there are no musts in AA. That's their privilege. But for me, those musts are paramount.

My alcoholic self will live as long as I; whether we ever get reacquainted is up to me. With the help of God, AA, and the wonderful people who make up the Fellowship, that other self and I will not meet again.

W. L., North Miami, Fla.

STEP

9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

Real Men Don't Make Amends — Do They?

MANY TIMES at meetings, I've heard something like "I did so and so. Do I have to make amends?" Or "A *man* never says he's sorry." Or "I'm just going to make a living amends by behaving myself." Or "What good does it do?"

Sound familiar? It sure does to me. I've had all those negative attitudes at one time or another during my sobriety. It seems as though considering amends removed everything positive from my outlook on life. Then, the

excuses started exaggerating themselves, and another chance to become a better person through our program slipped away. How many of those chances did I miss because false pride engendered a negative attitude toward amends? Almost all of them.

Now, thanks to God, good strong sponsorship, and a great AA group, my attitude regarding amends is no longer negative. I've learned to make an amends that is a positive experience, not just putting a check mark

on a list to fill a square. Just filling a square is not growth; it is just filling a square, the way I did when I was drinking. Growth is characterized by an identifiable change in attitude for the better. It is apparent in the way we conduct ourselves, in the way we express ourselves, in our actions. Fortunately, it comes in many ways.

The growth I have experienced through amends began when I found out exactly what an amends is not. Much to my surprise, it is not crawling on my belly or becoming a doormat or belittling myself. I no longer have to try to act responsible for events I had no control over. Did you ever try to alter events that took place when you were not even there? I don't need to justify myself or make excuses. Making amends means taking sole responsibility for all my actions and letting others have the responsibility for theirs.

An amends is taking the episodes of my life that haunt me and laying them to rest, finally. It allows me to walk down my side of the street with my head up, unafraid of anyone I may encounter. It makes it possible for me to anticipate life instead of hiding from it. Life is to be lived, not battled or avoided.

An amends is allowing those I abused in my disease to participate in my recovery. I owe them that, and more important, I owe myself that. I believe that each time I committed an offense against another person, in reality I committed a far greater offense against myself. The offenses

against others pale in significance when compared with the internal havoc I wreaked within myself.

I've found that mistreating others is really a two-part deal. First, I go against my values by telling myself it is okay to commit a wrong against someone else. My ethics and morals both say this is wrong, yet when I take over the management of my life, I tend to override any good sense I ever had. The pursuit of a fleeting moment's excitement becomes more important than living up to my own standards. Each time I did that, I gave a piece of myself away. I believe my self-esteem when I got here was on the minus side of the page because I had given so many pieces of myself away.

Second, I commit the wrong against another person. Therefore, each time I was harmful to others, I gave that piece of myself to them, thus giving away control of my actions and thinking. That was certainly evident by the pains I went to in order to avoid those I had wronged. I even had to change my route to the washroom at work, taking a longer, more devious path. Fear. Guilt. Hiding. Have you ever avoided going someplace you really wanted to go, because you knew one of your "victims" would be there, too? Not a fun way to live.

Upon sobering up, joining AA, and setting out on the "Road of Happy Destiny," I discovered a new strength within. That strength has allowed me to make my amends, and

as a result, I've experienced some of the most profound and moving moments of my sobriety. Some really marvelous people reentered my life because of my amends attempts, and we are closer today than before. You see, prior to the amends, I had never stopped to really look at them, to put myself in their place, to empathize with them, to consider their importance in my life, to just be polite. I found some really good folks where I had previously seen small, inferior, bothersome persons.

Each person did one big thing for me. They all returned the small pieces of myself I had left in their charge, thus participating in my recovery by assisting me to become whole again. The more I was able to follow the Big Book in making my amends, the better I felt. It astounds me that those I wronged are able to contribute so much to my recovery. Once I dis-

covered this, I began to seek them out more fervently, and my amends really began to enhance my sobriety. I am still amazed at God's power to put the wreck I was back together.

It has been eight years since my first stumbling attempts at amends, and I'm pretty much whole again. All the negative feelings I used to associate with Step Nine are gone. My Higher Power has allowed me to experience our wonderful way of life to the fullest, and I want more of it.

There is yet one piece of myself still in the care of another, and I am looking forward to going home for that visit in a few months. Thanks to God, our program, my sponsor, and my group, I have all the tickets I need for a very rewarding excursion into a few moments of my past. I left part of myself and someone I need there. I'm going back to get them.

N. D., Omaha, Nebr.

Step Nine

Mending Ourselves First

FAMOUS LAST WORDS: "What? You, an alcoholic? I know you used to drink a lot, but you were never *that* bad! Surely, you can have just one!"

That sounds familiar to some of us who skipped from the First Step to the Ninth without batting an eyelid.

Within the first few months of my recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous, still immersed in fogs of grandiosity, I was quite attracted to what I saw as the theatrical possibilities of the amends Steps. I wrote letters to two old friends estranged by my drinking. One responded with understanding,

and we arranged a meeting. The other sent a message that said, in effect, "Drop dead!" It was a crushing blow, and my last attempt at amends-making for many years to come. I had leaped into the ocean without first learning how to swim.

It is often pointed out that the Ninth Step is way down on the list for a good reason. Before tackling our relations with others, it seems a good idea to first work on our relations with ourselves, to pull ourselves together.

The tendency in my area is to move very slowly on the Steps, especially the amends Steps. Yet we learn from *Dr. Bob and the Good Old-Timers* that our co-founder was busy "making restitution to friends and acquaintances" even before his last drink of alcohol was out of his system.

And we know from Bill's story that our other co-founder lost no time, after his spiritual experience at Towns Hospital in 1934, in carrying a message of hope and recovery (Twelfth Step) to as many drunks as he could find in New York City. So the question of timing, like recovery itself, would seem to be an individual matter.

I felt angry and spiteful toward my parents most of my life. Unfortunately, my father died before I was able to make satisfactory amends for my years of neglect. I had a better opportunity with my mother and, in the last years of her life, was able to make a start at amends. With the passage of time and with the healing grace of

Alcoholics Anonymous, I came to see that my folks had done the best job they could in bringing me up. Thanks be, I was blessed with opportunities to make specific amends to other members of my family.

With my brother, however, I was unable (or unwilling) to let go of resentments against him — resentments more than thirty years old. It took years of recovery, plus the loving support of a friend/sponsor, before I could finally admit my anger, uncover the source from which it arose, and approach my brother. Since he lived at a great distance, I wrote to him. His response was immediate and accepting.

"Before tackling our relations with others, it seems a good idea . . . to pull ourselves together"

Also long in coming was my facing up to a lifetime of petty thievery. Stores I had stolen from were no longer in business; certain private individuals could no longer be found. What to do? The Step suggests that I make amends "wherever possible"; otherwise, let go of it. So I began making it a point to drop some extra folding contributions in our AA

group baskets. Second, I became a regular annual contributor to a few worthy charities (non-AA).

Another area that required extensive soul-searching was where I had caused disruptions in the domestic (romantic) lives of others. But I was unable to locate any of those whose lives I had disrupted. All I could do was pray for divine help in remaining aware of my defect and not sliding into the old pattern again, a day at a time. Early in my resolve, I found myself in situations where temptation was so strong that I had to abandon budding friendships with married couples in order to retain my sanity.

*“All I could do was pray
for divine help in . . . not
sliding into the old
pattern again”*

Places of employment where I had stolen time were no longer around. The best I could do was make a decision not to steal from or cheat my present employer, with the help of a Power greater than myself.

The many persons I used and abused as love objects in my drinking years (and a few in my sober life, I'm sorry to say) have disappeared. There was one in particular who relapsed into the drinking stage of his alcoholism, partly as a result of my abuse

(possessiveness). I didn't get him drunk, but neither did I afford him a very attractive power of example. As with others, I lost track of him. Again, what to do? Since amends to those persons were not possible, I made a decision to try not to use people in that way again. It's a decision I try to live by, a day at a time.

There are other kinds of situations where amends ought to be made. An old man who worked a few desks away from mine would stop at my desk at least once a day to reminisce on his young manhood. I was already an AA member, but still so self-centered that he bored me. One day, he came by to tell me that he had been fired. I may never forget the look in his eyes — the look of a little child lost. I experienced a profound sadness over my treatment of him but was unable to express it.

Much later on, as I became better able to decentralize myself, I made myself a promise to try to listen with more care and compassion to my fellow AAs and to try to remain as accessible as possible to them. I also made it a point to start reading that section of the Big Book that discusses the amends Steps. It's there we find the “promises,” a listing of benefits that “will always materialize if we work for them.” For a time, I thought the “promises” were unconditional. But they're not, of course. They must be interpreted and understood in the context of working the Twelve Steps.

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.



OPENING UP TO STEP THREE

*We need to let go
of spiritual prejudices*

ONE OF THE benefits of regular attendance at Step meetings is that it allows us to take a look back at our history with a Step. My growth on each Step has usually been slow and gradual, much as the Big Book describes the "typical" spiritual experience. Step Three especially has been like that, as I have made small efforts to understand that Step and incorporate it in my daily life.

The subject of God or the Higher Power was one that I thought I had neatly disposed of long before AA. If I told enough people that there probably wasn't a God, and that I refused to accept the idea, that would be enough, I thought; I wouldn't need to deal with him. I would quote the names of intellectual books and authors that I had heard of and in some cases had even read (in part).

About three years into sobriety, I was fortunate enough to read the AA booklet *Came to Believe*. . . . Near the front is a suggestion that we set aside our spiritual prejudices long enough to see whether we can be helped. I had just enough self-honesty at that point to realize that I was proceeding in life on some shakily constructed premises in areas that seemed to be vital. Next came a realization at a meeting that perhaps the "God people" were right and I might be the one who was missing out on something basic and real. I can say that my first true open-mindedness about God came as the result of pure self-interest. That began a journey into Steps Three and Eleven, which have become the basis of the hope I have today for some real peace of mind and serenity.

Since then, I have been able to identify at least four distinct reservations that I had about this idea of turning over my will and life to the care of God as I understand him. I define my will as everything I think and desire. My life consists of the material aspects, such as people and things.

First, I feared Step Three because I thought it would mean that I would have to be different from most of the people I knew. For an ex-people-pleaser, that was not a happy prospect. I was the kind of person who worried that some waitress or clerk might not like me and appreciate me for my uniqueness.

Next came the concern that if I

made some sort of commitment to a spiritual way of life, then those "out there" — the big "they" — would ridicule me. (To say that sensitivity has been a problem for me is gross understatement. Evidence of that has been my problem with bosses and my wife: They are too likely to point out my shortcomings.)

Third was the fear that spiritual commitment meant losing control of the details of my life. My awareness of that reservation came from work on Steps Six and Seven. The discussion of our reluctance to give up some

*"My growth on each Step
has usually been slow
and gradual"*

defects caused me to realize that only God could remove them, only in his way, and only if I allowed him. I got the idea that he would remove the ones *he* chose, and I realized that I was afraid to let him into my personal life. I feared that he might think it better for me to be poor. Also, I wasn't certain what his views on sex were.

The fourth area of reservation was harder to see and took more Step work than the others. After a lot of self-inventory and Big Book study meetings, I began to see how strong my doubts about myself were. Like any good alcoholic, I had hidden those doubts behind a façade of

words and actions. In one prolonged experience with a particular group, we identified a common fear we all had — of the “fatal flaw.” This was the fear that we might have some defect too deep and ingrained to be fixed by any amount of program work, and someday it would trip us up.

I realized that I had carried that fear over into my relationship with God; I was afraid I might make a commitment and be unable to stick with it. This fear of failing my Higher Power was based on my continual forgetting that he does all the work, and I need only to show up daily and follow instructions. It has helped me to take the advice in the Big Book and the “Twelve and Twelve” — to seek out

what others have to offer in my search for that “conscious contact.”

Today, Step Three is how I show up for those daily directions, and Step Eleven is how I take the action needed to assure another day without drinking. Recently, my action on Step Eleven was to write on three-by-five cards what the chapter on that Step suggests we do upon rising and during the day when agitated or doubtful. Carrying those cards helped me to remember to do those things more often than before.

I now realize that the reservations I had about Step Three were what got me going and moving toward my dreams, which this wonderful program has made realities.

D. G., Parker, Colo.

Step Two

Working Toward Sanity

TAKING THE First Step didn't seem all that difficult for me, because I am the descendant of three generations of alcoholics. Caught up in my family's denial system, I never realized how much alcohol had devastated my life until I came to AA. After that, armed with facts about the progression of my disease, all I had to do was look at the statistics and my own past any time I wanted a drink. I knew without question that for me, "to drink is to die." Even with that knowledge, it took one slip after two years to make my surrender complete.

The Second Step was quite another issue. Although the Big Book calls insanity the unreasonable decision to drink, my behavior was unreasonable whether I was drinking or not. Even though I was going to meetings and working my program the best that I could, I was caught in a recurring dry-drunk syndrome. Any time I was under stress or felt intense emotion, I would fall into extreme behavior. It was as though I had no memories of a sober life to fall back on — no foun-

dation to build on. I realize now that I was filled with a lifetime of feelings, didn't trust anyone at all, had thirty-five years to rebuild, and didn't even know what sanity meant!

I divided the Step into three parts, working my way toward sanity as a goal and beginning with "Came to believe." What did I believe in? I no longer believed most of what I learned as a child, because that was based on self-centeredness and the broken promises of alcoholic egos. I couldn't believe in any institutional or cultural standards, because I had always been an outsider without knowing why. Alcoholism in both my family and myself had always kept me apart from the rest of the world. I didn't believe in God yet, because I was still too full of resentment and self-pity. So what was the one thing I accepted as true? What did I rely on — right now, that day — with or without absolute proof? Sobriety.

I believed sobriety could allow me to be the person I had always wanted to be and hadn't known how to be. I believed that AA's Twelve Steps of

recovery could teach me how to stay sober. I made AA my church and the Steps of the program my gospel. Sobriety was truly a power greater than myself, and I knew I had to believe in it or die. But if I could stay sober and work through the Steps, I might be able to learn a real life that would be part of the rest of the world. Sobriety could, indeed, restore me to sanity, but it would have to be a rigorous daily process.

This was where the slogan "Fake it till you make it" came in. I had to change a lifetime of daily habits, by learning how to cook balanced meals and enjoy it, by smiling and trying to talk at meetings. The most important lesson of all was to learn how to come out of hiding — how to talk to other people and let them talk to me. After a lifetime of isolation, it wasn't easy to make contact with people.

I began with thanking each speaker for a good meeting and had to work my way up to just going to coffee with more than one person. But I began forming new beliefs in the process. I was learning fellowship and

from it faith and hope. About this time, I discovered I wasn't unique. Everyone in AA wanted the same thing I did and was trying to do the same thing I was — some just had more practice at it than others! As my feeling of uniqueness fell away, so did my fear of insanity.

AA is like my family now, and I am no longer the scared kid sitting on the sidelines of life. I'm also not as angry or hurt now that I sit in the AA circle with people I know and who know me. It took time, but now I have a consistency in my life that I have never known before, and I can share it with others. For that, I am truly grateful.

Today, I go to meetings for another reason, too, because I'm still working on my daily habits. I keep one eye open for the scared newcomer sitting outside the circle, the newcomer no one can quite reach. I used to be there, until I "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," for as long as we believe in sobriety as a way of life.

K. S., Houston, Tex.

A Prayerful Approach to the Steps

THE STEPS ARE like prayers. When we pray, we ask the Higher Power to do for us what we know we can't do for ourselves. If the prayer is answered, we know that we didn't make this happen, but a loving God as we understand him did.

The Steps lead us along a prayerful road to sobriety and serenity. The Steps introduce us to a prayerful and meditative life in Step Eleven. And the Steps tell us to practice this in all our affairs.

Steps Six and Seven are perfect examples of this prayerfulness. In Step Six, we become ready to have God remove our defects of character. In

Step Seven, we ask him to do this. We ask him humbly because we know that we can't do it alone. Just as it was with our drinking, we can't get rid of our defects without his help.

I tried to get rid of my defects of character and my shortcomings by myself, but got nowhere until the Higher Power lovingly showed me the way through the sober members of AA, using Steps Six and Seven.

Should we still try to practice Steps Six and Seven if we are not "entirely ready"? Should we wait awhile if we're not ready enough and humble enough to meet God? Should we wait, we are really asking, until we are *perfectly* ready and absolutely humble?

The answer, of course, is no. When we go prayerfully to the Higher Power, he accepts us just the way we are. Our goal is spiritual progress, not perfection. We certainly can't wait until we're perfect to ask God to make us better.

God, as I understand him, does this for us because he loves us. He accepts us today. He will take away our doubt, despair, and hate and give us faith, hope, and love, because he knows that we need these things.

I do each Step prayerfully. That is, I bring the Step to God as I understand him. Through the Steps, I humbly present myself to God as I am today, and I ask him to make me his kind of person, to lead me in his way, and to make me an example of his love on earth, one day at a time.

E. C., New Rochelle, N.Y.

Who Carries the Message?

*We all do,
in a surprising
variety of ways*



THE MIDDLE part of our Twelfth Step reads, "we tried to carry this message to alcoholics," and our AA Preamble concludes with "Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety." Naturally, the best way we can help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety is by trying to carry the AA message to them. Unfortunately, many people in our Fellowship believe that the only way they can carry the message is by one-to-one contact with the still-suffering alcoholic.

I disagree. True, that may be the best way, but it is not the only way.

Once people sober up in AA, when they walk down the street holding their heads high, with smiles on their faces, their eyes clear and shining with enthusiasm, they are carrying the message to those who remember them as hopeless drunks. Their former drinking pals can easily see a marked change, and chances are very good that someone will ask what it is.

I have found that another excellent way to share my experience, strength, and hope is to write to AA Loners. The list can easily be obtained by writing to the AA General Service Office in New York. It has helped my

sobriety a great deal to share with Loners who cannot attend meetings, as others and I are privileged to. These Loners are as a rule sober, but when the Twelfth Step says, "carry this message to alcoholics," it doesn't necessarily mean drunken alcoholics. Every Loner I have ever corresponded with has replied with really beautiful letters. It is truly a rewarding experience.

A still-practicing drunk is a very lonely person, and many can be found in rest homes and in senior citizen high-rises. Go visit a rest home or a nursing home. Just chat with the patients, and you will find many alcoholics to whom you can carry the message.

In almost every large city now, there are detox centers. Recovering alcoholics are always welcome at them. Work with your local AA committees to put on meetings there.

Write down your thoughts and feelings concerning the Twelve Steps,

or any other of the many facets of AA, and send them to your AA Grapevine. Voice your opinions. They may not be printed, but it will do you good to write them.

We must do all in our power to carry the message of AA, for there are millions of lost people who are still drinking and have not yet been chosen to find the miracle of AA. I feel they deserve sobriety as much as I do, and perhaps their sobriety can begin with me.

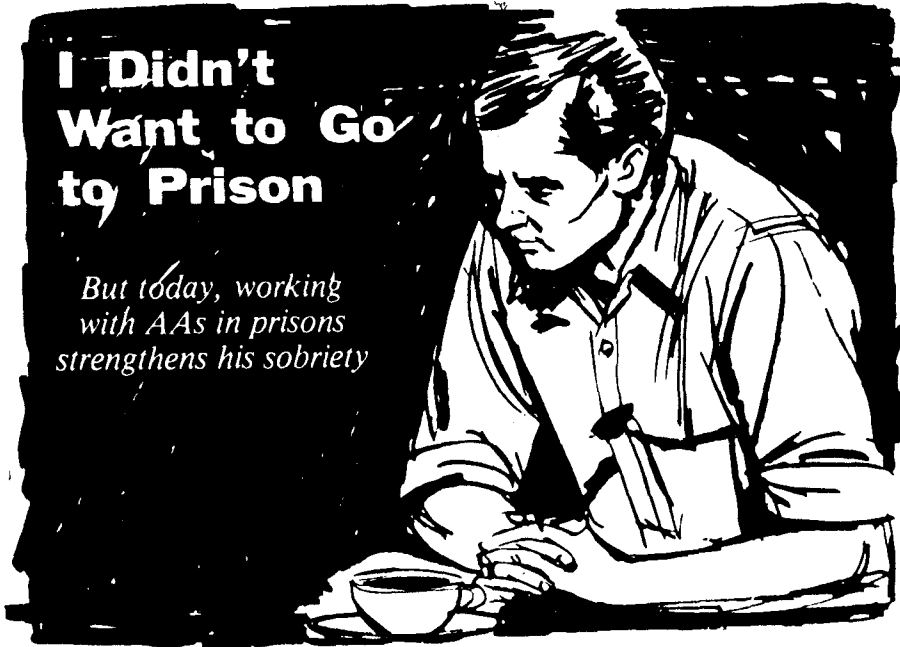
Finally, you are not breaking the anonymity Traditions if you go to your priest, pastor, or rabbi, ask who in the congregation needs help, and offer your services. Or you can do the same thing with your physician or your attorney. I do not believe your offer to assist will be turned down.

In trying to carry the message, we not only may help those people who are still suffering, but we are definitely helping ourselves and our own sobriety.

G. T., Minneapolis, Minn.

I Didn't Want to Go to Prison

*But today, working
with AAs in prisons
strengthens his sobriety*



FOR A LITTLE more than a quarter of a century, I have been attending AA meetings in correctional institutions on a weekly basis. The majority of those meetings were evenly divided between a county workhouse and a maximum security state prison, which gave me two such meetings per week over most of that time.

Why?

In the first place, it wasn't exactly my idea. When I started to become active in AA, my sponsor told me to do whatever was suggested and ask questions afterward. So when I was asked to speak at a jail or in the state prison, I did.

But I didn't like it. I got a nasty feeling in my spine every time that door or gate clanged or clicked shut behind me. The only time it felt good was when I left. I also thought that those on the inside couldn't identify with my white-collar drinking story, rough as it was. I had never done time, and I felt that they looked on me as some sort of snobbish doggoeder.

Then one evening, after about four years in the program, I was driving home from a meeting at a state mental hospital and thanking my Higher Power that *that* was over, when a voice spoke to me clearly, saying: "From now on, your principal

work in AA will be in correctional institutions!"

My reflex answer was: "The hell you say!" It was the *last* thing I wanted to do. I liked jails and prisons even less than mental hospitals.

But I had learned to do what I was told in AA, and this sounded a lot like my Higher Power telling me what to do. It certainly wasn't *my* idea. So I went to the warden of the local workhouse and arranged with him to set up a meeting there. One of the conditions he made was that I be personally responsible for every meeting — which meant I had to be there every week.

A short time later, I was scheduled to speak at the state prison. At that point, I had been fingerprinted and cleared as part of a very limited list of eligible speakers. The night I was due, I felt like calling someone else on the list and offering to swap dates. I was dog-tired and felt as if I was coming down with a cold, and there was a fight I wanted to watch on TV. But I went anyway, mentally kicking myself for having gotten involved in the first place, and oozing resentment all the way to the meeting.

I can't tell you what I said that night or what took place during the discussion that followed. All I remember is that I left that meeting feeling like a million dollars. My incipient cold had vanished. I was no longer tired. I had forgotten about the TV fight. The next day, I called the group sponsor and asked if he needed help. He did. From then on, I

started to attend meetings in the prison every week.

Working in correctional institutions has helped me in a number of ways — all of them spiritual (an area in which I needed, and still need, a great deal of help). One of my principal character defects has always been lying, or stretching the truth. Before writing down my Fourth Step, I had to take it aloud in front of a mirror in order to curb this tendency.

Anyone who has worked for any length of time in a correctional institution group will tell you that you can't lie to the inmates! In the first place, you feel a moral obligation to be honest with them, and that helps. But the real truth is, they can spot a phony every time, and they can ask some very searching questions. I have learned a lot about myself by having to answer their questions honestly. I found that I had to look at myself in a new light — a much brighter one than I had been accustomed to using. I was often uncomfortable, but I always benefited.

In addition, I have an ego problem. This can play havoc with an AA member like me, since I am articulate and, as a result, have been a speaker on the "convention circuit." Don't let anyone tell you that it isn't an ego trip when you are met at the airport, driven to a fancy hotel where you get a deluxe room and VIP treatment, and then get up to speak to an audience of anywhere from several hundred to a thousand or more.

It always serves to bring me back to

earth when, the following Tuesday, I find myself back with my small group of inmates. Other people are doing the speaking, and I realize that I am there *only* because I am a drunk who is staying sober one day at a time, and that my constant presence at meetings is merely a small, but a continuing, indication that the program of AA works.

Periodically, newcomers or non-AAs ask me, in all innocence, "But don't you get bored going to meetings after thirty years?"

I tell them no, but I seldom bother to explain one of the reasons for my lack of boredom. In my prison group, there are always new members. The speakers are often indi-

viduals whom I have heard many, many times. I could tell you their detailed case histories — in some cases, almost word for word. But when they speak in that room in the prison, I do not listen to them with my own ears. I listen with the ears of the new member! In this way, my old friends sound fresh and inspiring each time they speak, and I find myself discovering things I had never heard before in their talks.

I have only one serious problem with correctional institution meetings. What can I possibly do to give my friends the inmates one-tenth of the help that they have given me over the years, and still keep giving me every week?

Anonymous, Metuchen, N.J.

February 1985

'Infallible lie detector'

From Rochester, N.Y.:

After reading "The Eleventh Step" in the November issue, I just can't keep quiet. The author spoke of "the uselessness of trying to read or talk or reason our way into divine awareness." I have been trying to say that for years, in my own way, such as: "I couldn't possibly have been the architect of my own recovery," or "I am a recovering alcoholic — only God knows my potential," or "I cannot, by an excess of 'virtue,' compel God to do anything" or "You can work the program even if you cannot read or write."

One of our members is president of a Catholic college. After he had been in AA awhile, he said, "I have preached the gospel for over forty years, and you people have given me a completely new viewpoint."

We have a tiger by the tail! The power of this thing frightens me; I am glad it is benign. I have never seen such an infallible lie detector. J. B.



WE SEEK THROUGH MEDITATION

SEEKING “through prayer and meditation,” the Eleventh Step tells us, was among the vital actions that brought sobriety to the earliest members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Obviously, if we want what those pioneers had and if we are “willing to go to any length to get it,” we should pray and meditate.

As I slowly made my own way through the Steps, I was aware that I had to understand them fully if I was to take them. Prayer was not a big problem. By the time most of us reach the Eleventh Step, we are familiar with communication with a Higher Power. Indeed, by the time alcoholism has beaten us to our knees, most of us accept the fact that we

should stay on our knees and start praying.

But meditation? I realized that I had never really meditated. Oh, there were plentiful lonely hours (even complete nights) during my drunken years when my interpretation of meditation was wallowing in self-pity and fantasizing a dismal future.

Had I ever listened for answers during my pre-AA life? I searched my memory, and all I heard was a sick me bragging and commiserating with myself.

Today, I ask, “What good is meditation to a nonlistener?” Now, I know that meditation is basically listening — and *hearing* what the precepts of our program intend me

to absorb. There is no end to the answers that can be revealed while we engage in serious and extended periods of concentration.

Since this kind of thinking occurs only when we are alone with our Higher Power, meditation, like prayer, is usually a silent act. And although revelations may come suddenly during our meditating, it is best when done leisurely. What a lesson in patience!

The “Easy Does It” aspect of meditation allows us time to realize that the sudden insights we receive about ourselves are not complete fulfillments of our goals. These tentative answers require deeper investigation during further meditation.

Meditation, of course, is a personal act. To prove useful, it demands that our thinking remain confined to ourselves rather than to society as a whole. Only by improving ourselves can caring and sharing come. Meditation, like many other facets of our recovery, calls for total commitment. After all, we can hope to grow only by developing our own individual capabilities.

We should not be dismayed if some of our meditative thoughts become retrospective. Memories of errors can create lessons for today. Better still is meditating on events of the past that brought us great pleasure. Sometimes meditation can be like going home again; it can build a desire to return to a happy self, before alcoholism came — a determination to get back something we once had and lost.

Meditation should result in a change in living patterns. It can spur the direction of attention toward a single purpose. It can produce a willingness to analyze ourselves — and then change.

Meditation will reveal both our abilities and our limitations and prepare us to accept both. Such a realistic outlook will make us sure we belong with our fellow AAs — a big step toward liking ourselves.

Meditation will help us see how much closer to our goals we come each day, at the same time cautioning us that we can never arrive. We welcome the truth that there is no finish line in spiritual growth. Perhaps the greatest gift of meditation is the reali-

zation that we can never say, "I've got it all wrapped up and can coast the rest of the way through my sobriety."

How do we meditate? Whatever way best suits each of us individually. There are no set rules, no firm patterns. We can make the act easy and comfortable or hard and frustrating. Either way, the act will be rewarding. Rather than ask ourselves, "How well did I do?" we can ask, "How well did I try?" The lonely act will find us in good company — with our Higher Power.

On what do we meditate? I spent much time asking myself that ques-

tion until one day I heard a meeting leader greet newcomers with these words: "Welcome to our world, the world of AA." And I heard because it was my time to receive that answer. Why not meditate on the wonderful things that make up the world of AA?

Now, I have no trouble finding a brand-new topic every time I make way for meditation: honesty, gratitude, humility, faith, love, open-mindedness, willingness, tolerance, truth, trust, hope, positive thinking. The opportunities for savoring, through meditation, the gifts of our Fellowship are inexhaustible.

C. C., North Hollywood, Calif.

with a conscious effort, starting with the toes and going right up to the eyelids.

Stray thoughts kept bouncing in, so I tried to recall each of the Steps by thinking of crux words, which I had memorized by making an acronym. My acronym for the first two Steps was PUPS: Step One — powerless, unmanageable; Two — Power, sanity. The choice of key words might differ for each person. These are the rest of my memory triggers: Three — God; Four — inventory; Five — admitted; Six — ready; Seven — asked; Eight — list; Nine — amends; Ten — personal inventory; Eleven — meditation; Twelve — message.

I ousted all extraneous thoughts by trying to repeat an acronym. Soon, it was easy to recall every beautiful and

meaningful word in every Step.

I would then meditate on one at a time and try to review my day in light of that Step. (Sometimes, I could share with my group thoughts that I had found useful during meditation.)

The Higher Power certainly worked for me in keeping out extraneous thoughts. Within the first week, I found that I could meditate on my spiritual progress and gain new insight into my implementation of the Steps in my daily life.

I now find that a deep inner peace suffuses my being as I carry out this meditation. I rise from my easy chair with a vim and vigor that I experienced in my teenage days after a good game and a restful bath. This spiritual regeneration is another AA miracle for me.

K. G., Secunderabad, India

Meditation

Using Key Words

IN OUR VERY small AA group, none of the more experienced members could advise me on a practicable form of meditation, which I was keen to incorporate into my daily regimen as a newcomer. I would like to share with others a simple method that I have since found efficacious. It has brought me great peace of mind and serenity.

Being in the army, involved with a plethora of jobs that often tax me both physically and mentally, I real-

ized that my first problem was trying to find suitable time to ponder and review my progress in AA matters, especially each of the marvelous Twelve Steps. The early hours after rising were too much of a rush, but I could find about fifteen minutes after my evening bath, when, in my drinking days, I had normally poured my first "sundowner." My den, with soft lights and no noise, was the ideal place. First, I would close my eyes and strive to relax my whole body

WHO WANTS TO BE HUMBLE!

I SAT DOWN AT MY typewriter several days ago, not humbly but confidently, to write about the Seventh Step. After an hour and a quarter, I got up. The page was still blank. After a few more sessions, all I had accomplished was to spell out the Step at the top of the page.

What is it about this Step that confounds so many of us upon first encounter? Even at second and third encounters? Are we such a sad lot, so ego-driven that, as a young friend would say, at the mere mention of humility we "go bonkers"?

The suggestion that I acquire humility was not all that new. During my drinking years of big-shot yakking, it was more than once suggested that I "knock it off!" "Come down to earth!" was another suggestion that might have helped me to get

closer to acceptance of things as they are — one working definition of humility.

My first thoughts regarding humility had to do with the years of abuse I suffered, often at the hands of people who were not themselves drinkers. That, of course, had to do with humiliation, not humility, and in the "Twelve and Twelve" we can find a clearly defined distinction between the two.

Besides the word "humbly," there was something else about the Seventh that made it an obstacle. It called for yet one more contact with God, but a contact whose nature was such that my general progress with the Steps was brought to a standstill.

In the Second Step, I had come to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to wholeness,

and to subsequent ease with myself and with the human race. This new faith of mine needed daily bolstering (still does), and that was where our AA meetings proved invaluable. Oh, and telephone therapy — just great! (In my area, I don't hear that expression too often anymore, but it is still a good one. Did you know it used to be called "nickel therapy," referring to the long-ago price of a phone call?)

In the Third Step, I was able to make a decision to turn over to the care of God as I understood him my yesterdays and tomorrows, but especially my todays. The action that ought to follow that decision is well expressed in the moving and simple prayer on page 63 of the Big Book.

In the Fourth and Fifth Steps, thanks largely to the courage I had gained through the help of "another human being," I could take the first of many inventories and get down to the sharing of the exact nature of my wrongs.

With the Seventh, however, the situation was different. It was suggesting that, since I had done the groundwork of the first five and had crossed over the bridge of the Sixth, I was ready for a face-to-face interview, a private audience with God! The idea alone was unbearable. But why should I be so afraid of a God that had saved my life? A God that had given me enduring evidence of his love and care?

I had to pause in the middle of the Seventh, and do a mini-inventory. Why was I balking? What I found

was that I had relapsed into an old form of pride, which rankled at my *inability to deal with my own shortcomings under my own steam*. I then undertook a crash course to relearn that my old state of mental insurrection could not coexist with my new acceptance of things as they are.

I have heard so many of my fellow AAs talk of their religious upbringing, how they strayed away during their drinking years, and how hard it was to become willing to even investigate the spiritual life.

I, too, was brought up in the bosom of religious teaching. I was taught that God was a loving God, yes, but much more emphasis was placed on sin and man's (my) desperate need for redemption. Redemption, as I always understood it, was a cycle of breast-beating and tears that continued without letup until our dying day. Anticipation of punishment was one of the outstanding features of religious training.

Growing up, I learned on another level that I should be self-reliant and a self-starter. I could and should be those things, so my teaching seemed to say, because I was a man (and, being a man, I was the superior of the species); I was a Western man who belonged to a traditional Western church (and, as everyone knew — so I thought — Western churches were superior to Eastern churches, with their exotic, nonredemptive religions); and above all, so my peculiar bent of mind told me, I was unique, powerful, and in complete charge of

an entirely manageable way of life!

On such a foundation did I build my life, consciously working at it from my teens onward. There was no openness of mind, no emotional or spiritual perspective as to where I had been, where I was, or where I was going. In my little box of time and space, I was not approachable or knowable or teachable.

All in all, it should have come as no surprise that the adoption of humility, under any circumstances, would have been a major problem. But having to learn humility as a way of approaching God was startling in its novelty. I was not used to gentleness. After fifteen years of problem drinking, I was used to melodramatic groveling one day and arrogant demanding the next.

"Humbly asked him..." Come to think of it, what other way would there be to approach God? "*Patiently* asked him..."? "*Lovingly* asked him..."? "*Longingly* asked him..."?

A nonalcoholic friend once asked me if anybody had ever thought of introducing a companion piece to the Serenity Prayer, to read like this: "God, grant me the *humility* to accept the things I cannot change,

courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

We AAs sometimes divide the Twelve Steps into categories of "action" and "no action required." That bureaucratic idea has often distressed me, in the same way I am sometimes distressed when the AA podium is used to "teach" our recovery program. From the very beginning of my AA life, action was the key word. Even in those moments when all I can do is stand still and hurt, so my early AA friends told me, I am involved in the action of staying away from the first drink.

When I think about the Steps that mention a Power greater than myself, or God, I like to take note of the action words used to connect me with a Higher Power, or with myself. In the first six alone, some of those words are: "came to believe," "made a decision," "admitted," and "were entirely ready." They are words and ideas that lead me into the area of God-readiness and receptivity — directly to the heart of the Seventh Step, the touchstone of personal inventory-taking.

At least, that's the way it seems to me.

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

Switching On the Power

I ASKED THE COMPUTER, "Is there a God?" And the computer replied, "Of course, there's a God. Who do you think switches me on?"

In AA we do not demand belief in a Power greater than ourselves, but we do have to depend upon it if, like the computer, we want to get our program off the ground.

That AA has a spiritual program and not a religious one is explained in the old saying: "AA does not promise to get you into heaven, but we do guarantee to get you out of hell."

In meetings, we give an account of our own experiences; of precisely how we have recovered through working the AA program. Therefore, we pray simply to a Power greater than ourselves to give us the power to carry out the tasks the program calls upon us to do. Each AA prayer de-

mands an action.

Saying the Serenity Prayer will no more make me serene than crowing from the dungheap will make me a rooster. The prayer asks God to "grant me . . . courage to change the things I can." Then I should use that courage to carry out the actions of change as directed in Steps Four through Nine.

Right at the head of the action Steps of the program is Step Three, which is the equivalent of switching on the power to get our program into operation. It tells us that in order to tap our vast inner resources and be energized by a Higher Power, we have to first gain "conscious contact" with that Higher Power. As explained on page 63 of the AA Big Book, we do this by saying the surrender prayer on this page, until we feel the power entering our being and

we are ready to proceed into the action of the Steps.

As a former agnostic who has sponsored hundreds of similarly disbelieving people through this program, my experience is that if for the Step Three exercise the newcomer will say the Serenity Prayer and the surrender prayer alternately, it will not take many days to feel the "conscious contact." It starts with the feeling that one is no longer praying words to oneself, but that a "presence" is there. The person is filled with a wonderful sense of relief and power,

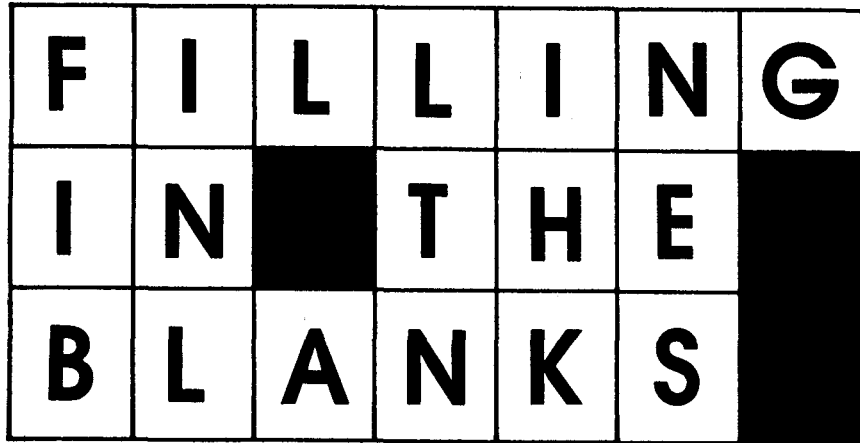
and then does really experience what it means to "Let go, and let God."

This is that wonderful Step Three, Cloud Sixty-Nine feeling at which some AAs abandon the program, and then wonder why some months later they hit earth again in the most terrible dry drunk.

The reason of course is stated throughout the Big Book: "Faith without works is dead," or simply, we have to pray to give us strength to carry out our work. No work, no sobriety.

I. R., Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Steps Four and Five



These vital Steps help us understand our own patterns of behavior

DURING MY FIRST weeks in AA, my group told me that three things were necessary for recovery: Don't drink, go to meetings, and get active on the Steps.

By the time I was ten months sober, I was both willing and able to take Steps Four and Five. By God's grace, I had survived thirty-five years of physical, emotional, and spiritual sickness, and I wanted to find out what was wrong with me. As the Big Book says, "Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions."

Earlier in my sobriety, I had made a couple of unsuccessful attempts at

Steps Four and Five. The first time, I used an inventory guide and "answered" the questions either by making check marks in the margin or by writing an occasional yes or no. Later, I started the Great American Novel approach, determined to recall every thought, word, and deed during that thirty-five-year period. Luckily, my sense of the ridiculous stopped that after three or four pages.

I had been raised to believe that listing the things I had done and the number of times I had done them constituted an inventory of my closeness to or distance from God as I then understood him. Yet something

kept telling me that there had to be more to my AA inventory than a list of actions and the number of times I did them. Looking back now, I realize that during those first two attempts, I was very willing but not very able to really confront the causes and conditions that underlay seventeen years of active alcoholism. The alcoholic fog hadn't lifted quite enough.

Once it did, a friend in the program told me she had used a guide that stressed feelings as well as actions. She hadn't even finished telling me about it when I knew that was the guide I needed.

The following Saturday morning, I fixed a pot of coffee, unplugged the phone, and started writing. What my inventory revealed was not a series of actions or a number of times, but a set of emotional patterns combining fear, a sense of inadequacy, low self-esteem, anger, and resentment. Because I had been largely a closet drinker, I had not been much of a "tornado roaring his way through the lives of others" via car wrecks, lost jobs, jails, hospitals, and devastated spouses and children. Instead, I found that I had been a little two-inch man who had never felt "as good as," who had always felt "apart from."

My selfishness and self-centeredness had manifested themselves not so much by acting out externally, as by becoming more and more tightly wrapped inside an emotional cocoon. Begun in childhood, that pattern of

alienation from God and man, of spiraling more and more deeply inside myself, continued for the next thirty-five years, aggravated during the last seventeen by active alcoholism. As one speaker put it, I kept trying to bridge the gap between how I felt on the inside and how the rest of the world appeared on the outside. And alcohol seemed to shorten that distance — for a time. It took the edge off my emotional pain and simultaneously locked me further inside myself.

Once the inventory was completed, I shared it a few days later with both my minister and my sponsor. And nothing happened. The reason was that I had not been entirely "searching and fearless." I had settled for "half measures" and omitted two crucial incidents from my past. I rationalized my decision by telling myself, "Well, now I understand what caused those two things, so I can leave them out."

Mercifully, my Higher Power did not let me get away with that shortcut for long. Within a month, another member of the Fellowship was writing his inventory while I gave him stern instructions about making certain that it was searching and fearless. The irony of that would only strike me later. When I heard his Fifth Step, he did such a thorough job that I became embarrassed by my own lack of thoroughness.

In another of the program's minor miracles, I still had my first written inventory. The night of my first Fifth

Step, my sponsor had returned it and said, "Hold on to this — you might need it." How prophetic!

So I took another Saturday morning, made more coffee, and filled in the blanks. What I had not realized the first time through was that even if I did understand what those two incidents meant and why they had occurred, it was still necessary to include them in my Fifth Step. Until I became willing to fill in those blanks — and then share them — I would continue to get the result of half measures. The Big Book has a word for it: nothing.

Once I had completed that searching and fearless Step Five, the value of the Step became apparent. I

no longer felt as isolated; I could begin to bridge that distance between me and God and other people. I also learned that what I'd done in those two incidents was far less damaging to me than the pain of keeping them bottled up had been. Only fearless and thorough sharing by another AA member of his entire past, withholding nothing, gave me the example — and the courage — to follow through and complete my own inventory and Fifth Step.

That incident was an early lesson about the danger that half measures present to my ongoing recovery in the AA program, and it helped me see that I did not have to settle for "nothing" ever again.

R. F., Missouri City, Tex.

STEPS 2 9 6 4 3 A LA CARTE 12 1 5 7 4 3 2 7 8 5 8 11 6 70

I STARTED TO do some thinking a while ago about how I have worked the AA program for the last twenty years. It finally dawned on me that I had been hearing for years that the Steps should be taken in order, and I accepted this with no thought whatsoever. The most frequent statement I hear is that you can't take the Steps smorgasbord style. After thinking and reading about this, I have come to the conclusion that the Steps can be and are taken in any order.

I have not taken the Steps in order and have remained sober (my primary purpose) for some twenty years. If I ever take a drink it can be said, "Maybe if he had worked the Steps in order he would not have gotten drunk." Until that day, however, I am doing it right for me.

I don't know how people can wait until they get to the Eleventh Step to pray and meditate for God's will. Bill's own words on page fifteen of the Big Book state that he took the Sixth and Seventh Steps while still in the hospital. Dr. Bob ran from house

to house the very first day of his sobriety (Ninth Step), making amends. These examples are straight from the founders of our program. To strengthen my argument even further, I make the point that the program was founded on the Twelfth Step.

Question: If you see someone who needs help (Twelfth Step), should you say, "If you're still alive when I get to the Twelfth Step, I'll help you, but I'm only on the Eighth Step"? Speaking of the Twelfth Step, I think that when most people read "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps," they think this statement does not include the Twelfth Step. You must remember that Bill and the others who helped draft the Steps wrote them after the

fact. The Twelfth Step is included in that statement. In fact, it is my opinion that the Twelfth Step is where you get your spiritual awakening. Over and over, both the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" stress the importance of Twelfth-Step work. I quote from the "Twelve and Twelve": "Even the newest of newcomers gets untold rewards doing Twelfth-Step work." I also like the statement in "A Member's Eye View of AA": "The Steps are reports of action taken, not commandments."

I hear some old-timers say, "I didn't take such-and-such a Step for five years, but I think new people should take it in the first year." If the old-timer needed five years, how does he know the newcomer doesn't need five years, or seven years? I feel that people should be given the freedom to grow at their own pace. The program tells me over and over that all I can share with you is how I am doing it, not how you should be doing it.

My last, but not least, point is that

if we take the Steps in order, at what point do we decide we have done a Step well enough to go on? The "Twelve and Twelve" states that only Step One can be done with absolute perfection. I hear so many people hung up on one Step or another (especially the Fourth), frustrated when they can't get it right. I think the greatest strength of this program is that I can never get it "right." I know a lot of people who thought they had it so "right" they stopped going to meetings and got drunk.

I think this is a great subject for discussion. I know when I make this statement ("The Steps don't have to be worked in order") at meetings, some people come straight out of their seats. Isn't it wonderful, though, that there are so many ways for people to interpret this program; that way, no one is excluded. I always try to remember my primary purpose, to stay sober and help other alcoholics.

J. B., Miami, Fla.

Of Love and Forgiveness

*How can we make
amends to someone
who has died?*

I HOPE YOU never work again!" Isn't it strange how one angry childish statement can affect your life for years to come? That's what I had shouted to Papa one summer afternoon. I shouted it with all the pent-up anger and frustration that a twelve-year-old can unleash.

Six months later, we found out that Papa had cancer. My words echoed in my mind. "God, please don't let Papa die. I didn't mean what I said." When Papa came home from the hospital, our worst fears were confirmed. "They couldn't get all the cancer," Mama had said. "Some of it is too close to the heart." For six weeks, we watched him weaken and deteriorate. "I hope you never work again."

Finally, he had to be hospitalized. I remember that he cried when we left for the hospital in the taxi. Mama and I went to visit him every day. Papa got worse. His left arm was now paralyzed and swung to and fro whenever

he walked. That was about when I began to feel as if I were in a bad dream. You know the feeling. It's as if you have taken an overdose of antihistamines and your head has gone numb.

One evening, when we went to see him, we found the nurses and attendants struggling with him. Papa was trying to get out of bed, flailing out at everyone with his one good arm, shouting, "Mama! Mama!" I stood frozen, watching the bizarre scene unfold before me. Finally, one of the attendants ushered me out of the room. Mama stayed behind. It was the last time that I saw Papa alive. "I hope you never work again."

Then there was the ride to the funeral home. I watched the scenery pass by with the detachment of a spectator watching a boring movie on a rainy afternoon. I thought of how life had been abruptly uprooted from all that had been routine and comfortable. It's strange how fast events can happen while, at the same time, each individual frame of our lives seems to be standing still.

Funeral homes are strange places. Everyone speaks in hushed tones, and the attendants look at you with blank faces. I looked at Papa lying in the coffin. I thought that he looked as if he were breathing. My uncle had talked a priest into coming to the funeral. Papa had always maintained that he didn't believe in God. Mama wanted the priest to give Papa the last rites. He refused, but my uncle got him to say a few words at the casket. When he finished, one of the atten-

dants reached over and closed the lid on the casket. "No! No," I shouted, leaping forward. Reality came crashing down on me like a club. How could God let this happen. I had prayed and asked God to not let my father die. "I hope you never work again." Didn't God know that I didn't mean it? I hated God. I hated the funeral home. I hated the priest, and most of all, I hated myself. This happened in the second year of my active alcoholism.

The years came and went. My alcoholism progressed. When you live the life of an active alcoholic, you accumulate a lot of pain and guilt along the way. There had been much in my life that I wish had never happened. On top of this mounting heap of debris that had become my life was the sentence, "I hope you never work again."

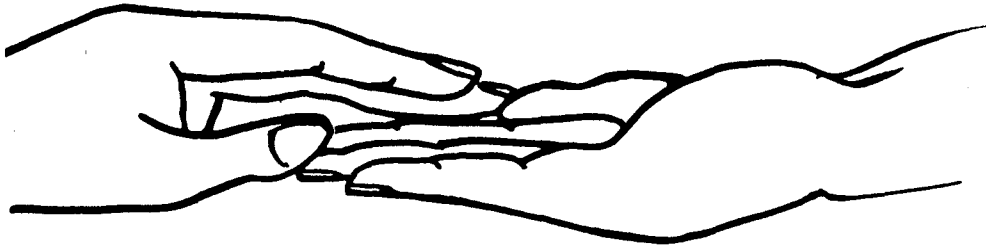
After bouncing in and out of AA for over four years, I finally got sober. The Steps and recovery came hard for me. When I got to the Eighth Step, I began to make a list of all the people I had harmed, and that, of course, included Papa.

"How can you make amends to someone who is dead?" I asked my sponsor.

"Do you have any living relatives?" he countered.

"Sure. My mother and my aunt live here."

"Well, for starters, you might try treating them the way you should have treated your father." I thought that over. I was amazed at how reluc-



tant I was to even consider trying it. Maybe I was afraid that it would work.

I should probably stop here and tell you about Mama. We didn't get along. Actually, I didn't get along with her — she got along with me just fine. Mama is one of those mothers of alcoholics that nearly smothers you with love. Each week at our family reunion, I got the treatment. I hated it. I had always hated being the only child. No matter how ugly I became, she never gave up.

However, my sponsor had said that I was to try treating other family members with the love and respect that I hadn't shown Papa. I said to myself, "I'll give it a try." My real thoughts ran more along the lines of "What an order! I can't go through with it."

An interesting thing began to happen as I put into practice what my sponsor had suggested. I realized that

my mother was not going to change. And where does it say, anyway, that other people have to change in order for us to be comfortable? Making a list of people I had harmed was not too difficult, but becoming willing to make amends to them all was another story.

"Write out the entire situation. Don't just list names," my sponsor had told me. "Remember, you are the one who is to benefit the most from your list."

As I reviewed this situation, I began to realize that I still believed in a God of retribution and anger. "God, don't let Papa die because I said I hope you never work again." Then, I thought, "If God is a vengeful God, why am I sober today?" There are questions about life to which we have no answers. Learning to accept life on its terms is part of growing up. "Why am I lacking in faith?" I asked. When I ask for help each

morning, I expect that God will provide for me. In fact, I know he will provide for my needs. I'm sober today because at one point in my life, God reached out and touched me. He didn't do it because I was a good person; he touched me with his healing love because I was a sick person.

A God of love and compassion couldn't be the God of anger I had envisioned for so many years. If God could forgive me, why couldn't I forgive myself? Was I still so egotistical that I believed the words of an angry twelve-year-old had the power to kill? Or was I still hanging on to that terrible passion for self-destruction that alcoholics seem to have? I thought of my sponsor quoting the Big Book. He had said, "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely. Half measures availed us nothing." He was fond of that one. And, "We stood at the turning point. We asked

his protection and care with complete abandon."

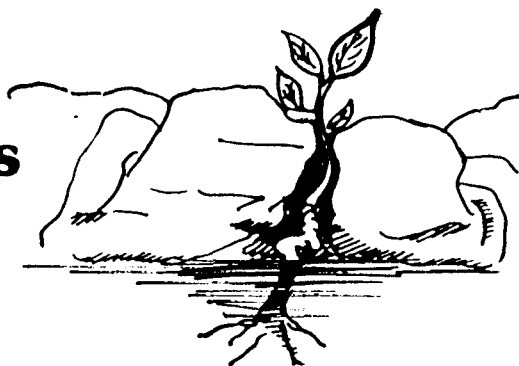
We still have the weekly family reunions, and my mother still says and does all the same things. However, there is one significant difference. By going back to Steps Four and Five, I have learned to forgive myself. I can love my mother and my aunt for being just as they are. Step Eight has given me the ability to forgive and a willingness to seek forgiveness born out of the freedom of faith in a loving God. I have learned that my ability to love anyone is contingent upon my ability to love everyone.

"Papa, I hope you never work again" has been laid to rest. You see, Papa forgave me long ago. I just didn't know it until God showed me his forgiveness through the love you expressed when you shared the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous with me.

C. C., West Palm Beach, Fla.

Working the Steps

Willingness to Grow



“LACK OF POWER, that was our dilemma.” “Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power.”

When I was an active drinker, I couldn't see past my character defects — I was controlled and blinded by them. I resented almost everyone I came in contact with on a regular basis, especially close relatives and work associates. I blamed them for my bad feelings about life and myself. I was dishonest in my thinking and full of self-pity. I was in constant fear of others and their opinions of me. I took little action and spent my life reacting to others. My anger exploded into all areas of my life. I envied those who appeared to be successful and happier than I was. Needless to say, I was very unhappy and felt I deserved to drink.

My character defects always led me back to drinking. I was unable to accept them as a part of life — I thought I was supposed to be perfect and felt guilty because I wasn't. The guilt overpowered me. Drinking helped me overlook these character defects, but they would reappear when I sobered up the next day. I would drink again, and the vicious circle continued.

But I couldn't see any of this. I couldn't understand what was wrong with me. Left to my own devices, I was self-destructive. On my own, I had no effective mental defense, against drinking or my character defects.

After sobering up through Alcoholics Anonymous and staying sober for the last nine and a half years, I am still overwhelmed by my character defects. Left to my own devices, and without the Higher Power, I would soon destroy myself.

How does one tune in to the Higher Power? The answer I have learned from AA is to recharge my spiritual

battery every day — “you can't pull today's load with yesterday's horse.” I recharge myself by being an active member of the Fellowship and working the Twelve Steps on a continuous basis.

In order to have a strong defense against the first drink and my character defects, I must make acts of surrender. These include working all the Steps repeatedly; going to meetings; talking honestly with fellow AAs (sponsor or close friends) on a regular basis and telling them what is going on in my life; helping other alcoholics by showing an active interest in their sobriety and well-being; and giving service to the Fellowship. All these actions help free me from selfishness in its various forms.

I can still be blinded by character defects at times, but my freedom is achieved by working the Twelve Steps, which give me sanity and certain insights into what I ought to do. I learn, or am more ready to learn, what God's will is for me.

Saying the prayers in the Third and Seventh Steps regularly, on the phone and in person with other AAs, shows a willingness to grow. Writing out a Fourth Step inventory, as suggested on page 65 of the Big Book, is concrete work on my character defects. I admit that I have them, that I am human. Rigorous honesty is the key — especially about things I wouldn't want others to know.

Swapping a Fifth Step with another AA is a major move toward freedom from selfishness. But more

importantly, the Big Book says that if we skip this Step we may drink again.

I show that I am entirely ready, as Step Six suggests, by working all the Steps on a continuous basis.

Step Seven involves sincere repetition of the Seventh Step prayer, alone or with other AAs.

In Step Eight, I make a list of people or institutions I have harmed before I became an alcoholic, during my active drinking, and in sobriety. The list can be started in seconds; I simply pick up a pencil and paper and start to write. The “Twelve and Twelve” says to search our memories as far back as possible when we write the names of people we have harmed. This helps us to accept responsibility for the past, and reduces guilt for our misconduct.

I have rewritten my amends list several times because new names appeared to me. I do not believe I would have thought of these names without the previous lists. In the process of making the earlier ones, enough guilt was removed to allow me to be aware of additional amends I owed. Freedom from past conduct was achieved when I admitted I was at fault and became willing to make the amends. Like peeling the layers on an onion, I had to take action on the first list before the other names came to mind for the next.

Step Nine is a major help in healing present relationships and clearing up the wreckage of the past. By going to the people or institutions on the written list, and telling them that I am

sorry for any harm or injury I caused them, I am freeing myself from the bad effects of my previous conduct. I am setting things right as much as possible and being responsible. If material or monetary amends are owed, I agree to pay what I can now and set up a payment plan for what I owe. This type of work on Step Nine has freed me from fears about the past and given me more energy to devote to present-day living — this twenty-four hours. Working the Steps is an effective way to treat my alcoholism, and the surest demonstration of my willingness to grow.

Step Ten is a daily inventory of my conduct over the past twenty-four hours, and involves sincere, honest discussions with other AAs. I work Step Eleven by saying the prayers in the Third and Seventh Steps, the Serenity Prayer, and other prayers of surrender, in the morning and evening, and during the day. Seeking God's will through meditation is an effort and takes discipline. In a quiet place, I sit on a straight-backed chair, in a comfortable position, and repeat a phrase or word such as "truth," "God is love," thoughts about present activities or the next day's events. Then I return to the phrase or word and repeat it until my mind wanders to other thoughts. I repeat this process over and over. Practicing is the key. I began with two, three, or five minutes twice a day, and as time passed I increased the amount. The benefits are many, and vary in quality and quantity. Little daily problems

disappear; life is much smoother. The effort alone provides an emotional shield from a lot of the usual worries and anxieties. Try it — it works.

Step Twelve is helping others work the Steps on a continuous basis. By working with others, we become what we should be, and save our lives in the bargain. The desire to drink is removed a day at a time when we maintain our spiritual condition. All the Steps are ego-reducing in nature. They help us to be more human, and for some of us, entering the human sphere has been a long journey. When we accept the human condition and our own mistakes, the give-and-take of life becomes greater. The idea that God's will is best for us looms larger, as an eternal truth to be used in daily living. The need to prove we can do it all, without anyone else's help, is drastically reduced. Sincere thoughts toward others enter our minds more often. Life is worthwhile — tough at times, but still tolerable.

Through the Steps, the Fellowship, and the Power greater than ourselves, our lives become meaningful, and we receive worthwhile answers to the question "Can you make your defects your greatest assets?" Using the Twelve Steps of AA as my life's plan in working on my defects, I am able to create assets. My willingness to grow, spurred on by others making similar efforts, gives me sobriety a day at a time, and freedom from the bondage of self. And in large measure, that's serenity.

S. M., Joliet, Ill.



*Were entirely ready
to have God remove
these defects of character*

Ready for Better Things

ONE OF THE outstanding developments of the twentieth century is product packaging. Food-stuffs, housewares, and even the talents of performers are packaged. How well the Twelve Steps fit the times!

Take the Sixth, for example. In this continuation of the inventory Steps, I have packaged all my character defects and declared the package ready for distribution (however and wherever God does such distribution).

When I first consciously approached this Step, I was struck by the fact that I was actually ready for something good to happen. Whether that readiness was entire or partial, the fact that I was ready for something other than the next drink was a brand-new adventure. How very dif-

ferent, too, from the early days of my membership in Alcoholics Anonymous. The aura that surrounded me then was one of impending doom, and my attitude was that nothing good could possibly happen to me. I had been released from the obsession with alcohol, yes, but a small, nagging fear told me that one day, sooner or later, I would drink again. It told me that good things could happen for others, but not for me — I had been too bad!

Yet here I was, at Step Six, as entirely ready for action as I could be. And what was more, the action was not even to be of my own taking. I, who had always been in the driver's seat — I, who had pulled so many strings (so I thought) — I, who had been all-powerful (so I thought) — I

had to stand back and wait for the principal action to be taken by a Power greater than myself. I had to acknowledge that my will was without use here. The gimmicks and dodges I had used to hang on to my old illusion of control were no longer at my disposal.

In attempting the Sixth Step readiness, I had to draw on everything I had learned in AA up to that point. I had to readmit and reaffirm my powerlessness, understanding that without the healing grace of all the Steps I had been involved in thus far, my life would continue to be unmanageable.

But how could I believe that the terrible defect of jealousy (one of my most troublesome) could be removed? I had to review the Second Step and reflect on my restoration to sanity. My mind had become so disordered during the last of my drinking years that I imagined dis-ease was the only way to live. I had long held the belief that I would surely die beyond the borders of sanity, and had accommodated myself to all manner of passions. When they burned furrows in my soul, I would whimper such things as "Just get me over this drunk, Lord, and..." Sound familiar?

Now, safe within the embrace of Alcoholics Anonymous, I was in a position where I did not have to try to strike bargains. I could afford to make myself ready for further restoration to sanity. In my unending worry over the ins and outs of my destiny, I would wonder what would

happen if, after all my readying of myself, my character defects were not removed. The response would come in the form of a question: What happened after my first time around in AA, when I went out and drank again? And the answer: I came back to AA and tried again.

"Entirely ready," it seems to me, does not mean that I must postpone the Step until I am absolutely, positively, 100 percent ready to have every single don't-dare-leave-one-out shortcoming removed. The "Twelve and Twelve" says that the Step "is AA's way of stating the best possible attitude one can take in order to make a beginning on this lifetime job." The key word there is beginning.

How many times in my sobriety have I cried out, "What an order! I can't go through with it."

And how many times have those other words from Chapter Five of the Big Book come to my rescue: "Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."

Identifying defects in my character was not an easy job. It was made more difficult by the fact that I had always been less interested in things themselves than in the appearance of things; less interested in sorting out what worked and did not work in my

life than in promoting the appearance of a sophisticated and civilized person.

Not too long ago, I read a piece in a 1946 Grapevine that opened my eyes. I used to be inflexible in my belief that the Steps should be practiced in the order in which they were set on paper. But listen to this.

“Many will apply the Sixth Step without being aware of it,” the piece says “and without considering it separately from the other Steps. Some, in fact, have already reached the state of acceptance called for in this Step by the time they seek AA. Others reach the same receptive attitude when they become receptive to the Third Step.”

When I first came into AA, a thing that appealed to me a lot was hearing people say that AA was a program of

action. And indeed it was. There were meetings to attend, jobs to be held, Twelfth Step calls to be made, and phones to be answered at my local intergroup office. So much action. A whirligig of leg muscles! I was very slow to learn that there are other levels of action as well.

The Sixth Step takes place on one of those levels, it seems to me. The action is spiritual. Or for those of us who may not be ready for that word, we can take an idea from the quotation above and speak of acceptance or of a receptive attitude.

AA is an action program, all right, but there is no reason whatever why *every* Step should be action-filled. Come to think of it, that might be a very good idea on my next go-around with the Steps — slow down, my friend, slow down!

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.



A Dozen or So Ways to Twelfth-Step

WORKING CLOSELY with new members, or actually going to them to carry the message, is what pops into most of our minds when we think of Twelfth Step work. But it is only one of the many ways we can share our experience, strength, and hope.

Our primary purpose is to help the alcoholic who still suffers. But taking newcomers to their first meeting is just one of the ways to accomplish this purpose.

Some of us are good at that. We can walk into drunks' lives, tell them our own stories with calm and clarity, and inspire them to join us at a meet-

ing, or to seek treatment first if that's what they need. We possess, instinctively or through experience, the right combination of tact and tough love, humility and outgoingness, patience and tolerance to get the job done. Sometimes we end up sponsoring these newcomers, along with others we encounter at meetings.

Others of us don't do that type of work well. Most of us can (and should) learn, by volunteering to accompany older members on Twelfth Step calls, asking questions, and reading the AA pamphlet about sponsorship. But it takes more than bringing in newcomers and sponsor-

ing them to keep AA functioning.

When I first walked through the doors of AA I was told, "Emptying ashtrays will keep you sober." I took that advice literally and made sure every ashtray was emptied after meetings I attended. It worked! Folding the chairs or washing the coffee pot may not seem like Twelfth Step work, but when we are newly sober, these are contributions we can make to our group. Getting involved by being helpful does help ensure our sobriety.

Using the telephone is Twelfth Step work if we don't just give people our phone number, but ask for theirs and then use it. (Making a habit of calling

other AAs is insurance for ourselves, too.) All we have to say is: "Thank you for giving me your phone number." It's a giant step for us in becoming "a part of" instead of "apart from." Volunteers are needed for phone work to answer the calls that come in from alcoholics and their families. We can find out how that is handled in our area, then offer to help.

Often overlooked as a part of Twelfth Step work is our own personal need to be informed. The Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" reveal more as our sobriety progresses. They are the textbooks for a survival course that we can't afford to flunk.

Our other literature is important, too, and reading it once isn't enough for most of us. I was surprised to discover recently that I was going to take part in an AA election, and I knew very little about how it would be conducted. I had read my *AA Service Manual* some time ago, but as the discussion went around the table, I realized I hadn't retained much of what I had read. When I skimmed through *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* last month, looking for a particular quote, I discovered many things I had previously overlooked or had forgotten. So, for me, periodically rereading our literature is a must.

Can food be a form of Twelfth Step work? Why not? I know a man who delights in bringing doughnuts to a morning meeting. It was many weeks before anyone figured out who

it was that brought them. At the end of the meeting, as we filed into the coffee area, we would find a box of fresh doughnuts, left there after the meeting had begun. Someone else makes a habit of picking up day-old bread, rolls, and cakes from several small bakeries and delivering them to a halfway house where they are gratefully received. A box of cookies, a bag of apples, or some iced tea on a warm night are welcome additions to any meeting. Everyone enjoys a treat now and then, and the friendship such a gesture conveys might keep someone coming back.

We can invite other AAs — not just newcomers — to go to meetings with us. Most of us, whether new to AA, recently relocated, or traveling, have felt that knot of panic in the pit of our stomachs at the thought of going to a new meeting place alone. There may be people in our home group who have never visited any other meeting; some don't have transportation; others are afraid to go to a strange part of town at night. The simple offer of a ride can broaden their AA base and help them to identify with a wider circle of AA friends. Carrying the alcoholic to the message is twelfth-stepping, too.

Forming a new group or meeting is still another way of doing Twelfth Step work. Several have sprung up in our city lately, including: a Sunday morning Big Book study at a local club; a Step study meeting in someone's home; and a small discussion meeting, held at a new time and

place, which is attracting people who can't attend regular eight o'clock meetings. In each case, it was a twelfth-stepper who made the commitment to arrange for the meeting place, be there to open, set up, clean up, and close.

If there is an AA central or intergroup office in your area, there is a good chance it needs helpers. Even though there may be a paid secretary, there are mailings to be done, typing, phone work, lists, and filing. As in any office, the daily work goes on. Without it, many of the services we take for granted wouldn't be available locally.

AA is made up of many facets. In larger cities, there are service committees or intergroup representatives who meet to conduct area business; all areas have GSRs (general service representatives) who meet with DCMs (district committee members) and area officers as the vital link with the General Service Office (GSO) in New York.

In addition, there are committees on public information, hospitals and institutions, budget and finance, area conventions, and the Twelfth Step call list. They vary according to the needs and the support available in each area. Local AA newsletters may publicize the various business meetings, and the local central office has more information about them. Most of these meetings are open and welcome visitors who might be interested in participating.

Some of us are tied to the house be-

cause of young children or other commitments, or are just homebodies who have no desire to attend more meetings. But that doesn't mean the end of twelfth-stepping. AAs who like to write have pen pals all over the United States, and sometimes the world. Someone moving to another city would like news from the old hometown. When someone visits our group, we can exchange addresses from another state. Through GSO in New York, we can get the names of AA inmates in prisons who need to hear from "outside" AAs. Items and articles for the Grapevine — the story you are reading now, the jokes, the letters — are submitted by ordinary members who have something to share and take the time to write it down. A box of thank-you notes can become a means of Twelfth Step work. Speakers at a convention or intergroup meeting appreciate knowing they touched our hearts. The leader of a Step study group enjoys receiving our comments. Doesn't the secretary at our central office or at a club where we attend meetings deserve special thanks? Birthday, get-well, and friendship cards mean a great deal to our AA acquaintances, they tell us.

Some of us may ask: "What if we really don't have time for a lot of those activities?" We may have very demanding jobs, or even executive positions, that occupy many hours. That work, in addition to the needs of our families and the meetings re-

quired to keep us sober — plus what Twelfth Step work we *can* do — are all that we can handle right now.

Then, we stop and say to ourselves: "Aren't you lucky? Without sobriety, you would have none of those things."

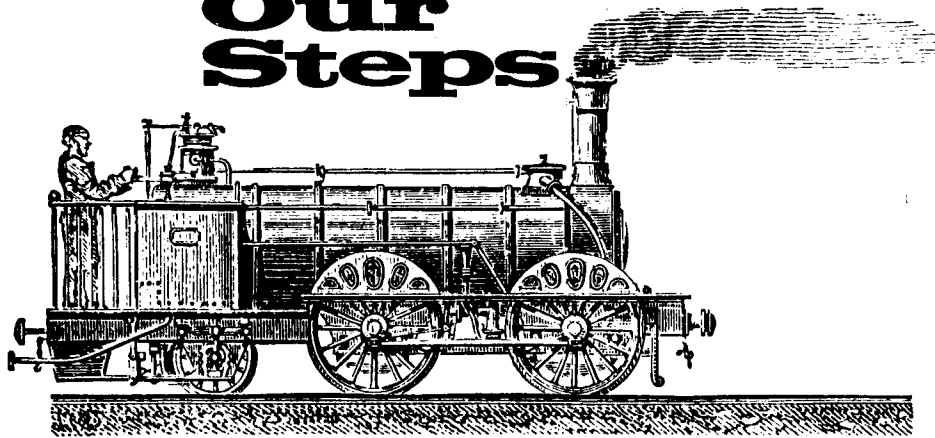
So how do we do more Twelfth Step work? How can we pay back what has been so freely given to us? What are our life-styles (and, for that matter, our lives) worth?

Dollars and cents can be used as a form of Twelfth Step work. If we are fortunate enough to have an income that permits it, we can put more than the average contribution in the basket. Most areas have some kind of "backers" program whereby we can agree to give a fixed amount regularly to our central office. An AA birthday gift of one dollar for each year of sobriety to GSO and our group is common. We can give a Grapevine subscription to a newcomer or an AA shut-in.

Suppose we are already doing most of these things. Have we become "gurus"? — holding two or three offices, or assuming responsibility for every aspect of a particular group. If so, possibly it's time to try a little "caring by sharing." We can ask for help, get newer members involved by sharing some of the responsibilities with them. We can twelfth-step someone into service work. At some point, we ourselves were encouraged to serve — now may be the time to pass that gift on.

F. D., New Orleans, La.

Retracing Our Steps



AFTER TWO YEARS and eight months' sobriety, I completed what my sponsor called my "final" and "fearless moral inventory." I had done my first Fourth Step at ten months' sobriety, and I know it was the best I could have done at that time.

Well into my second year of sobriety, I came to the conclusion that I was stuck on Step Six. I worried and pondered, asked "why" questions, prayed, but still could not get into or proceed past Step Six.

Funny things started to happen to me late in that year. I drove down the street and saw a bar I had completely forgotten ever visiting. I passed a motel I had not thought of for years; I had been there also. I was on my

way to jury duty one morning and recalled having slept in a certain alley. During my first year on the AA program and while writing that first Fourth Step, I'd had no recollection of those places.

Way down deep in my insides, I knew I had to do another Fourth and Fifth. Maybe that was why I could not get past Step Six.

I took pen in hand, and started. At the suggestion of my sponsor, I wrote at the top of my paper each day, "God, guide my pen." The memories of places I had been, things I had done, and people I had hurt came out of the recesses of my mind as if a dam had broken. It was the most exhilarating feeling I have experienced since the day I learned I had a disease called

alcoholism, and was not just a bad person.

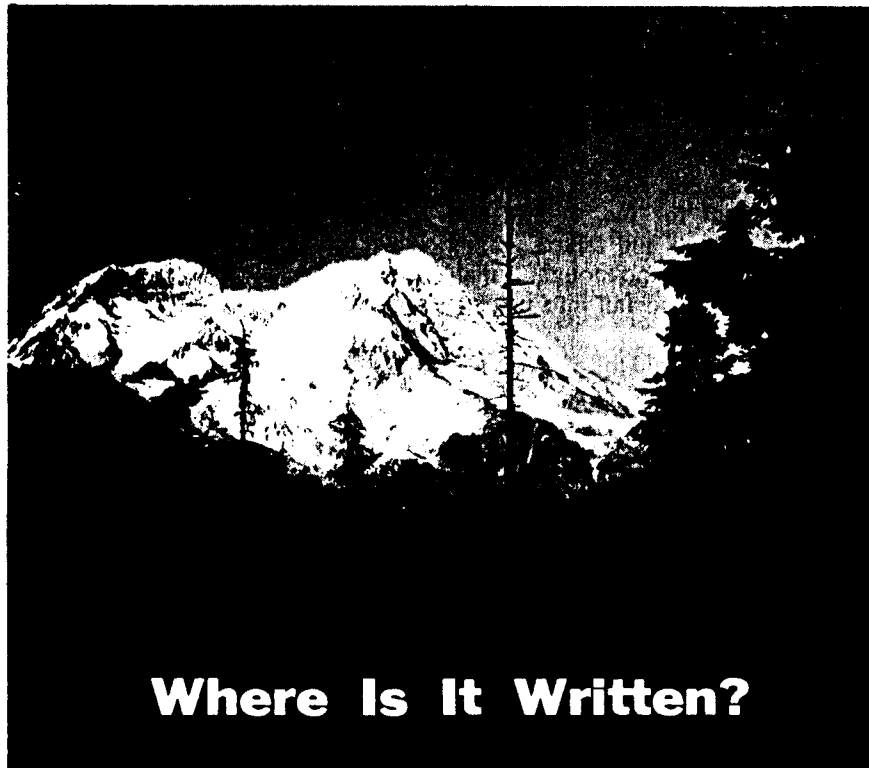
I did my Fifth Step exactly one week after having started my Fourth. On that same evening, with my sponsor's guidance, willingness on my part, and the help of my Higher Power, I did Steps Six, Seven, and Eight. Oh, the feeling of growth, the ability to say once again, "Yes, I am working the Steps."

In doing Step Eight, I made a list of all people I had harmed "and became willing to make amends to them all." My sponsor told me to place my own name at the top of the list; I was also to ask forgiveness of myself.

I am a sober woman alcoholic, happily married to another sober alcoholic. In doing Step Nine, I will not seek out all those to whom I owe amends. Many of those persons are still out there drinking in the bars and alleys, places I no longer frequent. The important thing for me is that should God place those people on the street in front of me, I have become willing to make amends to them.

Today, I am continually working Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve and trying to practice the principles of our program in all my affairs. And yes, as the Big Book predicts, God constantly discloses more to me.

C. H., El Segundo, Calif.



Where Is It Written?

WHEN I FIRST began to feel sober and knew I wanted to stay that way, my thoughts were of how to accomplish it on a forever basis; alcoholic thinking diminishes slowly. After I listened to many stories at many meetings and read the Big Book and other AA literature, one thought began to stir and grow: The key was in Step Twelve — not the key to getting sober, for that was obviously through the other Steps, but the key to staying sober. I could recover from my illness, and stay recov-

ered for as long as I chose to. The word “cured” had to be eliminated. When I found out that alcoholism is an illness and that there is no cure, only a chance for recovery, I had to understand the difference.

I immediately set out to “practice these principles” that were essential to recovery, and just as quickly was stopped dead in my tracks. What *were* the principles that would keep me sober? How should they be practiced? Where were they written? One day at a meeting, someone said they

weren't written anywhere. That caused a problem — how could I practice principles if I didn't know them and they were not written down? So I shelved that project for a while and went about sobering up through the Steps. At least, they were written down for me. I read and listened, listened and talked, talked and read, and sat and thought. Finally, things began to fall into place. I was getting sober.

The man who said the principles of the program weren't written down continued to say so, stating further that he had spent a great deal of time searching for them for himself. That taught me something still important for me today: I couldn't just go up and ask what AA principles were; I had to search them out if I was to understand them. So I searched until one night the answer came at another meeting, where the topic was the principles of the program.

Several people shared their thoughts. Then, one man got up, said, “There's a principle in each one of these Steps,” and proceeded to discuss his views of what the principles were. First, honesty — admitting to my innermost self that I was an alcoholic. I had to be honest with myself. He continued, but what he said didn't stick in my mind.

About a month later, I listened to a tape of a speaker from Los Angeles discussing the principles of the Steps. This time, I heard all of it, and it made sense. Hope, he said, was the principle of Step Two — hope that

my inner discontent could be changed to inner peace. The faith of Step Three had been cited many times at meetings and had been reinforced by my own experiences illustrating what I prefer to express as “Nothing happens without a purpose.” Many times, I had consciously let go of my own will and placed my fate in God's hands. To actually sacrifice my will for what I felt my Higher Power's will for me would be in a specific case, and then to experience a more-than-positive outcome became, for me, proof of the value of faith.

Steps Four, Five, and Six represent courage, a quality I lacked as procrastination delayed my Fourth Step. Those Steps are behind me now, and with more effort, procrastination will be overcome as well. Humility is the essence of Step Seven, a virtue that is hard for me to understand and difficult to practice; but, like other parts of the program, it can be acquired through continually striving for knowledge and understanding.

Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten represent responsibility: making necessary plans; carrying them out to the best of my ability; and continuing to assume responsibility for my actions. Patience must be practiced in Step Eleven whenever I pray for something that is right for me to pray for. When is my prayer going to be answered? How will the answer come? If no answer is forthcoming, or at least none that I can recognize, I must realize that either what I asked for or the time I wanted it was not in ac-

cordance with the will of my Higher Power.

Charity comes through in Step Twelve as we begin and continue to carry the message to others who still suffer from this illness of ours — charity in our thoughts of them and what they are going through, whether they are new in the program or seasoned members of the Fellowship. Financial assistance is often the least charitable thing to give; our own understanding and giving of ourselves are the greater parts of this principle.

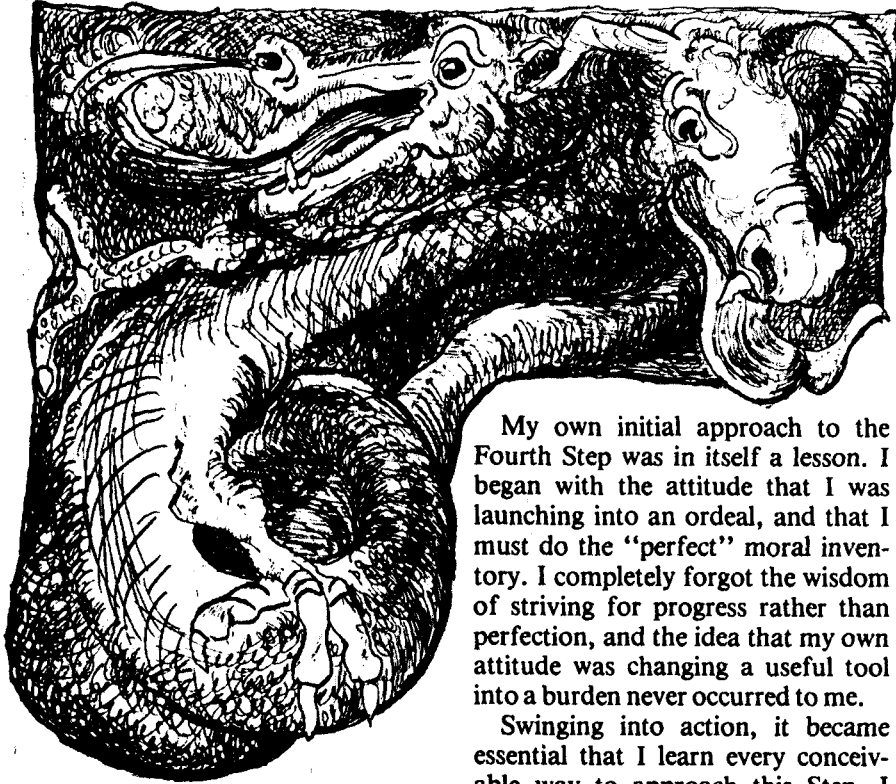
Honesty, hope, faith, courage, humility, responsibility, patience, and charity — these are the principles I must practice. There are others, to be sure, but these belong in my affairs today, just as others must arrive at and hold on to their own set of principles. Honesty first with myself makes it easier to be honest with others. As long as there is hope for me, there is hope for others. My faith grows stronger each day that these principles guide my thoughts and my ac-

tions. Should courage be weakened at times, I know whom to ask for strength. Humility brings greater comfort, for my Higher Power shows the greatest humility of all when he allows me to call him by any name, yet is always there for me. I am responsible for myself and my actions, especially when anyone reaches out to me or I reach out to them. I try to have patience with myself and others, for anything less leads me astray. Charity is always a goal, but always in the proper form.

“We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.” The foreword to the first (1939) edition of the Big Book tells me I can recover, but also that my spiritual maintenance grants my reprieve. For me, that means: One day at a time, I must practice these principles in all my affairs. Sobriety is mine through the principles that I follow.

D. Q., San Jose, Calif.

Turning Tools into Tyrants



My own initial approach to the Fourth Step was in itself a lesson. I began with the attitude that I was launching into an ordeal, and that I must do the "perfect" moral inventory. I completely forgot the wisdom of striving for progress rather than perfection, and the idea that my own attitude was changing a useful tool into a burden never occurred to me.

Swinging into action, it became essential that I learn every conceivable way to approach this Step. I polled AA members, collecting approaches, opinions, suggestions, and a lot of sympathy. I gathered piles of pamphlets, guides, questionnaires, and workbooks on the subject. This was becoming a career, and a cause of great clutter, not only in the house but in my mind. With all this studying, filling out, answering, and outlining, it began to occur to me that I had launched into what was becom-

OF ALL THE STEPS, the Fourth seems to have the biggest reputation for being a real bear. Perhaps we are doing it a disservice, and the newcomer as well, by convincing them they are approaching a two-headed monster. So many of us, it seems, have a fine-tuned ability to complicate things and make life tougher for ourselves. We hardly need more encouragement in that direction.

ing a novel, without including in its contents any real moral inventory.

Looking back, I did a great deal of work avoiding that Fourth Step. Finally, out of frustration, I looked again to the three-column format shown in the Big Book. Initially, I had discarded this who, what, and why approach as much too simple to serve for someone so complex as I. Indeed.

Easing into the water with some of my more minor transgressions, I was soon under way, daring into more sacred ground as my confidence grew that nothing dreadful was happening. As I finished, I wondered why I had made the job so complicated, and why I had decided, before even starting, that I would have a hard time. I also had to reflect on how many times in my life I had used this very same line of thinking when approaching something new, and how I had crippled myself with it.

The knowledge gained in taking the Fourth Step seems to have grown. At first, I was primarily aware of the sense of release from my past. I had always given my past a tremendous power over my present, trying to hide it, and trying to hide from it. I had judged myself by my past mistakes, in fact, I had unknowingly come to believe I *was* my mistakes.

Being able to look at them on paper seemed to defuse them. They became nothing but molehills. It has taken some time, but I am no longer as emotionally involved with these things. I look at my inventory now as

a personal feedback system that reminds me of what does not work in my life; it is not a judgment on my own self-worth.

Happily, I've refrained from judging my extensive research into the Fourth Step as spinning my wheels. I did learn from it. Now, when a newcomer gets that Fourth Step pallor, I try to accentuate the positive. If I drag out my own war story, I have to include that my own attitude made things much tougher than necessary. I tell them also that I look at the Step as one might consider the job of cleaning out the refrigerator. While I can worry and put it off until it's gone from a minor to a disgusting (if not downright dangerous) job, it's much easier if I don't bother loading myself down with negative opinions beforehand. Some of the things in my refrigerator were rotten and so grown over that I had no idea what they started out as. But there's only so much room in my refrigerator, and if it isn't cleaned out periodically, I have no room for fresh food. Not only that, but I risk poisoning myself or someone else with what needs to be thrown away.

While I can spend much energy in making it a tedious and hard job, the garbage has got to go. More and more I find myself fourth-stepping my refrigerator—focusing, instead, on the satisfaction of knowing that soon there will be clean, fresh shelves, ready to be filled with good things I can use!

J. T., Alto, N.M.

How Far Should We Go?

“IFIAM MAKING a Twelfth Step call or if newcomers ask for my phone number and help at a meeting — in both cases I give out my number and the rest is up to them. If they want to go to a meeting, I am available. That’s my total responsibility. If they want this program as badly as I did, they’ll call me. If they don’t — that’s their problem.” That was one speaker I heard at a meeting discussing Twelfth Step work.

Still another. “When I have a new baby I take him to three meetings. That’s it, brother. If new people haven’t gotten enough out of the program to stand on their own two feet by then, maybe they’re not ready for it.”

For myself I find both these positions unacceptable. If the people expressing them said (and they rarely do), “This is what I found works for me and it is not in the Big Book,” I could not quarrel with that. It is when the spokesman, not infrequently an old-timer, states a personal attitude as if it were an established AA procedure that I get uncomfortable.

It is my experience that no sweeping generalizations about this program, or how to work it, have any validity — beyond the one that says we just don’t take that first drink.

And everyone surely has a right and an obligation to practice the program in a way that makes him comfortable.

If there is anything I have discovered in working with newcomers it is that each one is an individual case, coming from different levels of pain and confusion to seek relief and understanding. Some come to their first or second AA meeting and accept wholeheartedly and with the faith of a child what we have to offer. They are blessed — and in a minority. Most people come in wanting and not wanting help simultaneously, kicking and screaming like a baby whose

bottle has been snatched away.

Just as recovering alcoholics must make personal in-depth evaluations of how far they are willing to go to get this program, and whether or not they truly qualify, each twelfth-stepper must make a decision about how far he is willing to go to help the newcomer. In my own case, people were patient with me for many years before I put a year together, and I can never forget that when I make a call. I

would rather err on the side of being too patient and forbearing than come down hard on a newcomer — and some of them need exactly that — and maybe contribute to someone’s going back out there again.

How far do we go to help the man or woman who is hurting? A wise man said it all: “We go as far as we possibly can — and then one mile further.”

B. I., Studio City, Calif.

In the Face of Fear

FOR FIVE YEARS, fear kept me from working the Ninth Step. I couldn't or wouldn't walk my own talk: "Eighty percent of my fears never materialize."

I had only a few qualms about examining my past (Fourth Step) and fewer still about sharing it with a fellow AA (Fifth Step), but the Ninth Step was the first that asked me to go outside AA and *do* something about that past. Fear stopped me cold.

Seventeen years ago, I abandoned a wife and five children (I needed the freedom to drink in the manner to which I had become accustomed). In view of that, how could I make amends? My ex-wife wanted me in jail for nonsupport. My children must hate me for what I had done, I thought. Fear, fear, fear.

Then, I attended Step study meetings (thirty-six of them — three times around the Twelve Steps) and listened to how others worked the Steps. Those meetings and those winners made it possible for me to proceed in the face of fear.

I started off slowly ("Easy Does It") by writing to each of my children with no return address on my letters. I simply shared with them how it once was, what happened, and what it was

like now. I did that for a year, remembering each of their birthdays (for the first time in years).

Just recently, I launched stage two of my Ninth Step plan. I sent my children an address they could respond to. A week later, I received my first letter from a son. He was five years old when I deserted him. He's now twenty-two. I'd like to share a few parts of that letter:

"Dear Dad: I'm glad that I'm finally getting to write you a letter. First thing I would like to say is that I have no hard feelings about the past.

"I know that you're my father, but I have to picture you as a very good friend. That's all right, because I always need a friend more than a father.

"I will always *love* you for bringing me into this world. I'm really glad that you're back around, and maybe sometime we can go out to dinner. You're welcome in my home anytime, any day.

"I wanted to say that I'm really glad you quit drinking, because that makes you a better man than ever. I'm proud to be your son. I'm going to close this letter, but believe me, there will be more."

T. L., Torrance, Calif.

FOR MOST OF MY LIFE, and certainly the seventeen years I was drinking and taking drugs, I used my resentments toward others to avoid taking responsibility for my actions, my feelings, my disappointments — virtually my entire life. I blamed everyone — my mother, my father, and men with whom I became emotionally entangled (usually in that

catch myself gritting and grinding my teeth as I drove. In the weeks before I got to the program, I would pound my bedroom wall in desperate anger and frustration. For the life of me, I couldn't understand why people always took advantage of me, and why I kept attracting "losers." I was sure that my mother's violence and my father's passivity when I was a



'It Is the Beginning of the End of Isolation ...

order). I spent years in therapy trying to find out what particular childhood experience it was that set me off-kilter — the one trauma that was responsible for my feelings of total unworthiness, for my continuing failures, and for my increasingly self-destructive habits. I never discovered the trauma, but I continued to blame almost everyone from my past, and even those who "crossed" me in the present.

I was so full of anger that I used to

child had permanently damaged me in some deep, secret spot that I could never find. I *knew* it was their fault.

When I got to AA, I was tremendously relieved to discover I had a disease that was treatable. I heard that building and keeping resentments was one of the primary psychological symptoms of the disease. I definitely fit that description. When I was just a week sober, I remember telling a woman at a meeting that I

was so angry, I felt like I was going to explode all over the walls. I was sure that sobriety was not going to solve any of my special problems, but I did get just a faint glimmer of hope that I might learn how to cope with my feelings from the people in AA, and that I might not have to stay angry.

Once I admitted that I was an alcoholic, all sorts of changes occurred relatively quickly and imperceptibly. First, I started taking responsibility for my disease and for doing something about it. Once that occurred, I somehow didn't need to blame others as I had before. Sure, I still had resentments — a long list of them. But as I started to expend my energy on getting sober rather than on blaming so-and-so for my suffering, my resentments no longer had the value, the same function that they had before. And because they were no longer

so useful, I began to let go of them — gradually.

I still did a lot of blaming in my first inventory, but I did have enough sense to see how I had been wrong. When I admitted my responsibilities during the Fifth Step, many of my resentments simply disappeared. I honestly don't know where all that anger went, but I realized one day that much of it was gone. I was then able to forge ahead and make amends to those people I had harmed — people whom I had previously believed had done me harm, and against whom, I had rationalized, I had simply been defending myself. Once I came to see that the problem was mine, not theirs, I was set free to begin living in the present — one day at a time. For someone like me, that is a miracle indeed.

L. B., Santa Barbara, Calif.

... From Our Fellows and from God'

ARE YOU THE TYPE OF PERSON who makes lists? There are a lot of us around. We make lists of household items, groceries, and toiletries; of things to do today, tomorrow, and over the weekend; of holidays, vacations, and activities for special events.

At many Step discussion meetings

in my area, I hear my fellow AAs share their fear upon reaching the Eighth Step. Usually, it's the fear of the impending Ninth Step confrontation with those they have harmed. "What will she think?" or "What will he say?" followed by our famous "What an order! I can't go through with it."

Eventually, I was asking the same questions and entertaining similar fears. However, something had to be done because old-timers said that their sobriety depended on how successfully they continued to practice all twelve of the Steps. So I began putting a list together. Fear of losing my sobriety overrode my fear of losing someone's goodwill.

Naturally, at the head of the list I put my own name, right? No. I was far too used to being first in the universe, far too self-centered. But didn't I hurt myself more than anybody else by my drinking? Perhaps, but amends to myself began the moment I put the cork in the bottle. At least, that's the way I came to see it.

My immediate family was high on my list. First my parents, whom I had long blamed for certain deficiencies in my make-up (in addition to my alcoholism); my brother and sisters who, I felt, had always made unreasonable demands on me.

There were the stores where I had begun a history of petty thievery during my teens. Small thefts, but they totaled up to a pretty penny.

There were couples whose marriages, already a bit shaky, I had done nothing to help. Fact is, I contributed to the grounds for at least one divorce.

There were jobs where I cheated employers of their fair due, as well as setting a very poor example by my drunkenness.

There were romantic love objects, persons used and then tossed aside.

And how many were victims of

my big-shotism — people I promised to help find living quarters or jobs through my "connections"? What connections?

That's a broad outline of my first serious approach to making amends. What did I do about it all? How do you make amends to somebody who has moved to you-know-not-where? How do you return stolen goods to a now-defunct store?

“The Eighth Step provides a time of calm reflection before . . . the actual amends-making task”

Our founding fathers wisely provided the Eighth Step as a means of collecting our wits, of charting our course as we prepare for a journey that might well prove to be stormy. It is a course where I might find it impossible, due to circumstances, to make amends, but not impossible to include my willingness on my list. To become willing. The Step is also about that, isn't it?

The Eighth Step provides a time of calm reflection before we get down to the actual amends-making task.

As the “Twelve and Twelve” says, “It is the beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God.”

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

BY THE BOOK

WHEN I FIRST began "carrying the message," I had no message. I had not worked the Steps myself, and therefore was totally unprepared to show anyone else how to work them.

When I talked to a prospect, I did none of the things Dr. Bob is described as having done in the tenth story in the original Big Book. Titled "He Sold Himself Short," the story contains one of the best illustrations I have ever read on how to sponsor someone.

In it, the writer, who had only been sober two weeks, describes how he met Dr. Bob on a Wednesday afternoon after Bob had closed his office. Together, that afternoon, they worked the first seven Steps, including an inventory, a Fifth Step, and the writing out of a list of those people the writer had harmed.

"We spent three or four hours formally going through the Six-Step program as it was at that time. The six steps were: (1) Complete deflation, (2) Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power, (3) Moral Inventory, (4) Confession, (5) Restitution, (6) Continued work with other alcoholics.

"Dr. Bob led me through all of these steps. At the moral inventory, he brought up some of my bad personality traits or character defects, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm and resentments. We went over these at great length and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed. When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed, each of us asking to have these defects taken away. . . .

"Dr. Bob then led me through the restitution step, in which I made a list of all the persons I had harmed, and worked out ways and means of slowly making restitution."

The need for a sponsor who has worked the Steps himself can sometimes be desperate. In my own case, I had been a sober member of AA for ten years, but had never worked the action Steps of the program. By then, I was depressed to the point of suicide, almost immobilized by my fears, and had been recently fired from an excellent job which my mental state had made impossible for me to handle. I was living proof that going to meetings and staying sober is not enough.

"The need for a sponsor who has worked the Steps himself can sometimes be desperate . . . I was living proof that going to meetings and staying sober is not enough"

Until that time, I had not figured out on my own how to work the Steps, nor had anyone shown me how to work them. Fortunately for me, I met a man in the program who told me that I would find relief from my depression and fears if I began working the Steps — a rather startling claim from my standpoint because I had been seeking such relief in self-help groups, sessions with psychologists and psychiatrists, and through reading countless pop-psych books.

That man, who became my sponsor, told me to read two chapters in the Big Book — "How It Works" and "Into Action," and then to start immediately writing out a Fourth Step in the actual format outlined in the book. I did this reluctantly, sure that it was not going to relieve my "psy-

chiatric" symptoms, sure that there was no connection between those symptoms and working the Steps.

After I had finished writing out my Fourth Step, I met my sponsor to take the Fifth Step. He went first with his Fifth Step, making it vastly easier for me to be as honest as possible with my own. Then he asked me to make a list of the people I had harmed, and in the weeks after that he prodded me again and again to make face-to-face amends to the people on that list.

Over time, as a result of continued and repetitive work with all of the Steps, the depression lifted entirely, the fears greatly diminished, and my ability to work returned.

Having personally seen the results that can be obtained by continuing work with each of the Steps, I try to sponsor people in the same way. I urge the man I am sponsoring (men should sponsor men and women should sponsor women) to read "How It Works" and "Into Action" in the Big Book, and Step Four in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. If necessary, I help the man write out his Fourth Step. Then we exchange Fifth Steps and together we write out an Eighth Step list.

After that, I follow up, encouraging him to make direct amends and to make at least preliminary arrangements for monetary restitution where necessary. All of this, of course, presumes willingness. The Big Book, in the chapter "Working With Others," cautions that "to spend too much

time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy.”

I have met quite a few people during my twenty-six years in AA who have figured out from reading the Big Book that the Steps *are* the program, and that each one of them must be worked. But for me, and I think for most of us, the help of a sponsor is crucial.

What should a sponsor be? Most importantly and obviously, he or she should be one who has “had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps.” He doesn’t have to be a scholar, a philosopher, a raconteur, or even an exceptionally charming person—just a person who has worked the Steps, and is now carry-

ing the message because the Twelfth Step calls on him to do that.

Nowhere in the Big Book or the “Twelve and Twelve” does it say that he should be a psychologist, that he should “care and share,” that he should be a good listener or available at all hours to discuss personal or job problems. The sponsor’s function is simply to show another alcoholic how to work the Steps.

My only regret is that I did not meet my sponsor — or a sponsor like him — within the first few days of coming to AA. If I had been guided through the Steps, and into the habit of working them on a regular basis, I might have spared myself ten years of unhappy, painful sobriety.

D. O., Glenview, Ill.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

I have something unpopular to say. I have heard in meetings that the Steps are only suggestions, they are not mandatory. I believe the people who say these things are sincere, and I do not fault them for their opinions. However, I do think they are wrong! If I want to get sober, truly sober, I must follow the Steps.

In my drunken days, I was the greatest starter of things you ever saw. I would begin all sorts of magnificent projects, certain to change the course of history. Strangely enough, some of these projects were good ideas, or could have been if I had done the work to complete them. No, I was content with the brilliance of the conception and didn't have the stamina or whatever else it took to get the job done. If I had been trying to run a mile, I would have started off like a flash for fifty yards or so, but I wouldn't have been around for the finish.

We all have to start with Step One. But as important as it is, if this is as

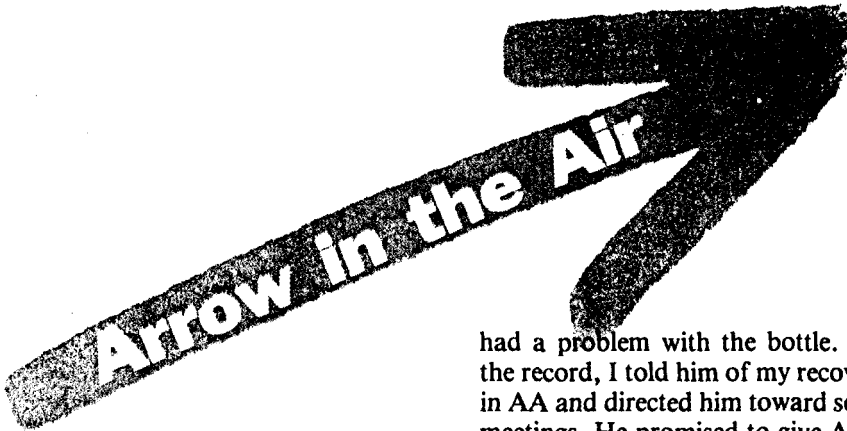
far as we go, we only hang ourselves out to dry, alone with the knowledge that we are powerless over alcohol and that our lives are unmanageable. It is in Steps Two and Three that we complete what we started in Step One.

Now that I have, with God's help, some control over my life again, I am able to go on and loosen some of the other millstones around my neck. Step Four helps me to identify these millstones. If I stop here though, I am out to dry again as I was after Step One. Completing Step Four without going on to Five, Six, and Seven is a reflection of my former insanity in allowing things to go unfinished.

By now you must be catching my drift. If I want to become sober and not just dry I must do all the Steps, completely! For me, the Steps are not "suggestions," they are required, and each must be completed in its turn.

This is one race I would like to try to finish.

D. G., Gloucester, N.J.



THE MESSAGE of AA, like the poetic arrow shot into the air, can find a target in the most unexpected places. We've all had such rewarding experiences.

A few years ago, a writer in his twenties interviewed me at my home for a project to record career stories of Southern California retirees from all parts of the world. I let him tape my outline of my Kansas boyhood and professional life in Hollywood studio production, but insisted on ending it by relating how I became an alcoholic and knew the joy of sobering up at seventy to begin a new life. Since the collection was going into libraries, I hoped to reach others in their senior years with a drinking problem. Naturally, I did not mention AA.

When my tale ended, the writer looked grim. He confessed that he

had a problem with the bottle. Off the record, I told him of my recovery in AA and directed him toward some meetings. He promised to give AA a try. I never saw him again.

Recently, as I was leaving a meeting I had not attended for years, someone called out my name, and a young woman came up to me. "I've been hoping I'd meet you someday," she said. "Do you recall telling your story to a young writer?"

"Yeah! He had a booze problem and wanted advice about AA. Are you telling me he got the message and he's made it?"

"No, he's still drinking. But the message found its mark. I was the supervising editor on that project. When I read copy on the story about you and your recovery, I knew I could find a way out of my own secret alcoholism. I got the message. I've been in AA nearly three years now."

So, when we shoot arrows into the air that fall to earth we know not where, as Longfellow wrote, we can have hope and faith that somewhere there is a target waiting to be hit.

C. C., North Hollywood, Calif.

March 1986

'Never too late to change'

From Chicago, Ill.:

I have been receiving the Grapevine for "a few twenty-fours" and noticed how complacent I had become about reading the articles (which may have been a reflection of how my program was doing). However, I read the article "Not a Threat — a Promise," in the October 1985 issue, and realized how the extended effort to give this program to others had helped a fellow member renew his attitude. This brought back memories of the happiness and joy I received when I was active with newcomers, sponsees, service, and Twelfth Step work. It made me reflect on the quality of the program that I presented. Did I convey to others the serenity and happiness that working the Twelve Steps can bring? Did I carry the message and not just the words?

These reflections and thoughts brought me back to basics — that this is a one day at a time program and that is never too late to change. Thanks to the Grapevine and the AA program for being there even though I had drifted.

D. X.

THIRTEEN PLUS
ELEVEN EQUALS
TWENTY FIVE

I have often heard it said in meeting rooms that if I've truly taken the Third Step, whatever happens in any given day is God's will for me and I should accept it. This misinterpretation of the Third Step nearly cost me my sanity. Worse yet, it nearly cost me my faith in a higher power.

By biological standards, a human being is simply a mammal, a member of the animal kingdom. However, humans have two qualities not present in other mammals — intelligence and free will — which mark them as something higher than the animals.

When I was drinking, I was merely a mammal. My intelligence and free will were not operable while I was controlled by the bottle. The First Step restored my free will; I was freed from the bondage of alcohol. The Second Step restored my intelligence. As I came to believe in a power greater than myself, the ability to think rationally and sanely was restored.

I moved on to the Third Step with

total willingness, knowing that my will had made a complete disaster of my life. Placing both my will and my life in the care of my Higher Power was a tremendous relief. Then I went on to work the rest of the Steps, and both my life and I improved greatly.

At five years of sobriety I found myself happily married to another AA and the proud mother of a baby girl (my fourth). I was forty-two years old and grateful for the chance to have a new lease on life. This child would never need to know the horrors of active alcoholism in the home as her sisters had. (My first marriage had been to an active alcoholic, and together we had dragged the entire family into a life of hell.)

I remained active in the program, worked the Steps daily, attended many meetings, sponsored, chaired, and led when asked. Life was good, and I was tremendously grateful and happy.

Then my husband's other illness

surfaced. The tip of the iceberg had risen occasionally, but now the whole thing loomed. He had served in Vietnam and apparently had problems other than alcoholism. My daughter and I became victims of physical abuse. My husband's uncontrollable rages were as shocking to him as they were to us. He insisted he was using the Sixth and Seventh Steps, but they weren't working. I suggested outside help, but he refused. He was a counselor at a treatment center and did not need counseling, he insisted. I finally protested to the police, and he abandoned the home.

People told me, "This is God's will for you; let go and let God; pray for acceptance." I loved my husband, understood that he was ill, but could not understand what was happening. Things continued to get worse. The children and I were often without food and basic necessities because my husband's illness blinded him to the financial responsibility he had toward his family. Serious health problems prevented me from working during much of this past year, and we've faced possible eviction.

I became angry with my Higher Power. I lost all conception of that power being loving or kind. Fear and resentment were taking over my life. But I kept trying to work the Steps, went to meetings, and somehow never thought "drink" even when I could no longer pray.

I realize now that my Higher Power had prepared me in advance. At three years of sobriety my sponsor

had strongly "suggested" that I needed Al-Anon in addition to AA because of my first marriage. She took me to several meetings. In this second marriage I found myself returning to Al-Anon with the same desperation that had driven me to AA. By working the Steps in both programs I came to a real understanding of "God's will for me."

All people have free wills. Many of the things that happen to me each day are the *act of another person's will*. My Higher Power was not doing this to us, my husband was. It was not my Higher Power's will for us to be hungry and homeless. That was my husband's sick will trying to manipulate us. AA is a program of surrender and humility. It is not a program of blind submission to humiliation.

Still a lot of AAs told me, "It's God's will," and turned their backs. Some insisted I was doing something wrong in my program or things wouldn't be such a mess. But there were many, many others who reached out to help. They provided food and assistance, and loving people in both Fellowships, relatives, friends, and strangers alike in our community have reached out to us. My Higher Power's will has been done through these people.

I've learned not to sit on the Third Step, but to stand on the Eleventh. Daily I seek only his will for me and ask for the strength to carry it out. Most days, I find his will for me is simply the Twelfth Step.

P. O., Euclid, Ohio

A Kaleidoscope of Meanings

It has occurred to me recently that during the time I've been in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have "used" a particular Step to fit a particular occasion on a particular day, and "worked" the Twelve Steps as a formal, studied program.

When I first came to AA, there were certain things that I saw occurring — talking, laughing, hugging — that let me know people were happy to be at meetings. I soon caught on to what I perceived allowed them to feel that way — a set of directions for living life, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Since I decided I wanted what these people had, I also decided to do what they did: I started attending a Step meeting, where I could hear lots of people sharing what the Steps meant to them.

Early in my meeting attendance I "used" the Steps to help me through periods of confusion and anxiety. I read in the Big Book that anger and resentment were two emotions alcoholics could not afford to harbor. I was full of both early in my sobriety, now that I was without my wine. So I started a notebook; when I felt angry or resentful, I would sit down with my book and answer the questions, "How am I being threatened? What

am I afraid of losing?" The process of writing gave me a positive way to deal with a negative emotion, and the writings became the basis for my Fourth Step. Also, I started making amends to myself by living a life without alcohol or any other mood-changing drug, and to my then husband by being a faithful and loving wife.

At meetings I heard that the Steps were written in their particular sequence because they worked best that way. I started formally "working" the Steps by reading about them, listening to people in discussions and talks, writing out what they meant to me. There seemed to be, at varying intervals of time, a point where I understood a particular Step and how it applied to me; when I knew in my gut I had worked that Step.

Almost at my first meeting, maybe even before, I recognized that my life was unmanageable and that AA was a power greater than myself which could restore me to sanity. Within three days of my first meeting I knew I was an alcoholic and that my insanity was connected to that, and I was able to work the First and then the Second Steps. At about this time I made a decision, intellectually, to turn my will and my life over to AA, which was then my Higher Power; and

after a while the fear of the unknown left me so that I could look at my own wrongs (and rights!). At about the fifteen-month mark I took the Fifth Step with a very gentle, serene member of the program, who started me looking at the subsequent Steps.

It was almost another two years before the moment came when I knew what the Sixth and the Seventh Steps meant and could feel them working in my life. I then "worked" the Eighth and Ninth Steps, and probably not too surprisingly discovered my amends covered almost the complete array mentioned in the Big Book. The last three Steps were worked in the same fashion. There came a point, as I stood at the podium to introduce the speaker to celebrate my fifth anniversary, when I knew I had worked the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability at that point in my sobriety — I knew I was precisely where I was supposed to be. I was comfortable "in my gut."

There have been several times since when I have worked all the Steps on a particular problem in my life — the dissolution of a longtime marriage; later a brand-new relationship and the subsequent marriage; people I do not agree with — and each time I have been given the direction for the next action for *me* to take.

Today I realize that over my ten years in the program, the meaning for me of all the Steps has changed. There seems to be a depth to them now that I could not have experienced any earlier. Just as I needed every experience I had before I got to AA, I've needed every one since to help me learn and change and get to the point of happiness and serenity I experience today. And I get very excited when I think that there are still lots of living experiences yet to come on which I can use and work the Twelve Steps.

S. G., Wilmington, N.C.

Five Friendly Fingers



“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character,” and then “Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.” The Sixth and Seventh Steps, right? I had no problem accepting these. I felt that somewhere along the line a power greater than myself would remove any defects and shortcomings when I was ready. Of course this could happen only if I was doing my part. That is, working the Steps, attending meetings, helping others, having a sponsor, being involved and doing all the other things necessary to stay sober, to grow, and to be a part of Alcoholics Anonymous.

However, I had a reservation. I stoutly maintained that there were certain simple shortcomings we could remove by ourselves, without asking

help from God or anybody else. I had that old attitude of “If I can do it, so can you.” At discussion meetings I gave examples of shortcomings I felt that everybody should be able to correct on their own, usually shortcomings that I had no apparent problem with. The group always gave me a lot of static about this.

My thinking continued along these lines until my sixteenth year of sobriety. One Sunday afternoon my Higher Power decided to bring to my attention, in a very traumatic manner, one of those simple shortcomings that, according to my thinking, I should have been able to remove long ago but hadn't.

During my drinking years, the mere sight of a black and white California highway patrol car set off an immediate reaction of nervousness,

resentment, hate, anger, and self-pity. This justifiable attitude was, of course, brought on by the innate unfairness of all police officers.

I'm sure you remember how unfair all law enforcement officers were in those days. “Accuse you of drunk driving when you only had two beers. Give you a ticket for overtime parking when you just ran into a bar for a short one.” You knew you'd only been in there a minute or two. They were just no damned good.

As a result of all that unfair treatment during my drinking years, a new reaction set in during my sober years. At the sight of a black and white, my right hand would automatically appear. Four fingers would be hidden in a fist, and the middle finger would protrude straight out as I sneakily gave them the finger.

This was a sore point with my wife. For the first few years of this behavior she would make remarks like “You're a big boy now,” or “What Step are you working, dear?” Being the type of guy who prides himself on working the program, when wrong promptly admitting it, I'd say “you're right, honey.” However, through the years I continued with the finger routine and she finally threw in the towel and sat in silence. I might add that she has eight years more AA sobriety than I.

Secretly I wanted to discontinue what she called “that childish act.” It seemed, however, that some invisible force would lift my hand up every time one of those damn black and

whites appeared.

One Sunday afternoon we went for a ride. Dressed in our Sunday best and at peace with the world, we were like any normal senior citizens enjoying an afternoon drive. The thumping sound of a flat tire broke the silence. Cussing slightly, but resigned to my fate, I got out of the car, opened the trunk, and removed the jack.

From the corner of my eye I saw a highway patrol car easing up behind me. All the years of resentment flowered. Here I was with enough problems on my hands, and this jackass was going to add more.

Warily I watched as he slowly approached. Drawing myself up to my full height, shoulders back, and portraying all the dignity of man in his sixties, I sullenly asked, with the maturity of a five-year-old child, “What did I do now?”

“Nothing,” he replied as he took the jack from my hand.

In total shock, close to having a heart attack, I watched this highway patrol officer change my tire. When he finished, I said “thank you” in an undecided-sounding voice.

Climbing back in my car, I watched him in my rearview mirror as he pulled out and around us. Smiling, he waved as he passed.

Forced by a power greater than myself, my arm went up and I returned the wave. Suddenly conscious of my hand, I saw all five fingers in plain sight, indicating a friendly wave.

A new reaction had set in.

E. R., Palms, Calif.

I Want the Whole Pie

Why work with half a program? Recently, the attitude that the Twelve Steps are the entire program seems to be more and more prevalent, and the Twelve Traditions are thought to apply only to group business and not to the individual attempting to achieve sobriety. However, I believe that the Traditions are just as important and useful to each person as they are to individual groups and to AA as a whole.

They have been particularly useful and beneficial to me in my daily Tenth Step inventory and in redoing my Fourth Step inventory. For instance, where have I placed personalities ahead of principles? Where have I allowed problems of money, property, and prestige to endanger my sobriety? Where have I attempted to be an authority and to tell others how AA should be run or how they have to behave to stay sober? Where have I selfishly placed my own welfare ahead of the welfare of others to build my ego, gain money, or exhibit power over them? Where have I attempted to promote myself or AA instead of allowing the principle of attraction to work in my life? It's interesting that what I attract stays of

its own accord but I have to fight to keep what I promote.

It's interesting, too, that when I am self-supporting through my own contributions, I no longer need depend on anyone or anything else for my needs to be met. Further, I find I have enough to give to others, and that's a great feeling.

Where have I expressed opinions on outside issues that allowed me to be drawn into controversy, either public or within the AA group? Such an incident occurred recently when I agreed to appear before a group of students who were studying the psychology of addiction. My purpose was to talk about treatment programs, not AA. There were some AA members in the class, however, who seemed to think I wasn't giving AA enough credit as the basis for all treatment programs. They kept trying to shift the focus of my talk from treatment to AA.

Respecting the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, I had not said I was, or ever had been, a member of AA, or that I had ever attended a meeting. But some of them knew me and brought it out. It seemed to me that they were attempting to discredit

both me and treatment programs in order to protect themselves and *their* AA program.

I do not consider AA a program. I consider the Twelve Steps the "simple program" referred to in the Big Book. I consider the Twelve Traditions the foundation for behaving in the manner the Twelve Steps suggest. I consider AA a whole Fellowship that grew from one drunk helping another — not fixing, teaching, or preaching — with the only requirement for membership being a desire to stop drinking, not expertise in "talking the talk" or "walking the walk." To me, there is no one talk or one walk. Each of us should be allowed to both walk and talk in our own way without objection or re-priming. That is how we learn to be ourselves and to become our better selves, in sobriety, with the help of those who have gone before. Dictating behavior does not work, either with alcoholics or those outside AA. Helping improve behavior, particularly by example, does.

Further, length or quantity of sobriety cannot be the sole criterion. Quality of sobriety is far more attractive to me, and I suspect to many others. I have heard things from those with less than thirty days that made more sense to me than some of the things I've heard from those with thirty years.

Once I even had a man interrupt a conversation we were having to ask, "How long have you been sober?" I asked him why. He answered, "Well,

how will I know whether to believe you or not if I don't know how long you've been sober?" I believe an understanding of the Traditions could have helped him make up his mind about what I was saying.

In fact, I believe that understanding AA is far more important to both quality and quantity of sobriety than merely knowing the Steps and attending meetings. There is no doubt that knowledge is imparted and shared at meetings, and this is good. But understanding comes from within and cannot be shared or dictated. It can only be achieved, and one of the criteria of achieving understanding is keeping an open mind. It is impossible to understand what another does or says when one is already either criticizing, dictating, or planning a rebuttal. A busy mind is closed to new input.

That, to me, is why we in AA traditionally do not argue, criticize, dictate, preach, or teach one another. Personal behavior in accordance with the principles and spirit of the Twelve Traditions, I have found, enables one to live serenely without having to do those things. Such behavior improves my attention at meetings, my relationships with others, and the quality of my life as a whole.

Those who wish to live with only the Twelve Steps are quite welcome to do so, but to me they are just half the pie. With the Traditions, the quality of living comes back with gusto, and I want it all!

R. L., El Paso, Tex.

CRAZY EDDIE

Almost without exception, whenever Step Two is under discussion, many voices can be heard clamoring in confusion. It may be a fifty-fifty split between those of us who cannot accept the implication of insanity mentioned in Step Two, and those of us who resist what appears to be the beginning of a religious commitment.

When I came in, I readily admitted to insanity and to being a drunk. What I refused to admit was that I was alcoholic.

As for religion, it seemed to me that all Twelve Steps were religious, and for that reason I resolved never to take them. One of the most horrible thoughts I used to have, when I would wake up in the dead of night, was that AA itself was actually a church, and that the older members were withholding this information and would spring it on me one day when they felt I was sober long enough. Even with that dire prospect before me, I was willing to keep coming back to meetings because I wanted to get sober more than I wanted anything else.

I used to classify myself with those AAs who claimed to have tried re-

ligion, without its helping them to get sober. I tied events of my life together into one angry knot, and conveniently forgot that it was I who had turned my back on religion. At the outset of my drinking years, I said no to God, as I understood him, and thus began the steady erosion of faith in family, friends, and institutions.

In his address to the gathering at St. Louis in July 1955 for the celebration of AA's twentieth anniversary, the Reverend Sam Shoemaker discussed the subject of faith. "Many people," he said, "tell you they've given up faith. They prayed for something they wanted and it didn't come, and either there is no God or else he has no interest in them.

"What childish nonsense! How can anybody expect God to acquiesce in the half-baked prayers that a lot of us send up to him. He would have the world in a worse chaos than it is now in five minutes. Real prayer is not telling God what we want. It is putting ourselves at his disposal so that he can tell us what he wants."

I cannot single out religion and say that it did not "work" for me. There would be too strong an argument to show that family life did not work

either, nor sex, nor profession. I must take responsibility for my actions, and acknowledge that *nothing* worked as long as I continued to drink. Even after I quit, the benefits of AA were slow in being realized. My recovery was hampered by too many self-imposed restrictions that I could not let go of, because I did not believe that the Second Step could help me — if, indeed, it even applied to me.

As we know, two of the characteristics of the mental aspect of alcoholism are obsessiveness and rationalization. Years before I started drinking, the patterns of obsessiveness were developing. At the movies, for example, as a teenager, if going to one show was exciting, then two would be more exciting. There were countless times I would have sat through a third go-around if somebody hadn't dragged me out.

That same pattern surfaced in the area of romantic love. I was forever "in love," and moved quickly from one love object to another. I have since come to recognize that the love objects meant little. I obsessed on the romance of love itself. While it might be disputed whether this was a form of insanity, it certainly made my life unmanageable.

In those years I had no idea of the nature (or the existence) of alcoholism, let alone the faith that a Higher Power could restore me to wholeness. I saw nothing wrong with the intensity of my feelings or ideas, and could readily rationalize these feelings by

citing my natural superiority.

Those were some of the old ways that I brought into AA — some of the old ways that I clung to for a dry decade.

*"Our founders
do not tell us
how long it took
them to come to
believe, nor do they
prescribe how long
it should take us"*

I used to worry over my apparent lack of progress in those ten years. It was an older, wiser member who pointed out something to me — the wide latitude we are offered by the words "came to believe." Our founders do not tell us how long it took them to come to believe, nor do they prescribe how long it should take us. Of course, the area of sanity we are primarily concerned with is that of our drinking patterns and compulsions. I used to believe that the Step was concerned only with that area. But as my mind cleared, I became aware of the confusion existing in so many other areas — confusion and unmanageability.

The benefits of restoration needed

to be brought to bear on very practical, down-to-earth problems. For example, I was unable to discipline myself sufficiently so that I could save money. I got results once I faced up to and admitted my powerlessness over the problem area. I got results when I came to believe that God, as I understood him, could restore enough order to my mind and could strengthen my resolve, so that I would no longer have to spend money indiscriminately.

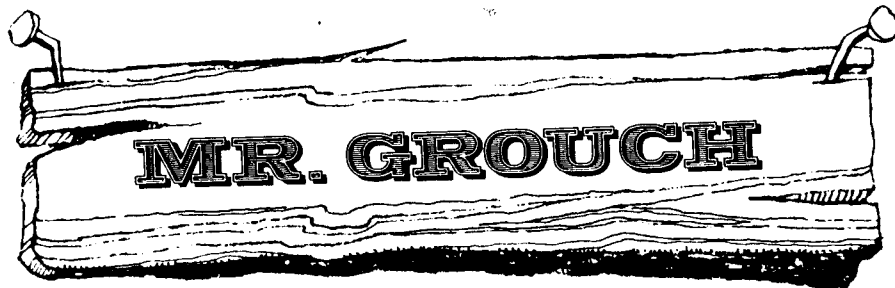
Accepting this Step is not an easy matter. But consider this. How often have you heard a fellow AA lament that he or she is stymied and stuck at the Second Step? He cannot believe

one hundred percent in a Higher Power, or cannot admit to insanity. He may fear hidden religious implications. Yet the same AA will tell us, in the very next breath, that he has had an impossible day, with one madness piled on top of another — and thank goodness for the AA meeting!

In other words, his sanity could be restored only at the meeting. What else is that but the Second Step in action?

If I were to formulate a slogan-type name for this Step, I would call it “the restoration Step!” But whatever I call it, like alcoholism itself, it is what I do about it that counts.

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.



MR. GROUCH

The celebration of my second AA birthday didn't seem quite as joyous as I had anticipated it would be. In a dark corner of my mind something kept nagging at me that it could have been better. True, I had gone through that year without drinking. I had attended a lot of meetings. My circle of friends had grown considerably. The pleasures of watching other alcoholics grow into sober human beings were real. I had made a few talks and I had been trying to work with others. But looking back I know I was running scared. Serenity just wasn't there. Sometimes it was hard to maintain a pleasant attitude. Yet I was proud of the fact that one of my pigeons had told me I made him feel comfortable because I was always the same. Even he had quit calling as often and I found myself worrying about him.

One evening after a meeting I was talking to a lady everyone admires and I confessed to her that I no longer had a sponsor — that I used everyone for a sponsor. Still I knew in my heart that I needed a sponsor and that even though I was attending meetings and “going through the motions,” I wasn't really working my program.

Her suggestion was that I start praying. “Just ask God to help you find the right sponsor for you,” she said. And I started doing that. I found myself trying to control God in doing this, however. I weighed each candidate very carefully. This person had to be just right. And everyone I considered failed the test. Probably I was looking for someone to pat me on the back and tell me I was doing well. Then the serenity would come and I would be okay. The considerations and rejections continued in my mind.

At some of the meetings I attend there are people who arrive early so they can socialize before the meeting since they must leave soon afterward for work. I had started going early so I could talk with these people, and I had expressed some of my concerns to them.

One evening one of my friends looked me right in the eye while he said to another man whom I had never really liked, “This guy needs a temporary sponsor. Why don't you take him on?” His reply was, “He hasn't asked me.”

It seemed terribly quiet to me. I didn't really want this guy for a sponsor. He was big and grouchy and gruff

and loud and he knew too much about AA. He made me uncomfortable. It just seemed like every time he looked at me he was looking right down inside me and I didn't like it at all.

The silence continued and I felt my color rise. Finally out of sheer desperation I blurted out something like, “I thought you probably had all the pigeons you could handle.” I really do not recall what his answer was, but the deal was sealed. Mr. Grouch called me over to a corner and started asking me questions. “Do you read your Big Book? Have you taken your Fourth and Fifth Steps?” I didn't want to hear these things. The Fourth and Fifth Steps were really out of the question. I had taken my own inventory and burned it, but I didn't see how I could ever discuss it with anyone else.

However, I agreed that I would reread the fifth chapter in the Big Book. As the days went by, I read the sixth and seventh chapters also. And I read the Book of James in the Bible.

I confessed to my sponsor that I had been working on my Fourth Step and that in doing so I was having trouble sleeping. This continued for several nights. He told me that I should go ahead and complete it and that if I felt the need to take the Fifth Step with a clergyman rather than him that would be okay. He said he would be available if I needed him, but suggested that I not put it off any longer than necessary. We made tentative plans to meet on the following Tuesday. In my mind the Fifth Step

had ballooned into gigantic proportions and I was scared spitless.

Early Monday morning the phone rang. I was eating breakfast and my sponsor said, “What are your plans for today?” Before I knew what had hit me, I was at his home and the coffee was on. The stage was set. I thought I would die.

For the first time in my life I tried to honestly tell all the most vile and despicable things I had ever done. And there were some moments that helped me see some of the good things about me, too.

This man that I had feared listened quietly, offering only small comments here and there. And I began to see him in a different light. He didn't throw me out of his house in disgust. He didn't judge me. I didn't cry. I didn't hyperventilate or vomit. I didn't get killed.

Suddenly I realized that I had gone through it all and I was made to realize that to err is human. We were sitting there quietly, talking and drinking coffee. He said that now, since I had worked those Steps, I could go on to others. I could start growing again.

That night I slept like a baby. I still feel good about myself. I know now why we are told to get a sponsor and home group, to read the Big Book, to attend a lot of meetings, and to stay away from the first drink.

In my heart I believe that God answered my prayers. He helped me find the right sponsor for me. He is doing for me the things I can't do for myself.

C. B., Valley Station, Ky.

June 1986

GIMME A GIMME GIMME GIMME GIMME

th

There were a lot of times I went to the liquor store and said, "Gimme a Fifth." You can imagine the results of that request. I usually got drunk, thrown in jail, and very sick the next day. I can then remember pleading the "Fifth" for my behavior the night before and fantasizing about making "Fifth Avenue" when I got out. But just recently I celebrated my "Fifth" birthday in the program of AA. That was a "Fifth" of the "good stuff" if you ask me.

Given to impulsive, irresponsible behavior that could not be controlled for any length of time, I was an emotional child walking around with an adult's body. On the job when things didn't go my way, I'd quit. At home, I'd blow up and run out to get drunk. The tools I used then were rationalization and projection. Then in AA I was given a simple kit of spiritual tools. When I used them correctly, I experienced a new sensation: growing pains! And I learned another new

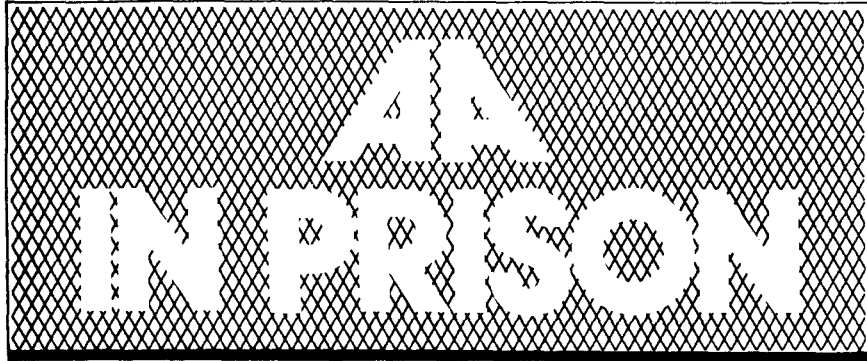
feeling — it was called peace of mind.

In small doses I was able to accept things I could not change. It was no longer necessary to be upset all the time. I found I didn't have to stumble along from crisis to crisis. I was told that "things" were okay and that people were permitted to be wrong. How amazing that it has only taken five years for just a little of this "stuff" to sink in.

In the old days when I had a Fifth there was love. But it was never enough or it wasn't the right kind. I didn't love you people in AA at first. Neither was I sure you were telling the truth when you said you loved *me*. There was the confusion of love and sex, or love and weakness in my mind. But like the old-timers said, "This too shall pass."

Today I have a love for myself, the people, and the program that I never dreamed possible. I would dearly love to have another "Fifth" (of AA).

R. R., Hohenwald, Tenn.



“**B**ring only your passport and 15,000 soles,” my friend had told me. “Nothing else. Don’t wear a belt. The guards at the prison won’t let you wear it in and then you’ll never see it again.”

Such were my instructions the night before our Twelfth Step call upon several incarcerated alcoholics.

dle of construction.

We arrived in Lurigancho, the “pueblo Joven” (literally, “young town”; actually, “shantytown”) where the prison taking its name from the area stands up hard against barren hills that vaguely suggest the Andes beyond. Outside, a line of visitors a half-mile long had already

New Life in Lurigancho

Lima, Peru, is surrounded by grim, dusty barrios of adobe and straw huts that stretch on like a puzzle before one’s unaccustomed eyes. From one of the better parts of town we drove through several of these bleak areas. The paved road ended and we traveled over dirt roads seemingly abandoned ten years previously in the mid-

formed by 8:30 AM. Nasty-looking guards strolled about, occasionally abusing a vendor or visitor who crossed them. “Here, I am in charge!” one yelled, as he pushed a woman selling juice out of his way.

During the drive from the comfortable house of my Peruvian hosts to this dusty scene of disorder, I was

rather distracted by... yes, self-centered fear. “What if there’s a mix-up and I am left inside the prison? What if some inmates kidnap me? What if there’s a riot while we’re inside?” I thought.

Perhaps you too have been crippled by the “what if’s.” But then, something from the Big Book came to mind, something along the lines of not hesitating to visit even the most sordid place on earth if you can be of service. God would be there. During those few moments when my motives are truly good, and I am sure about God’s work, I always feel completely safe. (Conversely, it tells me how insecure I often am during daily life.)

“We’ll never get in if we have to get on that line,” my friend exclaimed. So he led me on a ritual with different guards, each of whom he addressed with great respect. One laughed and turned his back, another sent us to the back of the line. Undeterred, we approached a third, showing our documents: a letter of authorization from some official; my missionary visa from another country; a church bulletin with my friend’s name on it. “A friend of Bill Wilson” was not useful status with these guards, whose brutality is such that the government does not allow them within the prison walls. Inside, unarmed civilian guards do the work.

The last guard relented and in we went, passing through three checkpoints and four locked doors. The nonviolent prisoners are kept in a separate pavilion, heavily barricaded

in case of a breakout or riot by the violent prisoners. Finally, within the building holding foreign nationals, we spotted our man on the other side of the barred door. He came forth to greet us, smiling. I was stunned. Imagine, smiling in such a place. Behind him, a scene from the Inferno appeared — anarchy in an open cell block. People were everywhere, doing everything. And there stood “Ken,” sober and happy.

Once inside, we sat down at a rough wooden table with three men, two Americans and one European. They secured some eggs, bread, and coffee for us from a vendor. The prison has a thriving cash economy for food, medicine, clothing, bedding, drugs, and alcohol as well. One needs money to survive. Left to the meager provisions of the authorities, one can suffer illness and malnutrition.

“We’ve been sober for a week,” Ken and the other American told us. It seemed a most impressive accomplishment. The third man was also sober, but he did not say for how long. The three of them had that light in their eyes and joy on their faces that we see in those who delight in their sobriety. I had little to say, I was so absorbed. Ken spoke of how “We had been reading the Bible recently, and were at the section, in Mark I think, where it says something about ‘when you visited those in prison, you visited me.’” His friend interrupted, “Well, actually it said, ‘when you came unto me in prison,’ and there is

a big difference between 'coming unto' and just 'visiting.'"

The citation may not have been right, and the quotation paraphrased, but never have those words been so alive for me. It was a moment when familiar words were suddenly fraught with a new and fuller meaning, a meaning beyond words. I was overcome with emotion, with gratitude, with enlightenment. Our friends there in Lurigancho thought we had done them a favor, while I felt myself to be quite the recipient. Familiar words were given new life.

"We've been sober for a week." Those words meant that a miracle had taken place. Yes, it is always a miracle, but during my first week of sobriety I had endless meetings and new friends to help me. There was a place I called home, encouragement from family and friends, and the liberty to remove myself from disturbing influences. These three recovering alcoholics were holding on in one of the worst prisons in the free world.

"We've been sober for a week." The words told us, "Yes, we're in a hellhole, but we're not drinking and we're happy about it." Sometimes we just have to hear the words in a certain situation for the deeper significance to hit us. Other times the words coming out of our own mouths mean more given the circumstances.

Earlier this year, I studied Spanish in Quito, Ecuador, for six weeks. The AA meetings I attended there could have been in Russian for all that I

understood. Yet the sentiment was clear. It was the sentiment, the consensus that fires every meeting: "We are alcoholics who want to live." Once, I did understand a man who was shouting rhetorically, "We understand the alcoholic..." Isn't that the basic message of every meeting? At my first meetings, I had a strong reaction to something foreign in the air. These people understood me! While I was drinking, friends, family, girlfriends had all offered advice, suggestions, pity, bewilderment, vague and often misplaced hope, but they did not, they could not understand. They were not recovering alcoholics. The words "we understand" gave me another chance to live.

Every meeting, every encounter with another member of Alcoholics Anonymous offers that blessed opportunity to be with someone who understands. And my presence announces that I want to live, rather than die from drinking. On both sides, I can grow complacent and forget the message behind the words. My friend in Quito had to shout, repeatedly, "we understand" for me to remember thankfully, "Yes, they do." The words are at every meeting. Because someone understands, I do not have to die. Because someone will listen, I can live.

I can tell my story though, or parts of it, with little feeling, the words just coming forth, barely beckoned. Words are then like little objects I toss out toward others as a matter of protocol. "My first drink was at my

sister's wedding...I came to AA when I was about to die...nowhere else to go." Yawn. "Well," I think, "I am at a meeting. I should be saying these things."

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understands"*

Several weeks in Quito had passed. I sat mutely through four meetings, and the only real encounters with other alcoholics were through the mail. Desperate action was called for. I waylaid a man after a meeting and conveyed my need to talk. We made a date, met, and after pleasantries he asked "Porque te unistes Alcoholicos Anonimos?" (Why did you join Alcoholics Anonymous?)

Over a million AAs in 114 countries reached out to me in that question. Every meeting asks that question, my every attendance answers it. Rarely have I answered with such feeling, such eagerness. Rarely have the words of the query been so pregnant with invitation, hope, help, promise. In the words of my reply I

explain myself and save my life. That afternoon, in a forty-five-minute torrent of broken Spanish, I did just that. Words, other times tired and stale, had life.

There are days when I look forlornly back on my past, and contemplate the "young man of promise" whose brilliant career I imagine to have been arbitrarily derailed by alcoholism. The great dreams have been drearily replaced by a colorless struggle not to pick up the next drink. At the end of such days, I sadly conclude, "All I did today was not drink..." But then it can grip me, "I did not drink!" And the words can come alive with the miles of meaning behind them. "I am sober! I am alive! And I almost died from drinking."

Last month, I endured an eleven-hour truck ride, sitting on a plank, along a dirt road down from the Andean village I live in, to the nearest city, 9,000 feet below on the coast. The scenery lost its charm, and as we stopped for the fifth time to strap the suspension springs together with rope and logs I could only think, "How boring. How pointless." Then I recalled the utter boredom of daily life back in the dark ages, and how I drank to fend off life. Morosely I consoled myself, "But I'm sober." Then, great awareness of the miracle galvanized me. "Yes! I'm sober. I haven't had a drink today." I looked at my fellow dust-covered weary passengers sitting around me. "How about that!" I thought.

C. R., Macate via Chimbote, Peru

Along for the Ride

By the grace of God and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I've not been back to skid row for over thirteen months — except to go to the Salvation Army where I have the pleasure of chairing the Thursday night AA meeting. It was at this meeting that the experience I would like to relate had its beginnings.

Upon entering the meeting room one evening, I noticed a familiar face. It was a "sally tramp," which is what we call ourselves, whom I had last seen a few years earlier in Little Rock, Arkansas. The look on his face when he recognized me was proof that Alcoholics Anonymous does work. I looked like a new man. The last time he had seen me I had looked like I was about to die, and can honestly say I felt that way too.

After the meeting I gave him my phone number, and four days later he gave me a call. He wanted to go to a meeting, he said, and I told him to meet me at the local alcoholic retaining center where they had meetings every night. I knew he was familiar with AA because in many of the Salvation Army rehabilitation centers across the country (and we were both veterans of such places) you have

to admit you are an alcoholic and agree to attend AA meetings in order to get in.

My sponsor had always told me that to retain what I had freely received (sobriety), I had to be willing to give it away, and I was hoping my old acquaintance wanted what I had. On my way to the meeting, I stopped and picked up another AA member who, like me and my old acquaintance, had been the Salvation Army route.

My old friend was at the meeting as he said he would be, and afterward he told me his story and his financial situation. I gave him a couple of dollars, all I had on me, and told him that if he'd call me the next day I'd try to get him into a treatment center in town. He didn't seem too excited by that prospect, though, and suddenly disappeared.

I left the meeting with my AA friend and some other members, and we decided to go to a restaurant for coffee and to talk. On the way to the restaurant we passed my old friend again on a street corner, and somebody asked me, "Hey, isn't that your buddy from the meeting?" I said it was, and suddenly we decided to bring him along for coffee and afterward give him a place to stay. I mentioned

to my AA friend how lucky we were, since it could easily have been us out there on the streets lonely, cold, defeated, hungry, and without hope.

*"I'd done all
I could to carry
the message and
now I had to wait
for God, in his
infinite wisdom,
to deliver it
in his own way"*

My AA friend kept the sally tramp at his place for a couple of nights, and then he stayed at my house for four days. But on a Sunday morning, I got up at four o'clock to go to work as usual, and when I returned that evening the sally tramp was gone — and so was all the change I had accumulated on top of my refrigerator. After taking a quick inventory of the place, the only other thing I could see was missing was my old jacket, which was nice and warm and a friendly memento of my own tramping days. I came to the conclusion that he had hit the road again.

As has been suggested to me over and over in AA, I went and found another sober alcoholic to talk to about the situation. I knew I was powerless and had to accept what had hap-

pened. I have been ripped off before, but instead of the usual anger, I realized that this fellow alcoholic's life was far more important than the few material things I had lost. The AA member I was talking to understood, and we came to the conclusion that I'd done all I could to carry the message and now I had to wait for God, in his infinite wisdom, to deliver it in his own way.

The following morning, I went to work as usual, but before the day was over I had been laid off. I again turned to a sober alcoholic to share the situation, and I decided that since I now had no job but enough money to tide me over for a while, I would go on a short vacation. I had been working every day for a year and felt I was ready for a break. I have family in California and in El Paso, Texas, and I decided to go to El Paso for a visit, to let my family see the sober me and maybe even to make some amends.

At eight o'clock the following morning, I left for El Paso. About forty miles out of Tucson I saw a hitchhiker on the side of the road. Since I used to hitchhike myself and knew the feeling of needing a ride, I pulled over. As I was backing up to pick up the hitchhiker, I recognized the jacket he had on as the one I was missing. And when he walked up to the car, I knew it was the sally tramp. I could not believe my eyes. These thoughts came to my mind in an instant: this was Tuesday; he left on Sunday; this was only forty miles from home; if I'd not been laid off

exactly when I was, I wouldn't have taken this trip; I had chosen to go to El Paso (east) instead of California (west). It was almost too much to handle. But believe me, I was not the only one with a multitude of thoughts flashing through his mind. From the look on his face, the sally tramp was quite beside himself, too. Silently, I asked my Higher Power what to do.

Instinctively, I reached across the front seat to open the door and let him in. I asked where he was headed, and he replied that maybe he was going to Corpus Christi for a while, and then maybe on to Florida. I looked at him and realized I was looking at a reflection of myself just a short thirteen months before. My Higher Power was using this man to show me and to remind me of what and where I had been before turning my life and will over to his care.

I told my old friend I felt that God was trying to tell us something, else why would we have met again, especially in these circumstances. I explained that for me this was how God worked, by using one drunk to help another. I told him I understood his disease and that perhaps he should

give himself another chance (as it might be his last), and go back to Tucson and give AA another try, an honest one this time. I said that I'd take him to El Paso with me if he wanted, and then back to Tucson in a couple of days.

He looked at me and said, "You mean you're willing to give me another chance after what I've done to you?" I told him I was. I explained that I used to do the same things he was doing now, at least before I had found a God of my own understanding, a little bit of hope, and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

What an experience it was for me when I watched his face as he told me that his God (the one he *wanted* to try and understand) and *my* God must be in touch with each other. He then told me he was willing to give the program an honest try and would return with me to Tucson.

There by the side of the road, a feeling of utter peace came over me and I felt this to be a spiritual experience. I realized that God was working in this man's life as he had been working in mine all along.

R. F., Tucson, Ariz.

I Don't Chase Unicorns Anymore



My name is not a household word; it doesn't flash in neon before the public eye. I have received no major literary awards, no citations for heroism. Yet I feel good about myself. This is a remarkable claim to issue from the lips of a lifelong perfectionist who based self-worth entirely on outward recognition.

Five and a half years ago, I admitted to being powerless over alcohol and to living a completely unmanageable life. But I hid a feeling of worthlessness under a veneer of confidence

and grandiose dreams. Conveniently, I blamed my low self-esteem on an overcritical family which demanded better than my best. Internalizing these familial expectations, I doggedly expected the impossible from myself and from others.

As the fog lifted by degrees and I started "working" the Steps, I wondered when the wonderful promise of self-confidence would ever come true. I paid lip service to "Easy Does It," "One Day at a Time," "Keep It Simple," and Step Two (belief that

God would restore me to sanity). I didn't really turn my will and life over to God (Step Three), but persevered in chasing rainbows. I morbidly reflected on my defects in Steps Four and Five; I shouted orders to God to remove this and that, now, in Steps Six and Seven. I made amends only when unavoidable in Steps Eight and Nine. And I practiced the maintenance Steps (Ten, Eleven, and Twelve) only when desperate and cornered.

Receiving my fifth-year medallion in July 1985 was traumatic. I felt I didn't deserve it because I had been on so many dry drunks. Paralyzed by guilt, I took a gigantic negative self-inventory, and if an area of my life looked trouble-free, I invented problems just to punish myself.

Slowly it dawned on me that I better redo Step Three. Relinquishing some of the control over my life did relieve my self-induced depressions; however, I still spouted a lot of negativity. My spontaneous remarks illuminated my critical attitude toward others and made it clear that I had displaced my own self-doubts onto my husband and daughter. In meditation, God placed a thought in my mind too strong to ignore: return to Step Two!

It became clear that in my pursuit of fame and outward recognition, I had never arrived at the gut-level, no-reservations belief that God would restore me to sanity in his own time and his own way, if I would let him! I wholeheartedly studied Step Two in

the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve." I slowed down and applied what I read. Each time my negative script surfaced, I would chant, "God's in charge. He'll restore me to sanity."

Needless pressures and fears dropped away. I began to see myself and life realistically. My best, guided by God, is all I can give. Happiness lies in setting possible, attainable goals. I let go of my unreasonable idealism and accepted my strengths and limitations as a wife, mother, writer, friend, AA member (and secondarily, Al-Anon member), and sportsperson.

Today I work the Steps and slogans as best I can. Self-worth comes not from working the Steps 100 percent, but from turning my recovery over to God and AA, and trusting that it will work. Smelling the roses is far more gratifying than chasing after unicorns. Strengthening my good points (Steps Four through Seven) is a far more positive enterprise than bemoaning my defects. A good foundation (Steps One through Three) gives me the faith and trust to be positive. In turn, I feel good enough to initiate honest amends (Steps Eight and Nine), apologize promptly (Step Ten), do God's legwork (Step Eleven), and carry the message (Step Twelve).

To be myself and to like myself is what God, through people and meditation, has been trying to tell me all along.

K. F., Parry Sound, Ont.



I used to wonder why people said that our Twelfth Step work is something we do for ourselves instead of a conscious effort to help others. This bothered me. What was the point of it unless we knew the consequences of what we did? One day a speaker answered my question when he told the following story:

An Eastern legend tells of a nightingale that sang in an emperor's garden. Each day at dusk, the bird poured forth its melodious notes for the sheer joy of singing. It had no thought about how its song might touch the hearts of those who heard it.

On one occasion the emperor paused to listen. Deeply worried about problems in his kingdom, he was near a nervous breakdown when he happened to hear the nightingale's song. In spite of himself, he was carried away. Forgetting his own troubles for a while, he listened to the beautiful notes. Then he went about his business refreshed, able to take a new approach that allowed him to solve the problem that before had

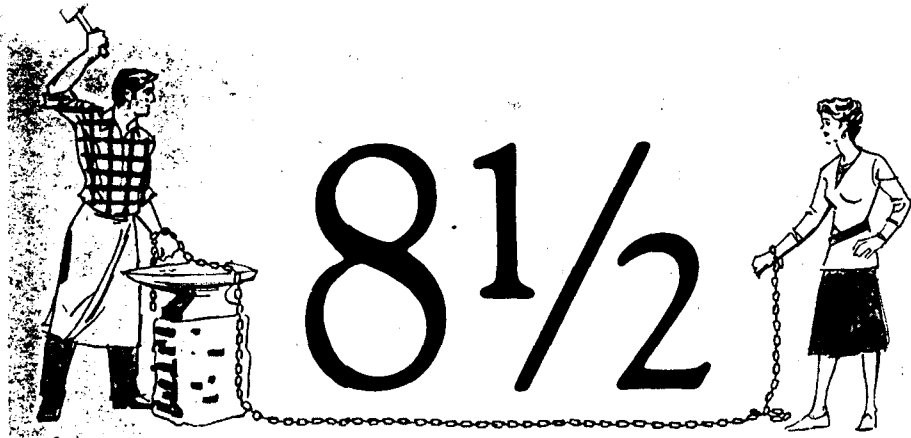
troubled him so gravely.

Another listener was the emperor's wife — a dour, crabbed old lady who was weighted down by her own self-importance. On this evening she, too, paused to listen to the singing bird. Its melodious notes reminded her of happier times many years before when she used to sing in this same peaceful garden.

Without thinking about what she was doing, the empress began to hum softly. Was it possible that life could still be beautiful if she could let go of her worries and live only in the present? She began to sing along with the nightingale as hope was reborn within her heart.

"In our Twelfth Step work we need to be like that bird," the speaker concluded. "Willing to give without thought of return as we carry AA's message of hope, unaware of the power that the message brings — and even less aware of the troubled hearts we may touch with these thoughts of truth and love."

G. B., Alexandria, Va.



As I continue to live each twenty-four hours in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and attempt to practice its principles in all my affairs, one Step seems to play an increasingly important role in my life and in my relationships with others. This quiet but potent Step is Step Eight: "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

Many people, myself included, tend to lump Steps Eight and Nine together. By doing this, I never really achieved even a glimmer of the humility and love that Step Eight has to offer. Being a person of impatient actions, I was off and running on Step Nine with a simple list of names tightly grasped in my sweaty hand and a bad case of false humility to go along with it. Needless to say, I came home each evening with a battered sense of justice and my tail tucked underneath me.

As usual, I did not read all the words contained in the Step, and, just as I had done in Step One, I read only

the first half before jumping to the next Step. The resulting self-induced pain has, however, taught me much about myself and the principles of this simple program.

Going back to Step Eight, I read the words at last, "... became willing to make amends to them all." As I began to absorb what was being said to me, and as I reviewed the first seven Steps leading up to this one, it suddenly became clear what the message was for me and what the hasty mistake of impatient interpretation had cost me in serenity. The word "identify" held the key to my success with this Step. To become willing means to become willing to identify myself in others. I had been using Step Eight not as preparation for Step Nine, which is the carrying out of that willingness, but as a hiding place for my own real fear of my true shortcomings. The purpose of Step Eight for me is not to hide but to identify. In order not to identify, I either condemned or forgave as if I were some kind of standard for com-

parison. In this Step I receive the humility to "identify," to see myself in others and to share their burdens and difficulties by sharing myself. In this Step I truly join the human race. My identification becomes my freedom — freedom from fear and anger. When I can identify my own shortcomings in another, the battleground between us is removed.

I cannot make an amends when I am still condemning or forgiving myself or the one I am making amends to, because of the judgment this implies. I have always found condemnation to be a lonely road and have always found forgiveness to be a confusing and impossible task. When I forgive someone I guess what I really mean to say is that I admit I

judge others. Forgiving and condemning are God's business, not mine. Only he has the mercy to judge and to accept at the same time. My job is to achieve enough humility to see myself in others and to accept both myself and others, by identifying. The willingness to make amends will grow from this act of love. When I become "willing to make amends to them all" I am saying to them, "your pain is my pain; when I hurt you, I hurt myself; I will try not to hurt you anymore."

When I have achieved this kind of willingness to identify, my Higher Power has always set up my amends and allowed both of us to grow from the love involved in such an act.

E. C., Bowling Green, Ky.

The Slopped SYSOP

Last August, I had an opportunity to make a very unusual Twelfth Step call. But let's start from the beginning...

I had my last drink on July 7, 1984. After four years of playing around with the program, I finally decided that this was no game, and if I didn't

get sober, and soon, I would most certainly die, or worse, continue living the painful life of a drunk. I finally wanted what AA had, definitely wanted no more of what I had, and was willing

to go to any length to get it! I started a program of action and slowly found the life that all sober AAs enjoy. A big part of this program of action was to carry the message to other alcoholics.

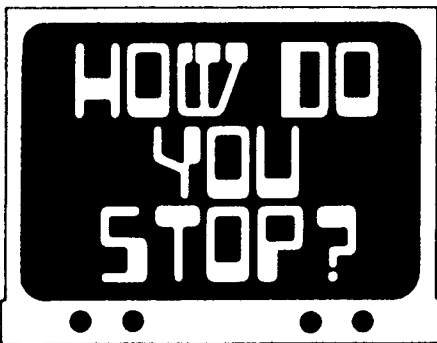
In the meantime, I had acquired a new passion, and that was calling electronic bulletin board systems

(BBS for short) with my home computer. For those who don't know what a BBS is, it is a computer that is maintained by a system operator (SYSOP) that runs a program which allows computer users who have a modem (a device that allows one computer to communicate with

another via telephone) to call and post messages on a public message base, and on some BBS's, exchange computer programs. Being a real alcoholic, I took to this new

obsession like a duck to water! My first telephone bill was \$212.00, and I soon decided that I had better try to keep my calls as local as possible. It's a good thing I didn't discover modeming during my drinking days, or I would have gotten into one heck of a lot of trouble!

One day, while accessing a BBS, I saw a message advertising another



BBS that was (happily) a local call. Making a note of the number, I finished my visit to the BBS that I was on and immediately afterward called this new local BBS.

The new BBS seemed like an average, normal BBS. It was a little bit slow as far as the frequency with which messages were entered, but very much like most others that I had called in the past. Within a few weeks I had started an exchange of private messages with the SYSOP (remember? that means system operator) and was surprised to find that the SYSOP was a female. Most SYSOPs are male, and, for that matter, so are most modemers (unfortunately).

We exchanged small talk at first, and then the SYSOP left me a message complaining about a friend of hers who was a terrible drunk. This friend, it turned out, was also a user of the BBS. Without revealing that I was a sober member of AA, I sent the SYSOP a message saying that I had been clean and sober for a year, and if her friend ever decided that he had enough, to put him in touch with me. She replied that she knew this drunk rather well, and that he would never stop drinking. I, in turn, replied, "I know a way to stop drinking, and all I am saying is that if your friend ever

wants to stop drinking, please put him in touch with me. If he doesn't want to stop, then don't bother him, because if that's the case, I can't be of any help to him." The SYSOP replied "He will never quit, but I know that I should quit drinking, because I'm an alcoholic."

Talk about "knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out"! That knowledge had just hit me between the eyes! I started to send another message to the SYSOP. I said, "Let's stop talking about your



friend and start talking about you. If you would like to be free of alcohol, I can show you how I was able to quit drinking." I had no sooner entered that line and was about to finish my mes-

sage when it became apparent that somebody on the other end had aborted my message, and I saw a prompt announcing that the system was entering the "chat mode," which means that the SYSOP was coming on line to type to me live. Slowly and sloppily, a question appeared on my monitor. "How do you stop?" it asked. At that point I suggested that we both pick up the telephone receiver and turn off our modems, which we did.

On the other end of the line was a very drunk young woman named Julie (not her real name), and I told

her that I had found sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous and invited her to come along with me to a meeting the following night — no strings attached. She seemed kind of skeptical, but decided that she had nothing to lose, so she would go.

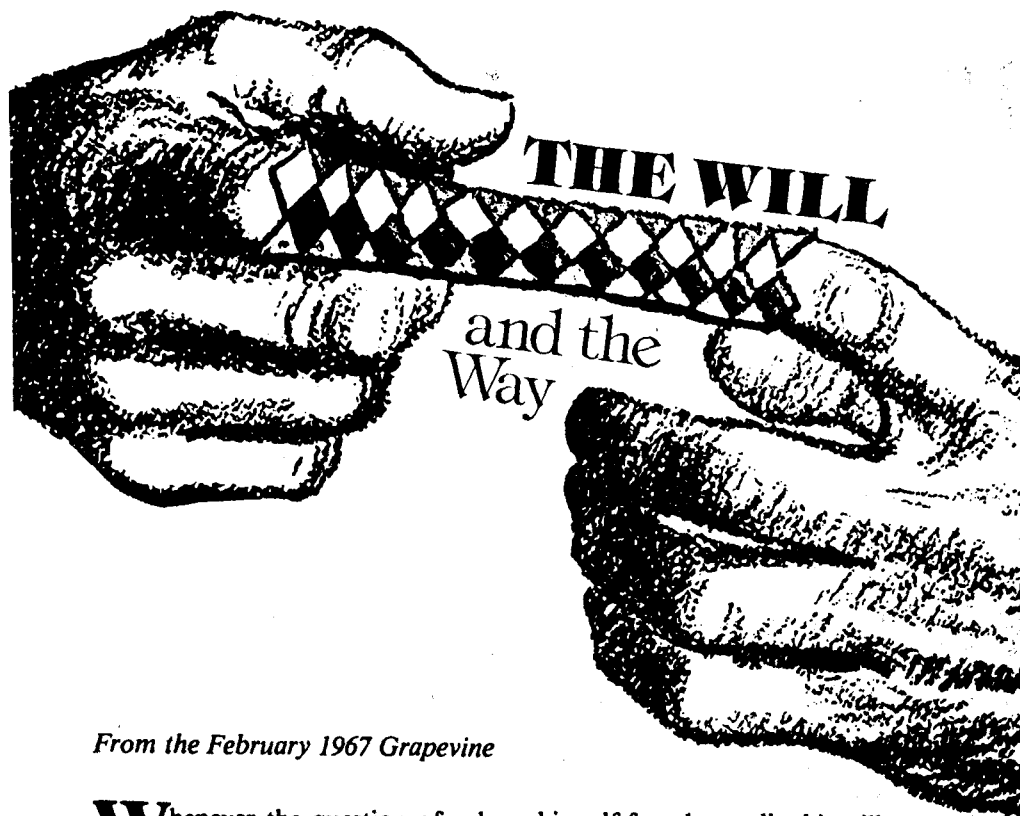
The following evening, we met at a restaurant where she told me she would meet me, and we went from there to a speaker meeting. I asked Julie if she would like to go to another meeting the following night. She seemed less than thrilled with that idea, but agreed anyway. I escorted my new friend to a meeting every night for the next thirty days, then I resumed my normal five meetings a week schedule. Julie kept going to meetings with me, and after a few months, got a female sponsor. I am happy to be able to tell you all that Julie has been sober for eight months now.

I often reflect back on this episode, marveling at the fact that Julie never drank anywhere but at home and managed to hold down a job during the day. She had few close friends and rarely socialized. The only way the AA message could ever have reached her would have been through

her computer, and despite this hurdle, the message got through.

This story in and of itself would be amazing enough, but there's more! Julie (with the aid of a nonalcoholic friend) has created a new message base expressly for AA members. It can only be accessed by a secret command which we have been passing on to other AAs who have computers and modems. To date, the "AA Message Base" has approximately fifteen users, one of whom is my AA sponsor who suffers from a bad heart condition, which keeps him from attending meetings most of the time. The AA Message Base is just like a closed meeting he can attend right from his bedroom, twenty-four hours a day. We have two callers from out of state, and the number of users is slowly increasing. The thought has occurred to us that this could be a perfect way to carry the message to AAs who can't attend meetings on a regular basis because of health problems, or AA Loners who live in rural areas too far away from regular meeting places. What a great new way to "carry the message to alcoholics"!

K. G., Los Angeles, Calif.



From the February 1967 Grapevine

Whenever the question of solving drinking problems by means of willpower arises, I think of the well-known Oriental finger puzzle. This finger puzzle, a dime-store item with a centuries-old history, is a plaited fiber sheath that fits the fingers snugly and has a diabolical way of gripping with increasing pressure the more one struggles to pull himself free. The irony in this entrapment is that a person's own exertion of strength is used to hold him fast.

The alcoholic's plight is a lot like that of the person caught in the finger puzzle. In his panicky struggles to set

himself free, he applies his willpower wrongly, thus making it another factor in his bondage. The more he consciously wills to quit drinking, it seems, the more often he fails and the harder he falls when he does fail.

We AA members have long known that willpower works this way in the alcoholic's life, but few of us really understand *why* it works this way. We have had to argue against the idea of using willpower without knowing the fundamental reasons that willpower doesn't work. What is willpower, anyway, and why has it become a negative element in the alco-

holic's life? Can it become a positive element in the alcoholic's life? Can it become an asset again when it is understood and properly directed?

The will is the individual's faculty of initiating *choice* and *desire*. The power of the will, obviously, is the personal factor in the ability to bring one's choices and desires into realization. When a determined individual arrives at a certain goal in spite of overwhelming odds, we recognize that his willpower is high. When a person fails even with everything going in his favor, we usually say it's because his will to succeed was weak.

But "willpower" is a somewhat misleading term, for the will is an executive or decision-making faculty and has no power of itself. The will must set other powers into action in order to achieve; unaided, it fails. It must also work intelligently. As one of our friends says, "A strong-willed person might want to pick up a house, but willpower alone won't do the job. He has to get help."

A strong will becomes a distinct liability when it is used unintelligently, and this misuse of the will seems to be at the heart of the alcoholic's personal problem. At some point in his life, he chose to drink under the delusion that it would bring him pleasure, poise, and friendship. The choice of alcohol was probably rather casual and innocent at first; but in time, it became a dominant, willful thing that demanded its way even when warning signals of every kind were beginning to flash. The alcoholic cannot use

willpower to stop drinking, because it is the will itself that is out of control; it is his own secret and swollen desire that is pulling him on toward disaster. As the hapless victim of the Oriental finger puzzle discovers, frantic efforts to yank himself free only bind him more tightly to his problem. "Self-will run riot," this terrible condition has been called.



It is harsh and unfair to say that an alcoholic's will is *entirely* given over to drinking even at this point. As a matter of fact, he most likely seems to be "double willed" at this stage, with at least one part of his nature protesting against the outrage of his compulsive drinking. Unfortunately, this warfare in his own will only makes the alcoholic more vacillating and erratic than ever, the "double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways."

Let us never forget that alcoholism is an illness. It is practically impossi-

ble to arrest an illness by means of a strong-willed frontal attack. An individual who attempted to use will-power to cure cancer or tuberculosis in himself would soon pay for this delusion with his life. The alcoholic is similarly helpless and ill.

Since it is the will that is out of control, how can an individual choose to regain mastery of his life and his affairs? The alcoholic's own dominant desires are destroying him, so how can the will be counted on to originate choices and desires that will lead to recovery?

The answer, I believe, lies in Thomas Aquinas' explanation of the nature of the will. As Aquinas explained it, the will always chooses the individual's good. When it makes bad choices (as when the alcoholic first willed to drink), it does so through ignorance and error. Since the tendency of the will is to choose the individual's good, it follows that the will starts to initiate new choices and new desires once the folly of the former choices has been revealed.

In this self-healing process, the will goes to work and builds up an intense desire to stop drinking. Though the alcoholic has lost the power of choice where drink is concerned, he can at least choose to contact sources of help. He *wills* to pick up the telephone to call for help; he *wills* to go to the AA meeting; and he *wills* to expose himself to the AA Fellowship and its ideas. Powers beyond those of the will then come to the alcoholic's aid and do their redemptive work.

Now, the will is becoming an asset instead of a liability, and it has freely chosen a new way which it construes to be for the individual's good. The way begins with the admission of defeat: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable."

To return to the analogy of the Oriental finger puzzle: The individual recognizes that he cannot pull himself free, so he gives up the struggle. At this point, though he may not realize it, he is already on his way out of the trap, for he is no longer contributing his own energies to the instrument that has been binding him. Alcohol has no power other than what we give it, and we unwittingly reinforced the desire to drink during those times when we fought savage mental battles to "stay on the wagon." We were really thinking about drinking when we were scheming to stave off the desire to drink, and may have even rehearsed future drinking bouts without realizing it!

The next step on the way describes a brief period of transition, during which the wrong application of the will is supplanted by one that works: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

What is restoration to sanity? For most alcoholics, it is simply being restored to a condition in which we are able to use our natural endowments and energies creatively instead of destructively. We are no longer forced to preside over our own debasement.

And what is a Power greater than ourselves? This Power is God, of course, but not a God who is a distant and unapproachable potentate of the universe. Our Higher Power, at least for us, is perceived as an indwelling Presence whose activity is *here* and *now*. The individual selves undergoing restoration to sanity are the *former* selves, the selves who made ignorant and shortsighted choices that led to alcoholic ruin. In each of us, a new and higher self is found through the grace of a Higher Power. Did this higher self come from outside the alcoholic's own being or was it with him all the time, waiting only to be discovered? Perhaps it was a little of both, as when an electric light bulb is connected to a circuit — the illumination comes both from the bulb's own structure and from the power flowing through the circuit.

With the Third Step on the way, the self-healing process of the will is well on the road to completion: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*."

We are back to the will again, and in this Step, we seem to be abandoning it altogether, giving up all personal freedom as well as personal choice. We are turning our will and our lives back to the Source, who is said to have given us free will and life in the first place.

Why should it be necessary to do this? Why was man given free will in the first place if he was so prone to misuse it? If God's concern for man

is as absolute as it's supposed to be, why did he ever let man have the power of choice and decision? Why did he give man free will if he wanted man to resubmit his will at some future time?

I can only speculate that it was necessary for us to have free will in order to have individuality. Free will is a good thing, though it became a temporary liability when it was used wrongly. But the will itself, after choosing the road to disaster, reversed its own choices and elected to follow a new way. So we were given a free will that could make mistakes, but could also correct its own mistakes. Surely, this natural self-healing tendency of the will must have been God-given.

When we choose to accept the Third Step and to let the Supreme Power of the universe operate as will in us, we do not really give up our personal will and personal freedom. In truth, we only put our will and our lives on a spiritual basis. We grow into a conscious contact with divine will instead of the self-will that ran riot. To the extent that we are able to maintain this contact and let divine will work in us and through us, our choices and desires result in lasting happiness and success.

Some of us have had to work against a belief that God's will for us meant groveling self-abasement and perpetual suffering. But it was the old self-will that brought abasement and suffering; in God's realm, the will and its actions are consistently good.

If he makes his will known to us and gives us the power to carry that will out, the result can only be good for all concerned. As Ernest Holmes wrote, "...we should interpret the will of God to be everything that expresses life without hurt. This seems to be a fair, logical, sane, and intelligent criterion. Anything that will enable us to express greater life, greater happiness, greater power — so long as it does not harm anyone — must be the will of God for us."

Once the human will has made the choice to reunite with the divine will, the will is restored to its role as a permanent asset instead of a temporary liability. There is no loss of freedom in this decision, for we are always free to do anything that expresses life without

hurt. I understand God as love, and this love, for all I know, is reaching out from every point in the universe with no other purpose than to live through you and through me. This love gives us perfect freedom to do any good thing. It is always good. It is always intelligence. It is always God. I hope I never desire another way than that of love.

Meanwhile over in the twilight world of the self-will, John Barleycorn is playing the Oriental finger trick on a lot of strong-willed but basically good people. I pray that we members of Alcoholics Anonymous keep the way to freedom well lighted for the day when they find the will to seek it.

M. B., Jackson, Mich.

MAY THE FOURTH BE WITH YOU



Of all the Twelve Steps, it seems the one most commonly rationalized and postponed is the Fourth. I had a bookful of "reasons" for not involving myself with it.

After all, it was bad enough that I had to admit defeat (First Step), without having to look at why I was defeated, at what was wrong with me (as if anything could have been *that* wrong!).

For the first ten years of my sobriety, I fought especially hard against the Fourth. How did I survive without taking inventory? By playing

word games and becoming pretty adept at them. For example, jealousy was one of my most grievous shortcomings. By calling it rancor, I gave it literary value and thus made it acceptable, even desirable. Possessiveness: I regarded it as the only civilized way to show affection. Do I need to add that I civilized more than one romantic relationship right out of my life, and ruined several budding friendships? Fear was one of the most corrosive characteristics that clung to

me, and I to it; yet I persisted in calling it caution or alertness.

I remember making a discovery about this Step that helped a lot. The word "moral" used to bother me, until I noticed that the word is not used once in the Big Book's discussion on the Fourth. Instead, we read of *personal* inventory. A welcome discovery, because the word moral had been inextricably woven through the daily "don'ts" of my childhood religion.

The idea of fearlessness posed a special problem. How could I be fearless confronted by what seemed a horrendous task? When I was finally willing and ready to face up to it, the answer was forthcoming. The same Higher Power that was restoring me to sanity could wrap me round in a cloak of courage. God, as I understood him, who held my life and my will in his care (Third Step), would not abandon me as I worked my way through personal stocktaking toward

the ultimate goal — carrying and living the message.

Speaking of messages, I used to work hard perfecting theatrical impressions I wanted to spring on AA groups as I traveled the local speakers' circuit. The type of meeting I preferred was closed discussion, where I could lovingly play the role of AA oracle. The open meeting (three speakers) was not my favorite choice. It would be too much of a hassle to get into the "right" slot. I had to be the last speaker, so that I could remember myself as the cleverest and the group could remember me as the humblest. What a relief to finally discover, thanks to the Fourth, that I did not have the last word!

There were a few questions that bothered me a lot, questions that bother some of us as we approach this Step for the first time.

Why do I have to do the Step at all? Of course, I don't "have to" do any of the Steps. But if I want to hold on to my sobriety, if I want to enhance it, I'd better do something about my old ways — those old ways that kept me drinking. How better to identify them than by writing them down? "Why not do what everyone else does," was the suggestion of an older, wiser member, "instead of insisting on doing it your way? Your way doesn't work, does it?"

How do I do it? It smacked of cruelty, to have to write down a list of weaknesses and strengths. Older members, however, said that was the way they did it. I made many attempts, but such was my resistance that it took a very, very long time before I could get at the festering trouble spots.

When should I do the Step? Perhaps the most predictable question, whichever Step is under discussion. As a group, we AAs seem to be, as my mother would have said, "bent and determined" to make up for lost time.

Well, did you ever hear of the theory of perpetual motion? It has to do with the idea, or principle, of a device which, once set in motion, would operate indefinitely by creating its own energy.

Consider how that theory becomes less of a theory and more of a fact in the life of a recovering alcoholic. In those localities, for instance, where ninety days are suggested before a newcomer can hold office or make an AA talk, if you ask that newcomer when he had his last drink, he can tell you without a moment's hesitation: "Fifty-six days, ten hours, and twenty-eight minutes ago!"

Were you like that? I was. I could not wait to find a new place to live or to begin a romantic relationship or to be happy or . . . I could not wait for speaking commitments or for twelfth-step calls or for jobs at the group level or . . . I was on the run from one phone call to the next, from one person to the next, and from

meeting to meeting. I could not wait for you to finish your sentence, but finished it for you!

The question of when to take the Fourth Step, like so much else in AA, is an individual matter. In the early history of our Fellowship, it was suggested that it be done (not attempted, but *done*) within the first weeks or, at the most, within the first few months. Today, there are thirty-day and sixty-day alcoholic rehabilitation programs where a patient is required to write out a Fourth Step, and to discuss it with a counselor (Fifth Step).

On the other hand, there are some AAs who believe it a more humane and workable plan to put off the Fourth for as long as a year.

Possibly the most useful tool we have to help us in working the Steps — the Fourth in particular — is sponsorship. In my view, there is no substitute in AA for the practical experience of the older AA member. The suggestion that I was given in the beginning is as valid now as it was then. "You don't have to do anything alone anymore," they said. I took them literally and would not go to the laundromat without an AA at my elbow. (That was not quite what they had in mind, of course.)

When we have grounded ourselves in the first three Steps, the Fourth usually follows relatively easily. Seems to me that's the reason it is not the Third, and not the Second either. Heaven forbid that it should ever have been the First!

W. H., Manhattan, N.Y.

The Write Stuff

I don't recall how many times we had actually discussed, then put off, attending a meeting in a neighboring community, but finally three of us "made a decision," a last-minute one at that, and took off on the seventeen-mile drive. It was a Tuesday night.

My sponsor, I, and the person who calls me sponsor drove down the road jabbering lightly about this and that, looking forward to a change of pace, and recalling the fact that none of us had been to a meeting in this particular town for at least a year.

As we drove into the Easy Does It Group's parking lot we were mildly surprised to recognize a fellow AA from our home group who had brought a newcomer, and as we all hurried in out of the icy winter air, our friend mentioned that he hadn't



been at this particular group for several months. None, I suppose, thought too much about it; we've grown accustomed to those kinds of pleasant coincidences almost to the point of taking them for granted.

In the old house we were promptly greeted with smiles, handshakes, and a cup of hot coffee.

I'm not a head counter, but my best guess was about twelve sober drunks sitting around an old Ping-Pong table, which was shoved against another table about the same size. In the table's center there was enough literature to start a small library.

As usual the meeting was opened with the Serenity Prayer, and the woman chairing the meeting made some apologetic statement about being unprepared and nervous because this was her first time. We introduced ourselves, then the chairperson asked another woman to read "How It Works."

At the precise moment the woman said, "Rarely have we seen a person fail..." I sensed something different about this meeting. I've heard "How It Works" read at least three thousand times and probably more. On any Tuesday night anywhere, the same part of chapter five is read, but on that night it seemed very special to my ears and I wondered if the others felt it, too.

The nervous woman chairing the meeting fumbled with some reading material in front of her, then announced she was going to read a short piece on sponsorship from the Grape-

vine. It seemed apropos. But when she began to read, moving through about two or three sentences, I felt my heart jump and my breath nearly sucked out of me. I nudged the friend next to me and whispered, "My God, I wrote that article! It must be four or five years old!"

After some of the surprise subsided and the woman finished with the one-page piece, my sponsor, reaching over to verify what he'd overheard me saying, mentioned that if we all wanted to consult the writer of the article, we could do so. The room filled with more delighted gasps, and discuss it we did. When it came my turn I had all I could do to contain myself.

After everyone had shared and we had closed with the Lord's Prayer, the lady who read out of chapter five came around the table and said, "That's the Higher Power!"

The chairperson was as surprised as the five of us, but when we inquired how she came upon that particular article, this is the story she told: "I got a call earlier this afternoon, and the regular chairperson said he couldn't make it and would I chair the meeting? I hadn't planned on coming because my daughter had a basketball game and I promised her to attend. We live in another town and I don't like to drive much during the winter, but I agreed. Before the game I was in the basement of our church doing some work, and a cleaning woman came up to me with a stack of booklets and small magazines. Much to my surprise I found

one Grapevine. This one. I took it to the game, and during half-time I began paging through it to look for a topic. I picked out two articles because they were short. When I got to the meeting I still hadn't made a decision about the topic, but when I opened the Grapevine it was this article — your article."

"Knowing you," my sponsor looked at me, "you probably had all this prearranged!"

We all laughed, and concluded it was one of those "against all odds" nights.

You see, I wrote that first Grapevine article in a little town where I was the first to get sober in AA, and I wrote it convinced it would end up in

someone's wastebasket. When I received an advance copy of the Grapevine with a note of thanks, I was as happy as a lark. A few years later we moved, then moved again, and the last time we moved it was back to my hometown and I truly wondered if I was in the right place. Today, whenever I hear someone in or out of AA talk about coincidence I get one of those brief but faraway looks and people probably wonder why. But it doesn't matter, not really, because on a Tuesday night, at another group I hadn't been to in a year, several of us witnessed the strange and mysterious ways of love. And for that I shall always be grateful.

J. V., Alexandria, Minn.

THE OLD ONE-TWO

I knew that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life was unmanageable before I ever hit the front door of my first AA meeting. It was why I looked for help and, somehow, was directed to the AA intergroup number in my local phone book.

It was no surprise nor was it a problem for me to accept Step One. However, even with my alcohol-numbed brain, I realized there had to be more to this program.

If Step One was all there is, where would I or anyone else be? The Step confirmed that I had a problem and told me specifically what that problem is. I may not be the smartest guy in the world, but I am not a total dummy! Where there is a problem, there must be a solution.

Aha! Step Two says that my desolation can be overcome, there is a way to solve the problem. So this is the secret; so this is the promise.

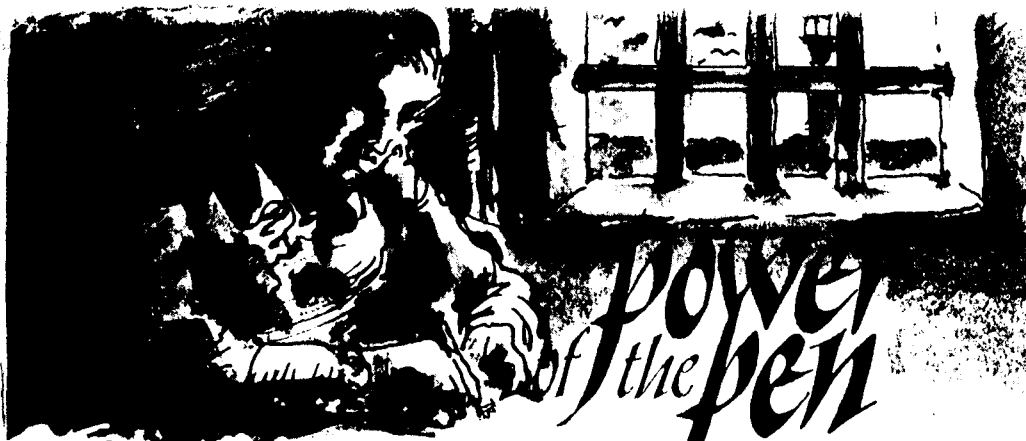
All of my drinking days I had a higher power. It was called alcohol.

Each time I faced something too big for me to handle I turned to the bottle. The problem never got better, mostly it got worse. But for a few meager moments I would be lost in a dream world. In no time, this power had total control of me. Dr. Feelgood was making house calls. Soon, I was facing nothing. My only goal in life was breaking the seal on my next bottle.

Step Two told me all I had to do was believe in the *highest power*. The promise was, if I can do this, that I could break the power alcohol has over me.

At last I can be one of those smiling faces in the rooms. But I will never forget the Step which gave me the very first promise of the program. Nor will I forget my Higher Power, whom I call God, and those sober brothers and sisters who led me delicately to the promise that I would get better.

D. G., Gloucester, N.J.



Some time ago, my sponsor told me about this great idea he had that would improve the quality of my sobriety. I was going to begin corresponding with an AA member who was "behind the walls" — in other words, a prison inmate.

It didn't take me long to point out that I had never been in prison. I had so many other AA jobs that I was starting to feel guilty about not leaving enough work to keep the other drunks sober. Besides, I got writer's cramp just signing my name.

My sponsor listened sympathetically to my objections, and two weeks later I got a nice note from GSO (General Service Office) with the name of an inmate who wanted to write to a member on the outside (that's me!).

Not too sure just how to get this started, I decided to keep it simple and just tell my story as if I were qualifying at a meeting. In about ten days I received my first letter from my new friend, telling me how much

letters meant to him because he was in a maximum security prison and could only get to one, possibly two, meetings a week. In his first letter he also told me the part of his story that had led him from the bottle to prison in the first place.

After a hesitant beginning, the letters became easier to write as we came to know each other better. Our backgrounds couldn't have been more different, but I had learned early in my sobriety to identify and not compare. So we had our alcoholism as a common ground and foundation for the friendship that developed and lasted for the next year and a half.

Eventually, our letters settled into a pattern of about a week apart. We talked about everything — even the weather! I had the advantage of living in New York and it was easy to send him a lot of AA literature, including Grapevines. He had the advantage of being in a situation where he had nothing except his sobriety to be grateful for, and his feeling of

gratitude for sobriety taught me one of the great lessons of my life.

As the time drew near for his parole to be approved, I wrote with more emphasis on the importance of getting to an AA meeting on the day of release. With the help of a power greater than both of us, he got to that meeting.

When I last heard from my friend, he was having the usual problems that most people have with a new job, but he was attending meetings regularly at an AA group in his hometown.

In one of the last letters I received, he thanked me for all the times my letters had come just when his loneliness was really getting to him.

Looking back on the experience now, I honestly believe that I had the best of the bargain. Gratitude is probably the best tool I can use to stay sober, and I learned from my friend in prison that even when there are no other fringe benefits, except that I am still breathing, I can be grateful for my sobriety.

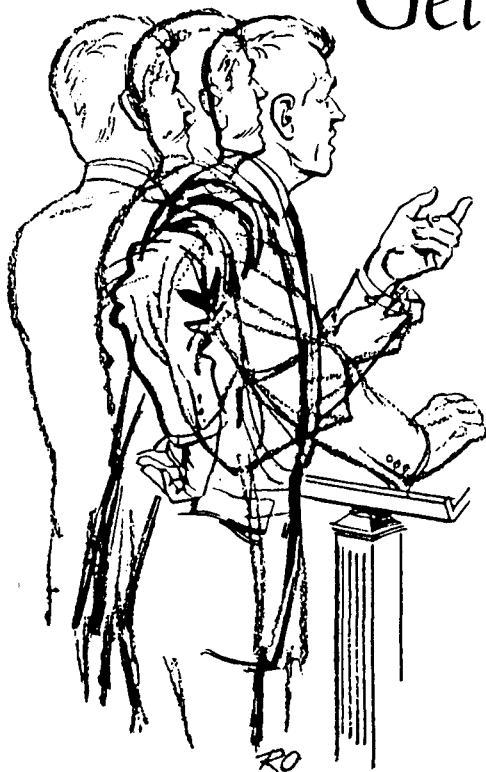
R. G., Bronx, N.Y.

Before trying to answer the question “What is the AA message?”, maybe it would be useful to ask: “Is there *an* AA message?”, one which can be stated simply and on which everyone can agree? In my twenty years in the Fellowship I have discovered no such universal message.

When I first became aware of the “message” reference embedded in the Twelfth Step, I was puzzled by the wording. It spoke of “*this* message,”

to be carried to others, but there was no mention of a message in the preceding Steps to explain the word “this.” When I finally received an insight that resolved my problem, it came from a rather unlikely direction — not from an experienced, tolerant old-timer, but from an abrasive, short-fused newcomer who exercised the group’s collective fund of “Live and Let Live.”

At a discussion meeting on the



Get the Message?

subject, he made one of his typical out-of-turn interjections: “What’s the big problem?” he growled. “The sentence says ‘Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message,’ etcetera, etcetera. That clearly means just what it says, namely, that you’ll get a spiritual awakening if you work the Steps, and *that’s* the message you carry to others. Period.”

I don’t know if anyone else at the table bought the idea, but I did — and still do. And the experience did more than just resolve my puzzlement about this message. It pointed up (and not for the last time either) that good things in AA can sometimes come in rather unattractive packages.

J. C., Surf City, N.J.

Introduction to Sanity

One night while I was sitting in a Second Step meeting I caught bits and pieces of what a woman named "Ann" was sharing with us. I had been in AA three long months and the inside of my head was still like a can of worms. I heard her say, "This is a list of stinking thinking that precedes the drinking. If I entertain any one of these thoughts for too long the rest will follow and I could pick up a drink. I use Step Two to rid my mind of these deadly thoughts."

Up to that point I believed I was surely *different*. I had been diagnosed by my psychiatrist as having an anxiety neurosis with schizophrenic reactions (I never mentioned my drinking to him), and I was impatiently waiting for somebody to address *my* unique form of insanity. Well, thank God my *unique* malady was described to me by Ann in seven short sentences:

- 1) "I'll show them!"
- 2) "I miss the fun."
- 3) "Is this all there is?"
- 4) "Next time will be different."
- 5) "I wasn't *that* bad."
- 6) "The world is passing me by."
- 7) "What's the use?"

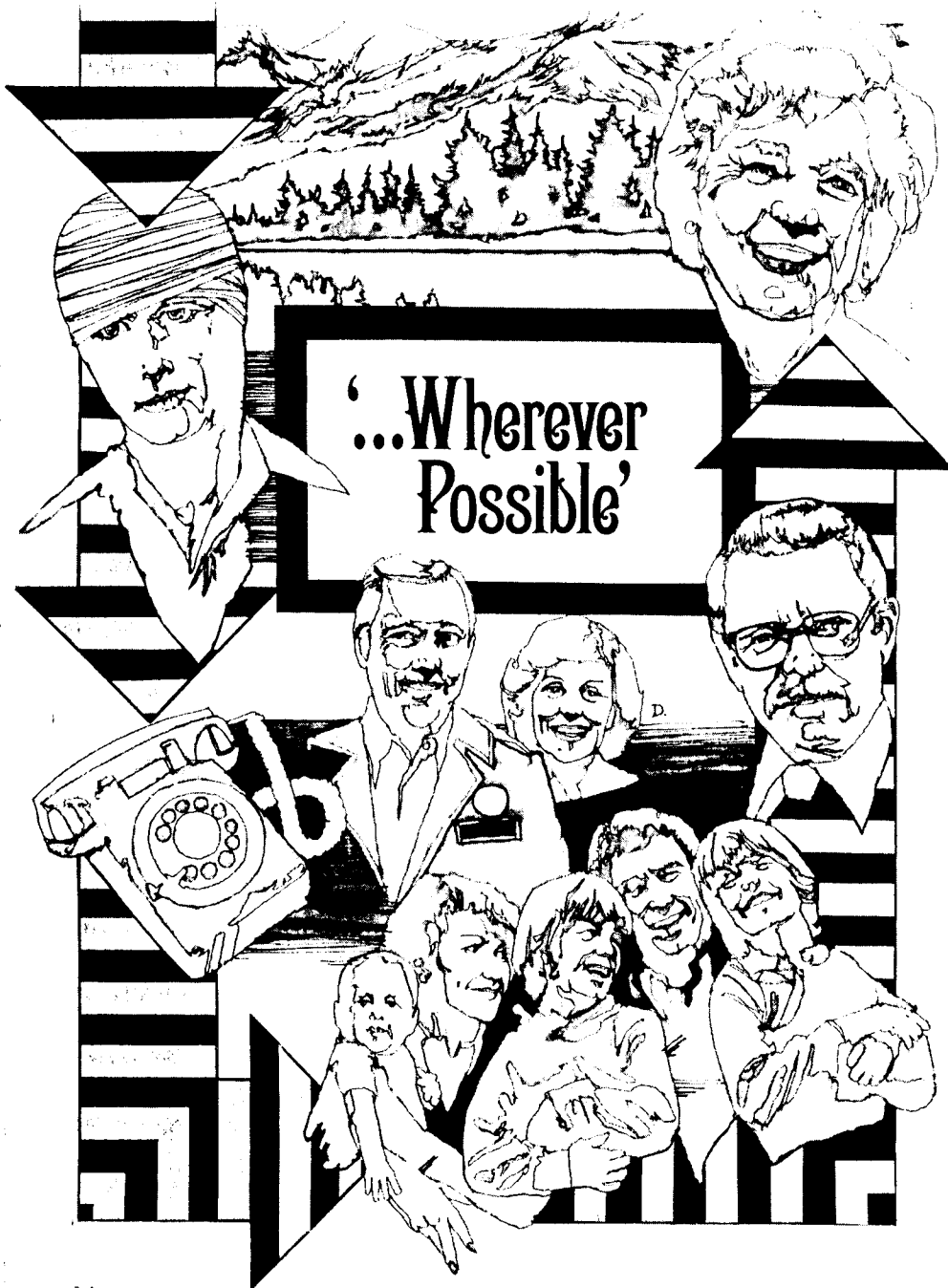
After the meeting I asked Ann to give me a copy of her list of "stinking thinking." As soon as I got home I affixed it to the refrigerator door and referred to it many times during the following days. It is still the basic guide for my Second Step inventory.

As I progressed in my recovery in AA by trying to apply all of the principles in the Twelve suggested Steps I added a couple of thoughts that can be lethal for me. I also jotted some notes next to each line. My up-to-date list reads this way:

- 1) "I can handle it." (Playing God, omnipotence);
- 2) "Is this all there is?" (Lack of gratitude);
- 3) "I miss the fun." (Fantasy, illusion);
- 4) "I'll show them!" (Resentments);
- 5) "I wasn't that bad." (Arrogance, comparing);
- 5) "I'll never get that bad." (Omnipotence);
- 7) "Next time will be different." (Fantasy, illusion);
- 8) "The world is passing me by." (Despair, lack of trust);
- 10) "One can't hurt." (Fatal illusion).

That night some nine years ago I was introduced to sanity. Since then, a day at a time, I am being restored to sanity by my Higher Power through the Fellowship of AA.

R. J., Oxon Hill, Md.



I have been working on the Ninth Step of AA off and on during the four and a half years I have been a member of this Fellowship. At first it was impossible for me to make amends to certain people. Some amends were easy to make, others were much harder.

During the first year of my sobriety I made an all-out effort to make amends to someone I had injured in an automobile accident three years before joining AA. I had been driving down the wrong side of the road in an alcoholic blackout when I ran into another car head on. A woman who was a passenger in the other car flew through the windshield and landed in the street. The windshield cut her from the middle of her forehead up to her scalp. She needed eighty stitches to sew up the cut and she was off work for about a week. Her boyfriend who was driving the car cracked three ribs on the steering wheel. Her nine-year-old daughter, who was sitting in the back seat, injured her knee. Both cars were totaled and I had a broken nose, a fractured face, and a big cut running from my lip up into my nose. I had no insurance, either medical insurance or car insurance. After a plastic surgeon put my face back together I was left with a slight scar, which is almost completely covered by my moustache. The lady I hit, however, was left with a bigger, more obvious scar going in a circular shape from the middle of her forehead to the top of her head. Fortunately she was able

to grow bangs which completely covered the scar.

I was an undergraduate student at the time of the accident and had very little money. I was able to settle all claims from the other couple for \$350. That included their car, medical expenses, and time off work. I never lost my driver's license, but I did have to serve one day in jail. In short, I got out of my responsibility for that accident incredibly cheaply.

For three more years after the accident I tried to control my drinking. After the accident I told myself that I wouldn't drink and drive anymore, but within a couple of weeks of buying another car, I was drinking and driving again. I finally joined AA in 1980. Once I experienced the wonderful release that comes with moving from denial to acceptance, I started actively working the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. When I came to the Ninth Step, the first person I wanted to make amends to was the lady I had sent flying through the windshield. I wanted to tell her that I had joined AA, I had finally quit drinking and driving, and I wanted to apologize for the damage I had done and to offer to pay her for her loss of wages for the week she was off work. (I had recently started at the first full-time job I had held since my drinking days.) I tried to reach her in person, by phone, and by mail, and nothing worked. I also tried to reach her sister, her boyfriend, and the witnesses to our settlement and release agreement, but this also failed. Regretfully, this

amends has had to remain unmade.

Later, I decided to make good on a bounced check I had written for a car repair back in my drinking days, about five years before I joined AA. I had paid half of the \$200 bill for a valve job before skipping out to a new address. I had told myself for years that the station owner had probably overcharged me anyway. Finally I came face-to-face with the fact that he had done a perfectly good job and I had simply cheated him out of a hundred dollars.

When I pulled into the gas station and asked for him by name they told me that he had sold the station four years ago and bought an automobile parts store about a mile down the road. When I walked into the auto parts store there were no customers present. The man and his wife were working behind the counter. They were somewhat shocked to learn that I had come to make amends and not to complain about repair work done on my car. They quickly caught on, however, and kindly and graciously accepted payment for the rest of the bad check. They wanted to know all about me. I never did mention AA, because these people never knew I had a drinking problem anyway. They could tell that I had experienced some kind of a spiritual rebirth and they were gratified by my amends. I told them that I was getting married and that I would have three step-children. They told me that they had two adopted daughters, both of whom were orphans. I thanked God that I

had grown to the point that I was able to make amends to these people.

The amends I made to my parents were more difficult. Unlike the gas station owner, they knew me well and knew of some of the problems created by my drinking and drugging career. They were so intimately aware of my shortcomings that it was hard to contemplate making amends to them. The first time I started to work on Ninth Step amends early in my sobriety, I was so full of grudges, resentments, and false pride that I repeatedly did the opposite of the Ninth Step — instead of making amends to my parents I was blaming them for past wrongs they had done to me, and I was blaming them in a big way. This went on for a year or more. I was really blasting them and accusing them like I had never done before. Eventually I said every angry thing I had been saving up for years. Nothing had really been resolved, but my parents wanted to reestablish a friendly relationship. After so many years of harboring resentments I finally reached a point of wanting to make amends. At last I was willing to sweep away the wreckage of the past and start living like an adult in the present.

When my dad visited here last spring I planned to make amends to him. I tried calling his motel room one afternoon when he was out. Somehow I never got around to making amends. The time was never quite right, it seemed.

Finally I took my new family up to

Colorado Springs one summer to visit Mom and Dad. I went to the Alano Clubhouse there and talked to a member about the trouble I had had in finding the right time to make amends to my parents. This member pointed out to me that the Ninth Step doesn't say "made direct amends to such people whenever possible," it says "made direct amends to such people *wherever* possible." Finally, I got it through my thick skull what had to be done. I had come to the right place to make amends; I no longer had to wait for the right time. I went back to the motel, and finding everyone else asleep, I went into the bathroom and turned on the light so I could write a simple amends that would say exactly what I wanted it to say and nothing else. The gist of it was that I was sure I had said and done things that had hurt them in the past and that I was truly sorry for this. I also said that I had tended to blame them for my own shortcomings and that I really do love them.

I made my amends to Dad first. He said he felt I had basically already made silent amends by leading a new life and dropping the angry tone. I was glad to hear him say that, and I was glad that I was finally man enough to go ahead and apologize anyway. I could feel a burden being lifted.

Next I made amends to my mom. Like Dad, she was moved by what I had to say. It was easier to see that she was moved than it was with Dad, who tends to guard his feelings. In the conversation that followed, she started to express resentments for another member of the family. I told her immediately that I didn't appreciate it and didn't want to hear any more about it, and she dropped the subject. I felt good because I had "cleared off my side of the street," and that is what the Ninth Step is all about. The only person I have the power to change is myself. I can do this by diligently working on all Twelve Steps in the recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

R. S., Tempe, Ariz.

A Program

for Selfish People

At meetings I would hear, over and over again, "this is a selfish program." Every time I would hear someone say that I would become uncomfortable and even angry. And inevitably I would be forced to go back to "the source," as I always seem to do when people and their ideas get between me and the principles of this program. The last word for me has always been the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

As I would read "How It Works" and "Into Action" over and over again, I would convince myself once more that this is *not* a selfish program. How could it be when I'd read such thing as, "... except when to do so would injure them or others;" or "We tried to carry this message to other alcoholics..." or "... any life run on self-will can hardly be a success"? And then of course there was: "This is a sick man. How can I be of help to him?" On and on I would read and wonder what was it these people were talking about when they said this is a selfish program.

Well, after a few years of doing the best I could at listening beyond the

personalities and living the Steps, I began to hear what was being said to me in a new way. I began to hear, "This is a program *for* the selfish." What a blow! They were calling me a selfish person! How dare they! And in my attempts to prove them wrong, I experienced enough pain and frustration to at least begin to surrender to the fact that I am indeed a very selfish person. It was becoming obvious at last!

What is this path of self-enlightenment that I, unknowingly, have been following all this time? Well, Step Four hit me in the face with the obvious. Step Five allowed me to learn from the obvious by sharing it with another. Step Six allowed me to have the obvious all to myself for a while. Step Seven allowed me to be aware of the obvious before the obvious happened. Step Eight allowed me to identify with the obvious in others. And Step Nine allowed me to experience and accept the obvious in myself when I took action to make amends to others for it.

What has become obvious to me since I first touched pencil to paper

back in Step Four is that I *am* a selfish person with selfish motives. This has slowly and painfully been revealed to me in ever new dimensions with every new Step. Fortunately, it is true for me that my Higher Power only gives me what I can handle (though at times I have sorely doubted this). The message I began to see was not that I wasn't supposed to be selfish but was instead that I *am* selfish. And as I moved from seeing this in my actions in Step Four to seeing this in my motives in Step Eight, I hit a new level of desperate and angry guilt that sent me into that arid wilderness of self-hatred where so many of us find our answers as we listen to our own judgment of ourselves. It's as if we become "the law" in order to see our inability to keep it!

Finally, in that wilderness between Steps Eight and Nine I began to surrender to the fact that I was a selfish person with selfish motives. But now I can see that as I begin to find out who I really am by getting in touch with the desires of my heart, my selfish actions can produce beautiful results, thanks to my Higher Power. As I grow in self-knowledge through the Steps I can begin to trust my desires, and as I continue to attempt to turn my will and life over to God, my selfishness more and more expresses his will. I am surprised continually by the love and compassion I find in my selfish motives.

Before the humbling and self-enlightening effects of the Steps, my selfishness always ran astray because I

did not know who I really was and what I really wanted. Fear blinded and perverted every motive as I grasped for more than I needed in an attempt to achieve that false security and fulfillment. But as I was gently (and sometimes not so gently) revealed to myself through the Steps by my Higher Power, my fears were slowly relieved and I began to see that my true desires were given to me by God, as I understand him, and could be selfishly carried out with loving and compassionate results.

I have, of course, a long way to go and will make many mistakes as I try to be true to myself. But as I slowly surrender to my selfishness, I begin to trust my true desires and over and over again find surprises in their results. And as I now attempt to begin each new day by first praying for guidance for a selfish person, and then allow myself to do what I want to, resentment falls away, I am given the courage to freely give of myself, and I enjoy life more, for I am doing what I want.

God has given me wonderful gifts to give to others and given me the motives to carry them out in a loving and compassionate way. My only real job is to pray for the courage to be true to myself in the presence of others who are still afraid, just like me. And I am indeed grateful that I no longer need to choose a suffocating life in the lie that I am supposed to be unselfish; no longer hating that lie by hating myself.

E. C., Bowling Green, Ky.

Promptly Admitted



I use the Tenth Step for revising, amending, and becoming. Unlike the Fourth Step, which was basically retrospective, the Tenth Step is progressive — dealing with current or daily feelings, thoughts, and reactions as they arise. My Fourth Step acts as a backdrop, a point of departure, a basis from which my awareness grows in recognizing when a Tenth Step inventory is indicated.

There are two major sets of circumstances in which I find the Tenth Step most helpful to me: When my actions, responses or reactions conflict with my conscience; and when I have unspecified discomfort.

The first happens most often in human interaction or transaction. Someone interrupts my work routine and, verbally or nonverbally, I let the person know I don't want to be bothered. The message: What I'm doing is more important than you, or whatever you have to say to me.

Or, God forbid, someone doesn't agree with me, support my position on something, or doesn't feel, think, or do what I *expect* him to do. I become angry (usually covertly), combative, demanding, and unyielding. I disregard the other person's right to be human, to be who he is, and deny myself an opportunity to appreciate his difference.

On the job, in small group situations, in one-on-one intimate encounters, I find it necessary to take a look at my reactions, admit my wrongs, apologize, then amend and revise my own behavior.

Is my admission prompt? The prompter the better for me, usually within the same day or the following. But often I suffer for days, often without identifying the problem until one of my sponsors says: "You're angry. Really angry!" Then, I can get in touch with a feeling in myself that I find extremely hard to acknowledge.

Once I identify the feeling (or someone helps me to), take a close look at its causes and effects, I can seek to remove it.

When ego is involved (which is most of the time), when there are underlying questions, real or imagined, of security (financial or emotional or conflicts with my cherished view of myself), the Tenth Step is indicated for me.

There are several messages I receive as a result of applying the Tenth Step in human transactions: I'm learning to place greater value than I used to on persons and relationships; it's not so bad to be wrong, and the admission won't kill me; and there is great relief from the weight of having to fool myself and convince others that I am always right. The perfectionist weight gradually lifts every time I admit my frailty and my fallibility. I experience not a decrease in self-esteem, but an increase in self-

esteem. I feel better about myself, more in harmony with my fellows.

The other set of circumstances exists when I feel stuck, disturbed, fearful, discontented or generally uncomfortable and I don't know what's bothering me. Then I do an inventory: state the feelings, find out where they are coming from (are some old tapes running?), and look at my reactions and overreactions.

Especially for this kind of situation, I've gotten in the habit of carrying around a small note pad — which has grown into a legal pad — for doing Tenth Step inventories. At break times and lunch periods at work I do an inventory, and it gets me over a difficult spot. Not long ago a Tenth Step inventory turned into a career adjustment plan.

My Tenth Step inventories are for examining myself, revising and amending, getting unstuck, and sorting out. And even more important, they are for becoming — because they help me to define myself, look at who I am without judgment, gradually accept myself, and eventually become the best person I can become.

On my *soberest* days — days in which I am keeping really close to the Fellowship — I receive the courage, the willingness, the openness, and the honesty to do a Tenth Step. It is this combination of Fellowship, meetings, and Step work which improves my spiritual condition and maintains my sobriety. And for that, I am truly grateful.

C. L., Alexandria, Va.



When I snivel a lot in an AA meeting someone is sure to approach me after the meeting and ask, "When was the last time you worked with a wet one?"

Such a situation recently occurred, and afterward two things happened. First, I was laid off from a steady half-day job; I am of retirement age but I like the supplemental income to allay my fears of financial insecurity. Second, I received a call from the central office to participate in a Twelfth Step call by taking a drunk from his motel room to a detox facility. I looked upon these two events with a total lack of gladness, which is usually my outlook when I am into self. I responded stoically to the first

situation as there was nothing I could do about it, and I responded affirmatively — albeit grudgingly — to the second because I have been conditioned that way.

As I view it now, both the loss of the job and the Twelfth Step call were the best things that could have possibly happened to me at the time. Had I been working I would not have been in a position to make the call. The call itself was an act of providence. It put me back on the right track.

Service in AA takes many forms. I have been told that just being at a meeting occupying a chair is one. Cleaning cups and ashtrays is another. Also, setting up tables, being the coffee maker, and acting as

the group secretary. I have done all of these; I am still the coffee maker at one of my meetings. Then there are the generally accepted "service" jobs of intergroup and general service. Additionally there is sponsorship and Twelfth Step work, which is primarily the subject of this article. In chapter six of the Big Book discussing Steps Eight and Nine it says, "At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But that is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us." So in the broad sense I suppose, whatever we do in AA is some form of service.

In my own case I have a poor track record in sponsorship and Twelfth Step work. In the last couple of years I've had three people ask me to be their sponsor; one is back drinking and one has disappeared. The other one is sober. I don't think I am the type of person who instills confidence in others. Definitely not a leader and terrible at suggesting or directing others how they should work their program. Consequently I don't seem to participate in this activity very often.

Therefore, getting that call from the central office, even though I accepted it ungraciously, turned out to be one of the most rewarding opportunities for service I have ever had. The drunk, who I will call "Robert O.," was in bad shape from being holed-up in the motel room for four days with plenty to drink but nothing to eat. He had been in AA

before and knew whom to call when he was ready. Surprisingly to me, the two of us got along splendidly right from the beginning. We had nothing in common, yet we had everything in common. He is a hillbilly type and I am a city boy. Boy? I'm 70 and he is 53, yet we are both alcoholics who need the program. There was just something about him that attracted me. Maybe I was seeing a troubled soul's cry for help. I visited him in detox while he was shaking it out. Now he is staying in a recovery house and approaching thirty days without a drink. He is attending meetings and even has a job.

I guess what I am becoming aware of through this experience is that service is much more than a duty or obligation to repay to AA that which was so freely given to us. It seems that I have always known this but I keep forgetting. Basically I would rather pursue hedonism than service. I see pleasure as something to be desired above everything. I do not like pain. If I could but remember that the pursuit of happiness is futile. Happiness, peace of mind, and serenity are the result of living the way you think God would have you live. I will not remember this for long unless I continue to act on the AA principle that our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us. Through service I will find the peace of mind and serenity that I sought so futilely in other ways.

T. M., Brea, Calif.

Four Familiar Words

Much has been said about Midwestern hospitality. I heard about it when I lived in Texas. I've heard all about it on TV. Now I'm part of it. I've lived in the Midwest for about seven years.

I'm a seventeen-year-old "new breed" — an alcoholic-addict. I'm an ongoing product of treatment center handiwork. And I've only been sober for a year and a half.

In treatment they rushed me through the first seven Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous; they gave me the real crash course. It was all for just a basic background in the program, but it gave me the treatment center mindset that I knew a lot about the pro-

gram and that since I had worked the first seven Steps I had a good start and could relax. Almost dead wrong I was.

For about a year I did some real good things. I read the Big Book, I went to meetings, I volunteered for Twelfth Step work, I spoke to classes and shared my story, and I associated with AA people. I even helped to start a new young people's meeting (which failed miserably; I guess my town just wasn't ready for that yet). Notice anything missing? Those four words AAs use so often: "I worked the Steps." That's what was missing!

I remember visiting a Chicago group in which those four words were

used so often, I was astounded. I thought to myself, "Now why don't they stress the Steps that much in my home town. If they only stressed the Steps that much, I would be eager to work them."

It seems to me that I always listen more intently when I'm at an out-of-town meeting. But I went home and tried to listen a little bit, and guess what I heard? A whole lot about the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Were these different people? No, they were the same people all along; I had just never really listened.

Well, I still wasn't real eager to work the Steps, and soon I forgot about these four words and just skated on the power of the group to keep me sober. That worked for about a year, and then I lost the internal joy in sobriety. It was all external fun.

I had a lot of fun, but none of it was spiritual. In fact I lost most of my spiritual reserve as a result of not working a spiritual program, which is

the Steps. I became discontented with my Higher Power and almost quit praying altogether. The group became my Higher Power for a while, and for some people that is fine, but for me since I had already experienced the joy of believing in God, it was a letdown. Gratitude fizzled away until I just didn't think about it anymore. Meetings became just drab hours that were hard to stay tuned-in for. Somewhere in the dim and dusty corners of my mind came a voice that said I was in trouble.

The solution came last night. I was in a different town and I had to attend a family birthday party. The only problem was that it was in a bar. Now I had been in bars before during my sobriety and I had stayed sober. I had felt some discomfort, though, so this time I thought I would try something different; I would go to a meeting beforehand. Since I was in a different town I listened as intently as I could. It was a speaker meeting, just

as the one in Chicago was, and something I heard quite a bit of was, "I worked the Steps."

This is where the Midwestern hospitality comes in. After the meeting I went up to the speaker and told him how much I enjoyed his story. One man came up to me and we began talking. This man was so friendly that I felt completely at ease and at home. We talked about AA in my home town, and in his home town. Little difference. Then we talked about the principles of the program and I learned how little I actually knew. Because of the conversation I had with this man, I felt a flood of seriousness. I realized that it was time to quit skating before I hit a patch of thin ice and fell through. It was time to start

working the Twelve Steps.

So today I started another Fourth Step — my second one. The first, in treatment, was good as far as it went but I needed something more thorough, straight from the Big Book. I'm not even halfway through but I've already noticed that I feel closer to my Higher Power. I am being shown that the Steps are an indispensable part of this program and of true serenity and joy in sobriety. I've heard it before and now I am experiencing it for myself; the Steps are the best vehicle on the road to discovering and cherishing a Higher Power.

Thanks to that Midwestern hospitality and my Higher Power, I was spared a lot of pain.

S. A., Iowa City, Iowa



In early March 1973, the American forces were pulling out of South Viet Nam. I, an army sergeant, was having a final talk with my sponsor, a Department of the Army civilian, who was due to leave Saigon the next day. I had made my first AA meeting just three months before and I wasn't sure how I could handle moving back to the States, rejoining my wife, and not having the benefit of other AA members for the next couple of weeks.

"Jerry" asked me if I was convinced that I was powerless over alcohol, that my life was unmanageable; and if I had come to believe that a Power greater than myself had restored me to sanity. I assured him that I had taken the first two Steps.

"Being convinced, then," he said, "it's time you took Step Three!"

He asked me to make a quick mental review of my life, to see if I had made the best use of it. Had I taken care of myself, mind and body? Had

I driven a car while drunk and even in blackouts? Had there been accidents, or even battles, when I could have been seriously hurt or even killed, and wasn't? The real question he was asking was: could I see that a Higher Power had actually been taking care of me all my life?

I had to admit that I had really done my best to destroy my life, that God must have been taking care of me, because I surely hadn't been. Jerry asked me, "Then what's the big deal about letting God continue to do what he has been doing all your life anyhow?"

He further explained that there was nothing in the Third Step that would take away my "free will." I could go get drunk anytime I chose to. Nor does the Step say that God will run my life in any way against my will. However, it does say that God will protect me from myself if I will make a decision to let him do so.

My sponsor gave me the names and addresses of a couple of AA members to look up when I got to Fort Knox, Kentucky, which was where I would go when I left Viet Nam. He told me several ways to contact AA and AA members in my travels. He did his utmost to impress on me the need to get on with working the Twelve Steps as soon as possible. He reassured me that if I asked for God's help in staying sober and in running my life, he would give it to me.

Finally he asked if I was ready to make the decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. I told him that I was. He picked up a Big Book, turned to page 62, and asked me to read the last paragraph and all of page 63. When I finished reading, he asked if I was ready to make the decision required in Step Three and to confirm that decision by reading the prayer in the middle of page 63 aloud with him.

We read the Step Three prayer together, talked for a while longer, then parted and were not to see each other again until some three years later.

Within two weeks of Jerry's departure all of the other sober AA members I knew had left Viet Nam. Being on my own gave me the incentive to begin working the rest of the Steps. Within six weeks of his departure, I had completed all of the remaining Steps for the first time. By then I had arrived safe and sober at Fort Knox, where I would begin the lifetime process of practicing the principles of AA.

At a recent meeting I was reminded again how fortunate I was to have had such a great sponsor for my first months in the Fellowship. The chairman explained that she had been approached by a person with much less sobriety than she, who had asked her opinion of the suggestion on page 63 to take the Third Step with another person, such as a wife, best friend, or spiritual advisor.

She had told the newer person that he was confused, it was the Fifth Step that we take with another person. She was dumbfounded when he showed her the sentence, in reference to Step Three, that said: "We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person..." She had talked with others, and had gotten almost the same reaction.

Shouldn't we be telling more people about that apparently very much overlooked part of the Big Book?

D. G., Radcliffe, Ky.

The Four Horsemen of 'Q'

I went to San Quentin initially for about five years, at which time I decided that I had probably worn out my effectiveness as an outsider bringing the AA message inside.

After a lapse of two or three months I was approached by a glib-tongued member who convinced me that I should join with three other members and go back to San Quentin once a month. The reason for this was that the inmate members at "Q" were tired of "drunkalogs" and wanted the four of us to come and talk about the *program* of AA. They all knew our stories, so I joined the group that came to be known as "The Four Horsemen." Where the inmate members picked up this title we never did find out. I always suspected that they had purposely left out one descriptive part of their title having to do with the back end of a horse. So I went to San Quentin for four more years. All of the other three members of the original group had died.

One year I went to San Quentin so often that Warden Clinton Duffy issued me an ID card after telling me that as often as I came to San Quentin I should not take up the valuable time of a security officer. As a result of this decision I was able to come and go without a security officer escorting

me. I still am the proud possessor of the now very old ID from San Quentin dated January 18, 1951.

During these many trips to the two prisons (I had also gotten involved at Folsom Prison), I encountered quite a few interesting happenings. For example, the group at San Quentin had an inmate steering committee. They asked me to attend one of these meetings. At this meeting, they wanted to know why when God was mentioned the person who had made the remark always hurried on to another subject. They pointed out that God was indeed in San Quentin and that they would like to have the outside visitors explain God in their lives. Another thing they did not like was the use of profanity and obscenities by outside members, including dirty stories and off-color jokes. They pointed out there was a plethora of such muck in prison without having it brought in by outsiders.

On another occasion I had a note from the inmate secretary at Folsom asking me to be sure and bring the maximum number (eight) to the next meeting I chaired. We drove up from San Francisco on our Sunday, a distance of over 300 miles round trip. I dropped him a card saying something like this: "Will arrive at

Folsom as usual and WE ARE COMING LOADED." When we arrived at Folsom, we were subjected to the most rigid and thorough shakedown we had ever experienced. The following week I had a letter from the warden suggesting that I carefully select the words I used in any communication with an inmate. They got the impression that I was going to engineer a "breakout."

Another time I took an AA member who was a former prisoner to Folsom where he really gave the members the message that AA works on the outside. That was the week that I received yet another letter from the warden that to bring an ex-convict into a prison without prior permission was in fact a felony. Luckily for me, the warden took no further action except to warn me forcibly to watch my step.

On another occasion, a newly released AA member from Folsom was sitting at the hospitality table of the San Francisco Alano club trying to find out the name of a certain fellow who came to Folsom regularly. The three fellows sitting at the table started out by asking "Was it so-and-so?" The answer to about four of the suggested names was negative. Finally, the Folsom graduate blurted out with "He looks like a well-dressed pimp," and wouldn't you know all three guys said at once, "That's P——."

There were several occasions that made all the trips I made to both institutions very worthwhile.

For example: at an AA conference

a man came up to me and asked if I remembered him. I didn't. He reintroduced himself to me and said that he had finished his probation from San Quentin two years earlier and had been an AA member ever since. He then introduced me to his wife and two little daughters.

Another time while I was chairman of a beginners meeting in San Francisco a man came up to me with the same question, "Do you remember me?" I didn't. He reintroduced himself as a former secretary of the San Quentin group — his name was "Mac." He said that he lived in San Diego and was visiting in San Francisco. He then told me he was having his fifth AA birthday in September and wanted to know if I would come to San Diego to present him with his birthday cake. Since this was early March I agreed, thinking that he would soon forget the whole thing. Like an elephant, he didn't forget and reminded me of it a few weeks before the time. So my wife and I hopped in our car and drove 550 miles, went to the meeting, gave Mac his cake, spent two nights in a motel, and drove back to San Francisco. Mac became a director of a halfway house in southern California where he was working when he died. Mac made the program.

Just these two incidents made all the trips I ever made to San Quentin and Folsom very much worthwhile. Two ex-convicts — living proof that this program works.

P. G., Mill Valley, Calif.

The Unlikely Messenger

When the topic at a meeting is Step Twelve, my tendency is to emphasize how I have had a spiritual awakening, carry the message, or practice the principles. The most important word tends to be "I." An incident about a year ago added another dimension to my understanding of how this Step works.

I had stopped for a newspaper and some ice cream at a convenience store near my home and met someone I had sponsored several years previously. He had stopped in for a can of beer in a brown paper bag. We talked for a few minutes; his main concern seemed to be whether I had resumed drinking. When he heard the story a few days later, an old-timer said, "Well, this time he twelfth-stepped you."

A few twenty-four hours have passed since then, but incidents continue to reinforce the message that active drinkers carry to AA members. On a business trip back to a city I used to live in, I encountered a very drunk young man panhandling on a subway platform. As protection against the subzero weather, he wore half a dozen shirts and a shapeless coat held together with safety pins. He said he wanted a dollar so he could buy another shirt.

When I had lived there, I had often drifted just as aimlessly through those same back streets wearing an equally shapeless coat. Looking back, I could accept the fact that I had been — then — a derelict who just happened to have a roof over his head, and buttons on his coat.

The program has taught me to accept what I cannot change (however painful that may be) and to be grateful on such occasions that I can see it but not be it.

The messages are not always so painful, however. My favorite is still the time that our local intergroup office forwarded a call from the manager of a local motel. A guest needed help.

Two of us drove over and found a man who had been drinking steadily

for over a week. He was in such poor condition that talking about AA really wasn't possible. He had not quite passed out and seemed to be watching us.

We spent a quarter of an hour throwing away empty bottles and making arrangements with a local detox center. The man lay silently sprawled on the bed.

Then, while the two of us were standing at the foot of the bed, he finally spoke one sentence: "Y'know, if I keep this up, I'm gonna die. But you guys *look*... so good."

That night his ears could not function, but his eyes did. And he could see the difference AA had made in the lives of two members who came that night to hear him carry a message.

R. F., Missouri City, Tex.



Last night I experienced a lesson in the Steps of our program. My home group was scheduled to have some of our members share an open informational meeting at the local

I know, as we all know, that the atmosphere of a VA hospital is not the same as our nice (sometimes even better than nice) meeting places. This facility sometimes has coffee,

centers? Few, if any, I should think.

Maybe outside members feel they might catch something. Something like shoes with toes sticking out, or maybe their clothes will be infected, or

don't want to help? Where would I be today if AA had not been there for me? I could actually feel that awful villain of sobriety, resentment, gnawing at my gut. If I left this irritant untreated, I knew it would cause pain and hurt; the depth of this hole has no limits.

In living one day at a time we quickly learn that we must use the medicine we have been given through AA. This doesn't mean tomorrow, it means now, right away. So I did; I used some small part of all Twelve Steps, not necessarily in order, and went to another meeting. Forgiveness was my beginning. I forgave myself first, for my misdirected thoughts. And then I forgave the friends I love in the Fellowship.

I inwardly had to accept the fact that people are people. We all do what we think is best for us at a particular time, a particular moment. This we call living.

B. H., St. Louis, Mo.



Meetings Are the Medicine



veterans hospital. There were eight people who had expressed their interest in attending, but when the meeting began at 7:30 PM, there were only two of us present. I was very discouraged. It caused me much distress that my dear friends who so openly professed their gratitude for AA were unwilling to share an hour of their sobriety with a few suffering alcoholics.

more often not, and never have I seen donuts or cookies. The patients come from all walks of life — the gutter, jail, slums, dumpsters, cardboard boxes, and yes, sometimes nice homes. They certainly don't choose to come here if they have money. In fact who with money or insurance would choose such as this, when there are so many first class treatment

their teeth will fall out. Perhaps the unshaven faces, because of bruises, cuts and sores, are too much for a sober drunk? This certainly is not that easier softer way, is it?

I know I have no right to control, manage or take other people's inventory, but I was hurt. I found myself in the uncomfortable state of confusion, wondering why — why people

Scraping Off the Mud

I travel a lot. Recently, in an out of town meeting, I listened while a person disclosed that he was six years sober and was fighting the urge to drink. I remembered my days like that. But I remembered, too, when the compulsion left. It left when I did a thorough Fifth Step. It left when I shared with another human being that thing which had caused my deepest self-hatred.

I had done at least two Fourth Steps when I read the first two pages of the Big Book chapter "Into Action." I don't know why certain things "jump off the page," even when I've read them before, but that day something jumped. It told me what happened to people who did not do the Fourth and Fifth Steps. "Almost invariably they got drunk."

During that time of my life, I read voraciously. I read anything I could



get my hands on about alcoholism. I read all the books. Trouble was, I had plenty of knowledge about alcoholism, but I had little practical knowledge about working the Steps.

After reading "Into Action," I read on the Fifth Step from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and I had the good fortune to "stumble"

across "The Therapeutic Mechanism of Alcoholics Anonymous" from *AA Comes of Age*.

The Fifth Step reading said, "Some people are unable to stay sober at all; others will relapse periodically until they really clean house. Even AA old-timers, sober for years, often pay dearly for skimping this step."

In *AA Comes of Age*, Dr. Tiebout indicated, "...and drinking will again enter the picture." That scared me. I didn't want to drink again. The literature was telling me that unless I did certain things, "...drinking will again enter the picture." Scary. I hated the idea of fighting the compulsion again. I hated the idea of fighting those hangovers, and the remorse, and...

I decided to do a thorough Fourth Step — and Fifth. Basically, I knew I had to tell someone else "all" my life story. I knew the things I did not want to share, though I did not know all the things which would come up from my inner self.

I often compare my mind to the mud pools at Yellowstone Park. Everything will be peaceful and smooth, and then right up out of the middle of a pool will come this big blurb. My mind reveals things when other things have been scraped off the pond. I found it well described on the second page of "Into Action":

"The inconsistency is made worse by the things he does on his speers. Coming to his senses, he is revolted at certain episodes he vaguely remembers. These memories are a night-

mare. He trembles to think someone might have observed him. As fast as he can, he pushes these memories far inside himself. He hopes they will never see the light of day. He is under constant fear and tension — that makes for more drinking."

I try to guard against too much "psychobabble." I get too much into "analyzing" rather than "utilizing." I found that through "utilizing" — through *doing* it — I reaped the benefits of what might have taken years of analysis. And it took scraping that first bit off the top of the pond so other crud could come to the top. Getting it on paper helped.

So I tried to do a thorough Fourth Step. I then drove about three hundred and fifty miles to share my Fifth Step with an AA friend, but I was unable to reveal the one bastardly thing which had bothered me for years.

To celebrate my "completion" of the Fifth Step, we went to a meeting in a neighboring town. On the way home, my mind swirled and swirled. I was haunted that I had come all this way and was going to go home without doing it thoroughly. I pulled the car to the side of the road and said, "I have not shared all my story. If, when I tell you this, you want me to get out of the car and never see me again, fine. But I am going to share." And I did. I shared that haunting memory which I had tried to push far inside me.

What happened? Just as described in the books, I "felt" the Fifth Step. I knew I had done my best. I knew there was not one thing in my life I would

not share with another human being. I knew my life was an open book.

Here is another revelation. Even though I had done a thorough job, new things still come to the top of the pond. Old memories “pushed inside” come to the surface. When they do, I write them down.

By “illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past,” I have begun to attain some sense of faith, hope, trust, and love. I have begun to feel that I can deal with anything that might come up. Turned around, that means I am under less fear and tension, and I am less threatened by drinking.

Slowly, very slowly over the years, as I face these things I have shoved inside, I get what is described by Dr. Tiebout:

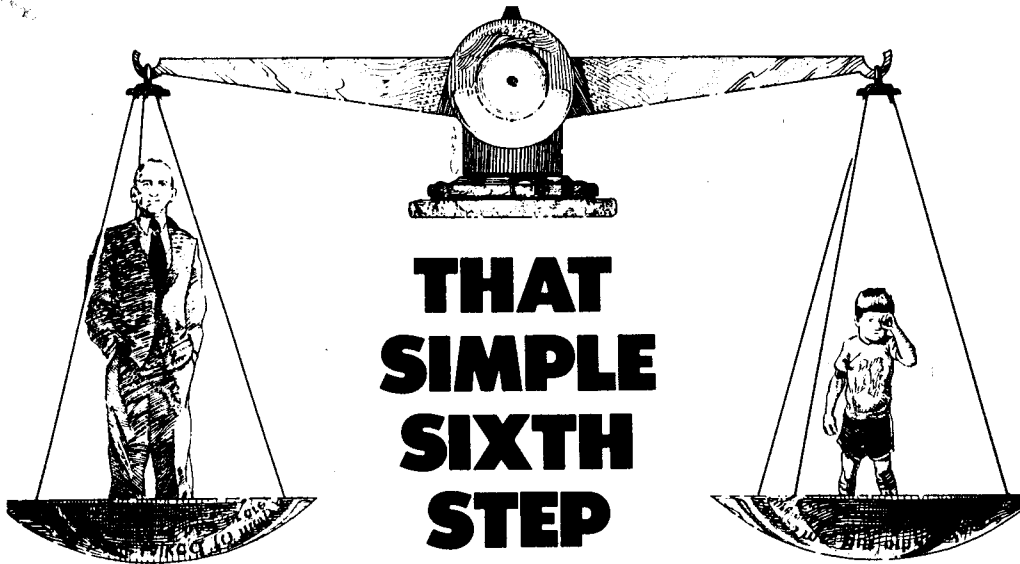
“... Most of the individuals who finally reach the necessary spiritual state do so merely by following the Alcoholics Anonymous program and

without ever consciously experiencing any sudden access of spiritual feeling. Instead they grow slowly but surely into a state of mind which, after it has been present for a time, they may suddenly recognize is greatly different from the one they formerly had. To their surprise, they discover that their point of view and outlook has taken on a very real spiritual coloring.”

So, I have tried to focus on “spiritual progress, not spiritual perfection.” I have my ups and downs, my ebb and flow. I have even experienced “hitting the wall” on a couple of emotional issues. When those things happen, I recognize I need to work through an emotional dependency, growing not perfecting. I know it is possible, because I worked through something I once thought impossible, sharing haunting memories during my Fifth Step.

I had that feeling of a clean house.

J. H., Coquille, Ore.



THAT SIMPLE SIXTH STEP

I have talked to many people in AA who have had, or are having, great difficulties with Step Six, myself included. Step Six suggests: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

"Too simple," I said, "much too simple! Can't possibly work that way." And once again I was immediately in trouble, for this is what I did:

"I'll just put Steps Six and Seven together and get this over with," I said. "Bill W. was just trying to stretch these principles out to twelve because he was superstitious or something."

Here I made my first mistake. I was "asking" before I was "ready." It didn't work that way for me and still doesn't. I had to become ready first, and this Step provides the proving ground for that to happen.

Sometimes my decision to let go of a defect is quick because of the in-

tense pain it causes me. But other defects are more subtle and I actually enjoy the sick kind of excitement and color they add to my life. I hate the "defect" but I love the "effect." These, I found, will take me a long time to let go of. A lot of pain and praying for willingness will be required. I try to accept this part of myself, share it with others, seek progress in these areas of my life, and move on in the Steps. To sit and wait always hurts me.

Continuing with my analysis I said to myself, "There's nothing to do here! There's no challenge, nothing for me to fight with and overcome."

Here I made my second mistake. This Step, like One, Two, Three and Eight, requires a submissive type action of me that my bulldozer ego finds intolerable. In this Step I do not go out and fix something but instead allow myself to "become entirely ready."

For me this is an act of letting go, not of grasping or controlling. For me this is an action I find harder to perform, have cried over, have rebelled against more than any other in my entire life. In this Step I literally have to try to let myself go and trust my Higher Power. I cannot beat myself into readiness with my own willpower. And I let myself go by accepting all my defects, not by analyzing or fixing them. To me this simply means repeating the process of the first Five Steps again on a new level: Admitting my defects (and assets) are truly who I am at this moment and then admitting further that I am powerless to change any of them by my own willpower alone. So simple to understand but so very hard to want to do! It is inside this Step that I began to really experience the true nature of my powerlessness, and the extent of it. I found that I stubbornly clung to many of my defects of character because of the comfort and security I believed they gave me. Just as with alcohol, I couldn't imagine life without them.

Analyzing this Step further I said, "Finally! Here is the Step I was looking for! Here at last is my chance to be perfect!"

Give me words like "entirely" and "all," and look out! I'm off and running in an attempt to be canonized by the end of the week. Needless to say, I haven't made it yet. I forgot this Step, like the others, was written by humans for humans. I now am beginning to see this Step as a process of

"Step Six is a guide, something to shoot for, not something I must accomplish perfectly before I move on"

letting go by acceptance, a little at a time. As each defect brings me to my knees, I let it go by accepting it as mine and by admitting my powerlessness over it just as I did with alcohol. One day at a time I am becoming "entirely ready." Because of my perfectionism, I must continually remember that Step Six is a guide, something to shoot for, not something I must accomplish perfectly before I move on, because I'd never do any more than five Steps the rest of my life, and five are not enough.

With further probing into this Step with my brilliant mind I said to myself, "Good deal! Here is a Step I finally get to work by myself. Now I can do it the way I want to!"

I had just made my biggest mistake of all, and not for the first time either. I tried to work this Step alone. I read it as saying "remove all my defects of character." It doesn't say "my." None of the Steps use pronouns like "I," "me" or "my." The Steps, as I see them, are a shared way of life. They are the common experience of many people working to-

gether to solve a common problem. I cannot work Step Six all by myself.

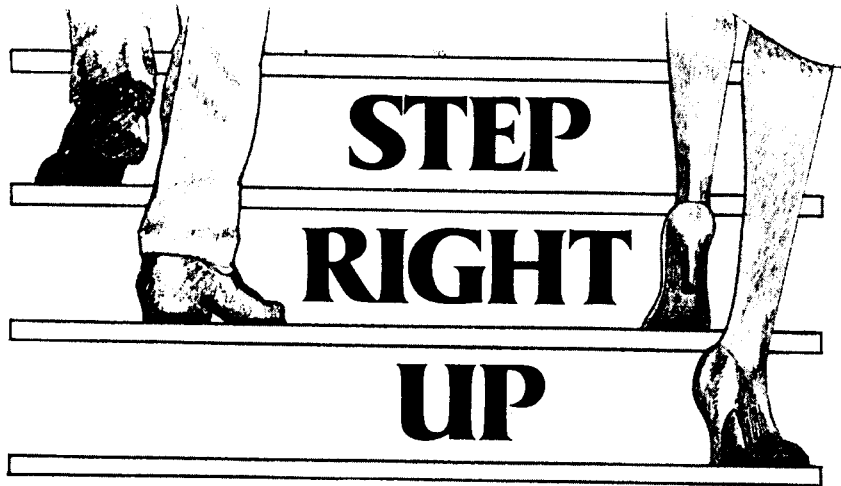
In the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, it says that this is the Step that separates the men from the boys. This has certainly been my experience for it has brought out and is still bringing out my defects of character in a very revealing way through daily experience. In this Step, for the first time, I am beginning to understand just a little bit the need for true humility to live a happy and serene life. Part of true humility I believe is self-acceptance, which as it replaces the self-hatred of failing to fix myself, adds that dimension of se-

renity I need so badly in my life. Bill W. expressed this idea so beautifully when he wrote: "To those who have made progress in AA, humility amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be."

So when it comes to living Step Six, I can say to you and to myself, "Boy, I sure have a long way to go, and some days I don't feel like going at all, but I thank God that I know that much today about myself, because for me, that's progress."

See how it works?

E. C., Bowling Green, Ky.



“**W**hat Step are you on?” was a question that I was frequently asked when I first began attending AA meetings. No matter what problem I brought up, that question was often the response.

“What does that have to do with it?” I would wonder. My new, simple-minded friends were just not grasping the complexity of my situation. I would repeat the problem — they would repeat the question! “What Step are you on?”

It took me a while to get the message: The solution to almost all of my living problems will be revealed to me if I will work the Steps on them.

Finally, someone simplified it even further for me: “Start with Step One and apply each of the Steps to whatever the problem is, whatever is going on in your life that is unacceptable to you.”

For instance: “I admit I am powerless over (the present problem)!, and my life has become unmanageable.”

Sometimes, that’s as far as I need to go. Through applying the First Step, we may realize we are *choosing* to be powerless — by procrastination, or by indecisiveness. Sometimes, we also come to understand that we have allowed our lives to become unmanageable by becoming paralyzed by fear or frustration instead of “changing the things we can.”

Step Two, applied to the problem, tells us to remember that *we* can be restored to sanity in our thinking — not the other person, place, or thing, but us. It’s important to remember that our best thinking got us here, so what seems rational to us may not be.

Step Three: *Made a decision* to turn the problem over to a power greater than ourselves. Another way we often say it is, “I can’t, he can, I think I’ll let him.”

Steps One, Two, and Three often produce the solution — particularly as we form the habit of applying them to our problems and see the results in

our lives. After all, if they could relieve us of that God-awful compulsion to drink, why shouldn’t they work in other areas of our lives?

But if we just *can’t* turn the problem loose — if no matter how hard we try to “turn it over” our minds still continually muddle in the problem — what then?

Shazaam! Step Four! Isn’t it funny how the simple logic of applying the next Step so often escapes us?

Step Four: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” in relation to the problem. What are our underlying motives? What “old tapes” are playing in our heads from similar past experiences? Which of the seven deadly sins cited in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* are being resurrected in us? Pride? Greed? Lust? Anger? Gluttony? Envy? Sloth? We write it down and take a good look at it.

Then Step Five: “Admitted to God, to ourselves and to *another*

human being the exact nature of our wrongs” in relation to the problem. (What? Talk to my sponsor? That’s usually my *last* solution!) Talking the problem over with someone else in the program — or as someone I know calls it, “dropping the rocks,” — helps immensely. Our perspective changes when we take the problem out of our own heads and let it see the light of day with someone else.

Still no relief? We go on with Step Six: Became “entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.” By now we know what our part in the problem is, but often we find that *knowing* doesn’t make us able (or willing) to change.

Then, Step Seven: “*Humbly* asked *Him* to remove our shortcomings.” That word, “humbly,” sometimes stops me cold. But a quotation that was given to me by a fellow-AA during my first jaunt through the Steps helps me begin to comprehend the meaning of the word: “True humility

does not mean thinking less of yourself than other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all."

Usually, my "holier than thou" self is right in the middle of the problem. So how can I not think about myself, and at the same time ask God to remove character defects from me? My own introspection can defeat me once more, and to progress I must "utilize, not analyze." Just ask him and go on to. . .

Step Eight: "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." Are our rights, our determination to have things our own way, now hurting anyone else? No? What about ourselves?

Step Nine: "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

The Big Book promises, at the end

of the Ninth Step, that by this time we will have been restored to sanity. At the very least, after diligently applying all nine Steps to a particular problem, we should be able to look at it more objectively, with a more balanced view.

Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve tell us how to transfer the focus from ourselves to others, and go on with our lives.

"But," you may protest, as I often do, "this particular problem is not my fault! I didn't do anything to cause it. Now what do I do?"

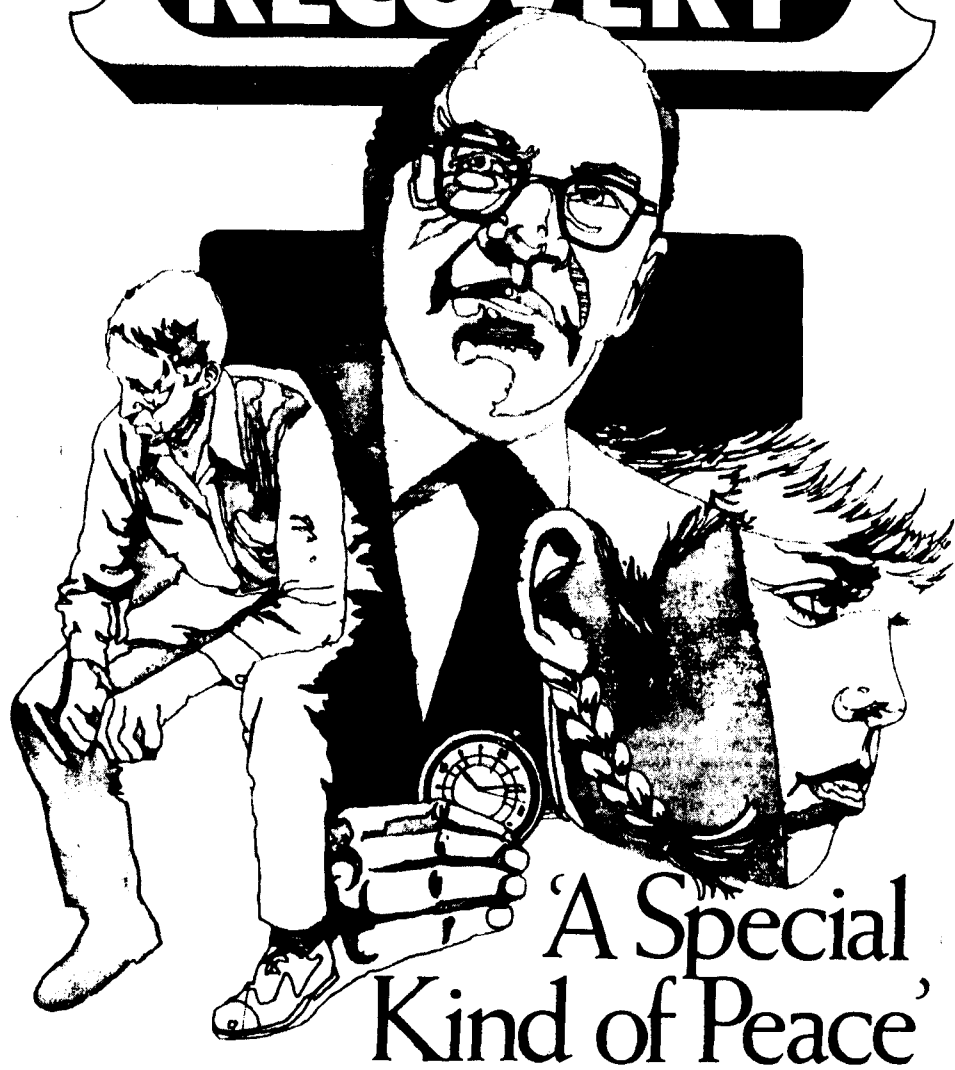
The answer, for me, is the same. No matter what (or who) caused the problem, my reaction to it is "eating my lunch." Therefore, my solution is to apply the Steps to the problem, and to my reactions, and see if I can find some relief.

By applying the Steps, we can learn to live in the solution instead of continuing to live in the problem.

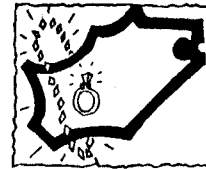
Fran D., New Orleans, La.

(SOUTH AFRICA)

RECOVERY



'A Special Kind of Peace'



I suppose that perhaps it is best described as a new purpose in life. That for all of us there has to be a

particular incident that causes us to pause and to reassess our personal goals and values and brings with it the commitment that one must have if we are to "practice these principles in all our affairs."

God has been kind to me in the way he has enhanced my personal experience. For many of us the significant event is part of our drinking experience. In my own case, I was able to get the real message of what AA is all about through an entirely different event — my first Twelfth Step task.

It was at that early, difficult, often painful and insecure period when I was just emerging from the nightmare. I was once again beginning to become aware of the world around me. This may sound strange but toward the end of my drinking the world seemed to have a "sameness" about it. I was no longer aware of the seasons. The winters, summers, autumns, and springs had somehow merged into one dark, angry, fearful, and lonely place. I seemed as alone in my recovery as I had been with my drinking and I had to wrestle on an hour-to-hour, day-to-day basis with my engulfing insanity. God and I still seemed a lonely place.

The little things that happen, the spoken word, the kind smile, the nod of encouragement — the fellowship

that goes with the program — these things I will never forget.

I went to a meeting one particular day. I still had that lost feeling of not really belonging — had all of this perhaps come too late?

I remember that it was a black man who was speaking and he seemed to have a special kind of peace about him. I remember how he held his watch and said "If you come to AA and you still have a watch, you have come too soon." I remember how good I felt — I did not have a watch when I came to the Fellowship. I could keep going for yet another day.

Maybe it was part of the miracle and I thank God for it because one day in our house (it was becoming a home again) the phone rang and I was asked to go on a call, there and then; there did not appear to be anyone else available just at that time and the family sounded desperate.

What panic! and the cold sweat again, why me? I am not ready for this kind of thing. What will I say?

I drove to the address given. It was not in the best part of town, and I found myself standing in front of what I like to call a "threadbare house." It's not really a question of money or material things that makes threadbare houses. There is just something about some places that I recognize. It's not difficult to tell when people have stopped caring — something about the house, something about the garden — it's not easy to explain, but I am sure you know what I mean.

I fought off the panic and marshalled my thoughts: carry the message, that's what you must do. I knocked at the door and a few moments later it was opened by a very small girl. I recognized the frightened, haunted look in her eyes — it is part of the disease of alcoholism. She looked up at me and said, "Are you the man who has come to help my daddy?" I really did not know what to say. Here was a challenge I had not expected. Why did I want to run away? I remember stumbling through some kind of response as she stood aside and let me in. I followed this little girl down a long corridor — which, incidentally, badly needed a coat of paint. I noticed that her blonde hair was a little untidy, that her dress, though clean, was well worn. We came into a room and she sat herself on a small bench, her little feet not touching the ground.

I was immediately aware of familiar smells, smells I could recognize — the smells of spent anger, fear, loneliness, and despair. Across the room sat the mother, unable to understand the hopelessness of it all. What had become of the man she had married — what of their dreams?

Daddy appeared confused. He smelled of stale alcohol — not through drinking it recently, he had not had a drink for several days — it was seeping through his skin. I could recall when the same was true of me.

I could not take my eyes off the little girl with a haunted look about her. Do little girls get angry, fearful, lone-

ly? There was so much unhappiness about her, and yet, something else — a real strength, perhaps even courage, and yes, a certain hope which was almost a part of her. Children do seem to be so much closer to God.

All of a sudden I became aware of the real purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I was no longer afraid. In my short time in AA I had already witnessed the miracle of the grace of God. I had engaged in battle with my obsessions and a consuming insanity. I had realized that for me there was no hope at all.

It was easy then. I started to tell them about me and I could see they began to identify and understand, and every now and again "Daddy" nodded agreement.

A precious and memorable moment had come into my life. I was able to put my hand on a thin trembling shoulder and whisper, "I know how you feel. I know what you are going through." In the kinship of common suffering, one alcoholic was talking to another. "It does not have to be this way — there is another."

The trip home was in so many ways different — so much had changed. My doubts had changed to faith, an abiding faith that lives with me to this day. I had gotten so much from trying to give something away. I now know without any doubt that the long search was ended and I had found the place where God as I understand him wanted me to be and where I truly belonged.

John H., Benoni, South Africa



For over a year I have been a “Citizen Volunteer” for my state Department of Corrections work release program. The men and women inmates in this program have earned the privilege to work at a job outside the prison. Many will soon be paroled. On Monday nights I bring an AA meeting to these inmates, with as many “free world” AA people as I can gather.

Sometimes this work is frustrating. I am the only active Citizen Volunteer at this prison. When I am sick or can't attend, there is no AA meeting. Recently, due to my illness, there was no meeting for a month. Imagine being an alcoholic inmate trying to stay sober and being unable to attend a meeting for an entire month. Could you make it?

What are the rewards of this work? There is the satisfaction of Twelfth Step work — planting the seed; not knowing when, if ever, it will sprout. There is the thrill of asking if anyone is attending their very first AA meeting, and having six or seven hands go up. And there is the joy of seeing a man, once imprisoned for thirty-five years, attending AA as a free man.

Most of all, I have learned to trust

and rely upon my Higher Power as a result of this meeting. Often I leave for this meeting completely empty of my own resources — tired, “brain-dead,” alone. At the last minute, several AAs will volunteer to go along, and we have a terrific meeting, full of sharing by both outside AAs and inmates. Week after week, I am “amazingly lifted up,” as Bill W. describes in the Big Book. The Higher Power is clearly involved with prison AA.

There is a great need for help with prison meetings. In my state, AAs who are not on probation can become Citizen Volunteers with the state prison system, and sponsor regular AA meetings. Citizen Volunteers can also transport work release inmates to outside AA meetings. How great to assist a prisoner to find a home group and attend AA regularly, helping him to stay out of prison later!

You can attend an AA meeting in prison, even if you are not a Citizen Volunteer. Or you can donate Big Books. Or get your home group involved. The rewards more than compensate for the frustrations. Best of all, I stay sober for today.

Judy M., Tampa, Fla.

AA and the Handicapped

From time to time under this heading we will present stories that illuminate the journey some AAs make toward sobriety — often against considerable odds

My attempt at writing an article on my experience working with “handicapped” members is most likely to turn into more of a story about gratitude, because it has been through working with hearing-impaired members that I truly was able to recognize what I had been given in Alcoholics Anonymous, but had just taken for granted.

this is true in theory, but the program of AA is not an intellectual exercise, and that the program is perfect, but the people are not.

I had learned some sign language, and got a call from a detox center to see “Tom” (he was deaf). I went to see him, and then later went back with one of the men from our group. We made arrangements to take him

“Something at Work in a Human Heart”

Early in my sobriety I was not able to see the importance of people in the program. I couldn’t understand it when group members talked about how grateful they were to other members and the Fellowship. I found this very strange because much of my understanding of the program at that time was theoretical. I thought that if you just do the Twelve Steps right, everything should be okay; that if all dependence was on God, all would be well. Thankfully, today, I know that

to the meeting Sunday morning. When we went to pick him up, he was already waiting on the sidewalk for us. Many times I had heard the expression “lit up like a Christmas tree,” but never really understood what that meant until I saw Tom. That was the only way to describe him, and the reason he was so excited was that he was having the opportunity to attend an AA meeting.

He was not able to use a phone, so it made getting together during the

week difficult. When he would miss a meeting I would sometimes slip a note under his door with a time and place to meet and just hope he would be able to make it. As time went on I found myself thinking, “It’s too bad he can’t just pick up the phone and call somebody whenever he feels like it; it would really make a difference.” In short, I started to realize all the things which had really helped *me* in my sobriety, things I had always just taken for granted.

Some time after that we had a woman from Africa visit our group, and when she was asked to speak, she talked about what it was like to be a “Loner member,” and how her contact with other members was through the mail. I remember thinking how difficult it must be not to belong to a group, and I started to realize how important having a home group had

been, and the unique influence the members of my home group had on me. For the first time I started to realize just how important the people in my group had been, and was able to catch a glimpse of the tremendous amount of time, attention, and love that had been offered me by my group. These things had been so freely given that I had taken them for granted. There is a line in the Big Book, “Here was something at work in a human heart which had done the impossible.” To me that best describes what happens in my home group.

Over the past few years I have had the opportunity to work with a few deaf alcoholics. A common problem is the inability to understand written English. These members’ first language is American Sign Language, and they are able to understand about as much written English as I am able



“Warm Hello We Grow Strong”

to understand a different language. Through this I came to realize the importance of our literature.

I remember reading the Big Book over and over, and *Living Sober*, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and looking up different things in *As Bill Sees It*, and the feeling of gratitude I experienced reading *AA Comes of Age*.

At the International Convention in Montreal, seeing hearing-impaired members from all over reminded me of the chapter "A Vision for You" where it says, "Little clusters of twos and threes and fives of us have sprung up in other communities, through contact with our two larger centers." The increase of hearing-impaired members and groups is very similar to the beginning of AA itself.

Also, from deaf members I am again reminded of the uniqueness of AA, and the importance of our Traditions, especially Tradition Three, "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." We have a responsibility to try to carry this message to alcoholics, whether they be deaf, hearing, gay, straight, blind, crippled, etc. The reason this Tradition in particular is on my mind today is that I recently learned there are places (such as some treatment centers) that do not accept deaf alcoholics.

A few years ago there was some question whether a non-AA interpreter (professional) should be allowed in a closed meeting. Because our group had deaf members at vari-

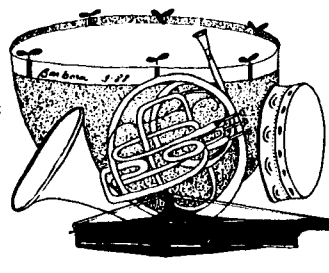
ous times, we discussed this in our business meeting. We did not consider this to be a breach of anonymity or violation of Traditions because the interpreter was not "attending" a meeting. He or she was a paid professional, working there so that an alcoholic could attend a meeting.

A professional sign language interpreter is bound to a code of ethics which ensures confidentiality, impartiality, and faithful relaying of information. If there is a hearing-impaired member who must have an interpreter to attend a meeting, and a group says no because there would be a non-AA present, then that would surely be a violation of Traditions because it is keeping an alcoholic out, and depriving him or her of the opportunity to recover in AA, for which we are responsible.

I am sure because of our Traditions, and from our history, that the number of hearing-impaired members will increase, and deaf groups will continue to grow throughout the United States and Canada. As our Big Book says, "Some day we hope that every alcoholic who journeys will find a Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous at his destination. To some extent this is already true."

I will be forever grateful to the hearing-impaired members of Alcoholics Anonymous, because these people have taught me so much, and I know that I will continue to learn as we "trudge the Road of Happy Destiny" together.

S. M., Ottawa, Ont.



Tuned In

At a concert recently, it occurred to me that musicians are a decisive lot. Timing, cooperating with one another, coordinating with the conductor — all call for conscious decisions.

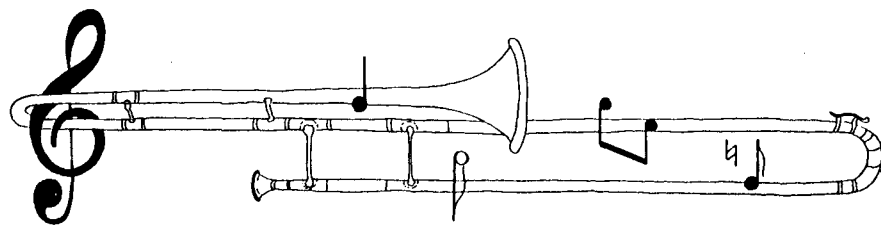
What do concerts and musicians have to do with the Third Step?

We AAs are forever reminding one another that, since time is on our side now, the number one action we have to take today is to make up our minds to stay away from that first drink. If I can follow that suggestion, my timing, like that of an accomplished musician, will be perfect.

A second thing that musicians and the Third Step have in common is the need for cooperation. For an orches-

tra to give a good performance, the musicians must cooperate with their leader, and they must also be in harmony with one another. In the same way, if I am successfully to turn my will and my life over to the care of a Power greater than myself, or God, I ought to try to be in harmony with myself and to have the full cooperation of my body, mind, and spirit.

It was at beginners meetings that I started learning about the care of my body. There, I was shown the importance of eating regularly, of getting a proper amount of sleep, and of medical checkups. I began to see that the many activities and functions of my body had to be in harmony if I was to be made whole again. I started



learning how to take care of myself all over again.

At regular discussion and at open (speaker) meetings I began to start pulling myself together mentally and emotionally. And it was at Step meetings that the healing of my spirit, which was already underway, took some giant strides forward. Thus was I able to see to the pulling together of my personal makeup, and as I grew in sobriety I became aware of an integration process into the Fellowship itself.

A third similarity between concert musicians and the taking of the Third Step is the eventual working together of my mind, body, and spirit.

For the longest time, as I made my

fog-bound efforts to cope with the Step, I haunted my fellow AAs with the question "How do I let go?" followed by "And what do I have to let go of?" As many times as I asked, I got that many answers, and more. The most on-target suggestion was that I try to stop worrying, and keep making my daily decision to stay away from the first drink. At the time I didn't appreciate it, but it was perhaps the best possible answer to a very difficult question.

As I continue to learn how to let go of my old ways and opinions, my old willfulness, and my old insistence on doing things my way, it becomes noticeably easier to make the kind of decision suggested in the Step.

In recent years, to correct a long-standing physical defect, I have been taking physical therapy. What a joy to be able to approach physical therapy with a decision to place myself in the care of my therapist, trusting that she won't harm me. (Incidentally, she's not even an AA member!)

Do you see a tie-in between the letting go aspect of the Third Step and the "attraction rather than promotion" of our Eleventh Tradition? In practicing the Step, I let go of my old identity as a power-driver (a promoter). I gain personal freedom, and the message of recovery comes through louder and clearer.

In the practice of the Tradition, by letting go of my old promotional ways, which always rebounded to my own personal prestige, I allow the attractiveness of the AA message to shine through. We have a saying in AA that we need to get out of our own way. What could be more apt in a successful approach to the Third Step?

Practicing the Step is also an exercise in putting an end to my old ways of "self-will run riot." I used to fear that when I stopped functioning by willpower, God would take over my mind, and I would become a wishy-washy nobody. But it hasn't happened yet!

It came as a startling revelation, when I realized that for fifteen drinking years I had been turning my life and my will over to the care of alcohol as I understood it. Alcohol corroborated my belief in my own powerful-

ness. It assured me that my life was not only manageable but meaningful.

As a "higher power," alcohol seemed to do even more for me. On hangover mornings, when I was confronted by the "madness" of reality, a few drinks restored me to the "sanity" of the only way of life that any longer mattered.

By the time I arrived at AA's doors, drinking had ceased to be a part of my life; it had become my entire life. The decision I had been renewing every day was not that I would quit, but that I would pace my drinks so that I could better control my "higher power." Right to the very end, I still insisted that I was in charge, that my decisions were the right ones.

In a sense, God, as I understand him, is constantly third-stepping me. He doesn't impose his will on me nor try to sell me on the idea that being in his care has more to offer than being in the care of alcohol. Just the contrary. Working through AA, he shows me day by day the joy of sobriety that is within my reach. He suggests that I look at the route that has brought me to my present place in the scheme of things. He makes it clear that it's up to me whether I want to go further. The sobriety highway extends far beyond my present horizon, and I want my trust to extend beyond that horizon, too.

"Let go, let God!" Considering the freedom that allows me to make my decisions, it often seems that it is God who is letting go and letting me!

W. H., New York, N.Y.



When I was a kid, I was frightened of rainstorms — frightened but fascinated. Lightning was especially scary because of the flood of light it would pour into my fragile world.

How like that childhood experience was my early dalliance with the Twelfth Step. Having a spiritual awakening, it seemed, could only be compared to being struck by lightning — fascinating but terrifying. As for carrying the message, did it mean anything other than showing off my flair for sober melodrama and new clothes? Since the only principles I knew were our slogans, which didn't

even appear in the Steps, and since I had no affairs — not business, or community, or love — this Step seemed a snap!

In the childishness of my early sobriety I would go out in storms, half expecting my alcoholism to be permanently arrested, if not cured altogether, with the first bolt. I had yet to learn that the principal purpose of spiritual awakenings is to illuminate; they neither kill nor cure. I find, too, that spiritual enlightenment extends only as far as my general well-being will permit. Like my disease, my recovery is also threefold. I must see to my physical "awakening" (e.g., eating, sleeping, and bathing regularly; medical checkups) and my mental/

emotional "awakening," too (e.g., learning to rely more on my mind instead of my feelings). "... The most important meaning of it," says the "Twelve and Twelve," speaking on the subject of a spiritual awakening, "is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before..."

A further thought about lightning. It used to be said that lightning never struck twice in the same place. As a Step-conscious member of Alcoholics Anonymous I began to see that spiritual change (awakening) can "strike" often, and always in the same place — me.

Light of another kind was thrown on the Step when I heard a fellow AA share that he had a one hundred percent success rate in carrying the message. His secret? *He* didn't pick up the first drink. And as long as he continued to stay away from that first one and did the best he could on any given day, he regarded himself as a successful person. What wisdom!

Along the way, I discovered another word of wisdom; a word, tucked into the middle of the Step, that protects my trials and errors and assures me the maximum of success in practicing this Step: "... we *tried*..."

How to carry the message of recovery? Participating in my home group is the most immediately rewarding way. Some other ways: chairing an institution meeting; sharing my story with my doctor; participating in local public information meetings; sponsorship; supporting my local intergroup/

central office, my area committee, and my General Service Office (GSO). I count myself as one of the alcoholics mentioned in the Step and carry the message to myself through my involvement in AA activities.

It is also suggested I try to practice the principles embodied in all the Steps in my everyday life. On first reading, a tall order, until I am reminded that the Step is suggesting

"I want to keep it immaculately clear that Twelfth Step work is not a measure of how good a person I am. I do it because it is what our founding fathers did to stay sober"

only that I *try*. I want to remember my powerlessness over alcohol and the unmanageability of my life when I try to go it alone. I want to remember that my restoration to sanity and my daily decision to stay sober are directly dependent on my continued willingness to trust in a Power greater

than myself.

Personal inventory and daily spot-checking can sometimes be difficult, but the payoff is tremendous.

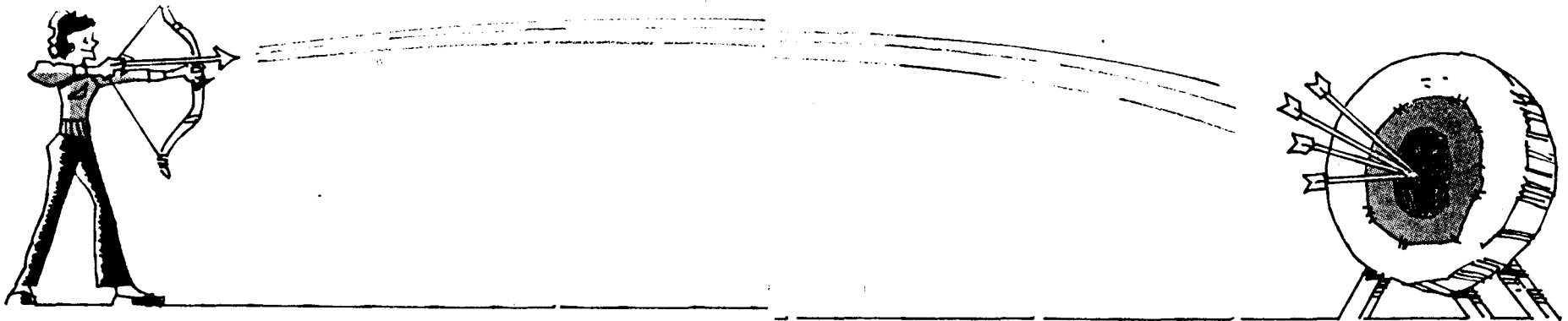
I ask daily for help that I may be ready to have my defects removed and daily ask for the removal of specific defects, as well as for guidance and power to act on that guidance. (When a prayer will be answered is only a matter of time. I may hold that belief with trust and equanimity since the most desperate prayer I ever uttered led me to the doors of AA.)

I want to make amends when necessary and to do it with not only my own well-being in mind but that of others. Thanks to the Twelfth Step, the simple and comforting *golden rule* learned in my childhood and unlearned in life's byways has been restored: "Do unto others. . ."

In my sometimes busy involvement I can easily lose sight of exactly what it is I am doing, and why. I want to keep it immaculately clear that Twelfth Step work is not a measure of how good a person I am. I do it because it is what our founding fathers did to stay sober. I do it because I believe in my responsibility to the next alcoholic. I do it because it is one of the best ways I have to give back to AA. My *first things first* approach must be to offer the help — to reach out. The prospect and his or her Higher Power must take it from there.

Daily, I pray that I may follow in the footsteps of our founders by trying to carry the message of hope; that I may reach out once again, with trusting simplicity, to the never blinding but ever enlightening Twelve Steps.

W. H., New York, N.Y.



A Process of Repetition



"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him...*" I guess I started on Step Eleven before I really even knew about the Steps or even had a God as I understand him.

I had admitted powerlessness over alcohol and had gone to the group willing to do *anything* to keep from drinking. After 20 years of social and alcoholic drinking, including brief periods of dryness, followed by worse drinking, anguish, remorse, and physical illness, I had stopped drinking and didn't understand how. Following two weeks of drinking around the clock and becoming an animal, for some reason I didn't understand, I was unable to take another drink. And I wanted to keep it that way.

I dragged myself to AA still in a fog, still weak, unable to eat, but able to listen. I'd been to AA meetings before and hadn't heard a word about how not to drink. This time I heard: "Ask for God's help in the morning and thank him at night." I started to do this. One who had scoffed at prayer was praying, and it was working! I was not drinking! Seven days, 90 days, six months. I became secretary of the Step meeting and one year later I was allowed to have the Step meeting at my house.

Through Steps Four, Five, Eight, and Nine I started getting rid of my biggest anger — which was against my husband. I had to start forgiving him and I did it every day. I forgave minor irritations that once made me angry. When we stood saying the Lord's Prayer at the end of meetings, I forgave him. When I had reacted angrily to him I used the Tenth Step and apol-

ogized to him.

Today we have a new relationship. We are beginning to communicate with each other. I am becoming a better partner in the real sense of the word. With God's help, I have reduced a little self-pity and some self-importance. I have begun to trust my husband again by trusting God.

With four years of Step meetings, besides losing a lot of fear, anger, and the compulsion to drink, I have lost a lot of guilt feelings. All my life I had been bogged down with guilt. I had the feeling "everything was my fault." The feeling that my words could cure or kill; that everything depended upon me and my efforts; that I was responsible for other peoples' lives and actions. First I asked God to forgive me for my drinking. Almost every day, as guilty thoughts came up, I forgave myself. I did several Fourth and Fifth Steps and continually asked God's forgiveness. The feelings of guilt began to leave me. To really accept God's forgiveness I had to continue my spiritual reading and I used the TV ministries. I became a born-again Christian and at four

years sober I had a miraculous feeling of freedom.

Much of my guilt has disappeared just like the compulsion to drink. Without so much guilt, I am able to start saying no to people, to situations, and it is becoming easier. It is still difficult with my sons and my sponsor in AA, but it has to be learned. I am not such a people-pleaser as I used to be. I had to please everybody at an AA meeting; even everybody on the highway when I drove my car!

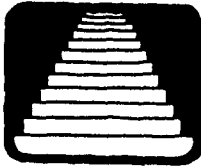
What has helped me most with the Eleventh Step and all the Steps has been going over and over the Steps with the same group, week after week for the last four years. Also my spiritual reading every morning has helped me find a "loving God as I understand him." With four years of sobriety, I can now pause long enough to calm my emotions and feel that love, that power which stopped me from drinking. I look forward to more spiritual improvement, more peace and serenity, through more sobriety and more AA meetings.

J. S., Millbrae, Calif.



Unwanted Guests

Step Ten keeps our defects at the door



For some reason, I gave little thought to Step Ten in my sometimes painful journey toward emotional sobriety. Perhaps it was because not many AA meetings seemed to be on this Step, and when it was the topic, I had cotton in my ears.

I was always careful to thank God each day for my sobriety and to ask for his guidance in helping me meet

each day's situations in a manner which reflected his will. But my failure in continuing to take a frequent personal inventory, admitting my wrongs, and treating Step Ten as a viable, stabilizing entity had left a gaping hole in my program.

By asking a lot of questions, listening closely at meetings, and expanding my AA reading program, I developed a clearer understanding of what this Step can do for me today if I let it.

First of all, the Step allows me to

be exactly what I am — a fallible, error-prone, less-than-perfect human being. In using Step Seven and asking God to remove my shortcomings (as I was able to define them in Step Six), I immediately started building new defects by not following through with Step Ten's suggestions. In addition, the identifiable defects which I asked to be removed were repeated within an alarmingly short period of time.

Just as my alcoholic ego is never dead and buried, my defects have a remarkable capacity for rebirth, and new ones appear as unwanted guests. If I'm not alert, they'll make themselves comfortably at home, often without my immediate knowledge.

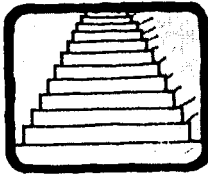
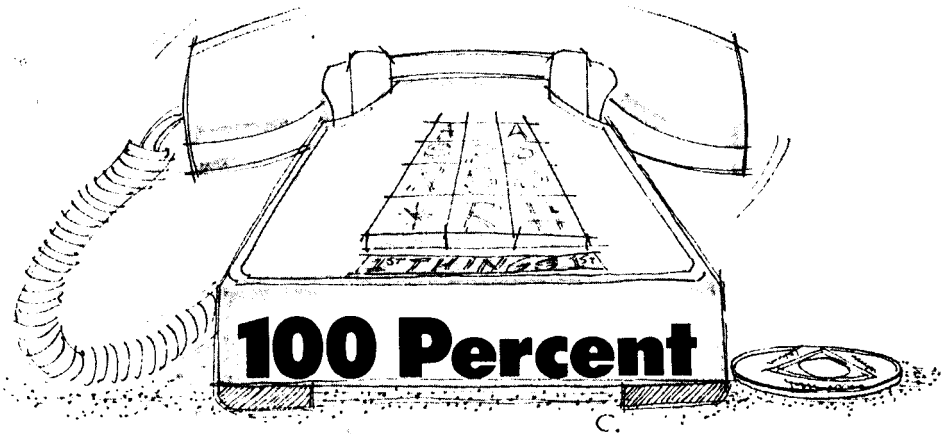
Steps One through Nine helped me reach a point where I felt pretty good about myself. I wasn't such a bad person after all. It was time for me to start working the program and Step Ten has become solid bedrock for letting it take place. My failure to activate the Step at frequent intervals during

my early months of sobriety inhibited my growth in the program. As someone once said, "When God seems far away, who moved?" Invariably, I was, and am, the one out of sync.

A most gracious lady put it very aptly at a meeting when she summed up the meaning of the AA program by saying, "The program lets me rest." There's great beauty in those five short words. Proper program maintenance, using Step Ten, keeps this beauty flowing in its proper perspective as I prepare to complete my third year of sobriety, a day at a time. It permits me to be gentle with myself.

For me today, the Tenth Step is truly remarkable. When I keep it up front, it helps me to more easily use the entire Twelve Steps, thereby providing me with the reasonable assurance that progress can be maintained at an acceptable level, provided I use the suggestions contained in this miraculous program.

Bert M., Madison, Wisc.



I have wanted to take the First Step for almost two years now. In Step meetings some of you said that the First Step was the only one which could be taken 100 percent. I could not take it that fully, though, and I envied those of you who could. I envied you for your DUIs and jail sentences and DTs. You had gone so low you had taken the First Step before your first AA meeting. You weren't fighting alcohol any longer.

For me, however, I thought about drinking a lot. It was still an option.

I used to plan on going to a bar, but one of our chips says, "Call your sponsor *before*, not after." So I would call, and each time she would suggest not drinking for the next twenty-four hours only. And so it was.

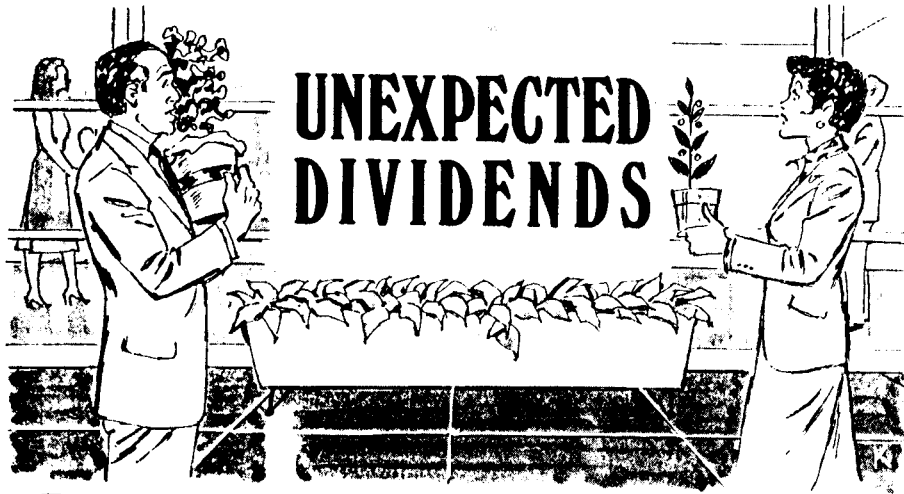
Recently, after my sponsor moved, the struggle with Step One resurfaced. I asked God to help as I could

not go on much longer resenting being in AA.

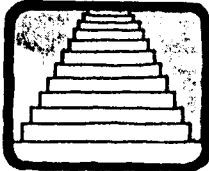
The next day I went to my home group where one of our members was telling his story for the first time. Toward the end he began to share that he had struggled with the First Step for his first two years, and the point he made was how glad he is now that he never decided to give up during those two years, because the obsession finally did pass. He said that he knew he was an alcoholic when he came into Alcoholics Anonymous, but he didn't quite believe it. And for as long as he didn't believe it, he fought it. Well, in time he not only believed it, but he accepted it. It was then that the obsession passed.

I'm glad he stuck it out because I needed to hear his story. If anyone reading this is still struggling with the First Step, I pray this gives you hope that there will be freedom for you, too.

Carol B., Atlanta, Ga.



UNEXPECTED DIVIDENDS



I was feeling some pressure to see my ex-mother-in-law, Libby. I had not seen her for the ten years I have been divorced. Last June, I learned that she was in a nursing home and had not spoken for seven years. The Ninth Step says that this process of making amends is for me. It was clear that I could not get anything from her.

With my sponsor, I prepared what I would do. In this Step, as with all parts of the program, I do not act alone. We decided that I would read to Libby and leave her an artificial plant. The main point was to make amends for abandoning her ten years previously. When I left my husband, I was not able to say goodbye to any member of his family. Now I needed to mend this hole in my spirit.

Two program friends from New York City went with me. The town

was thirty miles north of Scranton, Pennsylvania. We combined the trip with a chance to see the fall colors. I needed to renew my heart as well as my spirit.

I arrived in the small town and decided to get it over with and make the visit immediately. I left my two friends shopping while I visited Libby. I bought a small plant and prepared to enter the nursing home.

As I went through the door, I glanced over my left shoulder. My surprise stunned me so that my knees buckled beneath. My ex-husband drove up that instant. His second wife and child got out of the car and passed me down the hall. My first alcoholic impulse was to run and hide in the women's room. Then I said, "God, if you have given me this opportunity, the least I can do is to go through with it."

I walked out the door into the parking lot. I tried to make my voice

sound casual as if I spoke to Bill each day. I had not seen him for ten years. He came from Philadelphia and I from New York. Here we were meeting at the same time, place, ten years apart.

I had written him about eighteen months previously to make amends. For whatever reason, he did not respond. Now I had the chance to do it in person.

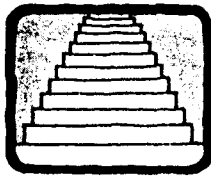
As I spoke, Bill turned. His astonishment was as great as mine. He had to do his recovery in public. He observed, "Seeing you is like seeing someone I went to high school with." I thought that was an appropriate way to put me back in his life. It was so very long ago. I was not able to make any fancy speeches. We were both too surprised. "I wrote you that letter about my alcoholism because I wanted you to know what went wrong with our marriage. I was so sick and crazy." He smiled a thin smile and said, "I also remember the good times. I have no regrets." A small word to lift such a burden from my heart. My arms did not know how heavy was the rock until I put it down. We made a few more attempts at conversation. He with his potted plant in his arms and I with my arti-

cial plant clutched in my hand. This was the most intimate moment in our ten years of marriage. He truly saw me for who I am — a drunk. I did not have to pretend to him or to the world. What a relief! I decided to let him visit with his family. I went back to town and told my friends of the miracle which had happened. Only God could have brought us together over so many miles and so many years.

The next day, I went to see Libby. She lay quietly in the bed, never stirring. Are we really sure that unconscious people do not know us? My sister reminded me before I went to act as if Libby could hear everything. I told her about my disease and how it made me act in ways I did not value. I regretted that I had not said goodbye before and told her I had come to do that step now. I read the first chapter of Hannah Hurnard's "Hind's Feet on High Places." It is the story of a woman named "Much-Afraid" who is transformed by her relationship with The Shepherd.

Truly that is what is happening to me in the process of this Step. The promises do come true before we are halfway through.

Ann D., New York, N.Y.



Last night the topic of our AA meeting was guilt — guilt over all the regrettable “crimes” committed while we were drunk. One member became angry telling of a daughter who kept dredging up the drunken past and expecting apologies for all past misbehavior — as if an apology could change that which has passed. This led to a discussion of Step Nine and a rather heated discussion of whether we should apologize or not.

Early in my sobriety a member had assured me that this Step did not refer to those embarrassing moments we can all recall. Rather, this Step referred to actual emotional or financial harms we had done. However, my dilemma over how, when, and to whom I should apologize remained. Does an apology suffice? Does just

getting sober suffice? I read the Step again, and this research disclosed one glaring defect in my thinking. The Step states “made direct amends,” not “apologized.”

This research also let me know that this Step should be taken just like every other one. I needed to change *me*. I had to turn to my Higher Power and ask for help to make me more patient, tolerant, and forgiving. My impatience made me want to rush into this Step and apologize for every moment of embarrassment to me. Maybe in doing this I would gain the serenity I so craved. But, fortunately, the “Twelve and Twelve” told me that good judgment suggests that I take my time. I could not buy my serenity at the expense of others. I must place my amends in the hands of my Higher Power.

Serenity is certainly one objective of amends-making, but I must also

remember the emotional well-being of others. Thinking of others had been foreign to me.

Meditation and prayer would also be necessary to make my amends, as my mind was in a complete state of confusion concerning Step Nine. Should I merely apologize when I make restitution for the fact that in my search for material gain I had attempted to deprive others of their due? Or should I understand, instead of resent, those who had accused me of this?

To develop a truly caring and understanding attitude toward these individuals would certainly be a step in the right direction toward my purpose of making amends. I demonstrate this attitude by listening and carefully responding to any problems

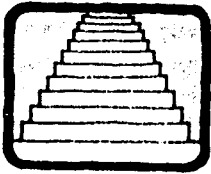
my dear ones may have. If they have any projects going, I plan to spend some time and effort helping them. If at any point my sensitive feelings are hurt, I intend to analyze the situation to see where I may be at fault. Hopefully I may keep my tongue from getting ahead of my brain if I meditate over this problem.

This type of concern about anyone whom I had harmed would surely help rectify that harm. This would also get my mind ‘off me,’ which would add to my serenity.

The Big Book says, “We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets. The alcoholic’s past thus becomes the principal asset of the family and frequently it is almost the only one.”

M. S., Punta Gorda, Fla.

Taking a Look at the 'Living Legend'



I wasn't afraid of Step Four until I heard about the emotional agony and shame that was supposed to go with it. My first attempt was a litany that told how uniquely terrible I was; it failed miserably, I suffered mightily, and the step still wasn't done. For me recovery is slow and I balk a lot but I don't believe it should be vicious; so, being the perfectionist that I am, I went through the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" one sentence at a time. This is what worked for me.

I made a list of everyone I had ever met in my entire life. The first name was the first human in my earliest memory. I put down friends and their relatives, my relatives and all their friends, school chums, cops, teachers, janitors, girlfriends, in-laws, bosses, and salesclerks. If I remembered a face but no name I wrote a short description so as not to forget. Nothing sensational or painful, just long and thorough and boring. God, as I understood him then, allowed me to keep plodding along and not skimp. Then I went back to the beginning and inserted the buildings, homes, laws, churches, rules, and animals that

I remembered. Even God was on the list whenever it was that he came into my life. As I wrote I would jog my memory and have to add people and things that I had overlooked. When I was done I had a long list of every person, place, and thing in my life.

I wrote the list again and left a couple of spaces between each entry. Then, praying for honesty, I went through the list and crossed off everyone and everything I didn't resent. When I was done I saw a lot crossed off and that was very positive. Whatever was left meant resentments, so I used page 65 of the Big Book as an example and listed the cause of my anger (the why), and what part of my emotional security was threatened. I prayed for thoroughness and honesty and studied pages 64 to 67 to learn.

The Big Book then said I was to make a list of every fear I ever had. I was afraid of the dark and afraid of dying and afraid of getting caught stealing. I was afraid of heights and sometimes afraid of big dogs, and on went the list, whether I had resentments in connection with the fears or not. All of my fears were written down and then I checked page 68 to learn about them.

Then came the part about sex and I made a third list. It had the name of every partner in every sexual relationship I could ever remember. That meant from holding hands and playing doctor to whatever the most recent was. With some embarrassment I included myself. Then I checked page 69 and reviewed my conduct. I

noted where I was dishonest or selfish or where I caused bitterness or suspicion. Wherever I was at fault I made a note of what I should have done instead. These notes gave me a sane and sound guide for future relationships.

Then I looked for whatever was next and found I was done. I kept wanting to write down what a rotten person I was but couldn't find the instructions. Step Four was sometimes emotionally painful and usually embarrassing but it was never the trial that was described to me. The words that are sprinkled throughout the writing on Step Four (detailed, painstaking, diligent, careful) are now in perspective, and I have lost my fear of me *and* of Step Four (which were both on my list of fears).

There are two sentences in the "Twelve and Twelve" that have lost their mystery:

"We want to find out exactly how, when, and where our natural desires have warped us."

"We thought conditions drove us to drink, and when we tried to correct these conditions and found that we couldn't to our entire satisfaction, our drinking went out of hand and we became alcoholics."

My inventory was in sequence. I saw a summer and fall in the late 1960s where there was a momentous change in my drinking and my personality. It was so baffling that I can only say that I was transformed. I looked at my Step Four and now I know when my drinking went out of hand and I became an alcoholic. The

Big Book says if I thoroughly follow its path of recovery I will learn these things about myself.

I also saw that very early in my life I was a much more ordinary person, not emotionally cruel, not suicidal, not a bigot. I saw a gradual change from "health to sickness" and then after sobriety from "sickness to health."

The word "restore" in Step Two became clear. Restore means to bring back to a former normal condition. As I looked at the sequence of what I had written and trusted in my Higher Power I saw in myself a basic goodness that wasn't sick and that was there before I drank. It was buried deeply inside. It finally came home that I really was worth saving.

I believe that every word in the Big Book's program of recovery has its ordinary meaning. It's the simplicity of the ordinary words that makes everything magic.

Those truths let me be safe and comfortable in doing exactly what I read there. And so it was with my Step Four. It was a long way from the horrible terror I had been told about. It was a bit emotionally painful and a lot boring and embarrassing because of my false pride. It was pretty ordinary, and I wasn't the living legend I had been telling everyone about.

I continue to balk and stumble and am impatient at my snail's pace of growth, but I am sober and for that I am grateful.

R. C., Edmonton, Alberta



MISSTEPS OF THE SEASON

1. We admitted we were powerless over the holidays—that our bank balances had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that paying attention to advertising would drive us insane.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our credit cards over to the care of shopping malls *as we understood them* from watching TV.
4. Made a searching and fearless shopping list for our family and friends.
5. Admitted to the bank and to ourselves the exact nature of our credit rating.
6. Were entirely ready to remove extravagant gifts from our shopping lists.
7. Humbly asked for a diet that would remove ten pounds by the New Year.

8. Made a list of all persons we had bought the wrong sizes and colors for and became willing to make exchanges for them all.
9. Made direct returns to stores whenever possible, except when they had gone out of business.
10. Continued to take personal grocery lists to the store and when we could use a coupon promptly cut it out.
11. Sought through procrastination and couch-potatoing to improve our conscious contact with the home team, praying only for the health of the players and their power to carry the ball.
12. Having had a rude awakening as the result of opening our credit card statements, we tried to eliminate shopping from our daily disciplines and to fill our time with more AA meetings.

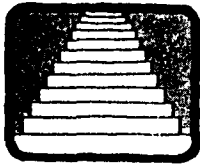
Pam H., Northfield, Ill.

Step One:

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.



Crossing the Threshold



I was a Bowery bum when I came to my first AA meeting. On the surface, you'd think I would have had no trouble admitting complete defeat. To most people I had become more of a thing than a person: a thing of pity, of fear and disgust. For almost four years I had panhandled for my wine, not bathed for weeks at a time, slept in doorways in my own filth. I had lice—and on my arms and legs were "wine" sores that wouldn't heal. Talk about being "bankrupt as a going human concern," I had, in the words of Red H., "no bank to rupt."

I had gone to AA meetings at

drunk farms and detox wards but my first "real" AA meeting was in New York's Greenwich Village, the first week of March, 1971. The week prior to that I was so messed up I slept outside in a truck park a block off the Bowery in below freezing temperatures. I couldn't even get it together to sign up for a free bed in a flophouse.

I loved AA from the start; I was hooked on meetings from the first time I stepped into a meeting room (that *step*, from outside the AA room to inside, is the longest step any drunk will ever take; it is the unlisted step: the step before the "Steps"). I had crossed the threshold, I was *in* AA and I have gone to meetings regularly ever since. But I was not to get

sober for eight and a half long years!

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

This was not news to me as I saw for the first time the writing on the wall at that meeting in Greenwich Village. I had known for years that I was powerless over alcohol — and I had almost no life left to manage. What was news to me was that here was a room full of bright-eyed people, sober, and obviously enjoying it! I wanted to be a part of that sober group and if complete surrender was the way to do it, I was more than willing. Or was I?

I went to two or three meetings a day, I got a job, I moved off the Bowery to my own apartment. At the end of 90 days I spoke at my home group; I started making coffee at another group; at 100 days I went on a drunk that lasted two weeks! This pattern continued for over eight years. I added other drugs. I slipped in and out of the program so often that I became a joke to some people: I was called "Slippery Dick."

I knew that I couldn't continue to live drunk; I didn't seem willing to live sober, so I found a third way to live: insane. For three years a combination of psychedelic drugs and a twisted spirituality sent me over the edge into psychosis. I was one of those crazies you see at large urban AA meetings drinking cup after cup of sugared coffee, writing strange symbols on scraps of paper, constantly moving about the room, mak-

ing eye contact with people until they looked away, laughing at the wrong things — when I raised my hand people learned not to call on me... "He'll say something weird and frighten away the newcomers." People were afraid of me; they gave me the old fish eye. I was hauled off to locked wards in mental hospitals six or seven times during that period. I loved being a madman: it was the greatest high; the most powerful and exciting high; the high I had been looking for since I picked up my first drink!

But like my drinking, my madness soon turned ugly and self-destructive: I would cross busy streets stopping traffic with my body; I believed I could live off of sunlight and city noise — that I didn't have to eat food; once I found myself walking along the top edge of a six-story building, knowing that if I fell I would be alright, because on the way down, I'd turn into an eagle! There were conspiracies against me: certain high-placed people were trying to silence me — to keep the forbidden knowledge I had gained from being made public. In Bellevue Hospital they were using new and more powerful drugs on me to break my spirit, to turn me into a zombie. Being crazy was no longer much fun. I stopped using the heavier psychedelics.

For the next three years I continued smoking a little marijuana and every couple of months I would go on a two- or three-day drunk. Slowly, very slowly, I came down from being out

of my mind. In August of 1979, I had my last drug and drink.

I was at a Step meeting about three years after I finally got sober. I'm not sure now what Step was being discussed, but my attention was fixed on the First Step. I wondered why I had so easily accepted the truth of the Step as far back as my first meeting and yet continued to drink and drug. Suddenly I saw the Step as I had first seen it: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." Yes, I thought, and I wouldn't have had it any other way! If I had had *more* power over alcohol, if my life had become *less* unmanageable, I would have loved alcohol less. In short, I would not have become an alcoholic!

Before I started drinking I was a frightened kid who yearned for adventure, but fear prevented me from taking chances. My imagination saw marvelous challenges, exciting travel to unknown places, intense sexual experiences, confrontations with danger and disaster; pitting my mind and body against overwhelming forces and winning through in the end. But I was stuck in fear and I knew it. Alcohol, then drugs, then madness, released me into a world of chaos I could not have chosen or imagined in my wildest pre-alcoholic fantasies. I was a junkie for self-induced disaster. Once, on the Bowery, a friend and I were kicked out of a flophouse for being too disruptive; it was late at night, the snow was falling, it was bitterly cold, we were wearing light

summer clothing, we had nothing left to drink or smoke and no money and no jobs. We walked the streets until dawn picking up cigarette butts. My friend said: "Sometimes I like it to get this bad, you know? Just to see how in hell I'm gonna get out of it!" I knew exactly what he meant. Many times, after I had been dry for a while and nothing was happening, when I was about to pick up that first drink, I would get a huge rush of adrenalin, knowing I was about to take a step that would send me spinning off into the Great Unknown.

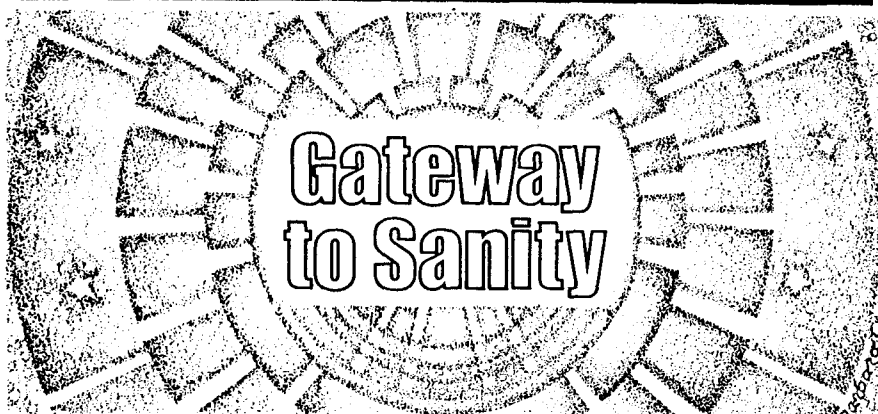
I don't know why I was able, finally, to admit complete defeat. Was it in answer to a desperate (though unvoiced) prayer? I don't know. Sometimes I think I was just getting too old for that kind of life and was willing to try anything — even sobriety, if that's what it took — to get a little order and comfort in my life.

To my great surprise, sobriety brought more than order and comfort to my life. I discovered that even without a drink, I could take chances: small chances at first, then bigger, scarier ones. Without drugs my consciousness expanded in undreamed of ways. There was excitement, challenge, victory, and acclaim beyond the specious grandiosity of madness. Sobriety has been an adventure, a journey down a twisting, uncharted river with surprises around every bend. I never would have believed it in 1971 when I stepped into my first AA room.

Richard K., New York, N.Y.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.



The words of the Second Step struck me with a kind of elemental force — a force I recognized as truth the first time I read them in southern Arizona after my husband had called AA for help. My first reaction was anger toward him for letting “other people,” as I put it, share in the secrets of our married life. It was 1966 — we knew nothing about AA — and I didn’t think it was anyone’s business if I drank a little or a lot. And anyway, I had pressures in my marriage and job which made me special, and allowed the letting-off of a little steam each night! My rationalizing, of course, was the mirror image of

Step Two: I believed that through the force of my own will and intelligence, I could shape the world into my personal concept of sanity!

But in my heart of hearts, I knew that something was terribly wrong, that my personal life and my marriage were headed for some kind of disaster. My husband’s academic career was going nowhere, and our marriage, instead of growing in strength as the years went by, was degenerating into a sodden and nonproductive drinking partnership.

Each morning, we would drag ourselves out of bed, eat something if we could, or — if the hangover was too intense — sip beer until it stayed down and the morning “glow” from alcohol temporarily replaced the hor-

ror of the early morning shakes. Then we were off to work, trying to nurse ourselves through the day, living first for lunch, always laced with a few drinks, and then for dinner, inevitably preceded by a fifth of Scotch. This was quietly consumed in our little home out on the Arizona desert, blinds and drapes drawn, air conditioner efficiently whirring. Often, even before dinner came around, unconsciousness would overtake us, and we would awaken again at dawn, facing the whole dreadful cycle all over again.

But my husband *did* call AA, and that evening a wonderful man who was to become our lifelong sponsor walked into our lives, smiling outrageously, and carrying an armload of AA literature. His obvious delight and happiness with life was at such variance with the absolutely horrendous story he told us of his many years of disastrous drinking that we listened to him in wonder and astonishment. Could this serene man be saying something that had to do with *our* situation? He left after an hour — we had hidden our drinks in the closet when he came — and we made strong new Scotches and sat down to read the literature he had left.

And then it happened — that sense that the Big Book, the “Twelve and Twelve,” and the pamphlets had been designed and written with me in mind. We pored over each sentence, as we poured more and more drinks, and we read all the literature that had been left, exclaiming to each other,

“Hey, listen to this!” or “My God, doesn’t this sound like us!” or “This is *exactly* the way I feel!” We were utterly charmed, that special AA lightning had struck, and we passed out in the middle of the night, still talking about the magic of the evening — our sponsor-to-be and the literature — not realizing then that we had had, a day at a time, our last drink.

In the morning, we looked at each other in the knowledge that something special and different had entered our lives. Our sponsor was coming in the evening to take us to our first meeting, and we spent most of the day continuing to go over the literature, especially the Steps and Traditions. The First Step immediately made great sense to me because it suggested that I merely admit that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life was unmanageable. But the Second Step posed an urgent problem, I felt, because it suggested I must believe in some strange, far-off power greater than me who could restore my sanity! What is this? Am I insane, as suggested? Why, I had a quite successful career which flowed from my university achievements. I had taken pride in my intellectual attainments, my “superior” brain, the quality of my reasonable and tolerant nature. Now am I to think of myself as insane? And what about this concept of a power greater than me? Formal religion and I had parted company some years before, and I wondered what, if anything, I had to believe if I joined AA.

I went over the first two Steps again. I had certainly come to the realization, subconsciously if not consciously, that I was powerless over alcohol, and when I saw the words in clear black print, I knew somehow I could accept them. And my husband and I knew that our best attempts to properly manage our lives had come to nothing — that we were in the grip of dark forces over which we seemed to have no control whatsoever. But that Second Step which alluded to the insanity of our present lives and the need of some greater power necessitated for me a leap into what seemed terribly risky darkness.

Yet that early faith in AA was already present. I had the feeling deep down that the program *must* be correct, and that I had little choice but to throw myself without reservation into the full arena of the Steps. I had tried diligently with my intellect to understand myself and my drinking, and to control and properly manage my life. All my efforts had not only failed, but failed abjectly and totally. So I listened to that inner voice saying, “Accept, try, have hope! Just perhaps, something might work here!” And my life of day-to-day sobriety began, a life of satisfaction and joy beyond my wildest, most alcoholic dreams.

When I discovered through reading AA history and listening to old-timers about how the Second Step came to be, tears came to my eyes — and again I had that strange, almost mystical feeling that AA’s principles had

*“Am I to think of
myself as insane?
And what about this
concept of a power
greater than me?”*

been hammered out with me in mind! Bill W. tells us that since Ebby’s notable visit to him in the fall of 1934, the program was basically word-of-mouth, with most of the basic program ideas coming from the Oxford Group, William James, and Dr. Silkworth. There were six major ideas, ranging from acceptance and powerlessness to the need for a full inventory. The sixth concept seems closest to our present Second Step. It read, as Bill remembers, “We prayed to whatever God we thought there was to practice these precepts.” Bill realized, as he put it, that these “. . . six chunks of truth should be broken up into smaller pieces.” So the first version of the Twelve Steps was written, the number twelve coming up quite accidentally. The revised Second Step read, “Came to believe that God could restore us to sanity,” and immediately controversy began. Bill says there were conservative, liberal, and radical viewpoints. Some felt the Christian message should dominate, while others would have nothing to do with doctrinal issues. They emphasized that the Fellowship was spir-

itual, not religious. Many who read the Steps wanted the word “God” taken entirely out, while others wanted a clear religious statement throughout.

The final version of the Steps reflects the force and value of these heated early discussions, and attempts to strike a balance, making AA open to all, regardless of personal beliefs, or no beliefs at all. And the particular decision regarding the vital Second Step seems particularly providential. Bill doesn’t remember who first suggested the actual compromise words, but he says, “In Step Two we decided to describe God as a ‘power greater than ourselves,’” and “we inserted the words ‘God as we understood Him’” in Steps Three and Eleven, deleted the expression “on our knees” from Step Seven, and added, as a lead-in sentence, “Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of recovery.”

I still feel a bit of a shiver when I read this history, because I wonder if I could have accepted a Step like the Oxford Group sixth concept or the Second Step as it appeared in the first version of the Twelve Steps. No, I doubt it. I needed exactly the freedom and openness and tolerance so beautifully expressed in the Step as it was finally decided upon. In fact, Bill said — in referring to the heated discussions and final compromise language — that “such were the final concessions of those of little or no faith; this was the great contribution of our atheists and agnostics. They had wid-

ened our gateway so that all who suffer might pass through, regardless of their belief or *lack of belief.*”

It is paradoxically the strength of surrender and the acceptance of help from a “Power greater than ourselves” which set me free from those tight bonds of alcoholic thinking and drinking. The Second Step in its careful language which denies no one, along with the other Steps similarly structured, provides an infinitely wide acceptance pathway. In reflecting on the final formulation of the Second Step, and the other eleven, Bill says, “God was certainly there in our Steps, but He was now expressed in terms that anybody — *anybody at all* — could accept and try. Countless AAs have since testified that without this great evidence of liberality they never could have set foot on any path of spiritual progress or even approached us in the first place. It was another one of those providential ten-strikes.”

Yes, some time spent reflecting on how the Second Step became so central in our program teaches me again how fortunate I am. We came to believe — perhaps not instantly but in good time — that a power greater than ourselves — however we as free individuals wish to define or perceive this power — could “restore us to sanity.” For me, this was the full education of my AA program, the gradual realization of who I was, where I should be headed, and the source of the joy and serenity in my life.

Jan P., Spokane, Wash.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

A Program of Action



As an atheist with long-term sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous, I am occasionally asked how I resolve my atheist philosophies with the program's strong reliance on belief in God's participation in recovery from alcoholism. I have been asked, for example, "How do you work the program when you don't believe in God? Do you just skip the God Steps? What do you turn your life over to? I can see how you could do Step One, and maybe even Two, but how does an atheist do Step Three?" I have asked myself all those questions and many more over the years as I learned how to stay sober within AA.

Perhaps the key to remaining atheist and in AA is that I got permission for some flexibility early in my AA experience. The man who urged me into AA told me the other members

would speak about God, but I could overlook that and listen to their advice on daily living. He said I could accept their friendship and assistance without buying all their ideas. The woman who took me to my first meeting told me to accept what would help me and reject what didn't — I could choose. She pointed out that chapter five in the Big Book says the Steps are "suggested," which implies the right to reject some of the directives.

Although I was given the permission for selection of ideas, I was also told by my early sponsors that the Steps and recovery go together. In other words, it would probably be necessary for me to find a way to incorporate into my life *all* the actions described in the Steps. I would reduce the likelihood of gaining a successful and happy sobriety if I simply omitted the Steps that refer to God. So, with the permission for flexibility, I also got the responsibility to find

ways to view each of the Steps as compatible with my lack of belief in God. My job would be to interpret the program so I could live with it, literally.

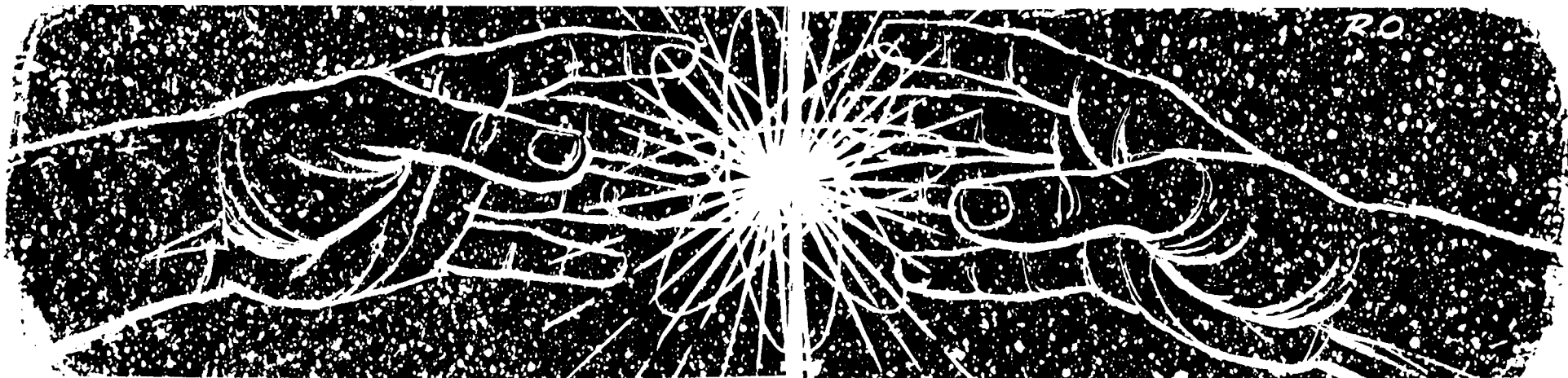
I cannot say when I began thinking about AA's Steps and how I could apply them to my life. I know that my initial sobriety consisted of little more than not drinking and going to lots of meetings. When I did start to listen to others' advice to incorporate the suggested Steps into my decisions, Step Three seemed the most important one to address. First, that Step contains an absolute declaration for belief in God, and I recognized that reconciling my atheism with such a seemingly incompatible concept might very well determine whether I could remain in AA. Second, everyone told me they had gotten the most benefit from applying Step Three. And third, I kept hearing people say that Step Three was their stumbling block. If that were true for believers, I thought I was facing one heap of trouble. I have since realized I couldn't have been more mistaken — Step Three has been no more difficult than those which have nothing to do with God.

Step Three had been thrust at me almost immediately. It seemed that nearly every discussion meeting I attended during the first few weeks used Step Three as a topic. What a greeting for an atheist! If I had not been so desperate I might also have been too narrow-minded and arrogant to think I could learn anything from all those strong believers. Luck-

ily, I was frightened, miserable, lonely, physically weak, and unable to argue about anything. Because I wanted and needed the safety of AA, I was forced to listen to dozens of people describe their experiences with turning it over, letting go and letting God, and trusting in higher powers. I stuck around because I had nowhere else to go. I didn't do anything about Step Three, of course, but I did find out that all that God talk had not injured me.

My approach to Step Three started with the willingness to listen to spiritual and religious perspectives I had dismissed many years earlier. I did not listen with the intent or hope to convert to a belief in God. I listened because I figured that each Step had a purpose for being and a route for acquiring some aspect of sober, sane living; I needed to find out just exactly what Step Three was meant to do and how I could achieve the purpose. Based mostly on what I heard from others about the effect of the Step, I decided its purpose must be to relieve self-generated conflict and fear. The method almost certainly is to relinquish the compulsive need to control and to do what is reasonable.

Having realized Step Three's purpose, I have spent the past sixteen years trying to hear what people *do* when they *say* they turn their will and life over to the care of God. The distinction between what people do and how they talk about and think about that action is very important for me. Someone would tell their method of



doing Step Three and it would strike me that I could do that; I could do it without believing in God. I could not, however, think about my action as having anything to do with God as my friend might, because I do not recognize any form of God.

All of us in AA have heard many different methods of acting out belief. Most of the time the process of exercising belief seems to consist of an internal pep talk and then going about one's business. One woman said that she "turns it over" by repeating an old phrase: Hope for the best, expect the worst, and take what comes. And then she cleans house or goes to work or visits a friend or whatever else occupies normal living. She does what actually is the only reasonable thing she can do. I can do the same thing — repeat her phrase to remind me of the reality of chance and the absurdity of expecting to be able to control all aspects of my life, and

then go about the business of living.

Another member described Step Three as "going with the flow" of life. That advice helped me try to fit myself to circumstances rather than insist on creating them. They are words for helping me establish more rational views of my role in life's events.

Countless numbers of people have told me they recite the Serenity Prayer as a tool for engendering an attitude of turning it over. I now regard the statements in that prayer, except for the part about asking it to be a grant from God, as a description of a completely sensible way to approach life. Even atheists can learn to recognize the futility of nonacceptance, the value of risking changes, and the way to tell the difference between things we can affect and those we can't. When I begin to worry about things I can do nothing about, I tell myself to "accept what you can't change." Often I have used the ideas in the Se-

renity Prayer as a trigger for relinquishing my need to control and as a reminder to take action when some discontentment can be remedied.

I find I actually do very little that is different from the actions of those who believe in God. I just think about the actions in a different way. The words of the Serenity Prayer are a concise way to tell myself to do what makes sense because sane and sensible action has a track record of success. When I make a decision to quit trying to control, I do not expect anyone or anything will oversee events and take care of me. I make the decision because it is the reasonable action to take. I get relief from anxieties and fears the same way the believers do — I stop concentrating on what dismays me and direct my attention to activities that are productive. For the past year or so I have been using a Zen observation as a guide to Step Three practice. The Zen master

noted that peace and enlightenment come when you stop evaluating in terms of good or bad and merely accept all of life as what is and try to learn from it. No mention of God is there, but that idea conveys a non-combative principle that is quite similar to that of Step Three and it is said in a way I understand.

Observing what people do, rather than simply listening to how they talk, has been crucial to my interpretation of all the Twelve Steps. Concentrating on discerning the action each person takes allows me to get around the words about God that get in the way of my understanding how various Steps work. Steps work the same way for me as for someone who believes in God. Only the words get changed. My Step Three would say, "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of reasonable action."

J. L., El Granada, Calif.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

'Act on the Decision'

I'M RESENTFUL AT:	THE CAUSE	AFFECTS MY:
Mr. Brown	His attention to my wife. Told my wife of my mistress. Brown may get my job at the office.	Sex Relations. Self-esteem (fear). Sex Relations. Self-esteem (fear). Security. Self-esteem (fear).
Mrs. Jones		
My Employer	Unreasonable - Over Threatening me for padding my expense account.	Self-esteem Security
My Wife	Misunderstands and likes Brown.	Pride Self-esteem Security



"Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness." These, I was told, are the keys to working each Step of the AA program.

The first three Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous came pretty quickly for me, but when I got to Step Four I was so busy trying just to not drink that it took me a while to get it done. At twenty-eight days sober, I attended a convention and during a Big Book study I heard a speaker say that the way to complete Step Three is to do Step Four (act on the decision). So I took action.

It was a few days before I could sit down with pen and paper in hand. In the meantime I thought about the many conflicts I had had with friends, family, employers, and enemies, trying to focus not on what they did to me, but what I did. I somehow had the idea that I was looking for all the things I had done wrong, and it puzzled me that in one particular instance there were hard feelings on my part while I could not see that I had done anything wrong.

Nevertheless, I wrote.

One day I found myself in a university lounge at 7:00 AM as my oldest daughter began a five-hour battery of tests. I sat alone in that sunlit room, prayed, and started writing down names of the persons I had resentments against. From my earlier mental inventory I had a number of names, ranging from the first grade

teacher who paddled me for sitting on my foot to a former sister-in-law who cussed me out in front of my new wife. My father, the workaholic spoilsport, was there, as well as the onetime best friend who turned against me for reasons I still don't understand.

I looked at the list I had and briefly described the particular situations upsetting me regarding each person. I also looked at myself in relation to the situation to see in what area — financial, social or sexual — I felt threatened. It began to get a little squirrely, because (as I see it now) I was taking the entire process one name at a time and getting bogged down in all the personalities and interactions of each incident. More and more I found my resentment getting stirred up so it was hard to see where I was wrong. In addition to chapter five, I was using an inventory guide that psycho-babbled something about looking for the seven deadly sins, and I found myself rationalizing, analyzing, and eliminating myself into confusion.

Nevertheless, I waded through. In five hours I had eleven pages of inventory — some of it quite irrelevant. While I knew there were still a few cesspools in me that needed to be cleaned out, I was certain I had hit on the grosser handicaps, and figured that where I was confused about me, my sponsor could shed some light when I took the Fifth Step. And he did — thanks to my Higher Power.

I may not have done my Fourth

Step "right" the first time, but I did do it! Despite my confusion, most of my major character defects came to my attention. I can still recall my amazement when, sitting on a couch in that big sunlit room with my feet on a coffee table, I discovered that I, who thought I was a pretty humble guy, had a giant case of egomania manifested as self-pity, and that the opposite side of that self-centered coin was pride. And the relief was almost comic when I realized how presumptuous I had been to be so upset with people who didn't live up to my expectations of them. That was when I understood the resentment I had against a person whom I had not harmed.

Since then, three charts based on the example on page 65 have begun to crop up in my area. You can simply fill in the blanks — one page each for fears, resentments, and wrongs done to others (including sex conduct) one column at a time. In this way, the inventory is laid out in organized form when it comes time for the Fifth Step. You don't have to ramble through an autobiography cluttered with side issues and room for rationalization.

I have done mini-Fourth Steps using those forms since that first time, and I encourage my pigeons to use the same method. They're simple to follow and straight out of the Big Book. And because there is not a lot of room to write in each line, I don't get so bogged down in side issues dealing with persons other than myself.

One other thing: There is a phe-

"... A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them

promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.

"We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly."

— page 64,
Alcoholics Anonymous



nomenon in AA that has not been addressed much — that of the alcoholic who cannot write. The Big Book maintains, as do I, that the inventory

should be written — so how does the illiterate (or otherwise handicapped) alcoholic write it down?

Well, I volunteered to be a secre-

tary for my illiterate sponsoree, pledging that whatever he dictated would be held in strictest confidence whether he chose to take the Fifth Step with me or not. In addition, being a Native American, his English vocabulary was also limited. I asked him for a list of persons he held a grudge against, and he named them. Going back I asked what had happened that caused him to resent each one, and he told me. Then I asked him what area of his life was affected: his wallet, his standing among his people, or his sex life. When he got to the point of determining the nature of his wrongs, I was shocked to discover that he thought "honesty" and "dishonesty" both meant "to be honest." But I learned, and he learned. And he just celebrated a year's sobriety this past month!

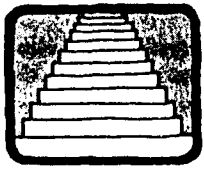
I'm sure this language barrier exists for alcoholics in addition to American Indians. I have known many who dropped out of school in the elementary or junior high school years. And there are amputees for whom writing is very difficult, if not impossible. I strongly suggest to AA members who know of such a person struggling with recovery to offer to serve as a secretary — promising to keep the information "secret," or "not to tell anyone" (those words are easier to understand than "confidential"). As for the idea of a person being "too dumb" to do the Step, I haven't met an alcoholic yet who doesn't know who he is mad at!

Alan L., Gentry, Ark.

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

'Building an Arch'



I first heard about Step Five from my sponsor. He had recently taken his. It didn't sound like fun. Not being one to suffer alone, my sponsor's immediate reaction to his own "spiritual house cleaning" was to launch me upon a Fourth Step. He wanted to give away what he'd received. I thought, "What happened to 'this is a selfish program'?"

Step Four took a very long time. At all of it I balked. I thought I could find an easier, softer way, but I could not. With all the earnestness at his command, my sponsor became cunning, baffling, and powerful, constantly reminding me that half measures availed me nothing. I hated him.

The day finally came when even I had to admit that I'd completed Step Four to the best of my ability. That's

what had me so upset. The best of my ability didn't look so hot in those days. I called my sponsor to tell him I'd finished, expecting to take a six-month to one-year sabbatical from the Steps after this arduous trek into my life. That's when he lowered the boom. "Great," he said. "The best time to take the Fifth Step is right after you finish the Fourth. Meet me at my home tomorrow at six."

Son of a gun! Who do you think you are? I thought, but aloud, I said, "Oh—kay, I'll be there."

I hung up the phone and said to myself, "I bet Bill W. didn't have to go through this!" I used to think the Big Book referred to Step Five when it said, "What an order! I can't go through with it." I thought, how can talking about all this junk that I never wanted to write down in the first place make any difference?

By the time I finished Step Five, I

knew that I was well on my way toward "building an arch" through which I would "walk a free man." What happened? Did God convert me into a religious AA dervish. Was I brainwashed by some mystical technique into an AA true believer? Did I go into permanent shock? None of these things happened. The truth is much simpler. Step Five simply accomplished exactly what I was promised, based on the tried and tested experience of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is what happened. For starters, I had prepared for Step Five by making a beginning on the previous Steps. I had my Fourth Step inventory which had given me a new awareness, albeit a not completely objective one. Nevertheless, I had it. Though the temptation to avoid sharing with "another human being" was nearly overwhelming, my fear of not following my sponsor's instructions to the letter was even greater.

I arrived at my sponsor's home promptly at six. I didn't want to be late for my "funeral." He ushered me into the living room and I sat in what was obviously the condemned man's chair. Given to redundancies in times of hysteria, I commented on the weather at least twice, and God only knows how many times I mentioned the state of local AA affairs. Then my sponsor said those terrible words: "Why don't you get out your Fourth Step so we can get started."

I feared that doors automatically sealed themselves during Fifth Steps.

But I prayed to God and "asked His protection and care with complete abandon." "Okay, where do you want to begin," I asked, hoping for mercy. "Why don't we begin with your grudge list," my sponsor said. "But before we begin," he added, "why don't we pray and ask our Higher Power for guidance. After all, this is a three-way deal. God is very much a part of this. It's his grace that brought you here."

"I used to think the Big Book referred to Step Five when it said, 'What an order! I can't go through with it'"

Sometimes sponsors can really surprise you. This was one of those rare times. We prayed, then he became his old self again, indicating that it was time I began. We went over my grudge list, item by item. I discovered that he liked "item by item." I read and explained. He listened and commented.

Before we were halfway through the list, I began to realize that the advice, counseling, and experience he shared was not only his, but that of others as well. It was the experience of one drunk talking to another, but it was more than that. It was the resonating voices of countless men

and women in AA who had shared their experience, strength, and hope with each other. Was this God-consciousness? I wondered, as I continued my disclosures.

Finishing the grudge list, we assailed my list of fears. To my surprise, I discovered my sponsor and I shared some of the same ones. By this time, occasional laughter interspersed the more serious portions of the unfolding panorama of my life. I was beginning to feel a sense of relief. It continued to grow even as we discussed pertinent aspects of my "list of major human failings — the Seven Deadly Sins."

It was incredible! As years of humiliation, pride, and fear fell away into harmless debris, my sense of isolation actually began to dissipate. I no longer felt like a freak, a pathetic caricature of humanity, incapable of integrating myself into the world about me. The existence of God's presence was no theory; it was fact. God was with us and my cup did indeed run over. It overflowed with his love as it was translated into the experience, strength, and hope of two twentieth-century alcoholics joined in the miracle of a spiritual awakening known as recovery.

Those secrets that I'd sworn to take to my grave were now dead and buried under the fertile soil of a new freedom nurtured by truth and sharing and laughter, moistened by tears of relief and joy, and warmed by the sunlight of the spirit. "Step Five works! It really does!" I marvelled. I

knew now that the man who was leaving was not the same man who had fearfully entered this Fifth Step sanctuary just a few hours previously.

Today, after many revisits to Step Five, I know that my initial experience was no fluke, that "God does move in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," and that Step Five is one of those.

I have also been privileged to share in the Fifth Step experiences of others. Since there is nothing like personal experience to qualify one for this extremely personal spiritual awakening, I would suggest having done a Fifth Step as a prerequisite for hearing someone else's. We must be prepared to share our own Fifth Step disclosures, laughter, and tears that the experience of others might be as profound as our own. Being able to keep confidential the disclosures of others is also essential. This experience is only between God and ourselves.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said, in his first inaugural address, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." If we're willing to expose the pages of our lives to the love and understanding of our Higher Power and a fellow alcoholic, we'll surely know a new freedom and a new happiness. We'll discover that love is never having to feel alone again; that God's presence in our lives has become profound; and that the unity of the Fellowship of the spirit can be ours so long as we are willing to "pass it on."

Chico C., West Palm Beach, Fla.

IN SEARCH OF EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY



About a year ago I read an article written by Bill W. titled "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety." He wrote this article late in his AA recovery and it deals with that

wonderfully terrifying realm — beyond not drinking. To me, it was the most powerful thing he ever wrote, along with the Big Book. It opened up a whole new dimension of recovery I was struggling to find. It literally saved my life.

After almost three and one-half years in AA, living without my medication — alcohol — I came to a crisis in my recovery. I ended up going back to alcohol for a short period because of the pain and despair I was feeling. It was worse than anything I had experienced up to that time because I had nowhere to hide from it. My emotions were stalking me into the deepest depression of my life.

I see now that I drank all those

previous years to stay sane. Year by year I had become more uncomfortable emotionally even though I continued to go to four or five meetings a week, read, pray, meditate, and really work Steps One, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. I talked constantly with my AA friends and others about how I felt. I was in a state of despair and self-condemnation for failing to "work the program." The harder I tried, the worse I felt. I could not find serenity or emotional balance. I could not figure out what was wrong and no one seemed to know what to tell me except to go to meetings, read the Big Book, and get off the pity-pot.

It was then that I discovered the article by Bill W. My eyes and heart and soul were opened up to that "new frontier" he had discovered after his long, agonizing, dry search through depression. I realized at once that he had suffered the same emotional devastation that I had — what he called an "emotional merry-go-round." He stated the problem this way: "How to translate a right mental conviction into a right emotional result, and so into easy, happy and good living. . . . It's the problem of life itself for all of us who have got to the point of real willingness to hew to right principles in all our affairs."

There is a "point," as he calls it, where I am willing, but for some reason unable, to get past a block that prevents me from choosing to be happy and journey on into emotional sobriety. Bill W. aptly called it "a hell of a spot!" He also showed me I was

dealing with my unconscious, that great expanse of old recordings which continually plays a lifetime of neglect, frustration, and fear. Locked in this deep hidden part of me are fears and compulsions which he calls "faulty and emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed, upon any set of circumstances whatever." This was a powerful and revealing statement about my dilemma, my recovery, and the direction I should now go. I was still absolutely dependent for validation and security on people (even my long-dead parents) and circumstances beyond my control. This created a terrible endless spiral of self-condemnation, guilt, and depression.

I began to see that my recovery was a process of growth followed by sabotage. These episodes began with a kind of innocence and newness of experience offered to me by my recovery — a pink cloud, if you will. From this new experience, I was allowed to make positive choices and responses, thus creating joy and excitement in my life. As this high peaked out, I felt the need for relief and rest. To find this relief I chose the opposite of the positive and joyous feelings. This was how I nurtured myself; it was all I had ever learned.

Of course, this caused decline instead of peace and so my need for relief grew. I added other opposites and experienced more decline. Frustration and doubt began to set in. Soon I slipped into a kind of learned violence against myself for failing in my attempts to grow and nurture myself.

*“Out of all the pain
and grieving . . . comes a
love of self and others
that is beyond
imagining. It is a deep
and powerful Ninth
Step . . .”*

From here it was only a short slide to depression, that gray expanse of self-hatred and self-deceit. After periods of depression, the episodes would start over again with some new experience. My absolute dependencies on people and circumstances were sabotaging my recovery with a type of self-abuse.

Bill W. goes on to say that the answer is love, “an outgoing love of God’s creation and his people, by means of which we avail ourselves of his love for us.” He says that something very powerful must now take place if I am ever to achieve the emotional sobriety this kind of love can bring: “It is most clear that the real current can’t flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken and broken at depth.”

This is now the new frontier of recovery I am beginning. It is a frightening, painful, and glorious journey into freedom — a plunge into depths of emotions and feelings I had

never achieved. But out of all the pain and grieving of breaking those dependencies comes a love of self and others that is beyond imagining. It is a deep and powerful Ninth Step of amends to myself and those I had so depended on.

As I begin this journey of “breaking at depth,” through reading, treatment, therapy, meetings, and the Twelve Steps, I am finding a healing beyond description. It is a bonding and reuniting with myself, with others, and with that inner light I call my Higher Power. Once again Bill W.’s words come to mind to guide me and help me go to any length to recover: “More and more we regard all who labor in the total field of alcoholism as our companions on a march from darkness into light. We see that we can accomplish together what we could never accomplish in separation and in rivalry.”

It is the wonderful searching and open-mindedness of this that has helped prevent me from suffering and the destructive recovery-robbing consequences of “contempt prior to investigation.”

I believe many of us AAs are entering the new frontier called emotional sobriety that Bill W. was beginning to sense and discover for himself years ago. Abstinence from alcohol is truly only the beginning of an incredible spiritual journey into healing and joy. And I thank my Higher Power that I have Bill W. and others to travel with me.

Anonymous

May 1989

Outraged

From Bensalem, Pa.:

My name is Bob. I have been a member in good standing in AA for twenty-one years.

The purpose of this letter is to express my chagrin and outrage at the publication of the article "The Mis-Steps of the Season" in the December 1988 issue.

Until I found AA, I can't remember ever holding anything sacred or in such high esteem as I do our beloved Twelve Steps.

It is inconceivable for me to believe that anyone entrusted with carrying the message through our precious Grapevine would select such a trite, juvenile and most degrading article.

I have never written a protest letter in my life but felt obligated to write and tell you of at least one person who finds this action reprehensible and irresponsible.

In my opinion the publishing of this article sends a very dangerous message to all and any who would like to devalue what input these Steps have for a suffering or recovering alcoholic.

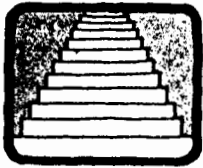
As we all have been taught, we are nothing but trusted servants. You have been given an awesome responsibility in the operation of the Grapevine. You are the voice of AA to many, many people.

You have, in my opinion, violated that trust. It is also my opinion that all responsible should reconsider their own capacity for assuming your present positions and turn them over to those who will operate our Grapevine in a serious and sober manner. B. C.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Ready, Set, Let Go!



I remember when I first tried to understand the words of the Sixth Step and how they applied to my early attempts at a complete inventory. "What's the difficulty here," I said; "this Step seems simple; *of course* I'm ready and willing to have God remove any defects of character I might have!" I thought I might just as well skip directly from the Fourth and Fifth inventory Steps to Step Seven and go right ahead and ask God to remove my shortcomings. Why dally with Step Six which only requires *readiness* to have defects of character removed? "I'm *always* ready to have any such defects removed," I reasoned.

But these were the thoughts of an AA member with only a month or two on the program. The truth is that I had *never* been ready or willing to have *any* of my defects removed; in fact I rather liked some of them! It had not yet dawned on me that AA

was a lifetime program, which suggested a constant readiness to have defects removed that might endanger my sobriety and interfere with my spiritual growth.

My story, though typically I thought it unique, is a familiar one. I discovered drinking in my late teens as a wonderful "cure" for whatever ailed me, whatever tape of self-pity I was listening to at the time. And drinking "worked," so I thought, for many years — well into my thirties. I listened to that quiet carbonated-effervescence-over-ice-cubes voice that always assured me that I was the sensitive one, the one "wronged" by that "uncaring" world out there. I was not at fault, I reasoned; the world was guilty for treating me unfairly. And so I thought of sobriety only when drinking ceased to "work," when I was told in no uncertain terms that jaundice and cirrhosis were life-threatening. I finally paused in my headlong plunge toward oblivion, certain of one thought: I didn't want to die. I

reached for the phone and dialed AA, although my twisted thinking wouldn't allow me to even imagine sobriety as "enjoyable" or productive; AA seemed simply a welcome and easily available way of avoiding death.

My habitual pattern of rationalizing so that I was always the "winner" went right on. I was from a wonderful family (my brother was a Catholic priest, so surely I had an edge here!); I had earned both a Bachelor's and Master's degree, and was well on the way toward completing my Ph.D. True, I had not written a word of my dissertation for four years, but this, of course, had nothing to do with my drinking. My problems had to do with my "sensitivity" and the fact that "nothing had gone my way"! My "bottom line" summation of myself still suggested that I was a pretty wonderful fellow, talented and extra-sensitive, who had been treated capriciously, perhaps even cruelly, by life.

There was a fascination in AA, because — despite my rationalizations — the program was clearly affecting people in positive ways. At these early meetings, I could see joy and happiness in the eyes of so many, and the constant melody of laughter was a kind of musical proof to me that the program was somehow working. So I plunged into the Steps, under the tutelage of Paul, my ever present and able sponsor. I learned that though I was truly powerless over alcohol, I could be restored to sanity through belief in a Higher Power. It was sug-

gested to me that I make a decision to turn my life and will over to this concept of a Higher Power, and make a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself. I began to understand the necessity of admitting to God, to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.

An incredibly big order, I felt, but I pushed onward, aided by the fruitful example of Paul's life, which seemed to me remarkably successful. He was an excellent teacher, an exemplary husband and a devoted father. I would listen to his horror tales of past drinking days, and compare them with his present life. The difference to me seemed awesome, and Paul always gave the Fellowship credit for generating these vital changes I had immediately noted. His example paved the way for my acceptance and full involvement in the Steps of the program.

The concepts of being powerless over alcohol and believing in a Power greater than myself seemed not too difficult to understand and accept, particularly when I realized that it was to be my personal and individual definition of that Power. And the turning of my will over to that Power also seemed quite reasonable and appropriate. But the inventory suggestions in Steps Four and Five proved to be much more of a personal challenge. I laboriously tried to write down my entire life and find whatever shortcomings existed; I talked with Paul endlessly, driving him, I'm sure, to despair at times! I

examined my upbringing, my career, my marriage, trying to avoid those two corruptors of straight thinking: rationalization and self-pity. Slowly — quite slowly — in my case over the course of weeks and months, I began to see that my *real* self was not so much (as I thought) my *potential* or what I *wanted* to be, but was rather, up to this point in life at least, what I *had done*. This bitter pill took a while to go down; it was difficult to admit that my previous definitions of self were all associated with my grandiose dreams of what I was *going to do* rather than what I had actually accomplished. And the truth of the matter was that I had truly accomplished little in life — and that clearly a *major* shortcoming in my personality and character had to do with my demonstrated *inability* to see myself as I really was, and my constant failure in life to recognize *accurately* my capacities and limitations.

When I felt sufficiently clear about

these inventory conclusions, I went through the Fifth Step, “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs,” with Paul, and found it a tremendous relief to finally put down the pretensions which had for so long formed the central core of my being. Now it was time for Step Six!

But why, I thought again, is there a separate Step solely concerned with being “. . . entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character”? And the answer, hidden at first by my pride, began slowly to take shape, as it inevitably does to those who have found the courage to plunge completely and without fear into the inventory Steps. The clear answer has to do with the realization of the necessity of *readiness*, based on careful and thorough inventory preparation. Without this preparation, how could I know which shortcomings were central, which defects of character most injurious to my sober growth? I real-

ized that any effective action was based on knowledge of self and *readiness*, and that delay would be dangerous and rebellion at this point perhaps fatal. Here is the precise moment in the program where we turn away from partial solutions and move directly toward full acceptance of God’s will for us.

How fascinating — and inspiring — that the separate Step Six exists. How many *hundreds* of times before I found AA had I implored God, or any other “Power” I was thinking of at the time, to “remove” all pain in my life. But in those drinking years, it never occurred to me that I was asking God to do all the inventory work for me, and that then he should operate in some “carte blanche” fashion to either 1) make my personality and character “perfect” so that I could enjoy the life I so richly deserved, or 2) “take care” of all those people and forces “out there” who were clearly inimical to *my* concept of how the

universe should be structured!

No, the sober universe doesn’t operate this way. Instead, we must take the necessary time to examine fully and honestly our characters in action, and then admit to God, to ourselves and to another human being the *exact* nature of our wrongs. How important is the word *exact* here! We are not sidestepping or evading any longer our personal responsibility to see ourselves as we really are; we specifically declare the exact nature of our wrongs and defects of character. *These* individual defects, we state to God as we understand him, have moved us blindly toward self-destruction, and we are now prepared and *ready* to have them removed. Thus Step Six is the passage between the inventory Steps and our earnest request in Step Seven which enables us to sail from the stormy waters of alcoholic thinking into the calm harbor of AA in action.

Anonymous, Spokane, Wash.

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The Pain Was Lifted



After several years of enjoyable sobriety I was suddenly seized by negative thinking so devastating that it wiped out my peace of mind, undermined my ability to work, and might eventually have sent me back to drinking. Today, with thirty years of continuous abstinence, I am convinced that I was saved from relapse by applying Step Seven fervently and in desperation.

When I was only a few months sober in AA I had included Step Seven in my self-directed crash course in the entire Twelve. While my Step Four inventory and Step Five were as thorough and honest as I could make them at the time, and were repeated a year later, my treatment of Steps Six and Seven was superficial, little more

than turns around the pylon without reducing speed. After a perfunctory, "Yes, God, I humbly ask you to remove whatever shortcomings I might happen to have," I moved on to the later Steps.

At that time I didn't feel it necessary to itemize for my Higher Power exactly what those defects and shortcomings actually were. After all, he should know. Wasn't he listening during my Fifth Step? I know now that I also skipped too lightly over Steps Eight and Nine. While I did make some difficult amends, I am abashed today at how blind I was to the need to make certain others.

Lest this confession be seized upon by newcomers as evidence that an alcoholic can safely go easy on the Steps, I had other support. Members of my home group in North Hollywood, California, dragged me along

on Twelfth Step calls and flung me into group assignments despite my touchingly modest protests that I didn't want my inexperience to embarrass AA as a whole. Working with other alcoholics and performing services for my group may have helped me reduce some of my defects even though I had not fully confronted them.

When I later applied Step Seven during a mental and emotional crisis in my seventh year in AA, it was not, like the first encounter, a casual ritual. After I describe my crisis you are apt to think, "Anybody who makes a big crippling issue out of such triviality is certainly neurotic!"

Good! You are now prepared to appreciate my difficulty. If alcoholics or others become upset over a death, job loss, or a broken relationship, they can talk about it or cry about it with dignity. Their problem will be heard with respect and sympathy. But a neurotic's problem is based on an inner conflict that he is in some way ashamed of, and he knows no one will understand. I knew my problem was petty, yet it was overwhelmingly painful and paralyzing.

My "crisis" came at a time when everything was going well. I was then a television writer in Los Angeles, and had begun to sell scripts regularly to situation comedy programs, a new field for me. I was faithfully attending several AA meetings a week, was active in the local central office (inter-group), and was frequently invited to speak at meetings, including some

out-of-state AA conferences.

The previous year I had contributed sketches for a variety show to benefit a halfway house for male alcoholics. AAs and nonalcoholics in the entertainment industry had freely contributed their various talents to the production. It was successful, and now a show was planned to benefit a similar house for alcoholic women. I submitted several sketches for the new revue at the request of the production committee.

While busy at work on TV scripts for which I was being very well paid, I heard from an acquaintance that someone on the benefit show's production staff didn't think my sketches were funny.

There. That's the crisis. Big deal, huh?

I brooded over this reported verdict. I knew this one member of the script committee didn't have the final say on selecting material. Further, he was not in the industry, and could well lack the special ability to judge from a typewritten script whether the material would "play well" when performed on stage by skilled actors. His opinion, if in the minority, would be overruled by the other committee people, both laymen and professionals.

This knowledge in no way reduced my discomfort. To get my mind off this rejection, I tried logic. After all, it was only a benefit show, and all of us were donating our talent. On the other hand, my TV scripts were being readily approved by the producer and

“I was free of the crippling obsession . . . Step Seven . . . had done what my own reasoning, common sense, and self-ridicule were powerless to achieve”

I was earning more money than at any other time in my life.

Logic didn't help. I was obsessed to the point that I could think of nothing else. I even tried self-ridicule. Shakespeare and Hemingway had their detractors, even among literary scholars. So who was I to get upset over this third-party report that my work wasn't appreciated by a real estate agent or a bookkeeper?

I went on brooding.

Sitting alone in a restaurant one afternoon, I realized if I didn't rid myself of this obsession I would be unable to do the work I was being highly paid for. Also, a negative state like this was actually a dry drunk. Unless terminated it would result in loss of writing assignments and sense of failure likely to get me back on booze.

This at last turned my mind to the Steps. I reviewed them one by one. Nothing in the first five offered a solution. None offered a visible han-

dle that I might grasp to get out of my misery. Something was blocking me from being able to turn my will and my life over to the care of God, as Step Three suggests. Then I pondered Step Six. Was I ready to have God remove all my defects of character? A new thought arose.

Was it possible that my psychic pain came not from the situation *but from a defect of character*? If so, I definitely wanted it — or them — removed. But I had to know which ones were involved, lest like the demons in the New Testament they return after the empty house had been swept clean.

In a moment I was identifying resentment, the alcoholic's Number One Offender: I *resented* my critic's unflattering opinion. Only when illuminated by Step Six did I see that my problem involved resentment.

Like all TV writers I had experienced many rejections of my story ideas and scripts by producers and story editors. After normal disappointment I quickly bounced back and returned with new ideas. So why this intense depression over this non-professional's viewpoint that did not in the least affect my livelihood? What character defect might I be demonstrating?

The reader of course has already spotted my difficulty: Pride!

My alcoholic ego, sufficiently smashed seven years before to permit me several years of comfortable sobriety, had returned during my recent good fortune in a difficult occupation. I had become intolerant of the

slightest bit of criticism. My pride was now hurting so much that I was not only ready but almost frantic to have that defect removed.

Silently at the restaurant table I bowed my head and humbly asked God to remove that pride, referring to it by name. Head still bowed I reflected honestly that I had turned to God only because I was in pain. It was then that I added this to my prayer:

“If it is necessary for me to hurt in order to be rid of the defect, *then take the defect and leave the pain!*”

In a split second the pain was gone, and I was free of the crippling obsession that had tortured me for nearly two weeks. Step Seven, sincerely and intensely uttered in silent prayer, had done what my own reasoning, common sense and self-ridicule were powerless to achieve.

My acquaintances will attest that my Higher Power did not completely and permanently remove my false

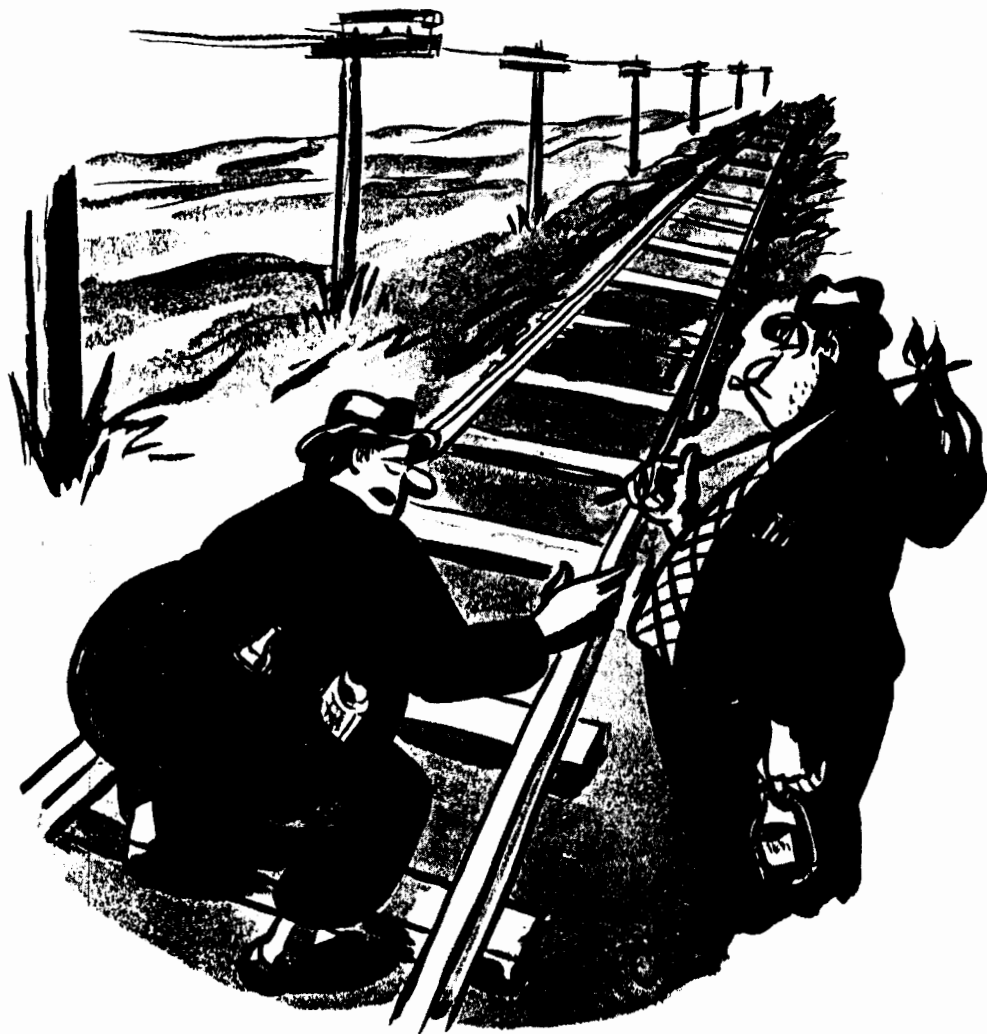
pride. It returns more often (I am sure) than I am aware. But so far, in the twenty-three years since my prayer in the restaurant, pride has not returned so overwhelmingly. Identified for what it is, it shrinks enough to prevent serious damage to myself and others.

Admittedly my problem was based on a triviality, but it was leading to disaster. My AA experience in four widely separated States of the Union teaches me that we alcoholics return to drink far more often because of petty difficulties than because of life's serious setbacks and tragedies. The big problems seem to bring out our virtues, petty ones our faults.

For God to remove our shortcomings, we need to identify the defect for what it is. Thus we attain the humility required by Step Seven. And certainly the most difficult fault to see in ourselves is pride, aptly termed the first deadly sin.

Lou H., Greensboro, N.C.

JULY 1989

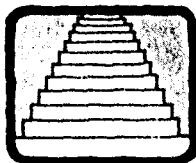


"I wanta practice them Twelve Steps —
but the railings are too darn low."

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Balancing the Books



My first experience of freedom came while I was locked up in the state penitentiary. I had been carefully guided through the first seven Steps and had begun to awaken spiritually. I trusted the AA process and was beginning to trust God.

But my sponsors and I were faced with a logistical problem. No matter how willing we were to make direct amends, the state would not let us out to do so. One of my sponsors had committed murder, and for him to directly contact the victim's family would cause much undue harm.

As we discussed these issues, it became clear that the key to the Eighth Step was willingness; if this God were truly loving and merciful as it appeared, we would not be kept in bondage simply because we could not reach those to whom we owed restitution. Freedom would come, it seemed, when I stood entirely ready to make amends wherever possible.

My sponsor gave me an exercise to do. I was to make a list of all the people I had harmed. This list would

start with the names from my inventory. It was suggested that there were many others I had harmed that also must go on the list, even though there was no resentment or fear connected with them. I was to be as clear as possible as to the harm I had done. *But* — my sponsor pointed out — even though I knew what I had done to each person, I was so insensitive that I probably did not know the consequences of my actions. He gave me the key to freedom; I was to close my eyes and picture each person separately in front of me. I was to look each straight in the eye and see if I could feel a willingness to say: “I have been wrong and have caused you harm. Will you please tell me what I must do so that we can get the books to balance?” As I sat in the cell that night going over my list, I had the experience I had been looking for all my life: I was lifted and set free.

In my blindness I had always believed that a spiritual awakening was the end of the road. Now, having had one, I knew it was but the beginning. Finally, at thirty-four years of age, I could truly begin to live.

Don P., Aurora, Colo.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

'Fear Gave Way to Faith'



"Good judgment, a careful sense of timing, courage, and prudence — these are the qualities we shall need when we take Step Nine." So says the opening paragraph on Step Nine from the "Twelve and Twelve."

Because I am a "normal" alcoholic my first response to Step Nine was to postpone doing it until tomorrow. Not only did I want to postpone it but I also had a tendency to turn the rest of the program into an obstacle course. However, despite having to negotiate this obstacle course of my own making, I had already experienced some of the miracle that is Alcoholics Anonymous. Had I not somehow managed the impossible — stopping drinking "one day at a time"? I had been around long enough to know that perhaps I was not hopeless. I knew that I was willing and had a conscious desire to be open-minded and honest. I knew that I was committed. In fact, I was prepared to go to any length to get what

the program had to offer. Eventually I found myself facing the very real challenge of making direct amends.

I would like at this point to share something with you which accurately illustrates some of what it was like for me. There was a period during my drinking when the family stopped talking directly to me and in fact addressed what they wanted to say to me to one another. Being a drunk is confusing enough without having to decide what comments were in fact meant for me. There was a clue however and that was that by now everyone referred to me as "it." The conversations were a little like this:

"How does she put up with it?"

"How does it keep its job?"

"Never mind, it will kill itself in its motor car one of these days."

When the people from Alcoholics Anonymous came to our house one night they were met at the front door by my wife and informed, "It is in the third bedroom." By God's grace, "It" stumbled into Alcoholics Anonymous and now stood on the threshold of Step Nine. There could be no

more evasion. The time had come to accept the full consequences of my past acts.

What was the real fear? Rejection or maybe just embarrassment? Who would believe me anyhow? Had it not all happened before? I had said "I'm sorry" a thousand times and promised to change. Would I be able to effect this change? The Big Book says you have to live the *spiritual program*. If we are painstaking about this phase, we'll have a new peace and a new happiness — two commodities that had been absent from my life for many years.

But the real stumbling block was my late mother. My father had died when I was seven years old — old enough to know that there was a problem in our home to do with drinking. My mother sacrificed all of her life for her three children and gave us all the love a mother can give. After eighteen years of sobriety I am still haunted by those last few months of her life. She had lived long enough to know that her eldest son had followed in his father's footsteps and that the problem was booze. I still vividly remember visiting my mother in various hospitals. I never managed a sober visit. I remember that most times I did not have the time to spend the whole of the visiting period with her. I generally came late and left early. She died before I came to Alcoholics Anonymous. Over the years, I have come to terms with this. But in those quiet secret moments I share with God, the hurt remains.

The other amends sometimes seem not to matter as much. But I had to examine the real purpose of Step Nine, to try to do something about the relations in my life. The major portion of my amends was owed to my wife. She had stuck with me, suffered with and for me, through all of my worst times. There had been tears, disappointment, and unhappiness. The dreams of a young marriage had become a nightmare.

Disappointment and regret had made me self-pitying and stubbornly angry. The real risk might only be ridicule and dented pride. But Alcoholics Anonymous asks of me a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty: self-survey, confession and restitution, in that order.

What had begun as a venture into the unknown was soon to become a revelation for me. Fear gave way to faith and with God's help and guidance my dilemma was to become yet another wonderful experience in sobriety. Despite my own misgivings it was possible for me to practice humility and to say with sincerity and to mean it, "I was wrong and I am sorry."

I know from my own experience that I have been able to acquire three personal attributes from the program that I did not have before — namely: self-control, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice. I know of no other Step which demands more of me, in terms of these three attributes, than Step Nine.

John H., Benoni, South Africa

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

A Day Without Regrets



Until someone suggested I write an article about Step Ten, I had not been aware that this is not really one of my favorite Steps. For one thing, it's so *daily*.

It's easier to admit powerlessness, to come to believe, to make a decision, to make a list — do some major cleanup on oneself; then move on to bigger and better things like carrying the message and writing instructive articles explaining the program to people who may not be catching all the nuances because they aren't as bright as I am.

It's okay to admit privately that a lot of one's past behavior was counterproductive to a rich, fulfilling life, and then to confess as much in dramatic or pitiful or humorous cadences. But to go through all this every day! To cast a judicious eye

over how you have comported yourself, not in the past, but in the *present*, trying to be honest about what you have done this day!

No wonder this is not a Step I've pondered over frequently. It's one thing to be brave about the Fourth Step. After all, that deals with the *past*. The defects that began to loom up out of the alcohol-saturated mists of my history — such as irresponsibility toward duties I had freely accepted, nay, actually sought; insensitivity, not to say blindness, about how my actions were affecting others — well, all those failings were due to the effect of alcohol on my brain.

Weren't they?

After a while, however, this pesky Step makes you wonder a little. One year, five years, ten — without a drop of alcohol to muddle and distort my mental processes — and I *still* thought mostly in terms of "Will this course of action interfere with my

comfort and pleasure?" rather than, "Am I selfishly hurting someone else for the sake of an ephemeral few moments of personal ego gratification?"

Because, *now*, it is *me*, not booze, that causes me to conduct myself in ways that leave me feeling ashamed, and which often rebound to my own disadvantage by alienating people with whom I need to be on good terms. Furthermore, there seems to be a consensus in Alcoholics Anonymous that one's own psychological makeup predisposed one toward drinking to excess in the first place and that only by working oneself out of those traits of character can one be reasonably certain never again to have to undergo the horror of waking up debilitated, dehydrated, aching, and in despair.

The whole thing was also sometimes complicated by the fine line between faults and virtues. What is necessary and good for my own individual survival often conflicts with what is necessary to the functioning of whatever group of human beings I happen to be dependent on and without whom I could not survive at all.

When under the influence of alcohol I may have frequently acted as if I believed I could stand apart from the rest of society, catering to and pursuing only my own individual wishes and wants. But even then I was not so stupid that I did not intellectually comprehend the saying: "no man is an island." In Alcoholics Anonymous this truth was spelled out for me, not in words and precepts, but in

the actual processes of changing from a "drinking woman" to a total abstainer.

Not knowing that it was a common remark upon joining AA, in my first week I told a friend, "I've rejoined the human race." You see, I already knew that to survive individually I had to become a functioning part of the rest of humanity. AA was the starting point. So what happens? I learned that being able to live with others without too much discomfort required continuing to take personal inventory and when I was wrong promptly admitting it.

At first I was so confused about my own ethical values that I couldn't tell the difference between moral cowardice and kindly forbearance, a need to control born out of insecurity and a healthy self-protectiveness, between a thorough con job on myself and an honest analysis of my motivations. In fact, many times in looking back at a given day all I could be sure I had done right was not take a drink.

I had to start cautiously, depending on the source of truth flourishing somehow, somewhere in the cells and molecules of my body to guide me through this labyrinth of "right" and "wrong." "Right" was *always* not taking a drink. That I could be sure of. "Wrong" was more nebulous, beginning with rather simple "faults," like monopolizing conversations; not listening thoughtfully to the views of others because my brain was so bursting full of my own convictions that there was not room to store *their*

erroneous ideas for later judicious consideration; demonstrating audibly and visibly emotions of anger and pain induced by the behavior of my loved ones, regardless of how my performance affected *them*.

I wish I could say that in the twenty-four years I have been a member of AA I had always recognized and admitted these defects. But I can't. All I can claim is that they don't occur as often as they once did and that when they do, they have moderated.

To someone new to sobriety, let me interpolate a warning here. Don't take the above inadequate list of my surface defects as a reference point for your own faults. It may well be that *you* won't enter a conversation at all, that you rarely have the courage to express an opposing point of view, that you almost never let either loved or disliked persons get a glimpse of how you really feel, good or bad. While I tend to create harm

by overdoing on these counts, you may be cheating yourself and others by under-doing self-expression.

Only *you* can get to really know yourself. That's what makes this Tenth Step such a toughie. You have to do it yourself!

Many times I have regretted dragging my feet on Step Ten. I could have saved myself a lot of regrets if I had been more conscientious about it. But, even so, I have been, I think, a more creditable human being than I was before I joined AA.

In fact, as I now write it is 1:30 in the afternoon, and I tell you honestly I don't think I've done anything wrong yet today. Of course, I haven't been out of the house yet and so haven't had a chance to tangle with another flawed human being. However, I hope that at 11:00 this evening, when I turn out the light, I shall still be able to look back at this day without regrets.

Bernice M., Los Gatos, Calif.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Stepping into the Sunlight



If someone were to insist on my singling out which to me is the most important of the Twelve Steps, I'd have to cite the Eleventh. Early in my AA journey I wouldn't have regarded

it with such reverence. In fact I scarcely noted it and would never have predicted that it would assume importance in my life because it smacked of religion, mysticism, trances, mantras, and all manner of squirmy things strange people who can't manage their own lives do. But

with time it slowly assumed a status as the first among equals and now plays a pivotal role in what I perceive to be my slow but continuing progress toward some semblance of sanity.

I found that practicing the Eleventh Step functioned for me at two levels. (I prefer to think in terms of *living* the program and *practicing* the Steps, thus avoiding the harsh sharp-edged verbs *work* and *take*, which have onerous connotations to a lazy critter like me.) First, as a daily ritual it works wonders in establishing a tone of serenity for the day ahead and helps me avoid my lifelong tendency to jump on my horse and dash off in all directions at the same time. Whereas I used to function at two speeds — fast and stopped — a daily fix of meditation averages those two extremes out to a more gentle and efficient cruise rate.

At a second and more profound level, daily prayer and meditation offers significant guidance and support. Now this Eleventh Step is not a dramatic one and it can be easily lost among the others. After all, if things are going well, if life is improving and we're not drinking, why bother with a vague kind of exercise that doesn't produce noticeable results immediately. Like children, we're inclined to want and indeed expect our rewards for being good little boys and girls immediately and in abundance, right? This wimpish idea of prayer and meditation simply doesn't promise that, although, surprisingly, it

often delivers it.

Like Steps Ten and Twelve it is an essential maintenance Step for me. But even more, I eventually discovered it to be the key to my becoming "weller than well," and to making the journey of Alcoholics Anonymous ever more fascinating and healing. Practice of this Step didn't come to me easily or quickly. The very idea of an invisible means of support seemed okay for you, but somehow I didn't quite need it like you obviously did. Where I was blessed from the start, I later realized, was that I wasn't militant about the idea of *not* believing in a power greater than myself. And in the first few months of going to meetings (and still taking an occasional drink resulting in an occasional drunk) I wasn't fighting the idea. This unconscious, unperceived willingness was the first of many strange forces for good that started working in my life.

As a formal practice, prayer and meditation had humble beginnings when a member of a stag group I attended gave me his copy of the Hazelden book, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day," a volume I hadn't then heard of. I took it with me on an extended trip and started reading it daily. And, by George, I found I liked it. I felt better most days just for reading it. And for a man who had never prayed since he crawled out of his World War II foxholes, this was a revelation. I hadn't trudged through much of my adult life disparaging prayer, you understand, just ignoring it.

And what was I praying for? I'm not at all sure. I do know it was not to a God such as memories of my Methodist Sunday school evoked, an all-powerful, white-bearded presence sitting on an imposing white marble throne monitoring and keeping precise score on all five billion souls on this mortal coil. But there were these new forces at work in my life and somehow I began to think of God as a force for good, a creative intelligence, a spirit of the universe and, of course, as a power greater than myself. I had quietly been accepting the proposition that deep down in every man, woman, and child is the fundamental idea of God. Sound familiar? Those are all words, phrases and concepts found in the Big Book's chapter four, "We Agnostics."

I had read that chapter early in my meeting attendance but while still guzzling a bit. In some mysterious way those ideas seeped into my psyche, soul, unconscious, whatever,

and had opened up a channel for different perceptions of God to reach me, perceptions that replaced and were more compatible with my instincts than a "Czar of the Heavens," as Bill W. wrote in his story on page 12 of the Big Book.

So I found there was a "target" toward which to direct prayers that made me feel comfortable and refreshed. These daily interludes became a regular part of each day and started contributing to my emotional and spiritual recovery, which in turn also quickly translated into the removal of any hankering or craving for alcohol.

The practice of reading, praying, and meditating to improve my conscious contact with my higher power evolved with the months. Among the first realizations was the difference between prayer and meditation made by a speaker that praying was talking to God, meditating was listening to him. And it's really the things I

"hear" in meditation that have done the most to adjust my heading in life and elevate my spirits.

But it wasn't until I persevered day by day and practiced and refined the process that I truly began to find ever more peace and serenity in the form of a more centered, purposeful life, at least in the sense that my body, mind, emotions, and soul were all more or less heading in the same direction. I was riding one horse instead of four.

Often I found remarkable results when I utilized meditation for a purpose, usually one of seeking direction. By that I don't mean whether to buy a grey suit or a blue one, but for guidance in some life-quandary or as a compass to lead me out of a quagmire of indecision. I became convinced early in this new and awkward experience that real meditation was a first cousin to self-hypnosis. I often formulated some positive suggestions to implant in my barren psyche and I tried to open up and listen to my intel-

nermost self as opposed to my intellect or to logic or to my emotions or to the world-at-large. And I thus achieved an inner resonance and harmony from which often gurgled to the surface a gentle inner leading pressure quietly nudging me in some specific direction or murmuring softly, "Stay the course." Once when I was deeply disturbed over the lack of financial stability in my life, I experienced an unmistakable communication, "It's going to be okay." With that there came a great release of anxiety and a new sense of confidence, followed within a few weeks by a steady improvement in the very conditions over which I had been fretting.

There are many possible explanations for these and other "spiritual" realizations, as I choose to call them. They range from divine guidance to the emergence of a psychic message from one's deep and scarred unconscious mind to the surfacing of strong

intuitive hunches based on common sense. Maybe the meditative process helped remove some psychological debris and created a moment of clarity that had been clouded by self-will and rampant grandiosity.

Spiritual guidance? Psychic phenomenon? Instinct? It matters not what we label it; much good and healing can arise from listening in deep peace to one's own inner or central self. But I haven't found that this can be achieved while driving to work or by stealing a quick twenty seconds between putting on my shoes and grabbing a glass of orange juice on the way to the garage. But through practice and patient meditation I have found that I could touch undiscovered parts of myself that were wellsprings of insight, wisdom (relative), conviction, and commitment never before dreamt of in my philosophy.

There are countless sources of reading on meditation; it's been practiced by human beings since they lived in caves. It's been part of every major religion, perhaps less so in Christianity than in some others. The pioneers in Alcoholics Anonymous simply called our attention to the fact that

we, perhaps more than most, could benefit from this ages-old practice of men and women who did not consider themselves as God, as the center of the universe, or as autocratic captains of their own souls.

So beyond any philosophical, metaphysical, mystical, psychic, psychological, or spiritual explanations, this simple time-honored practice has proved eminently practical. It can help me put the day in focus. It can evoke calm, confidence, and certainty that I can handle the day with composure and equilibrium. It enables me to set out on a broad course of action for the day and then set myself on cruise control, avoiding the stops, starts, sputterings, false starts, screeching halts, and the fussing, fretting, and fuming that once so punctuated my days.

Such a practice of the Eleventh Step can set us on a long-range course in life that is smoother and healthier and more enriching than most of us ever expected was possible. As written in the "Twelve and Twelve," "Meditation is our step out into the sun."

E. K., La Canada, Calif.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Keenina



When I had been sober about six weeks a woman in my group telephoned and asked me to accompany her on a Twelfth Step call. I agreed, and turned to inform my nonalcoholic husband of this exciting development. His delight in my sobriety was, if possible, even greater than my own. "Twelfth Step," he mused. "That's the last one, isn't it? Does

this mean you've graduated?"

"No," I replied, trying to sort out the little I had learned. "I don't think you ever graduate from AA. You just keep on going."

Now, quite a few sober years later, I understand much more about what, in the beginning, I only dimly sensed. In AA we don't graduate, we keep on going. And Step Twelve shows us exactly how to keep on going — and keep on growing.

To me, "keeping on going" means

keeping on going to meetings. Oh yes, I know about those who get sober, stay in AA for a few years, then stop coming but remain sober. I even know a few of them personally. But I know a lot more who come back after long absence to say: "I was so sure I would never drink again that I stopped going to meetings. Then I started drinking and couldn't stop."

Then there is the often quoted warning: "The trouble with not going to meetings is that you aren't there to hear what happens to people who don't go to meetings."

When my group holds its closed meeting on Tuesday night, I am there. That is a basic part of working the Twelfth Step as I understand it now.

In the beginning, however, like many new members, I thought the Twelfth Step was only about carrying the message. The rest didn't register.

Lyle, who was active in AA from the day he entered the door until his death forty-one years later, showed me the full Step for the first time at a workshop on the Twelve Steps.

"Most of the misunderstanding about Step Twelve will disappear," Lyle explained, "if we remember that it is not standing off by itself but is a part of our Twelve Step recovery program. It is there for the same reason all the other Steps are: to help us transform ourselves into the kind of people who have no need or desire for alcohol.

"Please get over the idea that the purpose of Step Twelve is to have you

rush out and start sobering up drunks. Not at all. Its purpose is to help *you* stay sober. Since the Steps deal entirely with maintaining our own sobriety, whether the person you carry the message to stops drinking is, to you, irrelevant.

"Over and over, our AA literature stresses the importance of working with others. Chapter Seven of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* starts with: 'Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.' AA started when Bill W. carried the message to Dr. Bob, not from any deep desire to stop Bob's drinking, but because Bill felt his own sobriety was in danger."

Lyle went on to point out that "Step Twelve is really in three parts, not just one: 1. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps. 2. We tried to carry this message to alcoholics. 3. And to practice these principles in all our affairs.

"Let's take a look at the first and third parts, and then come back to carrying the message," Lyle continued. "We have a spiritual awakening, but not just any kind of one. This is a special variety, a spiritual awakening that comes *as the result* of these Steps. You won't get it until you make some effort to take the other eleven Steps. You discover that you are changing, in surprising and gratifying ways. I first recognized a spiritual awakening in myself when I realized I could confidently speak to an

audience after a lifetime of paralyzing stage fright. In the 'Twelve and Twelve,' Bill W. writes that when we have a spiritual awakening we are able to do, feel, and believe what we could not do before on our unaided strength and resources alone.

"Then," Lyle said, "we try to practice these principles in all our affairs. Having, we hope, gained in honesty, courage, love, patience and tolerance through practicing the AA program, can we now go beyond AA and use these traits in our lives outside of AA, in *all* our affairs? By this time we have developed enormous patience and kindness for others in AA. When new people are slow to understand our program or seem to behave in a willfully wrong-headed way, we don't scream at them in rage, or withdraw in a fit of sulks. Instead, we attempt with love and tolerance to bring them to a more cooperative attitude. Surely our domestic lives will improve if we start to treat members of our family as well as we treat our AA friends. Workers with the honesty and responsibility we have learned in AA tend to be sought after and rewarded in the workplace. The disasters and disappointments of everyday life are infinitely more bearable if we can face them with the serenity and courage the AA program has given us."

I thought of Dennis, thin and weak from a debilitating disease, often in pain, but accepting the hard circumstance of his life with serene fortitude. So that was what Step Twelve means.

And I remembered the day, a good many years past, when a distraught Janice summoned her closest AA women friends to help her through a horrible day. Abbie and I arrived together and found her walking the floor and moaning. She had just learned that her son had been ordered to Vietnam.

"He'll be killed!" she cried out. "I'll never see him again! I can't stand it!"

Abbie took her gently by the shoulders and stopped the frantic pacing. "Yes, Janice, you *can* stand it," she said in a tone of utter confidence. "What's more, you can stand it better than most mothers, because you have a source of strength and courage in AA that they don't have."

Janice became quiet. The lines of strain on her face softened. "Why, yes," she said. "I do have, don't I? I'd forgotten." No one saw a sign of faltering courage in Janice from that moment until the day, many months later, when her son returned safely from Vietnam. That, too, was Step Twelve.

My attention came back to Lyle, who was talking about carrying the message. "Most of us," he said, "think of 'carrying the message' solely in terms of working with the brand-new person, very likely still drinking and not well-informed about alcoholism or AA. That kind of Twelfth Step work is surely the most rewarding experience in our AA lives, but it is only one of the many ways we carry the message. If you

have few opportunities to work one-on-one with newcomers, there are hundreds of other ways.

"Simply going to your home group regularly is a form of Twelfth Step work. Where would your group be if no one came? When you join in discussion or make an AA talk, it's Twelfth Step work. So is volunteering to help at your AA service office, if your city has one. Serving as general service representative or district committee member is carrying the message on a huge scale, for you have become part of the system that has spread AA across the world.

"To simplify, everything we do that helps AA or other alcoholics is a form of carrying the message. We help set

up the group's meeting room, shake hands with a newcomer and make him welcome, telephone someone who has missed a couple of meetings, agree to sponsor a new person, or inform our doctor and minister of our membership in AA and of our willingness to talk with anyone who might benefit from our experience — all the hundreds of other things we do.

"The Twelfth Step," Lyle concluded, "gives us both the joy of living and the deep satisfaction of carrying the message. And this is possible because we have had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, and because we are learning to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Elizabeth E., Tulsa, Okla.

WHY? BECAUSE
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WHY? BECAUSE

When I was growing up, I don't think I ever did anything that looked the least bit difficult without first finding whoever was responsible for my having to do the chore and asking, "Do I *have* to?" Upon hearing their answer in the affirmative, I'd whine, "But *why*?"

When I became an adult, my parents' answer — "Because it's good for you" — just wasn't good enough anymore. As an active alcoholic, I'd become obstinate. When faced with a difficult chore, I just plain old wouldn't do it until I could understand the benefits to be obtained. But there's the catch. You can't truly understand the nature of those benefits until you've gone through the work. Real understanding only comes through experience. For example, I can explain to nonalcoholics how miserable my alcoholic life was before coming to AA, but they can

never truly understand. They lack the personal experience.

There were loads of chores in AA that at first (and second) glance looked difficult or unpleasant. And no, I didn't *have* to do them. But it was suggested I do them, as it's suggested you wear a parachute when jumping out of an airplane. I voiced a particularly loud "*why*" when confronted with Step Four. After all, I wasn't such a bad guy once the drinking stopped, was I? But everyone said (and of course this was from the Big Book) that my drinking was but a symptom of the real problem. My ego was the real culprit, with all of its ugly ways of manifesting itself, called character defects. And to top it off, everyone claimed these defects blocked me off from God and kept me in spiritual darkness.

I came to believe that only God had the power to save me and I'd made

the decision to turn my life over to his care, but it took some time to realize that Step Three only represented a decision: my willingness to let go and let God. It in no way meant that I would automatically be good at or even able to actually let go and follow his directions or to discern what his will for me might be. After thinking this through, I had the answer to my question, "Why?" as it related not only to Step Four but to the need for the entire house-cleaning procedure of Steps Five through Nine. But more importantly, after working those Steps, I got a true understanding of their benefits. Now, when practicing Step Eleven, I'm gaining confidence that my perception of God's will for me is just that, and not some garbled nonsense being broadcast by my ego.

I know the only requirement for

membership in this program is a desire to stop drinking, but if you're to recover from the disease of alcoholism, you have to pass through the stage of mere desire into willingness — willingness to do whatever those folks who have gone before tell you that you need to do to stay sober. I know I certainly can't force anyone (newcomer or old-timer) to do those difficult chores. I *can* tell them how getting into action helped me. But ultimately, each of us has to achieve his own understanding of the value of the Steps through the experience of actually working them.

Today, I have the conviction that these things we do are absolutely critical to our continued sobriety and survival. Why? Like they said: because it's good for you.

Dave W., E. Palatka, Fla.

Is AA Changing?

Let's Dust Off the Twelfth Step

One of our area's most popular speakers visited our group last week, and in the course of his talk he referred to the "treatment center industry," and how the current trends have changed the face of our traditional twelfth-step efforts.

"My God," he said, "it used to be we'd sit and feed drunks milk and honey, and half the group would show up in two-hour shifts! Not only would the AAs come a-runnin', but even the wives would come, and while Joe and Harry were talking about

sobriety in the back bedroom with the drunk, Betty and Alice were cleaning up the place, washing clothes and dishes, and trying to comfort the distraught family."

I was struck at once by this description, for that's the way it was when I arrived, too. I was also struck by the peculiar quaintness of it. Here in Texas, such a recital, given in the proper Texas drawl, seems to belong in a collection of frontier memories, along with homesteading tales, wagon trains, and the inevitable

Texas Ranger adventures. It certainly admits to having no place among our modern, multifaceted rehab centers, with all that technology can provide. Mention this "edge of the bed" type of twelfth-stepping to some of our local counselors armed with their state certification and three years of sobriety, and you'll likely get a benign, somewhat condescending smile and little else.

To some of us, though, it *does* look like we've given an awful lot up, in the name of this progress. And while neither the speaker nor I would ever denigrate the enormous good that modern treatment facilities are doing, the question is inescapably raised of what happens to AA, with its need to carry the message. For it *is* a need that we have, which many old-timers will say was a key factor in their early sobriety and one which, if left to others, may in fact be denying recovering alcoholics one of their most potent resources.

The people who reared me in AA, in Manhattan where I sobered up, were a staunch, traditionalist, Tradition-minded, hard-nosed bunch. They impressed me with the program — which I was told to work *as written*, Steps in order — and loved me back to health. They also burned into my consciousness that although the program was basically a free ride — no dues or fees — I was being placed under the most strenuous obligation: Every day you are sober, they said, you are responsible to pass this thing on, undiluted and in the exact manner in which you have received it, *and* you are to do that whenever and wherever you are asked. I was told these are the terms: that you give freely what you have been freely given. I was told that the part about undiluted was because that's the way the thing works, and it doesn't need any help from you! Those were strong words, and a demanding obligation, indeed, but they were right, and I think I have

never been released from that obligation. Today I welcome it, and I'm grateful for it.

So where does that leave us? The common thing today, in our part of AA's world, is that we get a lot of our newcomers on their way out of treatment rather than off the street. They come to us all dried out and armed with a lot of psychology, trying to figure out our program. AAs no longer have the primary exposure to a shaking, quaking drunk that we used to have, so we are missing out on the background of each "case" that we had in the Dark Ages. We also don't have the input of families, or access to those around the drunk that we used to have. In short, where AAs used to have first crack at the poor soul, and a wonderful opportunity to instill our brand of sobriety, we now have a newcomer who's so dizzy from intensive "therapy" that piling on our Twelve Steps right away is more than anyone can bear.

There's another facet to this, as well. It's probably just human nature, but most AAs today seem to be content to allow all this to happen just as it is. It's true that some don't know any better, but many of us can't claim the luxury of ignorance. In my home group, and I'd bet in yours, eighty percent of everything is being done by twenty percent of the members — if you're lucky. This produces the kind of apathy that has been proven to be one of the greatest enemies of long-and-strong sobriety.

Face it, folks, we are told constant-

ly that ours is a program of action. We get sober by doing, we stay sober by doing. When AAs were the first line of contact for a drunk, it was the AAs that got the better of the deal. We were not only in constant action — running to jails, hospitals, strange houses in the middle of the night — but we were learning who we were. We kept seeing ourselves, and seeing over and over how we had gotten where we were. The newcomers played along, but the foundations of powerful and dynamic sobriety were being built under us. I think I can safely say that virtually everything I know about myself as a sober man I have learned from watching the day-by-day growth of the guys I've sponsored, even when they were drunk!

How does this square with us sitting back today, and letting the courts and treatment centers do all the twelfth-stepping? When the phone rings in an AA club, is the rush you see toward the door over who will get the drunk first, or is it about avoiding having to go?

Today, one might think the practice of "carrying the message" only entails calling the spouse and figuring out which treatment facility we'll haul the drunk to. It's possible we've fallen into a Madison Avenue trap. After all, those hospitals and treatment centers are so big. They have so many degreed professionals. Their TV commercials are so convincing, so emotionally appealing. Their after-care and family programs are so sophisticated. Maybe they have con-

vinced AAs that our version of carrying the message is somehow no longer effective, or at best, passé.

The truth is that when they have quite finished with the drunk, the family, and the insurance company, it is still Alcoholics Anonymous that keeps alcoholics sober. We don't need to fight over that — just know it — but it's something we never have to take a back seat over, either. If you think it's not so, watch the newcomers; compare the "walk-ins" with the treatment center people. Frequently you'll see the guy off the street get the program more easily, since he doesn't have the added burden of unlearning all the treatment center psychology first. The guy from the facility, on the other hand, will often come in thinking he already knows more than we do about the illness of alcoholism. He has to lose his pride in that area before making any real progress in the Steps.

I got sober because of the long-

term, one-on-one, personal, loving, and caring twelfth-stepping I got when I arrived. It wasn't packaged in four-color brochures, it had no fancy vocabulary. In many ways it was downright laughable, and indeed we laughed — and cried — a good deal. AAs doing twelfth-step work did it because they knew that to not do it was to wither and die, and they said so by their actions. They were never unwilling to go to any length.

Most of all, because the AAs knew it was really their own lives they were saving, it was never looked on as it often is by today's nonalcoholic professionals, as a job, a "career in the helping professions."

And that has made all the difference in the world.

Perhaps we all might look again at the Twelfth Step, dust off our carry-the-message suits, get out there, and improve our own sobriety in the bargain.

Tony S., Richardson, Tex.

Out of Date?

I was thirty-four years old when I came to AA following a stay in a residential treatment center. After attending about four closed AA meetings, I discovered that due to carelessness or oversight, no one had updated the Twelve Steps for about fifty years.

It seemed to me there was too much God talk and many areas lacked clarity — so I rewrote all Twelve Steps so they would make more sense. Proudly, I presented the updated version at my fifth AA meeting. The old-timer who was chairing the meeting smiled like a saint throughout my dramatic performance and when I was finished and prepared to take questions, said “Thanks, Dan. Next person please.” No one else at the meeting made reference to my literary attempts, and I have never tried to redo this program

publicly. Today, I’m grateful for the kind old-timer who didn’t insult or embarrass me. At that point in my life I felt like a failure and my low self-confidence could easily have been kicked lower.

In a few weeks I intend to return to that same meeting place to pick up my pin for ten years of continuous sobriety. There are still many people there who attended the meeting when I rewrote the program and I’m looking forward to being reunited with my first AA family. Many changes have taken place in my life since I started living sober and I have more changes to make. I go to Big Book meetings and still study the Twelve Steps. The Fellowship has given me another life — one day at a time.

Dan D., Rochester, Minn.



"No, never! I'm willing to make amends to everyone on my list, but not to her. Not to Janice. Not after the terrible things she said to me. She called me a 'gold digger'! She tried to turn her father and sisters and brother against me! As far as I'm concerned, she owes *me* an amends!"

As I finished my hostile outburst, my sponsor smiled sweetly with her exasperating, all-knowing look. "You may not be ready to make amends now," she said. "But there will come a time when you *want* to make amends to Janice. When you are spiritually ready, your Higher Power will find the right time and place. You'll make your amends, and

you will feel wonderful. I promise you, it will happen."

I didn't believe her. I couldn't imagine why I would ever make amends to a person who had insulted and offended me. Janice lived a thousand miles away and that was as close as I wanted her to come.

At 30, Janice was my husband's oldest daughter. She had suffered terribly when her mother suddenly died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Her grief was so intense that she wrung a promise from her father never to remarry and to keep the family home exactly as her mother had left it. She was a devoted (although bossy) sister to her younger siblings. Talented, educated, beautiful, she was the mother of an adopted son and a devoted member of her church.

I was told that she had many fine qualities, but no matter. She didn't like me and I didn't like her. She took her father's marriage as a breach of promise and vowed never to forgive him or me. When I tried to win her over, she angrily blamed me for alienating her from her family. She wouldn't listen to my drunk apologies and belligerent fuming. She didn't understand that, as a newlywed, I needed time (and plenty of alcohol) to adjust to my new status. It was all her fault! Then, somewhere during the last seven years of my drinking, she stopped telephoning. All communication between Janice and her family stopped.

But my sponsor was right. The time would come when I could hardly wait to make my amends. Making those amends would show the power of Step Nine to heal old wounds and unite loved ones.

By 1986, no one had seen or talked to Janice for almost seven years. She had stopped telephoning her father or the sister and brother who still lived with us. She never tried to contact her other sister, married and living in another state. Instead, she held on tightly to her grudges.

It was a family of grudge-holders. Her grandfather had gone to his grave without speaking to his brother for over thirty years. Her grandmother had refused to speak to her son's ex-wife for over twenty. If you offended once, you were never forgiven. Old slights were recalled and thrown in your face. No one in the family knew

how to say, "I'm sorry." No one ever admitted he or she might be wrong.

Into this family I came — a practicing alcoholic on the final, downward plunge. I added my own flaming resentments to the troubles. I covered up my excesses by blaming the family. I drank the alcoholic's bitter brew of anger, resentment, and bewildering despair. In the end, I alienated my stepfamily completely.

That stepfamily was the primary target of my Eighth Step. I was two years sober when I wrote my list and made those first, difficult, direct amends. With newfound humility and dignity, I recognized my part in the angry scenes and hostile home atmosphere. I admitted my mistakes, as best I remembered them. I said those unfamiliar words, "I'm sorry," and I asked for forgiveness. I told each person what I was doing to turn my life around and promised that I would try my best not to offend again. I never mentioned the other person's behavior; I kept to my side of the street.

My husband and my stepchildren were astonished. No one had ever talked to them that way. No one had ever admitted his or her own weakness or failings before. The pattern of blame, excuses, and grudge-holding had left no room for human error or compassion. Miraculously, everyone accepted my amends with grace and good will. But the real miracle was that they began to realize that they could do the same thing toward those whom *they* had offended. Mak-

ing my amends set an example in human relations that would be invaluable in the tragic years ahead.

As I saw and felt the healing power of Step Nine, I began to sense true peace of mind. I began to feel right with the world and right with myself. As I crossed off the names on my Eighth Step list and made my amends to each person, I felt stronger, more secure, more in harmony with myself and others.

But something in me kept telling me I had more work to do. I looked at my list again and realized that Janice's name wasn't even on it. I had totally blanked her out of my mind — and out of my recovery.

As I reviewed my drinking behavior, I saw my motives more clearly. I had interfered between Janice and her father. I had contributed wholeheartedly to family arguments. I had alienated Janice purposely — to keep her from intruding into my life and to protect my right to drink as I wished. She had reacted with hurt anger, which let me justify my own self-serving actions. Seeing my own motives so clearly helped me understand the emotional and psychological stress my disease had created.

Now I wanted more than anything to clear away my guilt. I had reached the point my sponsor talked about: the point of spiritual readiness to work Step Nine completely. Now those thousand miles seemed like an impenetrable distance. I asked my Higher Power to help me find a way to make direct amends.

“No, never! I’m willing to make amends to everyone on my list, but not to her. . . Not after the terrible things she said to me”

That summer, my husband and I went on vacation to Lake Havasu, Arizona. Soaring desert temperatures became too hot to endure. As we searched the map for a place to cool off, we realized that Southern California was only a one-day drive away. Janice lived near Los Angeles. We telephoned ahead to ask whether our visit would be welcome. Surprisingly, Janice seemed pleased. I now believe that she was as sick of grudges and bitter memories as we were.

Our visit turned out to be a delightful success. For everyone, it was time to bury the past and start over. On the final day of our visit, I asked Janice if I could speak to her privately. In a very sweet and loving manner, she listened while I explained about my disease and how it had affected our relationship. I told her about AA and how the Fellowship was helping me change my life. And I assured her that I would do everything possible to bring the two sides of our family back

together. She paused for a few moments, then hugged me warmly and said, “I think what you’re doing is wonderful, and I’m proud of you. Now maybe we can be friends.” With those words, the past was gone. We could begin again.

For the next two years, family relationships healed. Janice and her father forgave each other and telephoned frequently. Her brother and his wife and children spent two vacations with Janice’s family. Her younger sister moved to California and lived with Janice for six months. Although our relationship was cordial, it wasn’t the kind of warm, supportive relationship I enjoyed with my AA friends. But I was happy that we were at least speaking.

Then, in January 1988, Janice telephoned to tell us awful news. She had ovarian cancer. At that moment, our friendship changed. Janice asked for my support, and I was completely willing to give everything I had to help her.

During the next twelve months, Janice endured two surgeries and eight chemotherapies. She lost her long, thick hair. She lost weight and muscle. She lost the socially active life she loved. But she never lost her faith. She was an inspiration to me, and I to her. Through the grace of my Higher Power and the lessons I have learned in AA, I was able to share my experience, strength, and hope — and help Janice keep a positive, faith-filled trust.

Janice’s family rallied around her.

Old grudges were forgotten. She and I talked at least twice a week, every week for twelve anxious months. Her brother talked to her as much, or more, than I did. Her sisters prayed, and they gave as much support and encouragement as they could. My husband and I sent cards and flowers whenever she went into the hospital. We drove our motor home out to California twice and camped out on the street in front of her house. When Janice was joyfully pronounced “cured,” we drove out a third time to celebrate.

Warm, loving, bubbling with life, Janice talked about the future the same way a starving person talks about food. She longed for life, for happiness, for wellness. But six months later, she was dead. A recurrence in the lower intestine. Colostomy. More chemotherapy. Wasting away. Finally, peace.

I still don’t understand the terrible grief I feel. But I understand this: Because of the spiritual power of Step Nine, I have no regrets where Janice is concerned. The family that wept together in that flower-laden church would not have been there if Step Nine had not worked its healing magic. Making amends started a chain reaction of forgiveness that changed a whole family.

As my sponsor promised me years ago, I learned more from that one amends — the one I swore I’d never make — than from any other person or event in my recovery.

Carol S., Albuquerque, N.M.



When I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous fifteen years ago, I rather compulsively (like everything else) did the Steps — in about a month. When I came to the Third Step, “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*,” I probably checked it off with a mental note that God now had my will and my life, and moved on to Step Four. Some years went by without my ever really averting to the true meaning of this Step. Finally, after hearing enough people speak about it at meetings, doing enough reading about the program and possibly feeling enough tension, it dawned on me that I had never really done the Third Step, and that I still essentially lived my life wanting to always be in control.

On reflection I could see that all my life I had tried to control or even manipulate other people, events, and the world — for by controlling them, I could see to it that I wouldn’t get

hurt. I’d look good, avoid problems, and generally work things to my own advantage. Deep within myself, there was a basic lack of trust of others and the world. My attitude was that if I didn’t do it, it wouldn’t be done right. And yet, no matter how much I tried to control others, people still wanted to do things *their* way. And occasionally I’d even sense someone trying to control me! The result was that blend, so familiar to alcoholics, of fear, worry, tension, frustration, anger, and resentments — all those things that can lead to a drink, or at least to a very uncomfortable life.

Further reflection made me aware that despite my religious beliefs the bottom line was that I ultimately didn’t trust God. Sure, I could trust him on small matters, but on the bigger issues or problems, my attitude was that God need not be concerned. I’d handle it myself. In prayer I might ask God to help me do it my way, but rarely did I ask what he might want of

me in a situation. In a sense I had successfully blocked God out of my life. Even when I became aware of all this some years into sobriety, the idea of turning my will and my life over to God continued to be a very difficult matter. If I did so, I wouldn’t be in control and who knows what would happen? What I needed was what Bill W. called “a faith that *works*,” in other words, a living faith.

I read a little story a few years ago that illustrates for me what a living faith is all about. The story goes that two men were at a circus performance when a high wire artist came out with a wheelbarrow which he was going to walk across the wire, way up in the air. One fellow asked the other, “Think he’ll make it?” “I believe he will,” the other answered. “He does it every day and hasn’t fallen yet.” “Okay,” the first replied, “if you really believe he’ll make it, how about going up there and getting in the wheelbarrow?”

That’s the difference between believing in a God or Higher Power sort of out there and letting that Higher Power come into your life. A faith that works means putting ourselves on the line, getting in the wheelbarrow and trusting the God of your understanding who can and will change our lives for the better, if we allow him.

The Third Step I found to be the most difficult one for me but when I practice it, I also find it extremely rewarding. By “letting go and letting God,” I’ve seen wonderful things happen in my own life and in the lives of others in the program who practiced it. It also seems that the people in AA with a deep sense of serenity are almost invariably those who have been able to a great extent to truly turn their will and their lives over to the care of a Higher Power or God as they understand him. No longer responsible for running the universe, they can now relax and gratefully enjoy their lives and their sobriety. And isn’t that what we’re all about?

Don M., Manila, Philippines

Twelve Keys to Harmony

The Twelve Steps deal with relationships — my relationship with alcohol, my relationship with God, my relationship with my fellowmen, and my relationship with myself — an all important aspect of living that used to be extremely troublesome to me. The Twelve Steps do not, however, explicitly deal with my *future* relationships with other people. This is where the Twelve Traditions come in for me, and I would like to share with you my application of the principles behind the Twelve Traditions in my home life.

In the Big Book an AA member is described as an example of “self-will run riot.” I thought: if the Twelve Traditions could make a collection of self-will-run-riot types function together, then maybe their principles could make my family function together. If the Twelve Traditions could make me fit into an Alcoholics Anonymous group, then maybe their principles could make me fit into my family group.

At that time our family consisted of my wife, myself, and our three

children aged six, four, and two. Today our family is thirteen years older, and they are the loveliest and loveliest family imaginable, thanks to the Twelve Traditions. Our home is a harmonious home indeed.

We have harmony because our common welfare comes first. Personal security depends upon family unity.

We have harmony because no one among us tries to dominate anyone else or the family as a whole — for our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority, a loving God as he may express himself through our group conscience at regular family business meetings.

At these business meetings each family member has one vote, but we two “old-timers” — parents — have two. Why so? In the beginning my Al-Anon wife and I feared being outvoted by our three kids. So we decided to “safeguard the family” by allowing ourselves an extra vote each. In the thirteen years we have needed to cast our “old-timer votes” only twice, and that was right at the beginning.

We have harmony because the only requirement for membership in our family is that you have our surname — no favoritism, no love of the provisional kind, no black sheep allowed.

We have harmony because our family is autonomous except in matters affecting other families or our community as a whole. We do not, repeat *not*, keep up with the Joneses. Neither do we neglect something just because the Joneses are neglecting it. We simply consider everything on merit: one can often learn from the Joneses’ successes and failures.

We have harmony because our primary purpose is to provide security to family members who need it — social security, financial security, physical security and, above all, emotional security.

We have harmony because we make sure that outside enterprises — drugs, alcohol, gambling, long periods of work away from home — do not divert us from our primary purpose of providing security to family members who need it.

We have harmony because we try not to make a nuisance of our family in the community around us, by borrowing articles or money off our neighbors. You see, we think we ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

We have harmony because we remain nonprofessional: there is no lifelong “table setter” or lifelong “dog droppings picker upper” or “trash-bag remover” in our family. We practice the principle of rotation

in our family, as we practice it in our AA group.

We have harmony because our family as such tries to be as “unorganized” as possible. We let there be space in our togetherness. Each member can do his or her own thing, as long as it does not interfere with our common welfare, i.e., our feeling of family security.

We have harmony because we have no opinions on outside issues. We try not to slander, so that we cannot become embroiled in feuds and arguments with others, be they neighbors or relatives.

We have harmony because we do not brag about ourselves as a family or a family member to outsiders. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion. Our achievements as individuals are not open for discussion, hence we do not bore other people, create jealousy, foster envy, etc. Moreover we never play off family members against one another. (“Herman, why can’t you be like your sister Freja, or your brother Wienand?”)

We have harmony because we put principles before personalities: anyone can say anything to anyone, remembering that he or she is not the ultimate authority, remembering that our primary purpose is to provide security, above all emotional security, to one another.

We have harmony because we practice the principles of the Twelve Traditions in all our family affairs. *Johan C., Stellenbosch, South Africa*

Sustained by the Steps



At about four years in the program, I got what I considered to be a real gift. Because of my sobriety in AA, I had gone back to school at night to get the degree that had been partied away some thirteen years before. Now I was screaming with excitement, along with my AA roommates, because I'd been awarded a scholarship to study in Japan for one year.

I wrote to the Japanese GSO to make sure there'd be some meetings, and found to my dismay that none were in my city. Tokyo meetings, however, were only about 130 miles away. I could manage that, I thought.

Where I sobered up, there were about 300 meetings a week and I went regularly enough, volunteered, was a secretary for my home group several times, treasurer once, and GSR. I even helped paint the meeting room one long weekend. I had my sponsor and many AA friends, but I had a secret I didn't tell anyone. I really didn't know how the Steps fit together and worked. In fact, after Step Five, I wasn't sure of what was what until

Step Twelve. When someone would mention one of those other Steps, I'd nod and hope I could figure out from what they said which Step it was. I'd gone to a Step meeting for a few months when I was new, but I got tired of saying I hadn't gotten that far and began to try to bluff and soon stopped going to the meeting at all.

My departure for Japan was delayed due to visa problems, and my character defects began to take over. Petty resentments suddenly seemed justified and when the opportunity presented itself, I told the target of one of those resentments just how screwed up he was. I didn't just tell him; I screamed at him over the phone, and then hung up on him. I felt so high and so right. What power! But I didn't answer the phone for several hours in case he might call. That was the fear creeping in. Then I lied to his wife and told her I had a flat tire to cover for not having met her to say good-bye. These were the same two people who had been jumping up and down in excitement with me a month and a half before. Yet pride

wouldn't let me acknowledge I was wrong. I was in total delusion.

Off I went to Japan, glad to get away from it all. Words cannot describe the culture shock I felt. I forgot all about what I'd done to those people back home and wondered why people weren't writing. Then one day, after about six weeks — during a particularly bad spell of homesickness — there was mail. It was a letter from these friends telling me how they felt about what I'd done, and a letter from my sponsor who was also angry with me. It was a quiet, grey Sunday morning. I looked around the neighborhood in this foreign land and two things flashed almost simultaneously through my head. The first was that none of the buildings were tall enough to jump from and the next, that the treatment center I'd been in would reach over the ocean and pull me back for their "retread" program because they could tell (telepathically!) how crazy I was.

That was it. I went straight to the pay phone and called the number in Tokyo for AA. I hadn't called up until then due to my fear that they would speak only Japanese. A recording answered in English and said that if I'd leave my name and number, someone would call me back. That evening a woman called and asked me how long I'd been in the program. Then she asked how long I'd been in Japan, and when I told her she blurted out, "Well, what took you so long to call?" I almost cried as I thought, "Oh, she cares! Thank

God for AA. I'm home." This woman later became my sponsor.

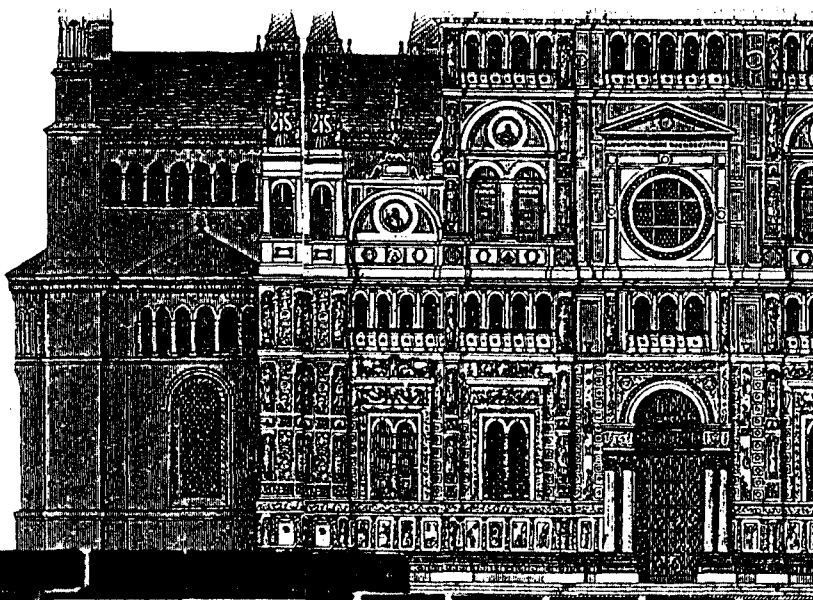
And I can say I'm now literally home. It's been a few years since then and for the past three years I've lived in Tokyo. I believe God had that lady call me back that day. I came to Tokyo the following weekend and stayed at her place. I listened, went to meetings, and told her everything. I had had a real good scare, and I wanted this lady to know it all. I learned through her own strength of conviction that the Steps were the only things that could sustain me in the long term. And she was so sold on service. She couldn't stress it enough. And those things which had sounded like drudgery became the fuel that caused my "motor" to run.

One day I was having breakfast with a newer lady in the program and she asked me to be her sponsor. I said that she should know that I believed the Steps and service were very important in my life and that if I sponsored her that was what I would share with her. She asked me how I worked the Steps and I told her. And what surprised me as I told her was the conviction I had about what I was saying and how I could really feel how the Steps worked in my life. That was a miracle and I sometimes am blessed to hear myself and to realize just how far I have come. I believe that, as one of our co-founders said, as long as I am thinking as I'm now thinking, I won't have to take another drink.

Kathy M., Tokyo, Japan



'The Power to Carry That Out'



We were together on a retreat — an opportunity to do an annual self-review, part of my working the Tenth Step — when I said to my sponsor: “I am in the worst spiritual state I can remember being in for a long time. All the joy I had in sobriety seems gone. I’m alcohol-free, but so what? I am starting to wonder if all this effort is worth it. This spiritual bottom is even worse than the bottom that brought me to recovery.”

We talked for a long while, he questioning and I answering as best I could. Yes, I was going to meetings regularly. Yes, I continued to pray. “But what use is it?” I wailed. “I do not feel as if I’m in touch with God!” Yes, I talked at meetings when called upon, and sometimes volunteered to speak. I called the people in my support network, and continued to help the people I was sponsoring. I still functioned

as secretary of one meeting and was even in the process of starting a new meeting. And yes, I stayed in touch with my sponsor. He knew that I did, since he responded to my daily phone calls, sometimes doing no more than listening as I tried to express painful feelings which I often didn’t understand and sometimes couldn’t even name or describe.

“You are in a lot of pain, and need to do something about it,” he said when I was finished. “But it’s emotional pain. Your spiritual life is in good shape — in fact, in great shape!” He saw my bewilderment. “You’ve confused your feelings with your spiritual state,” he continued. “When you feel good, you think that all is well spiritually with you, and when you feel bad you think you’re spiritually low. Many people in the program seem to think so, too. But if

that’s right, then you would have been in spiritually great shape when you were loaded and partying and having what you felt was a wonderful time for yourself. But no matter how wonderful you felt at that time, you were in fact in a bad spiritual shape. *That* was your spiritual bottom.” We talked at length about what he said, and he urged me to work on coming to a deeper awareness of what constitutes spiritual growth and a healthy spiritual state. “Begin with the Big Book,” he suggested, and I was not far into it before I began to get an idea of what spiritual growth might mean.

The first sign of “spiritual growth” was accepting things which seemed entirely out of reach. Some pages later, in the discussion of the Tenth Step, mention is made of a new way to deal with selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear: We ask God

to remove them, discuss them with someone, and then make immediate amends to those we have harmed. A very simple formula for spiritual maintenance is given: that we “carry the vision of God’s will into all of our activities.”

Finally, in the discussion of spiritual awakening in the “Twelve and Twelve” Bill W. wrote: “When a man or woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone. . . . In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself. He finds himself in possession of a degree of honesty, tolerance, unselfishness, peace of mind, and love of which he had thought himself quite incapable.”

I wondered if there was a single word that could put all of this together, that could describe spirituality, a simple description for spiritual growth. As I reflected on all I had read and heard, and on my experience both before and after I started my recovery, it seemed to me that it could all be expressed in the simple idea of “empowerment.”

To be spiritual is for me to be empowered. To be empowered means to find the power to do what I could not do before; it also means that I can do in a healthy and healing manner what I might have done before in ways that

*‘Spirituality for me
is . . . finding from
prayer and meditation,
from other people,
from meetings . . .
the power to do
what is good, what is
healthy, what brings
joy and healing’*

were unhealthy or which brought suffering to myself or others. This is why the Eleventh Step, more than any other, opens us to God’s power and makes it possible for us to do what we could not do before. It is the Step that leads to “sure power and safe guidance from God . . .”

Spirituality for me is not therefore a question of feeling good (though feeling good is a feeling I like a whole lot). Instead, it is a matter of finding from prayer and meditation, from other people, from meetings — in short, from all the “tools of recovery” — the power to do what is good, what is healthy, what brings joy and healing to myself and others. Spirituality is the power to do these things even though I may be in emotional distress; and one way I have of gauging my spiritual strength is seeing how empowered I am to do God’s will for

me. Spiritual growth means to increase such empowerment; and I lose spiritual ground when I lose the empowerment I once had.

As my sponsor reminded me, I sometimes felt wonderful when I drank. But despite this feeling, my spiritual state was then at its lowest since I did not have the power to stop drinking, or the power to see or stop the harm I was doing to myself and to others. Whatever “power” alcohol gave me, it was not the power I now have in recovery, the power to know God’s will and to carry it out.

Even when I am feeling at my lowest, the empowerment that is the meaning of spirituality makes it possible for me to work for others and to try to help them. It can give me the courage to take good care of myself — to go to meetings even when I think I don’t need a meeting, to speak up even when my alcoholism wants me to keep my pain to myself, to talk at a gut-honest level to my sponsor and to the people in my group about painful matters I would rather keep hidden. Empowerment makes it possible for me to pray and meditate even when I don’t want to do so, even when I don’t “feel” connected to my Higher Power, even when I don’t feel that any good is coming from these practices.

My spirituality is in good shape when I can *do* what is healthy and healing. Spirituality is not a state of feelings. It is a state of being, of empowered being.

James C., West Henrietta, N.Y.

KEEPING AA FIRST

using Step 11
when making meetings
becomes more difficult

After forty-two years of sobriety in AA the infirmities and restrictions of age have settled in. Seeking and maintaining sobriety has been my life from the day my early sponsor told me bluntly, "Put AA first in your life or get out." I have tried as faithfully as I could. No distance, weather or hour, no resentment or cost came before my AA activities. I have tried, imperfectly of course, to give 110 percent. And in return...? Sobriety and its inestimable benefits! But now, at seventy-five, the old fire and energy burn low. I would like to slide comfortably into my old age with my AA activities first as always, but these days I cannot always do so, for the "twinges in the hinges" command first attention. Thus I face this challenge: Can I stay sober with my physical activities curtailed?

To complicate matters I have un-

wittingly isolated myself from activities by relocating in a remote, rural area. AA is too distant to allow me, in my present physical condition, to get as involved as formerly. I have neglected to join a home group, nor do I get into twelfth-stepping, sponsorship, and service work any longer. I miss this and know that it contributed much to my sobriety and growth.

However, I am not entirely without defenses, for AA has taught me that I cannot take something out of my life (the bottle) unless I substitute something for it (AA). So if my physical activity is curtailed, what will replace it?

The obvious answer is spiritual activity. I was told AA is a spiritual program when I entered. That didn't mean much to me then but the endless wonders of recovery, coincidences that are miraculous, and the magic of love and compassion I have

known convince me that the spiritual essence of our program is even more powerful than I ever thought. It's powerful enough to keep me sober under any conditions, provided I learn and use these spiritual tools.

I have made an effort to substitute spiritual effort for the physical effort I can no longer expend, specifically practicing Step Eleven. In addition I have begun examining our Big Book for evidence to support my quest for spiritual enlightenment. Without fail, as usual, I found hope and comfort in Bill's words: "We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." This fit my situation, for despite these years of sobriety I knew that I was as alcoholic as ever. I could not trust past sobriety to keep me sober in the future. Then I began to examine more closely than ever before what Bill meant by "spiritual condition" and realized that he defined it in the same passage: "Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee — Thy will (not mine) be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will."

Bill's suggestions seem to confirm the viability of my intentions, for now more than ever I am dependent on God to keep me straight. I find here direction in my duty to God and to my fellow man, alcoholic or not. There are neighbors aplenty nearby

who are shut-ins, or feeble, or isolated in some way, and while they may not be reaching for sobriety particularly, they welcome any help in their fight against loneliness and depression. It seems to me that "to practice these principles in all our affairs" is meant for situations like this.

And as I search the program for more spiritual enlightenment I find it telling me precisely what I am looking for: "Remind the prospect [me] that his recovery is not dependent upon people. *It is dependent upon his relationship with God.*" (Italics are mine.)

The Big Book reinforces this theme and at the same time reinforces my faith when it says, "For we are now on a different basis, the basis of trusting and relying on God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity."

So with complete confidence in the spiritual power of our AA program I go on, bolstered by what Carl Jung once said of spirituality: "It is what supports us when we can no longer support ourselves — this is what gives an indestructible foundation for living."

Physically inactive though I may be, I have no doubts that the AA program, so replete with the miracles and mysteries of recovery, will allow me continued sobriety... as long as I keep my spiritual house in order.

D. T., Comer, Ga.

An Agnostic's Spiritual Awakening



I was more defiant than ever when I re-entered AA in August 1987, having come in and gone back out twice before. I was convinced that the Twelve Steps — excepting the first one — weren't for me. I was too intellectual, too steadfast in my agnosticism, for any spiritual experiences. I still equated "spiritual awakening" with "getting religion," and I firmly believed I would prefer dying in the gutter to getting religion.

My two previous encounters with AA — the first in 1976, the second in 1983 — had given me about six weeks' exposure to the program. I had heard all you had to say, I thought, about spirituality and the Higher Power. I had read Chap-

ter Four and Appendix II. I was not impressed.

Herbert Spencer's observation about contempt prior to investigation was, I agreed, quite correct. But I had investigated. I had even practiced a few different religions at one time or another before deciding that none of it was for me. Still, I maintained an intellectual interest in the subject. I'd become something of an armchair scientist, and humanity's evolution was among my special interests. Obviously, religious beliefs and their development over the ages were a major part of humanity's own story.

Still, like many intellectuals, I felt it was a matter of time before we all outgrew such ideas, if only our high-

tech civilization survived. No matter how the theologians dressed it up in modern language, to me religion remained superstition.

What Bill W. had to say in "We Agnostics" was nothing new to me. I had encountered his arguments, and others far more sophisticated, attempting to defend the logic of believing in a Higher Power. I had weighed them all, and found them wanting.

I went back out those first two times because I hadn't hurt badly enough. Still, I was luckier than most. Even my third bottom was a high one. My job was still secure. I had never even been stopped, let alone ticketed, while driving drunk. My physical health was fine. But I was in enough emotional pain to make me desperate, and I had become convinced, finally and totally, that if I kept drinking it would get worse.

Although I was more convinced than ever that I could never take the Second Step, or any beyond it, I came back to the meetings, knowing that if I got nothing else from the Fellowship, you could help me stay away from that first drink. I thought that would be enough, that if I could just stay sober, I could manage my own life.

It took about a month of drying out for me to realize I hadn't finished taking the First Step; to realize that, even if I wasn't drinking, my life still would be unmanageable until I overcame my terminal uniqueness and found a way to make the program

work for me. And, at that point, the point at which I began to acquire a little willingness, a way was revealed to me — a way in which I could believe in a power greater than myself without compromising any of the fundamental principles out of which my agnosticism had grown.

Even now, more than two years of happy sobriety later, I cannot begin to explain in a Grapevine-sized article anything about my Higher Power, or how it works in my life. It's not the God of the churches or the theologians. I'm still an agnostic, and there are some parts of Chapter Four I'm reluctant to encourage a newcomer to read. But I have discovered that the program will work for anyone who will let it work. I didn't have to find a way to make it work. It will work perfectly well on its own if I will let it, provided I'm willing to do some work myself.

The first thing I had to do was resign from the debating society. That didn't mean I started agreeing with everything I heard. It means only that I listened without arguing, used what I could use, and filed the rest for future reference.

The second thing I did was to become an active member of my home group, which happened to be my sponsor's home group. (I'd gotten a sponsor immediately. I already knew that was one thing I'd better do right away.) I saw that whatever else spirituality might consist of, it had to include being of maximum service to my fellow alcoholics, whether or not

they were still suffering.

Once I did those two things, every question I needed an answer to was answered. Every promise contained in the Big Book has come true in my life, especially the one about being amazed before I was halfway through.

It might be that my Higher Power is the same thing as the rest of you call God. I don't know. That's one reason I still call myself an agnostic. During a discussion, sometimes I'll call it "God" rather than "the Higher Power," just to keep it simple. Whatever it is, whatever you or I call it, it works, just like the Big Book says it will if we're openminded.

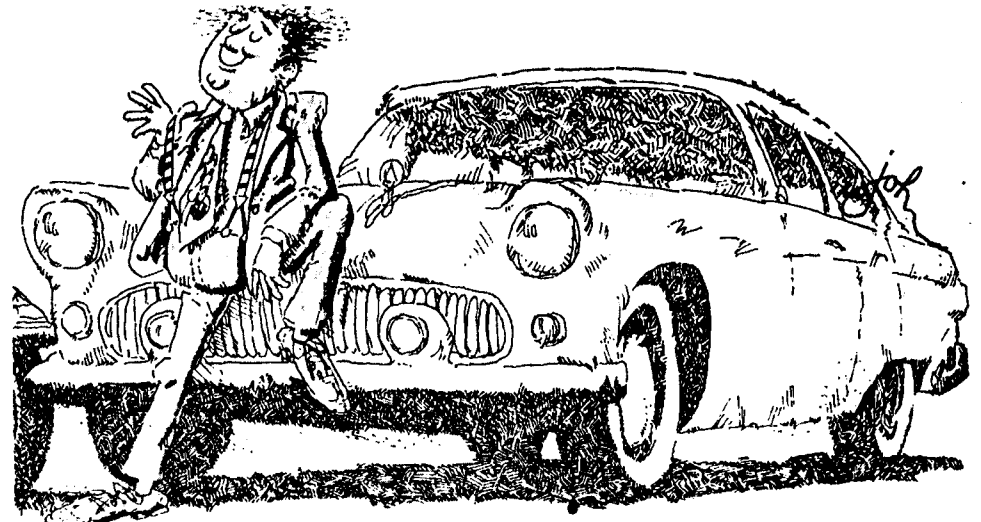
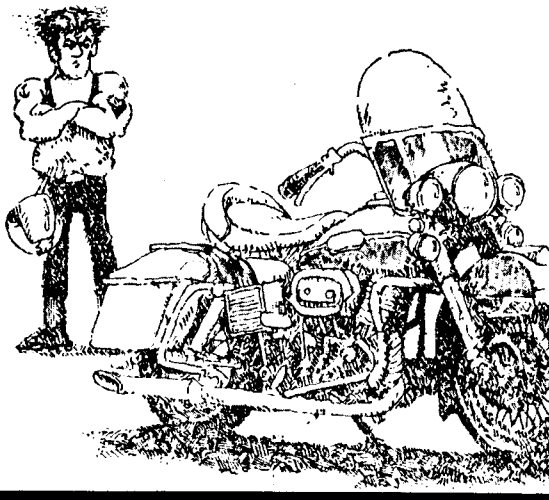
I can see no way I could have had this spiritual awakening if I had not been driven into the arms of this Fellowship by my alcoholism. I know that many nonalcoholics have experienced it, but I don't believe I would have if I had been a normal drinker. So I am grateful today not only for my recovery, but for the disease from

which I am recovering. My discovery of a Higher Power that I can use in my life has been worth every bit of the hell I had to go through to get there. (I wish it hadn't been necessary for others to go through this hell along with me, but all I can do now is make amends wherever possible.)

You told me each time I came in that I could experience blessings beyond my wildest dreams. I could only think at the time: These people obviously don't know how I can dream! But, like everything else you told me, it was exactly true. While my material blessings still are less than what I could wish for, my life today is indeed far richer than any I could have dreamed of. And it really did not take much to bring it about. Just a little honesty, so I could finish taking the First Step, then a little openmindedness, so I could begin the Second Step, and a little willingness to follow through with the rest of the program.

Doug S., St. Augustine, Fla.

'THE MAN I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE'



In November 1977, during one of my many stays "around" the program, an Al-Anon member asked me why I wouldn't work AA's Twelve Steps. In all sincerity I told him, "I don't need the Steps to stay sober. The Fellowship of AA is enough to keep me sober." I kept slippin' and slidin' around the meetings, convinced I had this AA business all figured out.

Two months later I took what turned out to be my last drink, although I didn't know that at the time. Shortly afterward I was in a beginner's meeting, for people with less than a year of sobriety, where the topic was AA's Twelve Steps. The chairperson called on the man, seated next to me, and what he said helped change my life.

This fellow was a loudmouthed, obnoxious, self-promoter who invariably took up meeting time to talk about cars, business, and anything

except sobriety. He had been "around" the program for nineteen years. I despised him heartily. Imagine my surprise, then, when he puffed out his chest, folding his arms across a flabby gut, and said, "*I don't need the Steps to stay sober. The Fellowship of AA is enough to keep me sober.*"

You might say it was a sobering experience to hear my words coming from that mouth. I looked at him and said to myself, "I don't want to be like you!" Here was a guy who'd been "around" for nineteen years, saying the same thing I'd said just two months earlier! I really did *not* want to be like him!

Fortunately, I had an option. A group in our town was known as a very Step-oriented, hard-core bunch with a lot of strong old-time sobriety, and that's where I went. I don't believe it was a conscious decision, but I knew those folks were different

from some AA people I'd met, and I wanted to become as "different" from that loudmouthed fellow as was humanly possible. I attended the meetings for a while, and finally found a man I wanted as my sponsor. He seemed the opposite of the loudmouth, with a quiet grace and gentle manner that appealed to me. What really hooked me, though, were his frequent references to caring for a nephew who'd recently lost his mother in a car wreck. That touched me, so I worked up the nerve and asked him to sponsor me.

Never let anyone tell you that God doesn't have a sense of humor. The man I selected as sponsor was a short, rotund businessman who drove a huge Lincoln and, for some reason, *hated* bikers. I'm a long-time Harley fanatic who, for some reason, *hated* short, fat, rich cats in fancy cars. Hence we were perfect for each other.

The first thing my sponsor told me was, "I don't have time to help you stay sick — I'm much too busy for that — but if you want to get better I'd be glad to help."

He definitely meant what he said, but my sponsor was not one of these head-crackin' types that order their pigeons about. That was just as well, because I was extremely rebellious when I sobered up, and could have seized on a domineering sponsor as an excuse to chuck it all and return to drinking. Instead, my sponsor laid out a set of tools (the Twelve Steps) and told me how he used them in his life. There were no demands made of me. He simply said, "If you want what we have, come and get it," and that's what I needed to hear.

Through my sponsor, and other members, I've learned that this program offers much more than simple dry time. They not only told me

about, but actually lived, what I now know as the promises. They explained that the promises were an end result of working the Steps to the best of my ability, and that life in AA took on a whole new definition when compared with the miserable existence I'd known out on the streets.

My friends did not lie. I have done more, accomplished more, learned more, and gone farther in the past thirteen years than all the other years of my life put together. One of my favorite words, when I came to AA, was freedom, but my concept of freedom was limited. I thought it meant doing what I pleased, when I pleased, without regard for consequences. Now I am truly free: to walk through any given day or situation without cringing in fear, exploding in rage, getting loaded, or self-destructing; to love, laugh, and know and appreciate the simple joys that come with being alive; to be a part of, instead of apart from, a society where I can serve an invaluable purpose; to recognize and utilize my own talents and abilities, as

a writer, a worker, husband, stepfather and participating member in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm free to be the man I've always wanted to be, but never before had the courage to become.

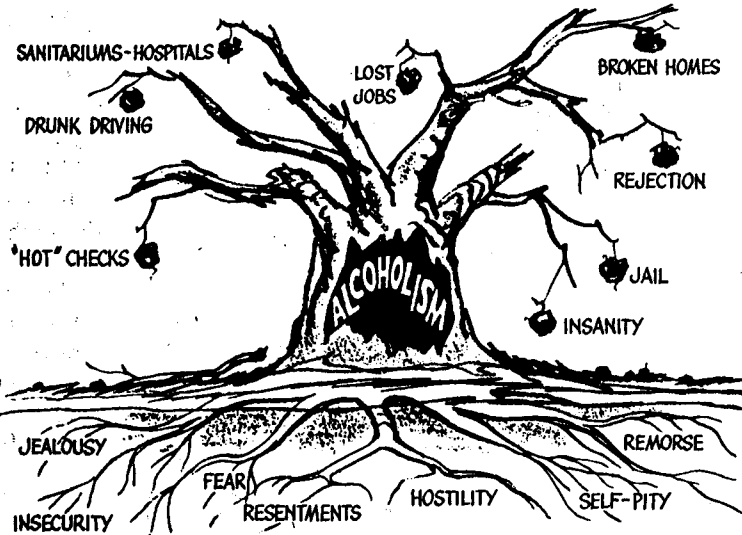
In what I see as a prime representation of AA's magic, I was offered two examples situated at opposite ends of sobriety's spectrum. Adrift between the two poles, I was blessed with a clear-cut choice, and for that I'm very grateful. I needed something just that black-and-white to penetrate the stone wall of excuses I'd built around myself. I now know, and my life in sobriety has proven to me, that I've made the right choice.

I'm also pleased to report that my sponsor has gotten over his hatred for motorcyclists, while I've mellowed somewhat in my distaste for short, fat, rich folks. As for the loudmouth? Maybe he found his own examples, because at last count he had several years of continuous sobriety, and was still going strong.

Wm. J., Temple, Tex.

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.



Not a Drop of Compassion



I was born and raised in the South Bronx as one of ten children. I always felt there wasn't enough of anything to go around, least of all love. I detested being poor and developed a sour grapes attitude early in life. It was easier not to want something than to face the possibility of disappointment. I nurtured an I-

don't-care attitude.

I first used alcohol at age sixteen and after chugalugging a couple of glasses of wine I fell unconscious. I was seeking oblivion right from the get-go. I eventually built up a tolerance for alcohol and could drink huge amounts. I used alcohol for everything, even as an aphrodisiac, not realizing that alcohol murders passion.

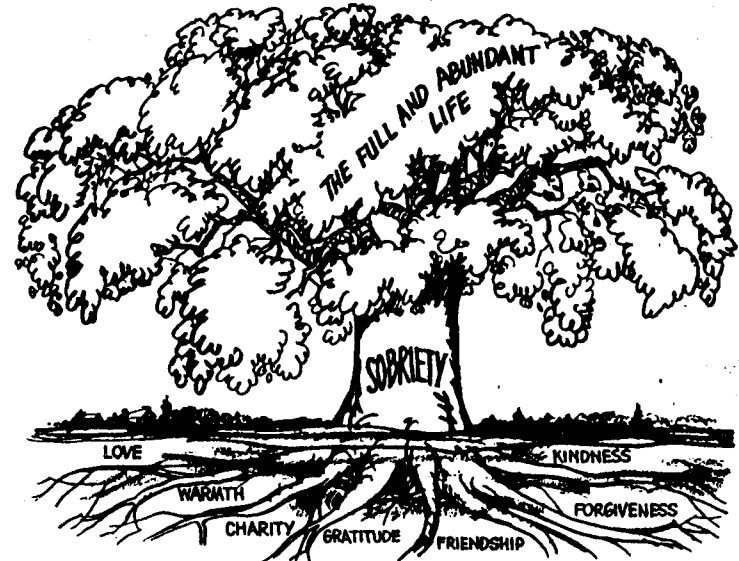
After nine months of sobriety I still had not accepted the First Step and I started seeing a psychiatrist. I wasn't in this man's office two minutes and I told him how I wanted to be treated. Luckily, he was one of the "friends of AA" that Bill W. spoke of. Although not an alcoholic himself, he was very familiar with our program and it was obvious to him that I had not taken the First Step.

I had six sessions with him when one Saturday morning I was visiting a rehab and glanced at some art work

on the bulletin board. It was a bottle of booze captioned with the words, "It's ironic that you should have embraced me when you were seeking love, for I have not one drop of compassion for you." This had a tremendous impact on me and I knew I was in the right program. That night I went to see the psychiatrist for the last time and told him, "I'm wasting my money and your time. I'm an alcoholic and if I don't get active in AA I'm going to get drunk." I had never been faced with a more obvious decision in my life — get active in the program or get drunk.

At a meeting that night I contacted some guy whose sobriety I admired and told him, "I want this program and I will accept any direction you offer me." I admitted that I was powerless over alcohol and my life was unmanageable.

Ed H., Brentwood, N.Y.



Admitting Powerlessness



“But you have taken the First Step already,” the man said. “You have admitted that you can’t stop drinking, that you are compelled to carry on drinking once you have had a small quantity of booze, that somehow you always take that first drink against all better knowledge, that the fact you did not complete your University course, and are homeless and deeply in debt is a result of your drinking. You have just admitted that and in AA we call that ‘taking the First Step.’”

So it was said to me when I was twelfth-stepped years ago, and I remember it, like many other things that were said that evening. I try to recall them when I twelfth-step someone today, because it has worked for me, the simplicity of the message, the hope the man gave me, the fact that he saw and expressed my willingness to recover before I did.

It was not until later that I felt the enormous relief that the admission of

powerlessness — and I believe that admission is the key word — brought. I had fought my alcoholism for ten years, with bizarre tactics sometimes. Once I locked myself up in a hut in the mountains, miles from anywhere, with the intention of not drinking for a week. It lasted twenty-four hours, after which time I walked for a whole day to the nearest village to get a drink, thus ending my dry-out holiday prematurely. And I tried all the other things as described in the Big Book: drinking beer only, not drinking until 8:00 PM, staying sober for a month, and so on. And nothing had worked. The insane voice that came into my head and forced me to act in a way I had sworn I never would again, had prayed not to have to again, that insane voice was greater than myself.

The worst result of my drinking was — and to this day is — the way I treated other people. I was young, I had ideals, and coming from an unloving alcoholic family, I had definite ideas about how I wanted to relate to other human beings. And over the

progression of my disease, all this had gone out of the window: people were there to help me get drunk, they were manipulated to cover up the mess of my life, they had become mere pawns. When they became obstacles between me and the glass, they had to go. And all because I had to drink.

And then of course there were all the other aspects of unmanageability: the shame and guilt of waking up in some stranger’s bed after yet another blackout, the terrible hangovers, the headaches that no pills could cure, the thirst that gallons of water could not quench, the occasional realization of the filth that I had come to live in, the increasing inability to hold down even menial jobs. In short, I lived my life in a way I did not want to, and I could not help it; it was all because I had to drink.

Still it took me a while to see how bad it had been. I had simply gotten used to it over the years. My demise had not happened overnight, and I suppose that deep down inside I hated myself so much — the true spiritual malady as I see it now — that I unconsciously believed that I did not deserve better.

Listening to someone else’s sharing in a meeting a few months into AA, having stayed away from the first drink a day at a time, it suddenly hit me how much pain I had suffered, how close to death I had been, what a nightmare these years had been.

And it was soon after that incident that the miracle happened. I became willing to face the pain of my life

without a drink, the fear of drinking had become bigger than the fear of life without drink. When I surrendered to the fact that alcohol was greater than myself, accepted life without ever drinking again, the compulsion was removed, left me, as if it had never been there.

Some people have choices, and I had lost the power to choose. From Day One of my drinking career I had known that alcohol did not agree with my system, and I had lost the ability to exercise choice over drink. Lack of power had been my problem, and recovery to me has meant to regain power.

“So you don’t consider yourself powerless over alcohol anymore?” one of my AA friends asked me in disbelief the other day. “What would happen if I offered you a drink?”

“I would say ‘No, thank you,’” I replied, “because I have been given the power not to drink. God has restored my right mind.”

Equally I believe that manageability is the goal in recovery. I don’t want my life to be unmanageable anymore, and I believe that as I work the Steps, God gives me the ability to manage my life, exactly in the proportion that I am prepared to work for it.

And as little as I could make myself stop drinking, as little am I able to restore myself to sanity in other areas in my life. And as with drink, I first have to admit that I have a problem. As long as I minimize whatever plagues me, as long as I try to reason myself to mental health, as long as I

'I suppose that deep down inside I hated myself so much — the true spiritual malady as I see it now — that I unconsciously believed that I did not deserve better'

“handle” my problem I am a long way from asking God’s help.

I have been troubled with lots of afflictions that resulted in temporary unmanageability in my sober days: anger, resentments, self-pity, fear of life in general and people in particular, obsessions and compulsions of all kinds. I just see them as demons from the past, old coping mechanisms that have outlived their usefulness. They are all I have if I don’t turn to God, they are so strong and destructive that it takes God to remove them. It is these things that stand between me and a sober, happy, God-centered life. If I drew a line between active alcoholism on one side and life as God wants me to live it and has equipped me to on the other, then I am somewhere in the middle, striving toward the ideal. If I allow my character

defects to rule my life again and forget my program, forget where the power to change for the better comes from, I will, in the long run, inevitably drink again.

The most recent and quite harrowing experience of powerlessness I had was a four month spell of compulsive working. I rationalized, I lied to myself, it was too convenient. I was not going to give in. My body gave me warning signals: palpitations, severe headaches. I ignored them. Eventually, it got really bad.

After a weekend of being ill with exhaustion, having lied to a friend in order to get out of an arrangement so that I could work a bit more, I threw in the towel. I admitted that I was unable to stop my destructive behavior and asked God for help. Instantly, the compulsion was lifted.

Sometimes I find it easier to accept my limitations than fighting yet another battle: I turned down an invitation to some social gambling the other day. It may well be harmless fun for other people, but I had an encounter with slot machines a few years back, and I am pretty sure there is a gambler in me.

I don’t have to prove my power over certain things. I don’t have a television — can’t handle it. I get addicted to watching trash. Maybe the day will come when I have power over the television and will be able to manage the on/off switch. If the day never does come, however, I am quite prepared to enjoy my recovery anyway.

Eva M., London, England

Peace Is the Power



It finally dawned on me that I was powerless over alcohol only after I had been pounded into something I barely recognized. Not until I had lost everything I owned; not until my family and my boyfriend had detached from me or deserted me; not until I had almost completely ruined my health; and not until my last scrap of dignity had been snatched away from me by alcohol.

My moment of truth came upon me in a room in a boarding house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, just before Thanksgiving of 1983. I had been drinking around the clock at the end, only venturing out to get more booze, but this was now impossible because I had run out of money and there were no more cans to return for the five cent deposit. In the middle of the night before Thanksgiving Day, I woke up sick, shaking, and alone. I went downstairs on unsteady legs, to the kitchen to scrounge for a bottle that perhaps I had hidden from myself and forgotten about, for a drop of alcohol, for anything that might take the sick feelings away. I tore the place apart, to no avail. And then I remembered the

spice cabinet. There was a small bottle of vanilla extract in among the rosemary and oregano.

In desperation, I took the bottle and drank the whole thing like someone who had been drowning and had just been pulled up for air. The effects of the extract took away the dry heaves and helped me get to sleep. But even as I climbed back up those stairs, I knew. I knew that if I didn’t stop drinking, I was going to die. There was a loneliness in my heart, an emptiness of the soul that every drunk knows. I had prior knowledge of AA; I had even been in a treatment center several years before and had gone to some meetings. So I knew what my recourse was. I resolved to go back to AA and I prayed to God to help me get there. I was twenty-nine years old at the time, and I have been sober ever since.

The liberating effect of admitting one’s total powerlessness is a funny thing. On one hand, you’re like a fly on a windshield after the emotional, physical, and spiritual devastation. But on the other hand, you’re reborn, free from the vise-like grip of alcohol, free from the deadly obsession and compulsion, free from the vicious circle. It is something of a dichotomy, to be sure.

In my sobriety, I have had to learn and relearn this powerlessness-liberation thing again and again. My most recent lessons involve my struggles with the damaging effects of the AIDS virus, HIV. My alcoholism led me into the dark and scary world of intravenous drug addiction, and in my travels through that world, I became infected with the AIDS virus, probably sometime between 1981 and 1983. I did not discover that I was infected until October of 1985, when I was a year and eight months sober. I got tested because I was in my first sober relationship with another AA who had never used needles and hadn't been overly promiscuous when he was drinking. I felt it was my responsibility to get tested because I loved this man and didn't want to hurt him. After a period of intense soul-searching, he decided that he wanted to be with me, no matter what. We were married in September of 1988, and carried on with our lives.

Having the love and support of my husband, my family, his family, my doctors, my friends and co-workers has been the cornerstone of my survival. But I learned very early on in dealing with HIV infection that I would have to do a lot more in order to stay alive. I would have to make some major changes in my lifestyle and behavior, even more than I already had. Seeing as the Twelve Steps of recovery had helped me in getting sober and staying sober, it made sense to me that using those same Twelve Steps could also help me make the

essential changes I needed to make in order to try and stay as healthy as possible. So I went right to work.

*'... Power comes from
the ground zero of
powerlessness, and
from the plea for
assistance from the
source of all true power
— God as I
understand him'*

I had read some self-healing books through this whole process (which took several years as I grew through it), and one of the main points these books made was that people who survive cancer, AIDS, and other deadly diseases all have several things in common, including the ability to take control over their situation, and become empowered instead of helpless and hopeless. It was then that I realized that I would have to reexamine the First Step, and try to figure out how to admit my powerlessness over the AIDS virus without becoming helpless and hopeless. I did not want to become a fatal statistic, and I knew there had to be a compromise between my powerlessness over being infected with HIV, and my empowerment in the choices I was making in how I

take care of myself.

When the First Step states: "We admitted we were powerless," and "that our lives had become unmanageable," I had no problem fitting myself into those parameters. Indeed, the gradual understanding of what it means to be infected with HIV had given me a feeling of powerlessness I had never experienced before. It was one thing to know, after repeated bludgeonings, that I was powerless over alcohol; all I had to do to reclaim my power was to not drink, one day at a time. But the dawning truth, of really understanding that I will never be able to get this invader out of my body (unless some miraculous medical breakthrough occurs), is unsettling. I sometimes feel like the character in the movie "Alien" who gets the crab-like thing stuck on his face and it plants the alien monster inside of him. I feel like there's an alien monster inside of me and I can't shake it. I can't just "not do" something, like not drink, or not smoke, or not stand on my head, and know that it will free me from the creature within.

So an uneasy truce exists between me and The Virus. I accept its presence, and I try to avoid behaviors that will aggravate it. It is here that I discovered where my true power lies. I found that I did have the power to change behaviors, to adapt to the ever-changing condition of my body as I try to keep one step ahead of the virus. I learned that I could exercise, practice yoga and the essence of the

Eleventh Step, meditation, and that these activities can help me to maintain a fragile balance. I let go of the cigarettes, the diet sodas, the coffee, the junk food. I began to treat my body with as much care as I can. My biggest problem has been my obsessive-compulsive perfectionism; I still tend to push myself beyond all reasonable limits in trying to live up to my ridiculously high expectations of myself.

The tricky part in this power struggle is that I have to be very careful not to set myself up to think that I have *complete* control over my health. That would mean that if I got sick, then I had done something wrong, or had not done enough. True, I am a lot more aware now about how stress affects me, how certain foods like sugars and refined carbohydrates make me feel lousy, and how if I want optimum health, to avoid those foods and high stress. But there are also times when, despite my doctor's best efforts and all my hard work, I get sick anyway. My immune system has been damaged by the virus to the extent that my body cannot respond very well to bacterial or fungal invaders, so I shouldn't be too surprised when I do get sick from time to time. But in typical alcoholic fashion, I pull out the baseball bat and start beating myself mercilessly for "letting myself get sick." It is this alcoholic tendency to judge myself harshly that I must also change. It is the compromise between accepting that I am powerless over having the virus in my body, yet hav-

ing some power over how I take care of myself, but not complete and total power. This way, I'm off the hook when I get sick.

I also need to be careful not to set God up. If I pray to God to keep me healthy, not to let me die, or not let my husband get infected, and I get sick or I die, or my husband gets infected, then I run the risk of being angry at God for not answering my prayers. I have had to analyze my belief system about God; I do not think God has anything to do with disasters natural or unnatural, diseases, or the terrible things people do to each other. It is a complex and difficult world we have created for ourselves, and the hazards of living in it come with the turf. And nature is just, well, nature. If anything, nature is there to keep us humble.

What I do believe is that God is there for us when bad things happen, when times are difficult, when we are in crisis. God is there to give us the courage to go on, to give us the hope and the faith to grow from our pain, instead of becoming bitter or cynical because of it. God is there to give us the courage to love, to take risks, to challenge ourselves in sobriety. We turn to God when we work the Twelve Steps; in acknowledging our powerlessness, we humbly turn toward a Higher Power for help, all the while hoping this Power will restore us to some measure of peace and clarity of vision. And then we make the decision to turn our will and our lives over to God's care, to a God as each indi-

vidual AA understands him, in the hope that his infinite wisdom will guide us through our lives.

Yet throughout this process, indeed, as we progress through the rest of the Steps, we find that we must make our own decisions. Using the tools of recovery, we rely on facts and information, input from others, and the voice of God inside all of us — intuition. It is here that my true power lives: in my ability to talk to God, and then to get quiet and listen. I have found that the Serenity Prayer is a perfect adjunct to the first three Steps: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." I break it down like this: "God" (I am powerless and I need help from a Power greater than myself), "grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change" (please restore me to sanity!), "courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference" (give me the guts to make a decision and take action to accomplish my goals; let me know what your will is for me and empower me to carry it out; give me the grace to discern that which I have power over and that which I do not). Step Eleven ties in well with this line of thinking.

Thus is the First Step, the original humbling Step, the Step that allows me the freedom to admit that I cannot do it alone anymore and that I need help, both divine and human. This is the Step that, through the freedom it brings, gives me the power to

stay sober, the power to love, the power to heal, the power to make my own decisions and to take risks. The power to overcome my fears and do it anyway. I am empowered to live my life with grace, dignity, and a sense of humor. I am blessed with the opportunity to share love with the people I care about, and to be there for them when they need me. This freedom of my spirit, this contented sobriety (most of the time!), this peace inside of me amid the turmoil, is the power.

This power comes from the ground zero of powerlessness, and from the plea for assistance from the source of all true power — God as I understand him. After going through the phases of being on the joyous pink cloud of gratitude toward God for helping me get sober, then the anger at God for seemingly allowing a bad thing to

happen to me (I've already concluded that he had nothing to do with it), and then a tentative rebuilding of my relationship with him... it is this alcoholic's opinion that God is really an OK guy. No matter what happens to me, he'll be right beside me, holding my hand. Sometimes I try to push God away, but he just hangs back a little, smiles, and walks a bit behind me until I get over my snit and invite him back alongside. So we walk together, in this journey called Sobriety. He has given me all the support I need through all the wonderful people in my life. For that, I am ever grateful.

I'd like to end this little tome with a blessing I find inspirational: May you all have contented sobriety, peace of mind and lots of love in all your lives. May you grow.

Connie F., Weymouth, Mass.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Cold Sober



For fifteen years, almost every time I work or think about our Second Step, considering the Power greater than ourselves, I am reminded of a large refrigerator in a ward at a Minnesota state hospital. It's not really idol worship, but it is a way for me to gratefully recall who I am and how amazing it is that I'm sober today by the grace of God. The Second Step is for me the Step of expecting good things and expecting them not from me but from a Power greater than myself.

I was sober just a couple of weeks in a sanitarium for alcoholic priests. After fighting tooth and nail against going into treatment, my head began to clear and I started to listen. The proposed stay in the sanitarium was three months, and like everything else in life, I thought I could speed things up if I went to as many meetings as

they would allow. I signed up to be taken out to a meeting at the nearby state hospital. I was picked up by a man whom I've never seen before or since, but he reminded me of the traveling salesman in "The Music Man" or maybe a character out of *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis.

He was giving the talk at the hospital meeting and was telling everyone about the Power greater than ourselves. He told everyone that the Power could be anything, even this refrigerator he was standing next to. And then he said: "Isn't that right, Father?"

It was many years ago, but I can still feel the anger rip through my insides. Here I was sitting quietly; nobody knew I was a priest. Here comes this traveling salesman pointing me out, me with my advanced theological degrees, asking me to say that a refrigerator could be used as a Power greater than myself to restore me to sanity. Oh, how mad I was as I

gamely smiled at this man I now considered a complete idiot. But something all of a sudden hit me.

I looked at this smiling speaker. He had the keys to his own car. He wasn't three hundred miles from where he lived. No one had to sign him out of an institution to travel a few miles to another institution. I'd better listen, something inside me said. All my great knowledge about God, my retreats, years of prayer, my consultations with psychiatric experts and wonderful spiritual directors — none of it had gotten me sober and kept me sober. I better listen to this guy and to these other people.

And so I try to, one day at a time. I know how that once I accepted that First Step, there was hope in the Second Step. And the Power was not me nor mine.

I have confidence now that it is the God who loves me and all of us. But every once in a while when I get messed up and feel these surges of anger and superiority, I think of a big refrigerator in Rochester, Minnesota and say: St. Kenmore, or St. Frigidaire, or whatever you were, pray for me . . . help me to listen and do what these people are telling me to do. Amen.

Dan M., Chicago, Ill.

The Art of Letting Go



When I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous, Step Two was like being asked to stand on the edge of a cliff and throw all my precious possessions — my diamonds, my rubies, and my job offers from top companies — out into the void.

After I'd been in the program a little longer, I realized that I didn't have any diamonds, rubies, or job offers.

After I'd been in the program longer still, I learned that I could take my worries — Will I be on time? Will he like me? Can I control her behavior? — and toss those out into the void, too.

I didn't even have to know who or what was in the void, and I didn't have to stand around, my hands cupped, to play catch in case anything came back. The Higher Power as I understood it took care of my life, whether I was paying attention or not.

In the early days, I'd bring my problems to meetings and people

would remind me: "Let go. Turn it over." Such simple words, simple thoughts. Yet always my entire body would relax, my jaw loosen, my eyes spill over with tears: "Oh, yeah! I forgot!" Letting go was the antithesis of every habit I thought held my life together. Learning to let go, then, took practice.

When I was one year sober, at age twenty-four, a job came to me that I couldn't possibly deserve. All the other staff were illustrious artists. I worked ten times as much as I needed in order to prove I was worthy.

What was I so worried about? That my boss would find out I was a drunk? I learned later that she hired me precisely because she knew I was an alcoholic artist in recovery, and she felt I would be more effective with the populations served by our arts program.

But I didn't know that then, and every morning, before I went into the room where I worked, my stomach turned over, and I would become sick.

For the next decade, I threw up al-

most every time I went into the rooms where my profession is practiced.

Eventually I took time off, entered two months of in-patient treatment, began my sobriety and my life again from scratch, and started to practice Step Two. Then came the day when once again I was offered a job.

I was paralyzed. Terrified. How would I, who had made a total mess of my life, my sobriety, go in front of all those people and actually say or do anything of value?

My trick on anxiety now is to pretend that today is the first day of my sobriety. I embark on a "thirty and thirty." I also divide each day into fifteen minute segments. The Saturday before my new job was to start, I attended a meeting I don't usually go to and was asked to chair the general discussion. When I exposed my nasty fear to the AA laundromat, everyone spoke eloquently, as all AAs do at every meeting I've ever been to, of their personal experience with fear, with anxiety, with going before groups, with jobs. And my spirit came clean: As I walked in the door the following Monday, I left myself at the doorway and let the Higher Power of my understanding take over.

That was three years ago, and I've worked in the field for hundreds of healthy twenty-four hours since.

Step Two also helps heal family relationships. A few months ago, I married a sober man who is the father of a young child. Without a day of previous parenting under my belt, I became an "instant mom." More to

the point, I became that storybook villain, a stepmother.

My first response was the old familiar "I will be perfect." Biological mothers bicker and argue and nag and hassle with their kids. I, however, will never frown, never criticize, never discipline, nor will I expect the "guest" to lift a finger toward household chores, but instead wait on the child hand and foot, arrange her clothes neatly on the bed and selflessly gather the dirty towel from the floor where she tossed it.

The result of this prescription for insanity was that I came to resent this perfectly charming child. As it was not acceptable to express this, I responded instead by starting to tighten up on Friday afternoon, as my husband set off to gather his daughter from school, and by the time they arrived home, I didn't feel like speaking to anyone.

The child figured she must be doing something wrong. She tried to be better and better in order to win back my approval, which at times I would provide. I could see my crazy-making behavior, but I didn't know what to do about it. My jealousy was as fierce and consuming as if my husband were bringing home another woman.

Through this program, I have learned that my feelings are not little gods to be cast in gold and set on a pedestal so I can worship them: "Oh poor me. Doesn't my anguish look attractive?" I have learned I can turn *anything* over and be transformed in an instant.

It came to me that I was so busy trying to please my new husband and be a perfect "mother" (when the kid has a good mother of her own — whether I like her or not) that I was neglecting to take care of myself. On Fridays, when my husband set off to pick up his daughter, I'd stay at home waiting just in case they needed me. And, I eventually saw, to control the time they had together.

What did I need?

A meeting. Hugs. To talk at the meeting and maybe have a couple of people come up afterward and say they liked what I said. To reach out to that newcomer and get out of myself.

Just a little sustenance for me helped turn my moods around.

Now, when I come home from a Friday evening meeting, the matter of my Friday pouting is solved. For starters, the child is deep asleep. She and her father have had an entire afternoon and evening to celebrate their own relationship. In the morning, rested, I greet her with a smile. Her delight is unbounded. "Oh, boy," she chortles. "This is going to be the best weekend, I can tell." I renew my contract with myself (to let go of my jealousy, to comfort the child within me) fifteen minutes at a time. I was earning kudos in my field of helping others, but I was starving those at home. Our house was immaculate and the meals elegant, yes, but I refused to reach out with a hug. Step Two rids me of that insanity.

Step Two has also helped me in the matter of being a famous artist. Now,

let's get one thing straight right now: I'm not a famous artist. That's one of my "yets." But ever since I was a young child, I've seen myself that way, treated myself that way, and expected that at any moment, the rest of the world would also realize this. My art requires long hours of dedication, years of apprenticeship, and I've put in every one of those hours and more. I slaved away most of my childhood, adolescence, twenties and early thirties in workshops, schools, graduate programs, solitude. And I attracted a fair amount of attention from people in the field, and won a few prizes, made some money.

And whenever I was about to push through, I'd zip into a destructive relationship, develop a major illness, or move to a new city so that the transition time would take years. I was afraid to turn my life and my will over to an invisible Higher Power, but I was quite willing to turn it over to the nearest goodlooking male.

At the rate I was going, building up, tearing down, starting over, I reached my late thirties with not too much to show for all my years of work.

Now I've been active in AA for more than five years, and most of those years I've had to make art second and concentrate first on working my program. But somehow, fifteen minutes at a time, with meditation, prayer, and meetings, I managed last week to complete a major project.

And if, one of these days, I open the mailbox or hear on the answering machine the words that spell "suc-

cess," as I did the other times, I don't think I'll need to run out and have a drink or get sick or divorce my husband to prove how wrong they were to select me. And if I receive the words that say, "you need to work on this some more," I might shed a tear or two, but I'll go to a meeting that day, talk about it, or shake hands with a newcomer, and then I'll get back to work.

The point today is that *I had fun doing it*. I don't create art in order to become famous, important, powerful, or so that all those people who ever hurt me, starting back in grade school, will be sorry. I no longer

make art from a place of rigidity and emptiness that created piece after piece symbolizing the same victim surrounded by slobs. Now my art is created in the process of detachment and fun, and whether this particular art work "makes it" or not, I know that I have the right to keep on being sober, just fifteen minutes at a time. And perhaps, after all the garbage I've thrown out into the void where my higher power resides, I might just have some diamonds and rubies after all. But there's no guarantee about what I will receive in return. Today, I can live with that.

K. P. T., Brinnon, Wash.

A Meaning Beyond the Words



In a way, Step Two has not been a problem to me, and in another way it has been very sticky. When I first staggered into AA, my powers of comprehension were shot. I looked at the Steps and just saw words — it was a good meeting if I managed not

to drool. It took me a week to learn the difference between the Big Book and the Bible. Neither of them made very much sense and both had an awful lot about God.

After three weeks I got too busy to go to meetings, and darned if I didn't get drunk again. A couple of months later, in a treatment center, I took a more sober look at the Steps. Power-

less, yes. Unmanageable, kinda. “Power greater than,” “restore to sanity” — OK. Actually, I could have been reading about little green men from Mars, and it wouldn’t have mattered to me. I was hurting; theological precision was not a priority.

Then one day, during an AA meeting, a voice in the back of my head said, “John, you are alive today in spite of all the insane, destructive things you did over twenty-eight years of drinking. It’s not your own strength or wisdom or virtue that got you here. Don’t worry about Step Two.” This was quite a jolt.

After treatment, I stayed dry two weeks and slipped for four more. But I was still going to meetings, and I read in the “Twelve and Twelve” that some of us have to be bludgeoned into humility. And I was praying for the strength or the courage or whatever to stop drinking. Praying to whom? To what? Who knows? I didn’t.

My idea of Step Three was, if I didn’t turn my will and my life over

to God, I would soon turn it over to the law enforcement agencies of the State of Oklahoma or to the medical profession. Then something told me to start on a Fourth Step. Progress on Step Four was slow and painful for months. And then a flash of reality showed me that something was working. I wasn’t drinking. I didn’t want to drink. Sure, I was crazy as hell and miserable, but I was sobering up. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps were working in my life. God was doing for me what I could never do for myself. It was the most powerful experience of my life.

The rest of the Steps aren’t easy. Living is hard work. The spirituality of the program has affected everything about my life. Marvelous things are now possible that were unthinkable before. My idea of God is as foggy as ever, but my feeling of awe and delight at the mystery and power of creation, reality, truth — it’s wonderful.

John S., Guthrie, Okla.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

The Miracle of Transformation



“Honey, keep it simple. Say ‘please’ in the morning and ‘thank you’ at night — just in case something is listening, something which might help you to stay sober.” That was my sponsor’s advice regarding my overwhelming fear of God. Yes, it sounded simple, but God and I were so alienated that even “please” and “thank you” seemed like a monumental effort, perhaps more than I could put forth.

From my very first AA meeting, I’d seen the Steps and Traditions hanging on the walls of meeting rooms. I am grateful that no one pressed me about using them. Step One presented enough of a challenge by suggesting that I might be power-

less over alcohol, and my life unmanageable; the Steps that mentioned God truly panicked me. I did not understand God, and we were not on speaking terms.

Fortunately, nobody at AA meetings seemed to think this would be a good reason to quit coming back. Rather, everyone said “don’t drink and go to meetings,” encouraging me to hang on to the only requirement for AA membership — a desire to stop drinking. So I put one foot in front of the other, went to meetings daily, and stayed away from the first drink. I brought the body and gradually the mind followed. I learned to listen as the days away from a drink increased, and came to believe in a power greater than myself: the AA group, the collective experience, strength, and hope of alcoholics

whose purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. One day at a time, my alcoholic despair was displaced by stirrings of hope.

As my listening got better, I noticed something about the old-timers whose sobriety attracted me. No matter how long they’d been sober, no matter how uneducated or intellectual, no matter what they did for a living, whatever their ethnic backgrounds or personal lifestyles, they all had two things in common: they worked the Twelve Steps of recovery, and were cultivating a relationship with some variety of God.

Gradually, my desire to stop drinking grew into a desire to recover from alcoholism. I came to want what some of the old-timers had, and I became willing to work toward it, at whatever cost to my pride.

I took my sponsor’s keep-it-simple advice, and started to say “please” in the morning and “thank you” at night, but I did so only because she told me to, only in the spirit of open-mindedness which the Big Book suggests in Appendix 2. I did not believe for a moment that God would hear me or help me. But with or without God, AA was helping me to stay sober a day at a time — the power I felt in meetings — so I figured it was safe to take a chance on these simple prayers.

There came a Sunday evening later in the first year of my sobriety when I began to sense a God who was mine. I fell into some serious conflict with my

family, and fear undermined my confidence. A drink started to look good to me, so I dialed several of my AA friends for help. No one was home. Their telephone answering machines responded, but I needed more help than that (and quickly too!). Someone in AA had told me a time like this would come. Not knowing how to move with the panic I felt, I sat still, asking for help from I knew not what, and feeling foolish for doing so. But my need was great, and my prayer as sincere as it could be at the time, and in reply, something came to my heart to soothe my panic: it was the power I’d felt in meetings. This was the first time I knew that power would help me *outside* of meetings. One day I awakened from sleep, knowing to call it grace, and because I sensed that grace was my own, our conversations grew beyond “please” and “thank you.”

Three steps forward, four steps back... that seems to be how I have often moved through sobriety. Knowing that grace existed gave me some solace, some added confidence, but a slew of fearful doubts followed close behind. What was the nature of grace? Would it really help me? Or was it just setting me up for later disappointment? What about the fire and brimstone persecuting God I’d heard so many dreadful rumors about? Did grace have anything to do with that?

As I look back, I see that grace had treated me with kid gloves during the early years. A day at a time, there

were glimmers of grace, small confirmations of love: curious coincidences, unlikely consolations. For example, once I had no money and no groceries either, and I found myself with an opportunity to "borrow" from an unsupervised till. But I stopped to think of the damage stealing could do to my sobriety. With grace's help, I did not take any money, and as I was walking home still broke and worried, I found twenty-five dollars in the gutter.

This is but one example of ten thousand occasions when grace encouraged me to pursue the principles I was learning from the AA program. Grace was divinely gentle, knowing that I would have balked at too much love at once.

One night in a meeting, I heard someone speak about the Third Step and his emphasis was on turning our will and lives over to God's *care*. Not to God's wrath, nor to God's ambivalence, but to God's care. That man's sharing struck me hard, compelling me to see that my greatest faith was in the conviction that God would fail me. It was strong in me, and I wondered when it had taken root. It seemed old, and yet I had no memory of dealing with God at an earlier time in my life.

So I asked grace to teach me about God's care, a day at a time (which has been the lion's share of God's curriculum for more than twelve years now) and gradually I recalled that as a child I had had a relationship with God and lost it as the despair of al-

coholism took over my life. God has never failed me, but God yielded to my increasing self-reliance, stepped aside to let me sow my wild oats of self-will, but hovered close at hand looking for any welcome of its guidance.

After a while in sobriety, I remembered an incident during my drinking days. One evening while feeling very blue and discouraged, I trudged upstairs to my little apartment, lit a candle and sat in a chair, filled with self-pity. Suddenly I sensed a presence in the room. It frightened me and I said aloud, "I'm not ready for this." The presence left.

Recalling this incident convinced me of the power of willingness. God/grace respected my unreadiness to welcome its guidance, but as soon as I sought divine help in early sobriety, grace began to work in my heart, to soothe my fears of self-reliance, and to transform me into someone who aspires to be of maximum service to God and my fellows. I arrived in Alcoholics Anonymous a self-centered drunk. By staying sober a day at a time, using the Steps and turning my will and life over to the *care* of God, I have become a God-centered recovering alcoholic who is happy to serve, joyous in honoring the gift of sobriety by sharing it with others, and free to thank God's grace for the transformation of my life.

God has truly done for me what I could not do for myself, and I have learned that my willingness is vital.

Anonymous, Omaha, Neb.

Trusting 'the Force'



Several years after I became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I saw the movie "Star Wars." When Obi-wan Kenobi told Luke Skywalker to "trust the Force," as Luke set forth on a dangerous mission, a light bulb went off.

"That's the Third Step," I excitedly proclaimed to myself, translating "Force" into "Higher Power," whom I call God.

Learning to trust "the Force" saved Luke's life and won the battle. Trusting my Higher Power saved my sobriety — and probably my life — five months after I attended my first AA meeting nearly fifteen years ago.

In the beginning of my recovery, I thought I did trust God. Now I realize I only believed in him. I had the mistaken belief that until I proved to God that I was worthy of receiving his help, he wouldn't give it to me. I had carved in granite the mind-set that my God-given willpower was all I needed to control my drinking. That it hadn't been successful for over thirty years didn't persuade me of the futility of my theory.

Only after my wife threatened to leave me, in early 1972, did I finally admit that I couldn't go for more than a few days without a booze fix. I had to have it just as a diabetic must have insulin. It had truly become essential for the treatment of my living problems, which included large amounts of fear and resentment.

With bitter reluctance, I went to my first AA meeting. I hated doing so, but felt I had no other choice. I didn't know where else I could find help. I sat alone in the back of the church basement, depressed and ashamed that I had descended to associating with a bunch of drunks for whom I had nothing but contempt.

Despite my scornful attitude, the next day I understood that something unusual had taken place. Somehow I no longer had the desire or compulsion to drink. I still viewed AA with abhorrence, but an inner voice whispered that there was a connection between this miracle and AA and I might lose it if I did not keep coming back. I'd go to a meeting a week, I decided.

I'm not sure that I would have come back if my Higher Power had not conferred instant sobriety on me.

I would have gone on drinking, and all the bad things that hadn't happened yet — such as loss of job, family, and health — would have happened within a year or sooner. I was on the down elevator and the basement was the next stop.

Fortunately, I began to look forward to the meetings and soon found them rewarding. I discovered that AA was the place I had been searching for for three decades.

However, I still didn't trust my Higher Power. Trust was the lesson I learned after five months in the program. I was driving home from work one evening when the desire to drink struck me with devastating power. It produced such an overwhelming craving that I felt I would not be able to resist it when I arrived at my suburban residence in a few minutes.

Frightened and depressed, I racked my brain for a way to escape what seemed an inescapable fate that once again would make booze my master. Suddenly the words came: "Third Step." I groaned. How could this be a practical answer to my hopeless plight? The idea of "turning it over to the Higher Power," which I had heard AA members tell about, I considered superstitious bunk, or at best a cop-out.

I had zero confidence that the Third Step could save me from the slip I was destined to make in a few minutes. But I was desperate enough to grasp at any straw. So with close to a mocking irreverence, I spoke out loud in my car: "Okay, God, I'm turning the compulsion over to you."

There were no lightning bolts. No peals of thunder. Yet in the instant that I spoke to my Higher Power, the compulsion vanished and was replaced by a faith that everything was going to be all right. Gratefully and joyfully I drove on, realizing that I would not have to take that drink, thanks to the Third Step.

That's how I learned to trust "the Force" — Higher Power to me. It was the second miracle of my AA life, the first being the gift of sobriety given to me at my first meeting. (There have been other miracles since.)

The Third Step showed me I could use it to plug into a power greater than myself. It has gotten me through dozens of crises both real and imagined. It has never failed me and I am sure it never will.

Thank God for the Third Step. I believe it is a direct line to the power I must have to stay sober and to deal with my living problems.

Bill M., Bethesda, Md.

A Total Commitment



My glory years had finally arrived. After fifteen years of struggling with a bad marriage, I had married a wonderful man and had a new chance. We had a dream house. I was doing the kind of work I had always wanted to do. My son loved his new school and new friends. He even liked his new stepfather. How perfect could life be?

The truth was, however, that in the midst of this "ideal" life, I was actually going down the tubes with a bottle of vodka in each hand.

In the latter years of my first marriage, I suspected I had a drinking problem. I even gave up liquor for two years without AA. But I didn't think I was an alcoholic. I thought that I was a problem drinker — that is, I drank when I had problems. And I had plenty to drink about in those years. My ex-husband was a drug abuser, our family life was awful, and I had a series of jobs which I hated.

After my divorce, my life turned sweet, but I kept right on drinking. This blew my problem drinking theory. This time my explanation for my drinking was that I was having a good time. One day after a particularly "good time," I became aware of how seriously debilitating my frequent hangovers were. I asked myself, "If this is a good time, why am I drinking this way?"

I had no answer. But, thank God, I came across a man who did. And, thank God, he confronted me. He was an expert in alcoholism in the workplace and I got his name from an article in the Sunday paper. I called to interview him for a book I was writing on the problems of drug abuse in business. (Oh, the irony of that.) I certainly didn't want help with my drinking problem.

The man listened to me patiently as I explained my writing project. Then he turned the tables on me. He asked who the drunk was in my family.

This longtime recovering alcoholic could see the banner I was waving

which said, "Alcohol problem here." I didn't realize I was so obvious. I stuttered and stammered then fell silent. When I found my voice again, I told him that I guessed it was me.

The man suggested an alcoholism counselor named Billy and I went to see him the next day. As I sat in front of Billy, scared and hungover, he told me that he would be my guide for about six weeks but that the real solution to my problem was to go to AA. I went to my first meeting that night, loaded with apprehension, which soon gave way to an overwhelming feeling of gratitude. Near the end of the meeting I raised my hand and said, "I'm Paula. I'm an alcoholic." I felt so much better saying it out loud. I was on my way. Two years later, I am still profoundly grateful.

For me, spiritual growth is at the core of my sobriety. When I came to AA, I was, as the early AAs describe it, spiritually bankrupt. But the hunger in my soul was not dead. It was just buried beneath years of anger, fear, and discouragement.

When I started, I wasn't daunted by the fact that I had no Higher Power and I didn't worry that I hadn't gone to church for at least fifteen years. In AA I found I could have a Higher Power of my own making, one that didn't demand my presence in a pew on Sunday morning. I made up my own Higher Power in the early months of my sobriety. And for a while, he did just fine, until my questions and needs became more complex. Then I

knew I had to find the solution to this Higher Power thing.

The first thing I did was to go over every Step that directly related to a Higher Power. I had come to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. I had admitted to my Higher Power, to myself, and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. I was entirely ready to have my Higher Power remove all my defects of character. I had asked my Higher Power to do just that. I sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with my Higher Power and I prayed to know my Higher Power's will and for the power to carry it out. Well, I pondered, "Where am I stuck?"

Ahh. Light dawned. The missing link was Step Three. I had not made a total commitment to turn my life and my will over to the care of my Higher Power.

My whole life? My whole will? That's what Step Three says. It doesn't say some of my life, like perhaps the parts I don't mind giving up or the parts I'd like someone to take. It says my life — as in the whole thing. Phew. I can't do this, I despaired. How can I function in this world if I move over and let this Higher Power run the show? I have been planning, plotting and manipulating for forty years. How can I possibly back off and let someone else take over?

The first thing I had to remedy was that *my* Higher Power was inade-



quate to handle this lofty job. This brought me to reviewing the religious teachings of my childhood. I did some earnest and intense research into the God of my youth and began to see him in a new light. He was not,

I discovered, the big meany just waiting for me to make a mistake so he could squash me. I found that he was loving, forgiving, and nurturing. And I could see — from his work in my fellow AAs with good sobriety — he appeared to be smart enough and strong enough to guide me through the thorny problems I was currently facing. I was thrilled. Now this was a God that could manage my life. I gave him a test flight.

I took it day by day. I placed my life and my will in God's hands. He took me up on my offer and started giving me guidance. I went through the Steps again, finding even greater satisfaction in them now that God was managing my affairs. My program was back on track again and my sobriety was better than it had been before. I had found the key.

And in discovering how important Step Three was for me, I also confirmed that spiritual growth is the essence of healthy sobriety for me. Now, when I hear my fellow sojourners say that they are having difficulty walking down the road of sobriety, I ask them how their spiritual life is. Usually, they tell me it needs major work. Then, I share with them something that has changed my life irrevocably — lasting fulfillment for a deep spiritual longing that, I realize today, has been in me all my life. This has brought me joy beyond my expectations and serenity that has become my foundation. And I still have a lot more growing to do.

Paula L., Bedford, N.H.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly



As with many other members of AA whom I have heard since their experience with the Fourth Step, I wanted to do it very early in my sobriety. With my copy of the "Twelve and Twelve," I attempted to write two lists, my good points on one, my bad points on the other. After three or four days and nights of work and many torn pages, I had a very large bad list and one extremely small good list.

On asking for help from one of the older and more reliable members of my home group, I was very much relieved to hear him say that I probably wasn't ready for Step Four yet, especially since I had been around AA for only about one month. I was told to

just keep coming to meetings and to keep asking questions. When I was ready for the Fourth Step, my Higher Power would let me know.

I stayed around AA for another year and a half. I made coffee, helped set up and clean up after meetings. I went to different groups in other areas. After I had three months in, I shared my limited experience, strength, and hope. I read some more AA literature. I went on Twelfth Step calls with other AA members.

Needless to say, all of this activity in AA helped me work on the changes within me which needed to be made. My life became much more manageable and content, to a degree. But there was still that empty feeling of something missing, something I could not quite put my finger on.

One night, while setting up for my

group's early beginners meeting, I was talking with one of our old-timers. I mentioned how I had been feeling of late. Not that I wanted to drink or drug. My life seemed pretty okay, no major problems that my Higher Power and I weren't working on. I knew I belonged in AA and was making four to six meetings a week. But there was this empty feeling.

My friend did not blink an eye before I finished my tale, and asked if I had done my Fourth and Fifth Steps yet. My answer was no and that I'd been told that my Higher Power would let me know when I was ready.

Then the person who led the beginners meeting shared how important his Fourth and Fifth Steps had been to him. And the chairperson of the regular meeting emphasized her Fourth and Fifth Steps as major in her recovery. I began to realize my Higher Power was speaking to me, through other people.

It took two to three weeks of soul-searching to complete my lists but, thanks to my time in AA and the insight into myself from identifying with many AAs, my good list was a little longer than my first try — although it was still six pages shorter than my bad list. At the head of my good list was the fact that I was doing the lists at all.

To share my Fifth Step, I chose a priest because of my early religious upbringing. I made an appointment and until it came I thought of at least a million reasons to cancel it. I did not let these fears overcome me.

Well, not until I rang the doorbell of the rectory where my appointment was. All of a sudden I felt I was making a big mistake.

My cunning, baffling, and powerful disease told me that when the housekeeper answered my ring, I should tell her I was looking for a Father Anybody. She would say he was not there and I'd be gone, never to be so stupid to get into a mess like this again. But the door was answered by the priest with whom I'd made my appointment. I was caught.

In the over ten years since that night I've been to many AA meetings. I've read most AA literature and a lot of other material on my disease. I went to college. I've talked with and heard many other AAs who have done their Fourth and Fifth Steps. But I have never found any words to communicate the feelings I had after leaving that rectory. Joy, relief, happiness, excitement, freedom — none come close to describing it. (I did tear up my lists and put the pieces in many different garbage cans on my way home.)

If anyone who's reading this hasn't done a Fourth and Fifth Step and you've been around a while, please think strongly about doing these freedom Steps. I have talked with people who have had slips after years in AA who have said they didn't do a Fourth or Fifth Step the first time around. Or to put it another way that I've heard: If you don't do a good Fourth Step, you may find yourself with a fifth. It does work.

Pat T., Williston, Fla.

A Good-Time Girl Gets Better



I have known about the program for almost seven years. I myself would have had six years of "dryness" in August if I hadn't gone back out in July. I say dryness instead of sobriety because those six years sure weren't happy ones. There were moments of contentment, even spiritual awareness, but they were fleeting and only made me more aware of my spiritual inadequacy.

Fortunately I found my way back to AA after two months of daily, heavy drinking and I have had eight months of real program sobriety. These haven't been easy months, but they have been rewarding. Rewarding because I have finally gotten honest about the one character defect I had refused to face in those dry six years — my sexual conduct.

For obvious reasons this is a subject that can't be discussed extensively at meetings. This is unfortunate, but understandable. We alcoholics

are at varying degrees of moral wellness and sex is often a part of our problem. I know it was for me!

When I was drinking I was very promiscuous. The next day I would blame it on the booze. Really sex was as much a release for me as the drinking was — if not more. In bed I could pretend I was loved, wanted, beautiful, and powerful. The more partners I had, the more popular I believed myself to be. I desperately wanted love, but anytime a sexual relationship showed signs of becoming serious I would end it because I was afraid to give myself completely. I was a good-time girl — the life of the party with my quick mind, sharp tongue, and nonexistent morals. Man's best friend and every wife's nightmare. Occasionally I would realize there was something desperate about my sexual behavior but I could easily drink such doubts away. Everything on the surface looked fine — a nice apartment, high paying government job, and parties every weekend. Yet the nights when there were no men to

fill the void, I had to rely on pills and booze to get me through. Often I would drunkenly leaf through the Bible, looking for a magic answer. I knew there was an answer out there, but how? Men came and went, and my self-esteem lessened with each. The less I thought of myself, the lower my standards became. Drinking ceased to be a way to lessen my inhibitions and became my only solace. A hasty marriage lasted only four months because of booze and promiscuity.

Then I met a good man and somehow managed to keep him. Fortunately he is also an alcoholic and through him I found the program. He has seven years in and I suppose the contented sobriety I have been seeking. Unlike me, he was able to give all his character defects to God. I was unable to do that and therefore I continued to suffer, even though I was no longer drinking. I didn't want to give up the heady power trip that comes with illicit sex. I wanted it all — the security of marriage, sobriety, and romantic interludes. Instead I lost everything because of self-centered foolishness. Even the sex wasn't pleasurable anymore because I had developed a conscience. I couldn't blame my behavior on drinking now. I knew there was something wrong with my actions yet couldn't seem to control myself. Unlike my drinking, I wasn't yet willing to admit I was powerless over sex. The scenes were the same — remorseful promises to change, begging for forgiveness, and pitiful justi-

fications. I still hadn't bottomed out.

My husband put up with a lot. No one could blame him for not wanting to sleep in our bed. He certainly knew I put no value in sex. Eventually I left him because I knew my actions hurt him. I travelled 3,000 miles, seeking that mystical geographical cure. I gave up on myself, spiritually and emotionally, and of course started drinking again. Yet I managed to get another good job and nice apartment, and back into the program. I stopped drinking but didn't stop seeking escape through sex. A month sober, I got involved with a married man in the program. Six months sober I realized that loveless sex was not what I wanted. Even though my latest partner was separated from his wife, he was not free. Even if he were there would never be love between us. For the first time in my life I finally realized that what was wrong was in me. All the love, stability and friendship I wanted was back in Alberta with my husband. The problems in my marriage were mine. I finally confronted myself and took a fearless, thorough moral inventory. I saw that love wasn't sex, nor sex love. Sex wasn't meant to be a casual encounter between strangers, nor used to manipulate men and relationships. I finally admitted to myself that I couldn't blame my promiscuity on my drinking. That actually my guilt over my sexual behavior contributed to my drinking. With more sincerity than I had used even when praying for help with my drinking, I asked God to re-

lieve me of my defects, especially sexual. Immediately after praying I received relief. I can't explain it, but it is real. I stayed awake all night because I was so happy. Even now talking about it brings a smile to my face. Serenity is a wonderful thing.

I pray every morning for God to relieve me of all my defects of character, especially sexual, so that I can better serve his purpose. I can feel the change in me, as if my eyes have finally been opened. My attitudes and behavior have changed, toward myself and men. I now feel comfortable forming friendships with men because I realize the relationships can be non-sexual. I have learned to say no because I no longer want loveless sex.

This spiritual awakening has put my program in a totally different perspective. I can finally be fearlessly honest in all aspects of my life be-

cause I have confessed to God, myself and another human being (my sponsor). God continues to grant me daily reprieves from my obsessions with alcohol and sex. It is truly wonderful to be alive and free.

I have made amends to my husband and asked for his forgiveness. I hope he will take me back because I know I never gave our marriage a chance and that I now could be the kind of wife he deserves. If it is God's will, we will be reunited and enjoy a wonderful spiritual marriage. If not, I know God will put someone special in my life when he feels I am ready for it. I know I will never be the way I was because God has made me better. The Twelve Steps can relieve so much more than drinking. By following the Steps and believing in God, my life has been changed forever.

Patricia S., Stratford, Ont.

the Fourth Step is fear and pride, and that is certainly what stopped me. In addition, I wanted to be sure I did it perfectly. I didn't know that perfectionism is a character defect; it is in itself an imperfection.

I believe that if I had not tackled the inventory when I did, the guilt could very likely have killed me; and it wouldn't have been God who was punishing me either. I would have done the job myself. We are not punished *for* our sins, we are punished *by* our sins.

In looking over the inventory with the aid of my sponsor I saw that I had uncovered a lot of fear and resentment. I believe that resentment destroys cells within my body. I learned in a biology class that body cells are constantly dying off and being replenished. What the class did not teach was that under negative conditions such as fear, anger, jealousy, hatred, and resentment the cells die at

a much more rapid rate than when we are feeling love.

My Fourth Step also showed me that I had an acid tongue — committing murder by character assassination. In my recovery I am sometimes able to pause before speaking long enough to ask three questions: "Is it true?" "Is it kind?" "Is it necessary?" I could reduce all three to one question: "Before I say it — would I want it said to me?"

Prior to the Steps I had isolated myself from God and man. People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges.

Many, many times while jogging I have repeated over and over, "I am beautiful, capable, and lovable." I needed this repetition in order to improve my self-image.

We cannot adequately live in the present, or effectively face the future, if our thoughts are buried in the past.

Ed H., Brentwood, N.Y.

With Courage



I remember feeling afraid as a kid and thinking that I was a coward — that the mere presence of fear in my life made me a coward. I did not know that one of the definitions of courage

was the ability to do the right thing in spite of fear. One particular word in the Fourth Step that I had difficulty with, therefore, was the word "fearless." "Fearless" does not necessarily imply the absence of fear. Fearless means "with courage."

What stops many of us from doing

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Exactly What Happened



“Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it?” So begins the discussion of Step Five in chapter six of the Big Book.

In one of the early issues of the Grapevine, the author of a piece on this Step described it as a link between recognizing our faults (Fourth) and doing something to correct them (Sixth and Seventh).

By the time we come to this Step, it seems to me, we ought to have encountered and begun to deal with the idea of a Power greater than ourselves. When I find myself balking again, because the Step involves further discourse with God, the signal is clear that it's time to backtrack. Let

me return to the earlier Steps and do a little more groundwork.

With time, I began to find it comparatively easy to make admissions to God. My God is eager to understand and to forgive, so eager that it becomes easy for me to misinterpret his love, and to overlook his request for rigorous honesty (the basic requirement, incidentally, for sobriety itself).

I sometimes take God for granted. I tell myself that he knows all and it is not necessary to make any admission to him. But that isn't so. It is entirely necessary to take God into my confidence.

I ought, also, to take good, reasonable care in my choice of the human being I'll be sharing my Fifth Step with. One aspect of the Step that still delights and reassures me is the use of

the words “another human being.” By implication, the Step is telling me that I, too, am a human being. I believe it today, but it was news when I first came in. I had long ceased to regard myself as a human being. I had lost my claim to humanity. I had next to no moral values left. Ideals, ethics, and virtue had fallen by the wayside. In the end it was the most difficult action imaginable to reach out for anyone's help. Finally, I reached out to AA, and made my first admission of powerlessness. It was also my first attempt to admit the

“Tell me exactly what happened.” So it is with this Step. For example, it is not enough to admit that I was a home-wrecker. If I am to be released from the burden of guilt, if I am to be strengthened against further indulgence in my old weakness, I must admit to God, to myself, and to another human being exactly what happened in each case of home-wrecking. I ought also be willing to admit to situations where I might not have caused a split but did actually damage the foundations of a home.

In order to derive full benefit from

I had long ceased to regard myself as a human being. I had lost my claim to humanity. I had next to no moral values left. Ideals, ethics, and virtue had fallen by the wayside.

exact nature of my most fundamental defect: that I drank too much for too long, and by my drinking had ruined my life.

But the part of the Step that gave me the most trouble, and still does, occasionally, is the last part, “the exact nature of our wrongs.” Even after reading the “Twelve and Twelve” and listening to lots of Step talk, I could not grasp the significance of the phrase “exact nature.” It took a crisis situation in the life of a friend to bring it home to me. In my attempt to console my friend, I heard myself say,

the Fifth Step, I like to think about the exact nature of my recovery. I was not able to quit drinking and begin recovery all by myself. I needed lots of help. Along with so many others I can say that I got the message of AA through the grace of God, just as through the healing grace of AA I got the message of God.

And I like to think about those messages. The one tells me of a way out of the drinking problem; the other, of a way out of the bondage of despair.

W. H., New York, N.Y.

Real Men Don't...



It seems to me that Step Five is especially difficult for men because it takes the masculine mystique by

the bull, if not always by the horns. A man is supposed to be self-reliant. He takes care of his own affairs. He doesn't go to another man with personal problems. A man's feelings are validated by a woman, not by another man.

For myself, growing up in the fifties, there were just two kinds of men: *real* men and the other kind. Coming from an alcoholic home I was naturally troubled as a teen. There were lots of older men around who might have been helpful, but I had trouble relating to them, all except for a Passionist monk I met while working part-time at a monastery in town. Father Connel was gentle and soft-spoken and most of all he listened. I spent many hours walking those serene, cloistered acres with him, trying to untie the riddle of my existence. My over-sensitive moral conscience left me falling short of the religious ideals I grew up with. The God we sought together made too-hard terms

for me and this drove me deeper into isolation and a sense of utter abandonment. But rescue was on the way in the form of alcohol and worldly literature.

Where religion had constricted and limited my experience, alcohol and worldly ideas freed my mind and spirit. The road at first was broad and roomy. But it finally narrowed to a path, then to a line I had to walk or else. And my balance didn't get any better. I ended up afraid to leave my apartment, afraid to answer the phone or door. I finally went to AA and in time got sober.

Most of the men I talked to in AA had "male issues" that had to do with the pressure society puts on men. There seems to be a tacit cultural tradition that gives women a license to broker feelings for the species. Men, meanwhile, are expected to magically confer manhood on their sons and on each other. A terrible burden, especially if you're not sure what a man is.

Step Five traces and shakes these old taboos right to their foundations. For one thing, Step Five calls for frank and open talk about sex. As drinkers, most of us men lied to each other a lot, and to ourselves, as a

social imperative. Often, sober in AA, we chose to exercise our right to remain silent. It is a right we exercise at our own risk — the Big Book says sometimes to our peril.

There were things in my Fourth Step that I swore I would never tell anyone. I was certain that if some people knew, they would throw me out of AA. (Some might have wanted to; but AA has plans for us far more generous than any we would want for each other, left to our own devices.) I spent my first two years ministering to the needs of others, because I wanted to avoid my own.

The problem with my behavior was that it was basically dishonest. I wanted to project an image of well-being and righteousness that was phony, more harmful to me than to the people I was with. Letting someone get to know you is scary. (I later learned the paradox that being vulnerable places you in an invulnerable position.)

Slowly, as avoidance failed to work, I allowed others to get to know me. When unexpected acceptance from others came, it was exhilarating, like the first drink. I wanted more. I told more and more people about myself in the interest of "honesty." But this getting better business is tricky. Slowly, I had to learn the distinction between candor, exhibitionism, and honesty. If I am telling the truth for a self-centered reason, I am not being honest. How much of the pain of bad relationships comes from just this failure of objectivity!

Even trust can be a trap. People thinking of taking Step Five probably remember how they used and abused the trust of others. Most of their experiences with trust, especially for those coming from alcoholic homes, have been unhappy. Self-honesty comes in here in a big way for me. If I trust someone with something of mine because I want something from that person, the "trust" is just bait, and the hook is self-will, the cause of all my unhappiness. The cure for this situation is an ongoing experience with the Steps. In my opinion.

Growing up, I had failed to learn to place my life on a give-and-take basis. I will listen to your problems — but don't ask me about mine. Ironically, for this reason I had failed to identify in the beginning with the self-fish alcoholic. I was always "giving." But a deeper examination of my motives showed me what I later learned in Al-Anon: that caring is the sunny side of control.

I think for many men in AA there are a lot of issues that center around power, control, and being in charge. I have tried a few men's meetings, but the posed and defensive pall that fell over these august gatherings was bone-chilling; I felt I was participating in a rite of passage. Thank God one of the great changes in AA since those days is that men are free to express themselves as men and as human beings at any AA meeting. We have really come of age in that arena.

Getting better means sharing my hopes and fears with other men. When

they shared back, as they always did, I experienced a healing of memories and a wonderful sense of oneness with people in general. My relationship with women improved immediately. I went through the terror of removing my masculine armor and experienced the joy of not needing any. Each man I got to know in this unguarded way left me with a little more of myself to bring to the world at large.

One of many such experiences occurred years ago at a drug rehab in Quebec. I was there as an AA visitor to go through their program. Part of the treatment required me to sit down on the floor of a barn on a Saturday night with thirty teenagers and take my Fifth Step. Unabridged. As I began, I had the distinct feeling that the last bus out of town had just left. I don't know what I expected, but what I saw in the eyes of those kids while I talked changed my life.

The next morning I was standing outside the barn with a seventeen-year-old named Pierre. Out of the blue he asked me a question I will never forget. "Jim," he asked, staring at the barn door, "what is a man?" It sounded like it was coming from deep inside him and something he had wanted to ask someone for a long time. I got a lump in my throat remembering my own battle with that question when there was no one there to ask.

I don't remember what I told Pierre; but it's an awfully good question. I believe there are times when answers are simply inadequate. Sometimes the best answer is just a question you can live with. I offer this as a little thankful wave to a Passionist monk who once showed me the force of gentleness, student to teacher, sponsor to sponsor, man to man.

Jim N., West Springfield, Mass.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

The Choice



All of them? As Bill W. points out in the chapter on Step Six in the "Twelve and Twelve," "Some people, of course, may conclude that they are indeed ready to have all these defects taken from them. But even these people, if they construct a list of still milder defects, will be obliged to admit that they prefer to hang on to some of them."

Several years ago I had a vivid personal example of what he was talking about. At that time I had a sponsor to whom I was devoted, one reason for which, possibly, was that she and I shared some of the same characteristics or, as some would say, defects. One of them was a quick temper. Restraint of tongue and pen didn't come easily to either of us.

One day, after a brisk altercation on the phone, she hung up on me. Indignation swelled up inside me. That was absolutely no way for a sponsor of many years' sobriety to

behave! Indignation was followed by a delicious sense of grievance, of having been profoundly wronged.

For the next twenty-four hours I fed and watered that delightful sense of victimhood. I would not, of course, have admitted for one moment to myself or anyone else how much I was enjoying it, or my discovery that being a victim was not far removed from (in the words of the Prince of Denmark) a consummation devoutly to be wished. In my own mind I replayed the incident on the phone over and over, brushing aside my recollection of what I might have said or done to bring on my sponsor's action. And each time her hanging up on me grew more heinous. I was innocent, and in a case like this, innocence is power.

The next afternoon, after being out of my apartment for several hours, I called my answering service to pick up messages. The young woman at the other end of the phone said, "Jean called to say she's sorry and would you please call her."

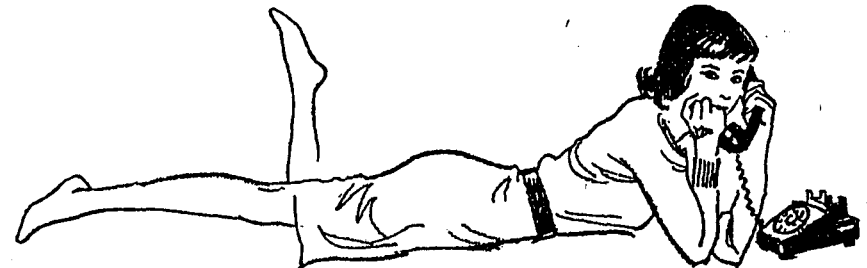
You would think, wouldn't you, that now, with my sense of grievance fully vindicated, I would be filled with joy and forgiveness? You would be wrong. My first feeling, and I remember it well, was dismay, followed quickly by a flattening sense of let-down.

I worried at that letdown for a full day before some glimmering of its real cause dawned on me: I knew that when I would call Jean she'd repeat her apology and I would have to for-

relinquishing the pleasure I would get something better — the restoration of friendship.

But sometimes the sense of gratification, of power that a grievance can bring is hard to yield up. I once heard a well-known doctor, one of the first to recognize what AA could do, say: "Self-pity is followed by isolation is followed by a drink."

And I began, especially after the incident involving my sponsor, to understand why when I first came



give her. And by forgiving her, I would yield up the sense of power, of self-justification, that I had enjoyed so much.

It took me another several hours to define what my choice was: I could have my grievance or I could have my friend. Not both. I had to choose. And I saw further that choice is one of the fruits of sobriety that by putting down the bottle I now had, not only about this, but about other aspects of my life and other defects of character. It was the first time I understood a defect for what it was: something out of which I derived pleasure or power and was therefore not entirely willing to give up. Obviously, in this particular example, by

into Alcoholics Anonymous, the most frequent warnings from some of the old-timers were against self-pity. All those sensations I'd been wallowing in with such enjoyment — of being aggrieved, of being wronged, of (for once!) being in the right, of being victimized — added up to the heady brew of self-pity. And I then comprehended fully why self-pity, leading to isolation (and wasn't I isolating myself from my sponsor?), was presented by that doctor and the old-timers as such a formidable enemy of sobriety.

P.S. I called Jean and we made up and the incident passed.

But I still think about it a lot.

Isabelle H., New York, N.Y.

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The Rose



In January, I celebrated my seventh birthday in Alcoholics Anonymous. As I look back over the year, I realize it was the very best year ever in my sobriety, for it was linked inextricably with the Seventh Step and the absolute necessity for me to keep on changing. As Dr. Silkworth states in the Big Book, unless the alcoholic can "experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery." Frequently last year, I was confronted with the pain of change. One day last week, I found myself confronted with yet another painful defect.

At first, I did what I usually do at such times. I tried to rationalize the defect away, then tried to blame it on somebody else, and finally began to say to myself, "This I shall never give up." That's when I knew I was in real trouble. At about this time, I

went to a meeting that was on exactly what I needed to hear — Step Seven. As I listened to my friends share their practical experience with this Step, I became increasingly aware that I didn't want to give up this particular defect because I was afraid — afraid of what might become of me, afraid of what God might change me into. What if I didn't like it? As I heard one of my friends refer to the "psychic change," my fear and defiance increased. But I began to listen more carefully.

When my turn came to talk, I found myself sharing with the group my first real understanding of the Seventh Step. It had occurred during my third year of sobriety. I had been figuring out Steps Six and Seven and working hard on them for over a year and had gotten absolutely nowhere. My sponsor, realizing that I was stuck, asked me to speak on these Steps at a Friday night meeting. I spent the rest of that week in a state

of semi-panic, realizing that I knew all the words but had been unable to practice the Steps due to my inordinate fear of change.

Early Friday morning when I arrived at the high school where I taught, I was met at the back door by two boys who were in my eleventh grade class. They were both grinning from ear to ear with a great surprise they had planned. All of my students had been attending an arts festival that week and were enjoying the challenge of finding a "poem" to bring back to English class in order to earn extra credit. I had received all sorts of "poems" — from weeds and wild flowers to a sublime strawberry crepe, whipped cream and all! These two students were eager to walk me to class to show me their "poem" before everybody else arrived.

When we arrived in the classroom, I saw a huge yellow helium balloon on my desk. The boys had tied the string inside a small vase that sat on my desk, and the balloon floated there like a bright, happy exclamation mark. On the balloon they had written some sort of ridiculous poem which they knew would make me laugh. Then one of the students, Larry, pulled a long florist's pin from behind his back and held it out toward me. "Pop it, Mrs. E.," he said.

I recoiled. I couldn't. I hate to pop balloons. It scares me, and I usually scream. "Pop it, Mrs. E." Larry was insistent. I continued to refuse, giving all sorts of great excuses and reasons. "Pop it, Mrs. E." I laughed, I

teased, I cajoled. But one of Larry's greatest assets was his stubborn persistence, and I knew we would stand there forever or at least until I popped the balloon. Finally I took the pin, put one hand over an ear, closed my eyes, held my breath, and popped the balloon. I didn't scream. I opened my eyes. Concealed inside the now disintegrated balloon was a long-stemmed red rose. I have no idea how they put it inside the balloon. I felt my eyes fill with joy, and I hugged Larry.



At last I understood the Seventh Step. I am so full of hot air, I am afraid to let God pop my balloon of pride and fear. I am afraid of what I will find. But that day, God showed me — an American Beauty rose. That night as I shared the story with a roomful of drunks, I looked at all of them and realized I was looking at God's garden of roses. Again I wept for joy. I realized that I, too, am part of his garden.

I have really learned only one thing since that day. I will not see my own rose. I must trust God for that as I continue to practice Steps Six and Seven. But my faith in this process of change increases as I look upon my fellow drunks and watch them blossom. I trust they are a reflection of what happens to me when I let go and let God.

Annie E., Page, Okla.

A Lifetime of Service



Fresh from a Fifth Step session with my sponsor, I turned to the Sixth Step. Gradually, very gradually, I became ready to have God remove my character defects — and God knows there were a lot of them!

That evening, I got home from a meeting and was ready for bed. It had been a long day. The blustery March night was cold and I was bone weary. With a smile on my face, I crawled into bed, folded my arms across my chest and realized, with some satisfaction, that on the following day all of my shortcomings would be a thing of the past. I was taking the Seventh Step, and I was at peace. After a tranquil night, I awoke knowing I had a clean slate.

Finally I got up — a bit late, but cheerful — because I was free at last of all those burdensome negative character traits which had kept me from making real progress. Leaving the bed unmade, and with shoes un-

shined, I bolted down my breakfast, and piled the dirty dishes in the sink. I headed off to work in a rush, for once again I was just a little behind schedule. On cloud nine, I did get to the office — only five minutes late. But what matter? I was free at last. Liberated! I managed to get in quite a bit of work in between coffee breaks and trips to the water cooler.

It was the new me. After all, I had humbly asked God to remove my shortcomings. Things were in his hands and God would take care of them. I didn't have to worry about all those little bothersome details. They were molehills, nothing more. I didn't need to worry about my shortcomings as long as he was working on them.

And then it came to me. The shortcomings were the molehills I had to take care of. I had addressed the mountains in Steps Four, Five and Six, but now it was time for the molehills — the bed unmade, the shoes unshined, dirty dishes piled in the sink — all those things I should have gotten around to and just never had.

There were some pretty significant molehills out there. How about relationships with my family and friends? Didn't they merit some attention? And my work? Was I putting in a full day's work for a full day's pay?

During my drinking days, I marched to a different drum. I seemed to abide by a philosophy which bore little resemblance to the Golden Rule. My basic attitude was, "What's in it for me?" I would do what I was supposed to do, only if it was to my advantage. My work got done — but barely — because I *did* need to live. It was very inconvenient to have to go to work every day, but generally I did make it to the office. (Let's not dwell on the days when I just couldn't come in.) Naturally, I wasn't being paid what I considered a just salary given my enormous talents. And just as naturally, if "they" weren't going to pay me well "they" weren't going to get much out of me!

You were my friend if you could give me a listening ear for my drunken and maudlin meanderings. That was a sign you appreciated the immensity of my intellect. You were a good friend if you would stand me to round after round of drinks, thereby demonstrating that you appreciated the company I offered.

Actually, I had a deep suspicion, barely admitted, that I really wasn't such a great person. But if others would affirm me, if they would stand by me, then there was the proof that I was good. I soaked up such moral support like a blotter, like water

poured over a dry brick. I needed that support to survive.

I used to think that I was absorbing the booze, deftly handling the drinks in my life. In reality, the gin was absorbing me. Gin didn't fit in me after a few years of heavy, heady drinking; I was fitting into the gin. I only did things which didn't interfere with my drinking schedule. Evening work was out because I was useless after the "happy hour" had begun. Mornings weren't too good either as I was suffering the agonies of the damned. Noon wasn't bad but by then, the sun was over the yardarm and I could have a drink to erase the ravages of the previous day's happy hour. I was pretty creative by one o'clock but by two I was beginning to get sleepy from the drinks that had accompanied lunch. I would come to just before five — because I didn't want to leave a messy desk before going home. All in all, I had about an hour and a half of productive time in any one day.

I had long ceased caring about whether I did my work or not. If anyone called my attention to the fact that I was a nonproductive member of society, I became irate. What an insult. Don't they know who I am?

I was, in reality, enormously egocentric. The word "egocentric" comes from the Latin and means that everything travels toward the center. The opposite of "ego-centric" is "ex-centric" meaning that everything moves out from the center. In other words, it means becoming a giver, one who serves others, one who reaches into

his or her own inner reserve of strength to help another. In terms of the Seventh Step, I had to stop being a *taker*, an absorber. I had to become the responsible person I had not been. In short, I had to learn to take care of the molehills in my life.

What the AA program really calls us to is not to be egocentrics but to be ex-centrics. Ex-centricity is an attitude, a way of life so rare in today's world that it has come to mean weird or off the wall. To be ex-centric, we are called to change our selfishness

into self-giving. We are called to exchange our absorption with ourselves into service to others.

This short step may be the most difficult there is. It implies an entire change in our way of thinking, in our attitude to self and to others. This is not something that will happen overnight. We have to practice it — a life-long habit of serving others. This, in large measure, is the basis of the "spiritual awakening" spoken of in the Twelfth Step.

Dan J., Maryknoll, N.Y.

The Triple Whammy of Spirituality



I went to my sponsor, a very smart man, and asked him, "What is the exact meaning of spirituality in AA? I'm really confused."

My sponsor leaned back, closed his eyes halfway, and peered at me.

"You've been sober over ten years?"

"It's almost twelve now."

"Have you read the Big Book lately?"

"Well, I go to a Big Book study group once a week," I told him.

"Let me tell you a story and you can figure it out yourself."

I expected this was going to be a long session, so I leaned back too, with my eyes half-closed.

"The Big Book says the spiritual life is no theory, that we have to live it," he went on. "This story is about a man not in AA who spent a lot of time in church. He was an usher on Sundays and he sang in the church choir. He really felt spiritual. But after a while

the amount of booze he was consuming had increased to the point where he lost control. He became one of us. Luckily for him, he found AA and recovered. He still goes to church but his attitude has changed. What happened? He started helping others. He became responsible."

"You mean being responsible has something to do with spirituality?" I asked.

"It has everything to do with it. We have to live it, not just *talk* about it. And being responsible means doing the right thing on a daily basis."

"What do you mean exactly?" I shot back.

"Being responsible simply means doing things like paying bills on time, getting to work on time, doing household duties as needed, and so forth. This doesn't mean we can't have fun — recreation and vacations are very important. I also need to take care of my health by eating a good diet and getting regular exercise."

"Okay. Is that it?"

"That's a lot of it, but there's

more. As a responsible person I also need to be fairly well disciplined — go to meetings on a regular basis, work the Steps on a regular basis, exercise on a regular schedule."

"Anything more?" I wanted to know.

"Well, another big item is being available. When people reach out, I need to reach back and listen to them talk about their situation. In some cases, I need to take them to their first meeting to get them started. I need to be available."

"Sounds to me like spirituality is more action than a lot of praying."

"True. But prayer is important because I must have the help of my Higher Power in everything. To sum it up, for me spirituality is a triple whammy — being responsible, being somewhat disciplined and being available."

"Sounds like a full-time job to me," I grumbled.

"Yes," my sponsor ended, "but it is the easiest way to gain peace of mind that I know."

G. L., San Antonio, Tex.

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

How Willing Would You Be?



Although my body walked, my spirit crawled out of the room where I had just completed my Fifth Step. I was so sick of myself and my character defects that I was *totally* willing to take the Sixth and Seventh Steps.

Then came Step Eight. The first part of this Step was easy. The Big Book told me that I had made my list when I made my inventory, so I took my list of persons I had harmed from my Fourth Step.

The second part of this Step was not so easy. "Willing," it said. There's that word again; the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" seem to use that word a lot. It's written in Step Three, again emphasized in Step Six, and here it is again in Step Eight. As I

looked my list over, there were many amends I was willing to make, as I could see where I had been childish, selfish, and self-centered. But there were some that brought back hurts so deep I was not willing to make amends then — and I seriously doubted if I ever would be. The words from the Big Book kept playing through my head, "We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable." I knew that, but I still wasn't willing.

Reading over the part on Step Eight in the Big Book, I saw I wasn't unique; earlier AAs had evidently been like me. This was apparent when I read the line that says, "There are probably still some misgivings," and again when I read, "If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes." (Ask God, of course.)

I kept praying about the difficult

amends while I was making other amends, and it seemed like every meeting I attended during that time was on the Eighth Step. In one of these meetings, I heard someone share her experience. She had been willing to make all her amends but one. In talking to her sponsor about it, the sponsor put it like this: If your program depended upon this one amends — that is, if you made this amends you would stay sober, and if you didn't make it you would drink again — how willing would you be then?

Hearing that, and reading again about going to any length, brought me the willingness I had been praying for — at least on all but one. Deep in my heart I knew it would take a miracle for the willingness to come for

that one, and when the exact moment was right, God gave me the willingness so suddenly that it was like a physical force slammed into me. Once again, God was right on time, not a minute too early or a second too late.

Since I've been in the program, I've been told countless times that if I will take care of the possible, God will handle the impossible. Countless times I've witnessed this to be true.

It's been over two-and-a-half years since all this happened, and I'm still sober. I can only say it's because of God and not me, for the part I played has been so small in comparison to God's part. I thank God for AA, and for the fact that, just for today, I'm still willing.

Robi M., Edmond, Okla.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

A Benchmark in Sobriety



When I arrived at the Eighth and Ninth Steps, I found I had an unusual amends to make. I needed to make amends to the entire town I grew up in, for various acts of juvenile delinquency. There was no way of finding individual firemen, policemen, or citizens I may have involved or harmed twenty years before. But I still wanted to make amends in some way.

I first tried writing a letter to the local newspaper, outlining my transgressions of the past, and declaring that I wanted to apologize to the town. The editor refused to publish my letter, saying that such a letter might actually encourage other young people to misbehave.

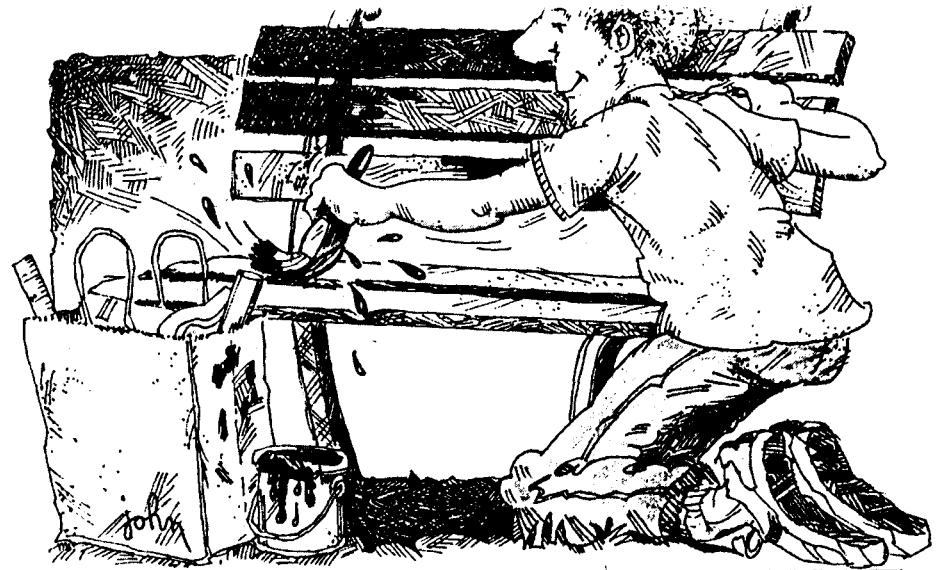
So I turned the whole thing over to

my Higher Power and went on about the business of living in sobriety.

One day, after about a year in the program, I sat down on a park bench to rest. It occurred to me that someone ought to paint the bench, spruce it up. I thought about doing it myself, but I realized I would need a whole bagful of tools, besides the paint, to do a good job. It was too much for me to deal with. So I turned it over to my Higher Power.

Another year had gone by when I sat on another bench in another park and I thought, "Somebody ought to paint this bench!" I realized that over the preceding year I had acquired most of the tools I would need. All I needed to buy was some paint and some brushes.

I bought the needed supplies, assembled my tools, put them all in a



large shopping bag and I began to paint park benches. I took it one day at a time, painting one bench at a time.

Over a period of three years I painted about thirty benches in three parks. Some of the benches were getting tough use and those I painted twice. I used a rasp to smooth out coarse edges and sandpaper to roughen the surface of the smooth, weather-worn boards so they would take the paint. I did a priming coat and another day a finishing coat. It took about four hours' work altogether to do one bench.

I want to say that I enjoyed the work. It wasn't drudgery for me. I was outdoors, in the parks, out in the sun and the wind, listening to the birds, watching the squirrels, and sometimes interacting with people in the park.

I never told anyone, outside of AA, that I was doing this to make amends. I just said that it needed doing and I enjoyed doing it. Some people asked if this was required court-ordered community service, and I said, "No, I'm just a volunteer."

Then came a day, after about three years, when it occurred to me that I was done. I had made my amends to the town. I didn't have to do it anymore.

Several years have passed. I still use those parks as a place to sit and rest. Occasionally I see a bench that needs painting and I remember the work I did. But I don't do it anymore. Now the town does it.

If you can't figure out how to make amends, just turn it over to your Higher Power. In time, there will be an answer, there will be a way.

Jack A., Montclair, N.J.

A Wagonload of Forgiveness



The word "sin" is not one we often hear at meetings. I must admit, however, as a kid I felt sinful. Guilt must follow sin and fear must follow guilt. Such seems to be our psychological makeup. What was I to do with this "unholy trinity" of sin, guilt, and fear? Ego told me the best way to get rid of it was to project it onto other people; they were the guilty ones, not me. I began to look outside myself for scapegoats. I wanted to see in others the very defects that were in me. Now I needed a technique to keep distance between myself and those I hated and this is where anger came into the picture. As long as I stayed angry at others I didn't have to look at myself. This anger prevented me from having healthy relationships and it certainly got in the way of my being able to experience the Eighth and Ninth Steps. It took a wagonload of forgiveness for me to be able to make the list and

be willing to make amends. I realize today that anger is nothing more than an attempt to make someone else feel guilty. Anger is never justified. Mind you, I'm not saying that I do not get angry. I'm simply saying it is never justified. I may be angry but I am willing *not* to be.

As used in context, the word "direct" means "straightforward, plain, or frank." This could describe either a face-to-face encounter or one in the form of writing. To "amend" means to change. Improving relationships with family and others is a way of amending. Clearly, we are making certain amends simply by remaining sober, but the Ninth Step asks far more than this.

My Ninth Step did not take the form of apologies. In my drinking days I suppose I had apologized a thousand times but I never changed anything. In working the Ninth Step I asked forgiveness of the people on the list because I had not been the person — the husband, father, bro-

ther, son, etc. — that I might have been were it not for my alcoholism. I must also be able to forgive those people in order to become "willing to make amends to them all."

Every Step has a spiritual dimension, including this one. Do you remember the first time you fell in love, how beautiful it was? The phenomenon that was taking place, I believe, is that we were able to suspend judgment of that person long enough to see goodness in them. I believe it is possible to love everyone else the same way. In the final song of the play "Les Miserables" one of the lines is, "To love another person is to see the face of God."

Bill W.'s wife, Lois, addressed an AA function shortly before her death. The guy who drove her to the meeting told me later that he had revered her as a saint. At the meeting, however, she put things in perspective. Lois said, "I watched you people treat Bill as a savior and since his death you have been treating me the same way." She added, "I have no difficulty with

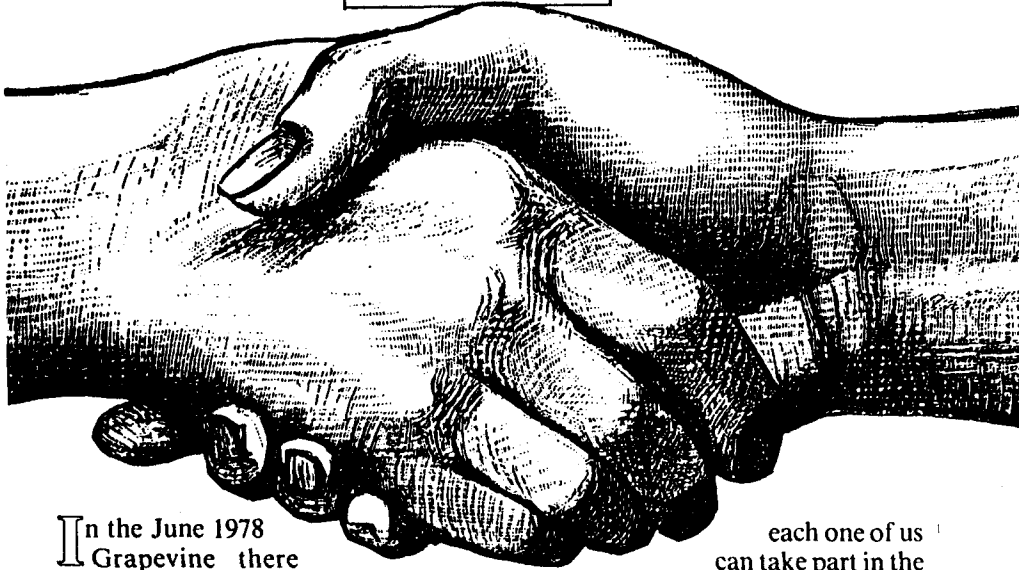
In my drinking days I suppose I had apologized a thousand times but I never changed anything. In working the Ninth Step I asked forgiveness of the people on the list . . .

this except to say that if you see yourselves as any less of a savior you are shirking your responsibility."

The earth has a broken heart, and we can heal it. We *do* make a difference. We can save ourselves and others like us by changing our mind about the world, by loving and forgiving the world. If not us — who? If not now — when?

Edward H., Brentwood, N.Y.

**'Constant
Thought
of Others'**



In the June 1978 Grapevine there was an article called "Will We Squander Our Inheritance?" In this article, the writer expressed his concern that only a small percent of our members are doing the majority of the Twelfth Step work. He mentioned that he had gotten sober when Alcoholics Anonymous was relatively young, and that he had been exposed to a form of sobriety that taught action as the magic word, that in AA

each one of us can take part in the group's primary purpose. This had been true for me. My sponsor had me picking up drunks off the sidewalk at three weeks and told me that I *never* turn down a request from AA. This was right in line with another statement he made, namely that if I was to live and grow in the likeness of my Creator, I must put sobriety first. To put this more plainly he referred me to the top of page 20 in the Big Book,

which states, "Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs."

I have been working in the local central office now for three months and before that, when I was unemployed, I simply lived at the central office and did Twelfth Step work to keep from going insane or getting drunk. It's a fact that, "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics."

But the sad part is that we are sliding away from that. I have found that, unless it is particularly convenient, very few will make a Twelfth Step call when asked. Yes, there is that small percentage who never turn down an AA request, but that percentage drops daily. I believe this is due to several reasons, but the main one is that we are not passing along the experience of our older members. I am a young person, so this is not a biased opinion for the older member. We are so blessed to have this living archive of experience and yet we

waste it. I hear younger members, on a daily basis, making statements like, "My sponsor told me I couldn't go on Twelfth Step calls until I had one year of sobriety," and "I really don't think I have anything to give away yet," and countless other excuses such as this for not giving away what we have been so freely given. Many are the times I have been literally cursed for calling someone after midnight to do a Twelfth Step call.

It would be simple to say, "Well, just ignore these people because they are the ones whose recovery will suffer." Although this is true, I think AA will suffer right along with them. Are we letting treatment centers do what we are responsible for? Are we putting work, sleep, and family ahead of helping another suffering alcoholic? Let us not squander our inheritance.

As Bill said, "Gratitude is the finest emotion that can move the human heart." When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

Terry T., Oklahoma City, Okla.

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

How to Lose 100 Ugly Pounds



In the Altiplano (high plateau) of Peru and Bolivia live the descendants of Inca Indians. Over two miles up, the air is thin and the Indians have adapted to their harsh and difficult climate. Many are potato farmers, cultivating several varieties of potatoes which grow up there.

On market days, it is customary to see men trotting along the road with one hundred pounds or more of potatoes in sacks on their backs. At that altitude, carrying all that weight must be quite a job. When they sell their goods, they return to their distant homes. It is said that on the return trip they fill their backpacks with one hundred pounds of stones so as not to grow unaccustomed to carrying!

These images came back to me when I took my Fifth Step with Jim, my sponsor. We had gone to a diner after a meeting. With fear and trembling, I began what I thought was going to be a very painful exercise. Quite the contrary! Jim made it easy for me to unburden myself of the weight I'd been carrying around for years. In the course of the next several hours, little by little, I emptied that backpack. As weighty matter after weighty matter came spilling out, I felt my spirit soar.

Like a descendant of the Incas, I went to that diner with my one hundred pounds of wrongs. I admitted them to my sponsor who then assured me that through this process, I no longer needed to be concerned about them. Then and there, the burden of guilt, shame, and remorse was lifted.

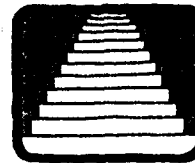
But how often we begin to fill our newly emptied backpacks anew under fresh loads. It is as if we had become accustomed to carrying all that junk around, almost as if we had grown fond of the burden.

So we need to take an occasional look (every day?) into our backpacks to see if we haven't tossed in a stone every now and then. And when we discover some load of guilt or shame, some wrong we may have committed, toss it out. Otherwise, we spend all our lives struggling to walk, burdened by these impediments.

The word "impediment" comes from the Latin word *impedimenta* which means baggage or luggage or whatever we carry around — guilt, wrongdoing, shame, remorse. Instead of trying to live our lives with that burden, we unload all of that weight through Step Five and we drop off the occasional rock or two which we may have acquired through Step Ten. Unlike the Indians of the Altiplano, we don't need to continue our journey with a fresh load — "so as not to grow unaccustomed to carrying."

Dan J., Maryknoll, N.Y.

'The Acid Test'



The first paragraph of Step Ten in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* reads as follows: "As we work the first nine Steps, we prepare ourselves for the adventure of a new life. But when we approach Step Ten we commence to put our AA way of living to practical use, day by day, in fair weather or foul. Then comes the acid test: can we stay sober, keep in emotional balance, and live to good purpose under all conditions?"

Early in my sobriety, as I began to get acquainted with the Steps, I heard people say in meetings that the Tenth Step was a daily inventory. That did not appeal to me. A Fourth Step inventory seemed to me to be quite enough. Daily? No thank you.

So, over a period of time, I paid little attention to Step Ten. Oh, I occasionally reviewed my progress. I wasn't drinking. I was no longer doing the outer things that kept returning me to the bottle. But deep down, I felt little growth in myself.

Recently, however, the practice of

*'When we approach
Step Ten we commence
to put our AA way of
living to practical use,
day by day, in fair
weather or foul. Then
comes the acid test. . .'*

the Tenth Step has had some new meaning in my daily living. About two years ago I began to feel uncomfortable with some of my thoughts and actions. A new sponsor suggested I write short inventories to find out what was really happening to me. Her example of over twenty-five years of continuous sobriety seemed reason

enough to try this approach. It also happened that this new sponsor was the lady with whom I had taken my Fifth Step many long years ago, so she knew me quite well.

I began this approach to living and, wonder of wonders, it worked. Soon I began to feel differently and most importantly of all to act and think differently. Since that first attempt, I have many times taken this route to find out about me. Very often I find that changes have indeed taken place. When the changes are not what I want in my sober life, I can take appropriate action: Step Ten. I now "continue to take personal inventory" and when I am wrong I can promptly admit it.

I wonder how many of you find it difficult to admit to yourself the "wrongness" of your thoughts and actions? I do. But when a new awareness comes about it almost feels like Christmas and I am opening a package! I know the shape of it implies a

certain thing, but there is an element of surprise when it is finally out in the open. So often these days it is a positive thing about me. Of course there are the times when I find negative things. That's when I must admit I have been wrong and set about correcting things.

And so, can I pass the acid test? Can I stay sober?

For nearly sixteen years now, I can say "yes" — one day at a time. "Yeah, but suppose I have a great physical illness visited upon me." Now, that's serious. Enough to take a drink over? No. Many friends in the Fellowship have gone through situations like that and are staying sober and bringing continual joy to those living around them.

Can I keep in emotional balance? When life seems to be dealing me a bummer of a hand, what can I do? Well, I can be grateful that the hand is not worse. I can be grateful that I'm even allowed to play a hand. What

can I do to get back on track? What have I done to drift? A careful review of my reactions to any situation can keep me in emotional balance — hourly, daily, weekly, or whatever it takes. That's one of the things I can and must stay willing to do.

Can I live to good purpose under all conditions? I *have* a purpose today. That purpose is to stay sober, practice this program, and to the best of my ability carry the message to another alcoholic. "But that's so ordinary," you say. Well, you're right. My life today is ordinary — not boring, mind you, far from it — but ordinary. Just like "earth people." Are there conditions that could cause me to lose this purpose? Certainly there are. But a careful review of just who and what and where I am brings me back to the attitude of gratitude. I need only ask myself, what is my purpose, and I can get back to some good orderly direction.

Anonymous, Raleigh, N.C.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Trusting the Silence



Sometimes my faith in a Higher Power slips. I look at the people, places, and things around me and ask, "Is this *really* what you had in mind for me? Is this what I sobered up for? Is this all there is?" And I sometimes get the silent treatment. That's only fair. My mouth has usually been running overtime, anyway.

Who is God? I don't need to know. I only need to have faith in a power greater than myself. What matters is what works, not my opinion of what works.

It took me years to figure that out, years in which I did mental and emotional battle with other people's con-

ception of God, years in which I managed only to make myself miserable, cringing or scoffing whenever someone mentioned Step Three or Eleven. It took me a while sober to realize that it's a waste of time to take God's inventory.

So I don't pretend to know God well. And I really don't claim to pray respectably. I say the words "Thy will, not mine, be done" as if they were magic, as if they could help me stop yammering so much to have my will done. My prayers are usually brief and to the point. "Help!" is one I use often.

Often in sobriety, I've prayed when I needed to meditate. I've yammered at God so much that God can't get a word in edgewise. (What I practice

with people, I cannot help but practice with God.) To me, meditation is simply being quiet and listening for a change. It is buttoning up my lip — and my mind that yaps even when my mouth is shut.

Meditation is the path by which I cease being caught up in my own mental "garbage in/garbage out" recycling. It is the path by which I walk out of the turmoil, trouble, pain, depression, and frustration that I create in and around me.

Meditation is when I learn to be a child again. Not a noisy brat, but a child of the sort I always admired but rarely was as a child — quiet, serene, loving, trusting, teachable.

To meditate means I have to become willing to sit alone in silence — and endure silence patiently. It means trusting the silence around me for a while, as if it were an answer I had long sought. This is simple but not easy for me to do. I don't meditate to hear God's voice inside me, but merely to allow some space and time for the awareness of something higher than myself to grow more strongly within me.

I began doing meditation when I gave up my childish habit of expecting God to part the Red Sea and save me from myself once again, when I gave up my spoiled-brat routine of expecting God to show me a burning bush to prove that God really does care about me.

Practicing meditation means I open up for spiritual contact before disaster strikes, before even the need

for prayer becomes desperately obvious. It's the brand of spiritual contact with God that I practice early enough in the day that I have nothing to tell God and nothing to ask God about in prayer.

Meditation is the only time when I can be absolutely sure that I am not running on self-will.

In the beginning, while admitting I didn't know the first thing about how to meditate, I turned my ignorance into a major case of self-confusion by reading various books on meditation and trying to follow all the guidelines they presented.

Then simplicity mercifully struck. I found I didn't need to learn how to meditate before meditating. It turned out to be one of those learn-as-you-go things — just as learning how to stay sober is part of staying sober a day at a time. Meditation is something like showing up on a new job I don't know how to do, only to find out that by merely showing up on a regular basis and doing what is placed before me, I'm automatically doing what at first I did not know how to do and was sure I could never do.

When I practice listening in AA meetings, I am learning something I can use in private meditation practice. It took me a while to learn how to really listen to others in AA, to have my mind solely on what the speaker was saying, instead of hearing only the part that plugged me into my own preferred thinking. What I do in meetings is called listening. When I listen alone with God, it is

called meditating. When I can listen completely to what you have to say without having to change or criticize it to meet my expectations, then I have a better chance of being able to do the same thing with God the next time I pray or meditate.

The hardest thing for me to do is listen honestly when I've asked God in prayer for direction regarding a particular person, place, or thing. I tend to put words in God's mouth — the ones I want to hear. After years of misunderstanding God, I've devised for myself a simple test for reliability in prayer: If the answer is the one I want to hear — or the one that lets me sit back amid my complacency, laziness, or fear and let someone else do all the work in solving my problem for me — it probably isn't God's answer. What God wants me to do is rarely what I want to do.

For instance, if I want to avoid or leave, God wants me to stay and handle. If I want to be understood or accepted by others, God wants me to try to understand or accept others a bit more. If I want to forget, God wants me to forgive. If I want to point the finger of blame at someone else, God wants me to see my part in creating the disaster. If I want to dislike someone because of a grating character defect he or she has, God wants me to see the same defect in myself.

Meditation not only helps me hear God and others better, it also helps me see how even the tiny things I do daily for others strengthen me in my

ability to cooperate with God. For I am one of those hardheaded alcoholics who had to practice cooperating with others for a while to learn how to cooperate with God, so that "turning it over" could become almost as easy and often as automatic as not taking the first drink.

In the last year, I've heard more silence than messages from God while praying or meditating. At this stage in my development, I think God is trying to teach me something I could not learn otherwise about patience and trust. What I'm now learning is how to apply to myself a bit of Native American wisdom that my sponsor shared with me over a decade ago: "If someone comes to you who is hungry and you give that person a fish, that person will expect to get a fish from you every time hunger strikes. But if, when the person comes to you the first time, you teach her or him to fish, that person will never be hungry again." So the messages I receive during meditation or prayer aren't anything like a fish from God. Instead, the messages are like God's lessons in fishing.

Whatever I learn during meditation applies to me in my life, not necessarily to anyone else. The messages are usually what I need to hear at a particular time, whether I agree or not. For example:

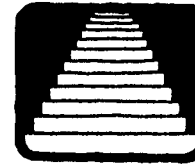
Help yourself by helping someone else first.

When in doubt, be silent.

Grow where you are planted.

Anonymous, U.S.A.

First Things First



At 7:00 AM five days a week you can find a small group of AAs meeting at a club on the north side of Tallahassee, Florida. The group is called Conscious Contact. Its purpose is the daily practice of the Eleventh Step.

The meeting usually starts with a reading from the Eleventh Step discussion in the Big Book that begins "On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead." Then the Serenity Prayer begins a twenty-five minute period of silent meditation. Meditation ends with the prayer of St. Francis from the Eleventh Step in the "Twelve and Twelve." A brief discussion follows. After the Lord's Prayer we're off to work at 7:45.

The meeting has been going for about a year now. For those of us who attend, it has become an essential part of our lives. In the "Twelve and Twelve" Bill W. compares meditation to food and water. In our experience the comparison is appropriate.

Out of this meeting has developed a method for directly dealing with resentment, frustration, and fear. The meditation-based approach is a

powerful addition to the technique suggested in the story "Freedom from Bondage" in the Big Book. It is an alternative for people who never learned to pray or don't like prayer.

Meditation is a little like playing a musical instrument. Anyone can make a sound with a violin but it takes practice to make music with one. Just a few days of regular practice will provide benefits. Two weeks of daily meditation, at the same time each day, should show tangible changes in the quality of your life.

There are a number of introductory books on meditation at most bookstores and libraries. For the first year of my meditation practice all I did was count my breaths — one to ten and then back to one. This is a good way to quiet the committee meeting going on in your head.

The book *Zen Training* by K. Sekida has some very good instruction on meditation and breathing. His basic breathing exercise is "bamboo" breathing, or breathing in segments: Breathe in in three stages — breathe, pause, breathe, pause, breathe, pause. Breathe out in one stage against slight pressure. It will take a little practice to get the pressure right. If you're gasping for breath the exhalation

pressure is too high. If the pressure is too low there will be little tension in your abdomen and your mind will tend to wander.

The idea is to keep tension in your lower abdomen while you are breathing. If you do this, you can keep your mind tightly focused. Sekida also suggests focusing on an object and holding your breath for a minute while maintaining the focus. You will find that it is much easier to hold your mind focused if you also hold your breath. You may want to start with fifteen or twenty seconds and work up to a full minute. This technique has added to the quality of my meditation in terms of clarity of mind.

The procedure for eliminating resentment, frustration, and fear uses the segmented breathing technique. First, you bring the cause of your resentment or frustration, or the object of your fear, clearly into mind. You attempt to experience it in detail. Then you abruptly return to your inmost self by closing your eyes and focusing your eyes and mind on an infinite wall while practicing deep abdominal breathing using the segmented technique. Ten minutes of this practice can blow away small resentments.

An example of the power of mindfulness came to me last year. One day my secretary told me in an excited way that there would be a meeting the next day during which the transfer of some of my space to other people would be discussed. This came in the midst of trying to rebuild an alcohol-

devastated life. After assuring her that there would be no conflict, I went on with my work. But by the time I got home at 5:15 I felt attacked and feelings I have learned to recognize as depression were very strong. It got worse. By 5:30 I used the bamboo breathing exercises to return to my inmost self. By 5:40 I was back to normal, not to be bothered again. Four years ago this event could have lasted for a month and I would have been physically ill for the entire time. (As it turned out, the meeting didn't even get to a discussion of my space.)

Seven o'clock in the morning is a tough time for most alcoholics, active or recovering. It took me three months to get to the point where I could look forward to getting to a 7:00 AM meeting five days a week. The benefits have been considerable. The use of segmented breathing and mindfulness to deal with fear and resentment is just one benefit. The practice has brought serenity into my life that was previously unimagined.

Solitary meditation is excellent, but meditation in a group is even better. There is something about the power of the group that helps keep my mind from wandering and makes me more open to my Higher Power.

If you get to Tallahassee, come to see us for the early-morning meeting. For those who come, it is a solid experience on which to start the day. People who come daily for two weeks tend to come back for a long time.

Ralph D., Tallahassee, Fla.

Conscious Contact



When I first joined AA I was an atheist and unable to pray. After attending ninety meetings in ninety days, I knelt by my bed one morning and in tearful frustration pounded with my fists and cried, "If you are up there, if there is a God, help me!" In the days to follow I tried to meditate and pray but I really didn't know how. Like many newcomers, the idea of meditation or prayer seemed too esoteric for me, something only priests or pastors could do. Gradually I was able to learn, through reading, and through much practice, to "let go and let God." But it took some doing!

There are many techniques and methods of meditation, from saying the rosary to doing Yoga asanas. Inward repetition of a prayer or a mantra is one way. There is always some self-discipline involved, but it does work. One way or another, one's emotional balance and stimulated intuition begin to stir.

My way is consciously to relax each muscle in my body, one by one, sitting in a straight chair, breathing deeply while rolling my eyes back under closed lids and feeling my body

heavy against the chair, my hands loose in my lap. I control my desire to look at the clock and I ignore "drunken monkey thoughts." I pay attention to how I am feeling. If I am angry or resentful, I pay attention to that. If I don't know "what to do today," I look at that and I ask God to send me answers. Perhaps today I should do nothing but go to a meeting. If I empty myself and let God in it is working.

Gradually a sense of freedom and light permeates my being. Clarity and love of God are there and fear departs. The process does not need to be understood to allow it to happen.

Later, when I open my eyes, what a sensation it is to look around me and see that nothing has changed. I am still in the same body, the same room, the same house, the same world. But I have acquired conscious contact with God as I understand him. I can pause during the day for only a second, ask for help, or say "Thank you!" God goes with me all day. Now I turn my life and will over to him every morning. (I have been sober thirteen years.) Step Eleven is the maintenance I need to expand my awareness of the world of God's good.

Jeanie N., Napa, Calif.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

'When Other Activities Fail'



The Big Book devotes two chapters (five and six) to the first Eleven Steps.

The Twelfth Step gets a chapter all its own — one whose fifteen pages, in comparison to the thirty-one pages that covered all the previous Steps, is disproportionately long. The significance of this imbalance is made clear at the start of that chapter: "... nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail."

This is the major reason for the strong emphasis on this Step; and in fact, many of the Big Book's personal stories tell us that Bill W. and Dr. Bob lost no time in having new recruits go out to spread the word.

But what exactly constitutes Twelfth Step work? What might such work include?

Since the Big Book was written just a few short years after AA began, and at a time when most people had not even heard about us, its discussion of twelfth-stepping emphasized the importance of bringing our message of hope to those who were still actively suffering from the disease. The classic AA images of twelfth-stepping — going to hospitals and talking to alcoholics who are drying out, or going with another member to the home of a drinking person who calls for help — were thereby formed. Some present-day AAs have these kinds of images in mind when they say that they are not yet ready to do Twelfth Step work or that they are not particularly suited to it.

Yet, to neglect Twelfth Step work is to ignore an important tool for one's own recovery — a tool that will not only work "when other activities fail," but also one through which "life will take on new meaning." For everyone in recovery — and not just those who have the talent for helping the active alcoholic — what the Twelfth Step might mean needs to be carefully considered.

My sponsor recently said to me, "Recovery depends on being of loving service to other people." What better antidote for the alcoholic's self-will run riot than a life in which obsession with self is replaced by loving concern for others no less than for oneself? Sometimes, I have distorted the idea of ours being a "selfish program" and have made it instead into a self-obsessed program; though I may not be drinking, I am at those times as self-willed as I was during my drinking days. "Loving service" is my way of fighting self-will. It is, in the last analysis, what the Twelfth Step is all about.

Working effectively with still-drinking persons or those in very early recovery is not what all of us can do since it often requires a special talent or a kind of strength which we don't all have. It can be a wise policy to leave that type of work to others more suited to it. Yet, even if that form of twelfth-stepping is not what I can do, it is important for me to recognize that it is only *one* form in which the Twelfth Step can be practiced; the spirit of loving service is not restricted

to just one kind of service.

How can the Twelfth Step be practiced? Putting it simply, Twelfth Step work is any service to other alcoholics, and indeed to all who need such service (for the Twelfth Step reminds us to practice these principles in *all* our affairs). There is, however, one important qualification: the work must be primarily motivated by the love of others, rather than by gain, or by the desire to be admired, or by some other self-seeking and self-centered motive.

At a simple level, twelfth-stepping can include setting up chairs for a meeting, or making coffee, or cleaning up after the meeting has ended. It can mean going out of one's way to help others get to meetings, or volunteering at a group's central office, or being on a service board or committee. It can involve listening to someone who is troubled and sharing with that person my own experience, strength, and hope; it can include sponsoring someone, or simply passing up a television program I want to see in order to speak to a person who asks for my help. Some people speak of the importance to them of simply seeing the same faces at a meeting day after day, week after week, month after month: their very presence shows the effectiveness of our program of recovery, and often inspires a person to go on, to hang on to recovery, to stay with us and heal with us. In short, pretty much any service, as long as it is rooted in the spirit of the Twelfth Step.

St. Francis of Assisi advised one of his brother monks to live in a God-centered way: Remember, said Francis, that you might be the only gospel that someone will ever read. In a similar way, I might be the only "Big

Book" another person will ever read. To live in the spirit of the Twelfth Step is to demonstrate the program in action; to live in loving service of others is to find a new meaning for my life.

Jamie C., W. Henrietta, N.Y.

A Love That Asks for Nothing



I went on my first Twelfth Step call when I was three months sober. To tell you the truth, I didn't want to go.

I didn't want to go on that Twelfth Step call any more than I wanted to be doing anything the old-timers had me doing, like washing the cups, reading chapter five, or going to meetings every day. But they told me to do these things if I wanted to stay sober and so I did them though they made no sense to me at the time.

Once, when we got to a newcomer's house on a Twelfth Step call, one of the old-timers told me to say something. Since this was my first Twelfth Step call, I asked her what I should say. She told me to say that I had been

sober three months and that the program worked. It was that simple then and has remained that simple for the twenty-one years I've been sober.

Of all the Twelfth Step work I have done since then, very few of the people I have worked with have gotten sober and some have died. It is very sad and heartbreaking at times and I have cried many tears, but I will never stop carrying this message because I am so grateful to be able to carry it. Through carrying this message I have learned to love. This is a love that asks for nothing in return, not even that the person stay sober. This is a tremendous thing to be a part of.

God bless those old-timers for all the things they taught me. Though I didn't know it at the time, they were telling me to do the things that would

ensure my sobriety and save my life. Whether I was washing the coffee cups or going on a panel to share, I was keeping sober by staying close to the program.

If I felt like drinking, I would have to wait until I set up the meeting — and invariably after the meeting I always felt better. I started feeling a little better about myself each time that I did some small act of service and though I was very shy and introverted, I found that I could talk to people a little bit. All these little actions that I took gradually built a solid foundation of sobriety for me and took me into a new way of life which was incredibly joyous.

Today, when newer people in the program ask me how I have so many friends in AA and how I know so many people, I tell them that first, it takes time, and second, it all starts with small acts of service. These lead

to larger opportunities and before you know it your life is full of good friends and wonderful experiences. But it does take time and I tell people that if they're alcoholic like me, they'll probably never feel like doing any of these things. But the great part is that it doesn't matter whether you feel like doing it or not — it works every single time.

Last month, I was having a bad day when the telephone rang. It was a woman whom I had met several years ago at a meeting. She'd called to tell me that when she was new I was very kind to her and that this kindness had meant a great deal. She has been sober now several years. How she had gotten my phone number or why she picked that particular day to call me I don't know. But she carried a powerful message to me that day and I'm grateful.

Robin F., Los Angeles, Calif.

Citizen of the World



During my early months in AA I was able to work my program just enough to keep me out of bars and liquor stores, to have a job, and to

attend meetings so that I could learn more about how AA works. Doing a lot of Twelfth Step work was part of that process; it kept me out of bars, right? For the time being that was enough.

After a year or so of sobriety I real-

ized that I had to face the last part of Step Twelve — to practice these principles in all my affairs. By consciously using the Steps in all areas of my life, my thinking patterns slowly changed. It became a habit to approach life more as a child of my Higher Power and less like a slave of my own self-will. Facing victories and defeats, setting priorities, and making decisions became manageable facets of my life.

AAs helped me during my adventure with Step Twelve by offering me good advice and especially by the example they gave me. I watched my AA friends struggle through their accomplishments and failures while they continued to grow by working the Steps, especially the last part of Step Twelve.

I found that practicing the AA principles in all my affairs takes a great deal of time and energy, more than I ever imagined. It means doing things like paying bills, making repairs on the house, and visiting relatives who are happy to see me — all activities I thought were impossible during my drinking days. I actually started to like being part of the world even though it meant spending less time twelfth-stepping others.

I had mixed feelings about this new direction my life was taking. On one hand, my sobriety gave me the ability to live as just another citizen in society, at least as long as I continue to work the suggested Steps. On the other hand, I wondered whether spending less time with other alcoholics might diminish the duration or

quality of my sobriety. I knew the answer to my dilemma would be found by asking my Higher Power to take charge of my time and energy.

Gradually I began to understand that my sobriety required my return to a world larger than one populated with only recovering alcoholics, a world that had a place for me all along. All I had to do to become part of that world was to move in. One day while reading from *As Bill Sees It*, I realized that my adventure with Step Twelve is only the natural consequence of working the Steps.

Bill W. once wrote in a letter that "the Twelfth Step also refers to 'practicing these principles in all our affairs.' Therefore, I think your choice of whether to take a particular Twelfth Step job is to be found in your own conscience. . . . I just know that you are expected, at some point, to do more than carry the message of AA to other alcoholics. In AA we aim not only for sobriety — we try again to become citizens of the world that we rejected, and of the world that once rejected us. This is the ultimate demonstration toward which Twelfth Step work is the first but not the final step."

Using the last part of Step Twelve in my everyday life does not mean I've graduated from the program. I go to some AA meetings and AA functions; I sponsor people when I can. Working the Steps does not result in my reaching perfection, a fact which still irritates me.

Many times I don't like being an

imperfect person in an imperfect world, but who does? Many times I don't like feeling that I am different from those who can drink without ill effects, but so what? Everyone is different from everyone else in some way. That only makes my adventures in this life more interesting. Those imperfections and differences force me to grow in my own spiritual program.

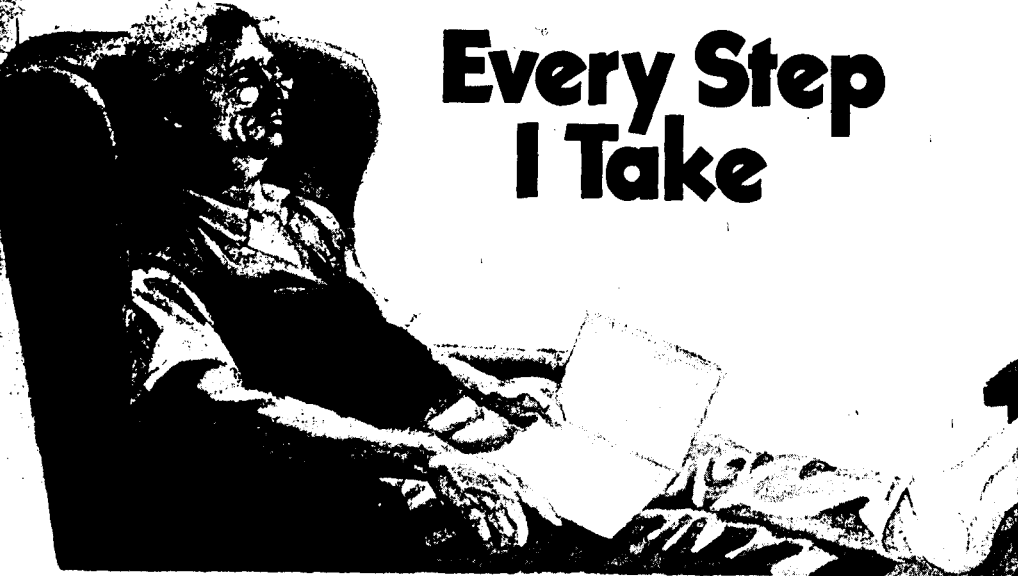
I am criticized by some AA members for not spending as much time as I used to working with other alcoholics. That's okay. I appreciate their

concern. Such criticism shows me that my critics, too, are committed to the AA program. They know how much time and energy Twelfth Step work requires while learning to practice the AA principles in all their affairs.

Working the last part of Step Twelve gives me choices for my life I never thought possible. This is quite an accomplishment considering I once had no choices at all. For anyone who wants to become a citizen again, try the Twelfth Step. It is time and energy well spent.

Barbara L., Casper, Wyo.

Every Step I Take

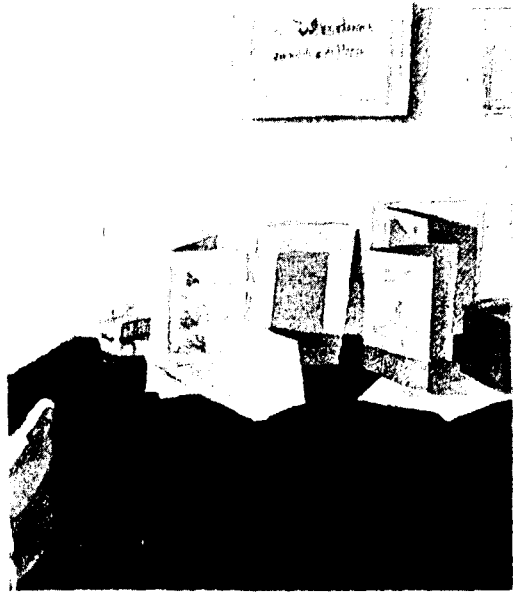


My name is Bill, I'm an alcoholic, and I'm grateful to be sober today. Last night, my group and I celebrated the fifth anniversary of the first day of my second attempt at continuous sobriety, and I have never felt such love and friendship in my life.

As my sponsor announced this grand occasion from the podium, he (as has become his habit) made sure to explain to the packed hall just what I looked like that first night when I stumbled into a meeting: the flushed and bloated face, the glazed eyes, the shaking hands that couldn't hold a full cup of coffee. He told of the negative power of example I had been to him when we were both "out there" — he had decided that if he ever got as bad as I was, he would quit drinking. For whatever reason, he got sober about three years before I did.

As for other celebrations I had during my drinking days, I remember few with any clarity. There were birthdays, when I managed to attract enough attention so everyone in the bar would celebrate along with me. One year, another bar across the street even sent over drinks! Someone would get the band to play "Happy Birthday," they'd mangle my name terribly, and I'd stumble over the feet of some poor girl who had agreed to dance with me. Yeah, those sure were good times.

There were some holidays I remember. Mainly, I seem to recall the ones where I wasn't with my family, because I was either too drunk to be with them or not drunk enough. One of the worst things about the holidays was that the bars closed early and the Chinese restaurants didn't open at all.



My AA anniversary usually falls during Thanksgiving week, right at the start of the Christmas season. In five years I haven't missed spending either holiday with at least part of my family, and while I'm becoming increasingly less interested in the material aspects of Christmas, the true spiritual meaning of this time of year is becoming more and more important to me. This Thanksgiving, it *mattered* to my sister that I be there, along with Mother, and the kids who call me Uncle.

Last Christmas, I didn't go crazy with presents; instead I supported some charitable organizations. But for the past few years I've given my family something they didn't have before: me, sober. My birthday comes a week after Christmas; and I hope it will pass unnoticed!

Nobody from the barroom has called me in five years, while my AA friends won't leave me alone. When I was recently made single again, members of my group, and AA in general, rallied round, refused to let me sit in my own stew, and pulled me through to where I am today: sober and grateful.

Now I'm sitting in my apartment, surrounded by little packages, shreds of wrapping paper, a small pile of congratulatory cards — the tangible evidence of an outpouring of warmth and love that can only be shared among sober alcoholics. The seemingly endless stream of hugs after the meeting tonight is etched in my heart, I hope never to be erased.

I have much to be thankful for, and many to whom I am thankful. I will give thanks tonight to my Higher Power, as I do every night, for the gift of sobriety, and for the gift of fellowship in AA. I offer thanks to my friends in the Fellowship for believing in me when I did not, for loving me when I could not, and for helping me become able to believe in and love my friends in return. I am thankful to my family for acknowledging that there's a "new me" that changes, and that improvements have been made. And I'm thankful to the newcomers, even to those still out there, for keeping my memory green.

Every step I have taken in my life thus far has led me to where I stand today, and the Twelve Steps of AA have insured that I stand here sober.

Bill T., Hull, Mass.



*"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol
— that our lives had become unmanageable"*

The fellow who said that the first step off the Empire State Building was the toughest might well have been talking about the AA program. I had four problems which kept me from even trying the First Step and two more problems when I finally tried it. The whole process took three years.

You see, I could do "controlled" drinking (meaning that I didn't get slobbering, falling-down drunk) sometimes for as long as several months. I would start with wine or beer on some "special occasion" and after one drink stop with no effort at all. So where's the problem? Since there was none, I would try something more or stronger a few days later. It might take months before I got so unmanageably drunk that I had to be lugged off to the hospital — a couple of times in a straitjacket.

Problem #1. They say that lower levels of intelligence are unable to

identify the relationship between cause and effect if the two are separated in time. There's supposed to be a remote tribe somewhere that has never figured out what causes babies.

The fact that I failed repeatedly to relate the one innocent drink to the eventual drunk says something uncomplimentary about my intelligence. That innocent first drink lit the fuse of an immutable mechanism that kept on ticking until it exploded into another drunk. But it took all of three years for me to acknowledge the causal relationship. Some people get drunk right away. I just happened to have a long fuse.

Problem #2. This was the successor to each struggle with Problem #1. After each drunk, I dried out, I ate well, I exercised. Pretty soon I felt I could lick anything that came down the pike — including booze. My thinking went like this: "Don't tell me that anyone in as good shape as I am who

feels as well as I do can't take a drink or two from time to time. Furthermore, I know the danger signs. I'll just stop when I feel myself beginning to get tight. There's certainly no sense in my giving up drinking entirely. No one would want my company and no way I could have any fun."

We all know the answer to this: Our physical and emotional well-being has no effect on our ability to handle alcohol.

Problem #3. I have never encountered anything in life I could not achieve, provided I gave it my total energy and concentration. It's a sign of weakness and an acceptance of defeat to admit that I can't do something myself and have to turn to others for help — and strangers at that. I'd rather die than submit myself to that kind of humiliation. A couple of times I darn near did die.

Problem #4. Where do they get this "life is unmanageable" stuff? I am holding down a good job. I am paying my bills. I have a wife and kids and a good roof over our heads. If I can do all these things, my life is certainly not "unmanageable." Q.E.D., why should I join AA, have to go to all those meetings and associate with all those stuffy people?

The four problems described above were what prevented me from even trying Step One. Then when I did try it, here is what I encountered.

Problem #5. What's this intellectually dishonest ploy about not taking a drink for just one day? I know perfectly well that they intend that I

should never take a drink as long as I live. I'm not going to participate in that kind of self-delusion. It may make the future awfully grim, but I've got to make up my mind never to take a drink from now till the day they bury me.

Problem #6. They tell me to ask for help from a Higher Power. If there is a "Higher Power" (which I doubt), then he must be a malicious one rather than a benevolent one. He's fixed it so I can never have any fun for the rest of my life. I can just see myself asking him for help!

So much for the problems. How did AA guide me past these six roadblocks to my sobriety?

First of all, my sponsor and others reviewed my history with me, over and over again, and were able to demonstrate beyond contradiction that:

The first drink — any drink — lit a fuse which led inexorably to a drunk.

Neither good health, happy circumstances in my life, nor any other factor could stay the burning of that fuse.

Not all my so-called intelligence, not my ability, and not my will power had been able to control my drinking.

So where was the intelligence in trying the same thing over and over again with the same disastrous result? Maybe intelligence would dictate that I try something else — like getting some help?

Finally, about my conviction that my life was "manageable," Webster cites one of the definitions of manage, "to achieve one's purpose."

Was I achieving any purpose — even the purpose of handling my drinking — to say nothing of the fact that my home life and my family were a shambles, my health was cracking at the seams, and I was barely holding on to my job? That doesn't sound as though I were managing. And if not, perhaps it's because I am powerless over alcohol.

So now I am grudgingly willing to admit that the First Step may possibly apply to me. How do I go about implementing this admission and making it a part of my basic thinking about myself?

They tell me that the sine qua non is that I must ask for help. It seems that the most important four-letter word in AA is "talk." I've got to start talking to other members of AA about my feelings and the struggle I'm having in trying to practice the program. And the one I should talk to most is a sponsor.

This makes Job One the finding of

a sponsor — someone whose sobriety I respect and to whom I can talk with reasonable comfort.

So I listen to different people at meetings and chat with some of them. Afterward I finally pick one with whom I have a lot in common outside of AA and who seems to be very comfortable in AA. When he agrees to be my sponsor, I start talking. I am surprised to discover that talking about my problems, rather than proving embarrassing, turns out to be encouraging and helpful. . . very helpful.

Job Two is to ask for help from a Higher Power (which I am not at all sure exists). But I figure that as long as I have gone this far in trying AA, I might as well keep on going. So I gulp and start every morning asking this Higher Power for help and thanking him every night.

Job Three is to yield on the "intellectual dishonesty" problem and give a try to this one-day-at-a-time delusion. I find that, while the assump-

tion of having only this one day to contend with may be a delusion, it sure works. I can do a better job today because I've got an accomplishment which gives me a lift to tackle the next day. Instead of moping over the past and fearing the future, I am free to concentrate on today. It's the most productive delusion I have ever encountered.

It has been almost half a lifetime since I finally succeeded in taking that First Step. The struggle was so intense that I remember the whole experience rather vividly. It has been many years since the thought of a drink has even crossed my mind. I want to keep it that way.

So every morning when I say my prayers and confirm to my Higher Power that I am an alcoholic, I picture a specific favorite drink (frequently a dry martini with a twist) and, at the same time on my mental projector, I run a few feet of film of a specific alcoholic episode.

Then I call to mind how, when I first forced open my eyes at the end of a drunken episode, I was overcome by a dread horror of facing anyone or anything. I was desperate to cringe into my skin. I wanted to be a turtle so I could pull back into my shell. That would lead me to a frantic search for some basis — any basis — for accusing someone else of being the cause of my behavior.

By recalling these events and emotions I lock together the first drink and the inevitable consequences thereof. If I should ever reach for one, I am sure that projector would start running.

At that point, I ask my Higher Power — oh, yes, I almost forgot to say that he has proven to me that he exists — I ask him to help me stay away from a drink for that day. And he does.

This is my way of taking the First Step once again every single day.

B. F. P., Vero Beach, Fla.

The Broken Pulley

Some years ago, I realized that much of the great staying power of the AA program is wrapped up in Step Ten: "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it." In my opinion, this Step suggests the daily practice of Steps Four through Nine and is designed to keep us from lapsing into complacency and self-righteousness.

Step Ten has saved me from more mistakes than I can count. But time and again, I've delayed taking this Step—because of pride and fear. One of my sneakiest evasions has simply been in posing as morally superior to the person I have wronged.

Since I'm more comfortable discussing past sins than those I'm committing today, I've talked recently about the time I broke the cast-iron pulley in the Detroit engine plant where I worked in 1952. I can find no better example of using the other person's faults to gloss over my own mistakes—even when there's no logical connection.

At the time of the broken-pulley incident, I was well into my second year of AA sobriety. For the first time in my life—and as a result of AA—I was doing the right things, such as getting to work on time and paying my way in life. AA sobriety had enabled me to graduate from alternating periods of

homelessness and dependency to a steady life. I was grateful for my job in a clean factory with good benefits, and I even had a new car to drive to meetings.

Though I was getting along well with fellow workers, I was secretly critical of our foreman, Chris. His sin? Well, in my view he was a terrible bigot, particularly toward blacks who wanted to move into his all-white residential neighborhood. By contrast, I considered myself an exemplar of true racial tolerance. After all, I attended interracial AA meetings in Detroit and sometimes lunched with blacks in the company cafeteria. This, I imagined, demonstrated that I was far ahead of Chris and the older members of my family in social responsibility.

Aside from his racial views, Chris was an excellent boss. He understood production and had worked in the Detroit factories for thirty years or more. Surprisingly, he worked well with the blacks in the company. He was also fair and forgiving of mistakes, as he was the day I broke the pulley.

It went this way: In assembling special diesel engine units for our customers, our job was to install accessories on the basic engines received from the assembly line. This included installing drive pulleys onto the engine shafts.

All attempts to indict those who criticize me are simply the broken-pulley incident in new forms.

Performing such an installation one day, I was too impatient to find the wooden block that was usually used to tap the pulley into place, so I tapped directly with my hammer instead.

I had been able to get away with this several times before, but this time the worst happened—I broke the thin wall of the pulley groove. Since all expensive breakages like this had to be accounted for by the foreman, I reluctantly reported it to Chris.

I can still remember my embarrassment as Chris looked over the pulley and slowly shook his head. "How did it happen?" he asked. "Didn't you use a wooden block to drive it on?"

My first thought was to lie about it—to say that I used the block but the hammer slipped and struck the thin part of the pulley anyway. The AA program, however, had given me enough honesty to sidestep such a lie, so I frankly admitted that I had been careless.

Chris sighed, wrote up the damaged part on the necessary scrap form, and then said curtly, "Under the contract, I could suspend you three days for this.

But I'll let it go this time. Just see that you do things the right way after this."

I should have been relieved and grateful. There were other foremen in the plant who issued suspensions for such violations, so Chris was well within his rights. Even the union contract conceded the necessity for suspensions for negligent work. I was being let off gently.

But instead of being grateful, I felt furious and humiliated for the rest of the afternoon. And whenever the thought of the incident came back again, I also felt a resentment toward Chris. Sure I was guilty of breaking the pulley. But what right did he have to pass judgment on me in such a brusque manner when he was guilty of the far greater shortcoming of racial bigotry?

If this sounds like twisted reasoning, it certainly was. Chris's racial bigotry or other personal faults had nothing to do with the issue of my work performance. In the matter of the broken pulley, Chris was 100 percent right and I was 100 percent wrong. When I broke the pulley, I had shortchanged the company and reduced the output in Chris's section. He had every right to be upset. It was as simple as that, and I should have admitted it promptly.

That was nearly forty years ago. I worked for Chris only a few more months before joining the company where I was to work for thirty-three years, mostly in public relations. The broken-pulley incident became very minor in comparison with other work responsibilities that came later, and it may seem to have little to do with the business of living sober in AA. But as

I view the matter now, it's a great example of how the Tenth Step should have been employed, then and at all times when I was clearly wrong. My sobriety would have been far richer without this devious practice of mentally switching to the other person's faults when I made serious mistakes.

I employed the same trick later on. One of my bosses in public relations and advertising was a heavy drinker; I let myself think of that whenever he criticized something I had done. Another boss was carrying on a secret liaison with his secretary, and I used this as an excuse for feeling secretly superior to him and even believing that he had no right to criticize my work. Later on, I worked directly for the company president on some projects. Despite the fact that he was one of the finest persons I ever knew, I found some faults in him that I remembered on the very few occasions when he pointed out a mistake I had made!

So it's a good thing, today, to remind myself that all attempts to indict those who criticize me are simply the broken-pulley incident in new forms. The Tenth Step—like all of AA's inventory steps—says nothing about the other person's wrongs. The only issue I ever have to deal with is any wrong I have committed

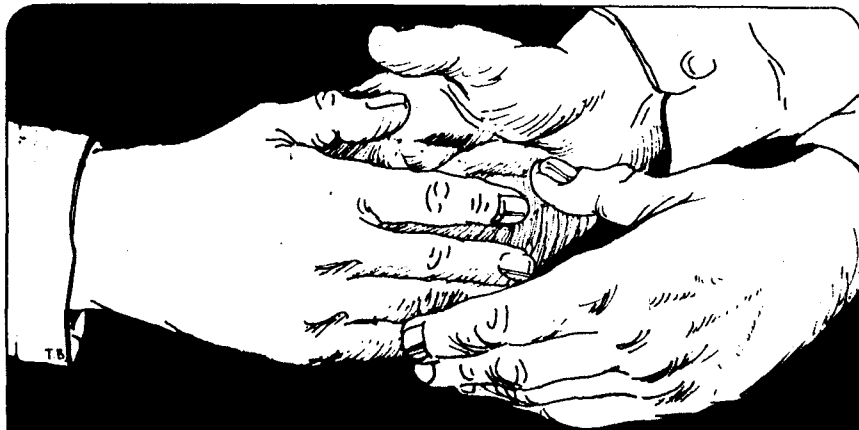
in thought or deed. And I am responsible for admitting and facing such wrongs, even though the others involved may have wrongs of their own which they are not admitting or facing.

This may seem to be a humiliating, one-sided arrangement. Why should I be the one who must always admit his wrong? But it is only foolish pride and fear that would make me ask such a question. In truth, I can only gain in being able to come to a quick understanding of my mistakes when they occur. Extending this principle to all my affairs, it sometimes helps me correct a bad practice or a proposal before it has time to result in further damage. In one case, it even helped me avoid a job change that would have been very costly.

If Chris were still with us today, I think I'd look him up and discuss that broken-pulley incident with him. I don't know if his racial views would have changed over the years, but I'd stay off that subject. My aim would be only to tell him I appreciated working for him. He was a very competent foreman, and maybe he should have issued the three-day suspension.

But he did get his point across. I never broke another pulley.

Mel B., Toledo, Ohio



An Experience Not to Be Missed



Hospital and institutions work is a wonderful way to spread the message of AA. Of this there can be little doubt.

People in jails in particular benefit greatly from AA meetings brought in by people who are concerned. While I spent the better part of two decades in several prisons, I never partook of AA. I got AA after my release from prison and have kept it for nearly five years since. In that is a message.

Men and women who are just released from prison feel very isolated.

They feel separated from AA groups. I know this because I work with many of them now. They approach me to sponsor them, after they hear my story. The simple fact that I was there, have done lots of time, and may understand their situation draws them to me.

Not many people who have served significant prison time ever make it to Alcoholics Anonymous. Certainly not many stay around. The peculiar mental twist of the disease is only amplified by years in prison, amidst the violence and the overpowering fear that are an integral part of any prison environment. In the years I was in, for example, over

three hundred men were murdered. You get a fatalistic attitude. Eventually, you think, some crazy is going to put a shank in your gut, too. So you live as much and as fast as possible.

The availability of drugs and homemade alcohol in any prison is also pervasive. Drinking and drugging often appear to be the only way to cope.

The "convict code" has to be understood when working with people just out of jail. Since being able to mind your own business in prison is a valuable skill, keeping a confidence is paramount. People just out find it difficult to cope with gossip and outright inventory-taking at meetings, and often leave the Fellowship. They need to be shown a good example. Sponsorship takes on a whole new meaning.

In AA we like to say, "I understand, I've been there." But if a person hasn't served time in prison, sponsoring or talking to someone who has is difficult. The language of prison, the way you carry yourself—these things are only learned by being there.

I understand this and so make my story known all over.

The grim details of the murders I served time for are aired out sometimes. Among prison inmates there is a perverse respect for people who served time for murder, particularly in conjunction with armed robbery. Nobody understands this except a convict. People in AA are shocked at my story. Convicts aren't. They simply relate to it. Shooting a drug dealer in a rip-off is considered an okay thing to do. The AA who hasn't been inside wouldn't know this.

Seeing a man come out, get involved in AA and bloom into a contributing member of the Fellowship—that has given me a great feeling.

I believe those of us who have served time in prison have a very real purpose in AA. Our message shows people who aren't too sure about this deal that AA can and does work—for anyone, from any circumstance. I've worked with dozens of men, and that work is satisfying, and has kept me sober for a good number of years.

God works in mysterious ways. I never thought during all those years inside that this negative experience could ever be turned into a positive one. Only in AA could it happen, in my opinion. Seeing a man come out, get involved in AA, and bloom into a contributing member of the Fellowship—that has given me a great feeling. I hope that guys who come from prison and have managed a few years of sobriety will avail themselves of this experience. It is a good one.

Michael P., San Diego, Calif.



With five years of recovery under my belt I thought it was time to “lighten up on the program.” Oh, I continued to go to meetings and sponsor people. I called my sponsor every few days or so. I was getting on my knees every morning and evening, but what I wasn’t doing was practicing these principles in all my affairs. The spiritual and emotional parts of this disease were not being addressed.

I was in a tremendous amount of fear of moving, getting married, change, etc. and I wasn’t in touch with any of it. It was safer to feel the anger and resentments that I thought were so justified. I had gotten engaged after months of trying to discern whether or not it was God’s will that I marry my husband or not. As the wedding got

closer I was having muscle spasms in my back from the stress of the planning. Resentments were taking me over. I went to a lot of meetings and shared what I was going through, but never made any changes. I thought the confusion would just go away. I would go to a Step meeting here and there and every time I did we would read Step Two. I knew I needed to be restored to sanity, but I didn’t have any clues how it would come to be.

I didn’t realize it, but I stopped my conscious contact with God on a regular basis. I was caught up in the wedding planning and everyone told me that it was usual for the bride to be “off the wall” during this time. (Today, I believe I would have been able to plan it a lot more effectively if I had

I didn’t realize it, but I stopped my conscious contact with God on a regular basis.

actively been living the Steps. I say that from experience, not in a way to beat myself up, but because I now know my experience can benefit others!) I started to feel the distance from God I had once felt before I was sober.

I got married and returned home from my honeymoon only to find I began to get obsessed with being the “perfect wife,” never asking God what *his will* was for me. I was pushing myself into the ground and I was losing hope. Having moved, I was in a new area and I had new meetings to go to. I felt very disappointed by AA and for the first time felt unable to reach out. I would ask for telephone numbers, but not use them. I called my old AA friends and (thankfully) didn’t change sponsors.

I was sober almost six years now, all of the “outsides” in my life were better than they had ever been, and yet I was depressed and disillusioned. I got on my knees one Sunday morning and asked God for a word or sign I could hold onto. I got relief, but as

soon as I felt better I started pushing myself again, thinking I had control. I had some pretty painful interactions with my family that left me really devastated. I had no defense against any of these and my reactions were way out of proportion to the situations.

What I didn’t know was that these situations were beating humility into me. I was becoming humble! Thank God I didn’t have to drink to go back to Step One! I joined a women’s Step meeting and the first night we read Step Twelve. We read the part about AAs “two-stepping,” which is exactly what I had been doing for quite some time.

When I came into the program, I was told it was a threefold disease: physical, emotional, and spiritual. I was also told that I could have recovery on those three levels if I didn’t drink and tried to live the Steps in my life. Well, I’m slowly working my way toward recovery again. I still run on my own will, but I am aware of it sooner and am able to stop at times during my day and ask for God to guide my thoughts and actions.

I recently got a “Step sponsor” and that has been wonderful for me. I am working on my *own* program and trying to keep my nose (and ego) out of what others in the program are doing or not doing. I need to identify, not compare. I have decided to stop playing God and pray to be just another alcoholic who has surrendered to the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Kelly L., Framingham, Mass.

'An Indescribable Benevolence'

Step Two
can
reveal
our
true colors

“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” What does this Step mean to me, a woman with just nine months of sobriety in AA behind her? What was my process of “coming to believe,” and in what way do I feel I am being “restored”?

At first I had to take this Step on faith alone. I knew I believed; but I did not begin to understand. Why would God bother with someone who had misused her energies, squandered opportunities, bruised the hearts of loved ones and ridden alcohol like a runaway horse to the gates of insanity and the brink of death?

Slowly I began to realize that “why” was the wrong question. One day when I was about three months sober, a quiet gentleman spoke up at my noon meeting and delivered a message which seemed to have my name written all over it. He said that we need only ask ourselves “how”—and that this question could be an-

swered by three simple words: “honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness.”

I was desperate enough to try anything—even follow directions. I began to share at meetings as honestly as I was able. The pain and ugliness that poured forth from those dark recesses within appalled me; but to my amazement, no one judged. My worst confessions were received with tenderness and even a certain reassuring humor. I began to see that all of us had suffered in many different ways, and that I was hardly unique in experiencing that terrible sense of being “in disgrace.”

But wasn't “dis-grace” the opposite of God's grace, God's blessing, God's love? As I strove to keep an open mind, or at least to prevent the door from completely slamming shut, more things were revealed to me. My own active role in forsaking God became all too apparent. It seemed that I had “disgraced” myself, not so much

through the recklessly hurtful actions I committed in my drunkenness, but in closing myself off from the infinite, mysterious flow of divine love.

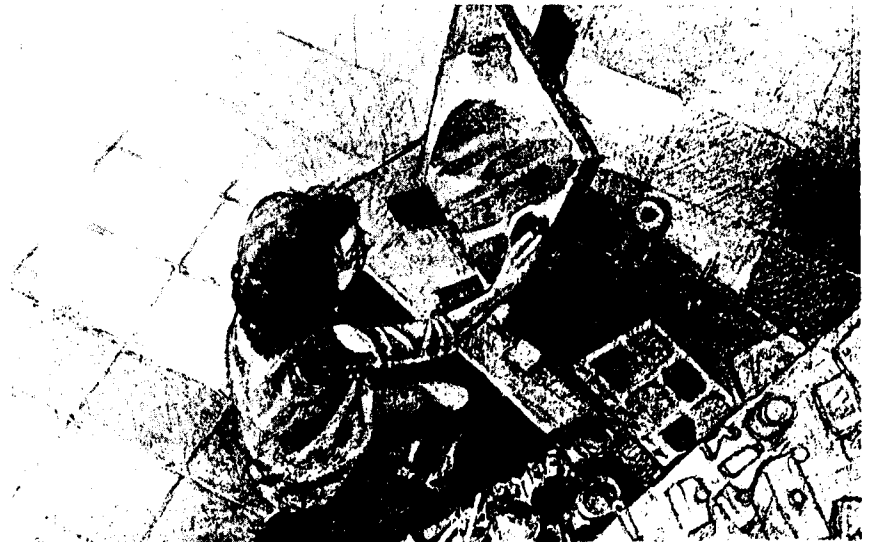
In opening my mind to new ways of loving and being (and sometimes, in my willingness, I could only manage the merest crack), I felt the gentle infusion of an indescribable benevolence. It was as if, in spite of myself, unconditional love insisted on streaming in through that crack in the door and filling the aching void, the God-shaped space in my heart. I felt his love in the embraces of fellow AA members, I witnessed his grace in the serenity shining from their eyes, and in the rollicking laughter which sometimes threatens to lift the roof at my home group meetings; I heard the music of recovery.

Willingness was simply given to

me. I began to feel that my feet were keeping me sober; they unfailingly took me to a meeting even when the rest of me screamed in protest. As this willingness was planted in me and slowly, haltingly grew, I began to feel the subtle dawning of an amazing inner light: a sense that I was being restored.

How could God do this? Had I ever really been sane—and if I hadn't, where was the model for this restoration? Surely he had nothing to go on, no plan to follow. I began to doubt again, to wonder whether I even had enough inherent worthiness to warrant this miraculous process.

Then I began to realize, through other people's loving messages, that no one is entirely self-made. A woman in my Step group expressed it this way: “Who we are is God's gift to us. Who



we become is our gift to God.” It began to dawn on me that recovery is something like the restoration of a very old painting, covered over by layers and layers of darkening, distorted varnish. This process of restoration is so precious in God’s eyes and is undertaken with such infinite care that not all of the underlying pattern can be revealed at one time. What is uncovered, bit by bit and layer by slow, careful layer, are the things which are necessary and appropriate for me to know about myself right now.

Moreover, no painting paints itself; we are masterworks, all lovingly created by God’s hands. Whether our colors are vivid or subtle, whether the design is boldly abstract or serenely pastoral is not our choice. Ours is only to accept this work of art as given—to strive to reveal our true colors and the beauty of our true design in everything we say and think and do.

I do not begin to understand the miracle of this restoration in my own life. I only know that it is happening, and that it is not a mistake. A sense of

my own worthiness is restored only very slowly; it is as if God knows I must be responsible for past damage and be more careful in the future if I am able to feel truly worthy. Though God loves me unconditionally, I will have to live my own faith, cherish each day of my recovery, and practice unconditional love to the best of my limited ability before I can wholeheartedly love myself.

The process is slow and often painful, and sometimes I feel I have barely begun. But when frustration or impatience overtake me, or when ego threatens to override all the progress I have made, I try to remember that God is the master painter—the spirit which inspired the works of Michelangelo, Renoir, and Van Gogh—the loving force which is even at this moment restoring the damaged painting of my life to its original luster and irreplaceable design.

Who better to carry out this loving and painstaking restoration than the master himself?

Margaret G., Port Coquitlam, B.C.

Whole Measures

*Working each Step is
more than a one-shot deal*

OFTEN, WHEN a group is discussing one of the Twelve Steps, someone around the table says, "Oh, I took that Step a couple of years ago." Clearly, the statement implies, he or she need not think about the Step again.

At these moments, I often feel envious, because none of the Steps has been a one-time experience for me. And I've had to take some of them many, many times.

The first part of Step One was relatively easy. By the time I found AA, I had tried consciously controlled drinking for two or three years — and experienced the dismal failures that always followed such episodes. So I was ready to accept powerlessness over alcohol.

But admit that my life was unmanageable? I still had a job; I had never been hospitalized or tossed in jail. Clearly, I was in control. I was managing my life, I thought.

Only after many months was I able to examine all areas of my life honestly enough to drive out any illusion of manageability. Unfortunately, this

realization didn't quell my inclination to run the world. From time to time, I still get smug and start thinking I have it all under control again. Inevitably, I end up in trouble, concede that I can't handle everything alone, and take Step Two when I admit that only a Power greater than myself can keep my life on an even keel.

Immediately, I take Step Three and turn my life over to that Higher Power. For a few hours or days, I feel super. Then, for inexplicable reasons, I forget how lousy I felt wrestling with the dilemma, and I pull it back again. After I've made myself thoroughly miserable, I take another Third Step. And sometimes another and another . . .

I've also had to take Steps Four and Five several times as I've been able to look at the past more honestly.

The first time I took Step Four, I found one character defect. Because I wanted to use the office's typewriter and paper, I took the Step on my lunch hour. Completing my task in less than ten minutes, I read a maga-

zine for the rest of my break and wondered why some members found Step Four difficult.

A year later, I took Steps Four and Five again. Vowing to be more assiduous, I completely bogged down in Four and spent several days rehashing my many character defects.

Later, suspecting that neither of those approaches met the intent of the Steps, I tried again and achieved a more balanced inventory.

When I hit Step Six, I thought this was the easiest one yet. Of course, I was ready to have God remove my defects of character, wasn't I? Unfortunately, time has proved I'm not.

When I'm unhappy, I don't immediately ask a Higher Power's help. Instead, I nurture resentments and self-pity — sometimes for days — playing over and over in my mind the tape of exactly how I was right and the other guy was wrong. Only after I've made myself thoroughly miserable once again do I take Step Seven

and ask God to remove the shortcomings.

In response to Step Eight, I made a list of all people I had hurt to whom I could easily and painlessly make amends. From that list, I scratched off the names of anyone who, I judged, had hurt me more than I hurt him. With a sigh of relief, I took Step Nine and raced on.

Much later, after hearing Step Eight hundreds of times, I noted that it didn't read quite the way I had interpreted it. The fact that I couldn't easily (or ever) make amends to a person didn't exclude his name. Neither, I was shocked to learn, did the fact that he might have hurt me, too. So I tackled Steps Eight and Nine again.

Clearly, Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are intended for continuous maintenance — not as one-time experiences. My problem with those Steps is a little different. I forget to take them.

Actually, forget isn't the right word. I remember, but then I procrastinate, so the Steps don't get done. Evenings, it seems to me, are the best time to take Steps Ten and Eleven. When everyone is in bed and the house is finally quiet, I can look back at the day, pray, and meditate without interruption. Unfortunately, when that magical time finally arrives, the Steps still get crowded out by other activities. I need to fix a snack first. Then, I'm going to read one more page of this book before I begin. Soon, I'm half asleep, and the Steps get short shrift. The next night, I neglect Steps Ten and Eleven altogether.

When, shortly thereafter, I get into emotional trouble, I realize I've been omitting those Steps, vow never to forget them again, and then proceed to fall into the same pattern within a couple of months.

Step Twelve gets similar treatment. I forget it or procrastinate. When I

arrive at meetings, I'm often so glad to see my friends that I disregard the new person sitting alone. Or, if I do notice the newcomer, I think, "Well, I'll approach him later. Right now, I want to tell my friend about..." Later, of course, is often too late.

When I first came to AA and read the Twelve Steps, I thought I would rapidly check each one off as I bounded on to the next. But that has not been the case.

Sometimes, I've felt discouraged as I've had to take Steps — or at least parts of Steps — time and time again. But then, I remember that "half measures availed us nothing." As I grow, I'm given the capacity to view the Steps differently and respond to them more honestly. And each time I take a Step again, I make some "spiritual progress." Perhaps I'm never intended to reach that level of "spiritual perfection" where I can be done with the Steps and rest on my laurels.

K. W., Fairborn, Ohio

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol —
that our lives had become unmanageable.

'The Main Taproot of Our Society'



Full and complete acceptance of Step One will insure that an alcoholic man or woman need never drink again. That is my belief based on what I have observed during thirty-four years of continuous abstinence in Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Hold on!" I hear a strident chorus rising from better AAs than I. "What about the *other* Steps? What about the AA philosophy of One Day at a Time? What about sponsorship and carrying the message?"

Excellent points! And they support my original statement. Please note that I specified *full and complete acceptance* of that first Step. I did not say that an alcoholic could remain sober on Step One *alone*, although some AA members would make that

claim about themselves.

When I truly concede that I am powerless over alcohol — that my life is unmanageable, I admit complete defeat. I admit that this powerlessness is a permanent condition, and that my disease progresses whether or not I drink. I know I will die unless I get help. If I don't want to die, I am willing to go to any lengths to live.

Only then will I reach out for help in applying the remaining eleven Steps. I will then read the Big Book and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and other AA literature. I will get a sponsor and do what the sponsor suggests, even if I don't agree with it, see no sense in it and don't want to do it. *Naturally* I don't want to do it! During my twenty-three years of drinking, my alcoholic thinking repeatedly produced decisions and actions against my own best interests

and those of people close to me at home and at work.

The alcoholic shuns sane, sensible behavior like a bat shuns sunlight. It takes a tremendous amount of work to alter this tendency, work under the guidance and example of successfully sober alcoholics.

As I look back on the later years of my drinking I see times when I was close to grasping the truth about my problem. Each time the moment of sanity vanished and I made the inevitable decision of the alcoholic brain: to drink.

Here's an example. I had scores of blackouts during my drinking, waking up in my apartment without remembering how I got there, and in agony over what I might have done to, and with, my car. I dreaded to look at the front of the car, which I had always found parked in the garage, lest I see gruesome evidence of having hit a pedestrian.

Just one such experience would have turned a normal drinker into a teetotaler. Within a day or two I was back drinking, starting with the confident resolve to control it, but never seeing the need to do so after one or two drinks.

In 1952 I came out of a blackout, not at home, but standing in front of the booking desk of the Hollywood Police Station. My last memory was of staggering out of a bar, headed for my car. Charged with public drunkenness, I was transferred to the downtown Los Angeles jail and put in a large cell with twenty other men.

I noted ruefully that I was the only talented, neatly dressed script writer in the drunk tank.

The police had told me my car had been impounded. Even then I realized how lucky I was not to be charged with drunk driving. My wallet was just two dollars short of the twenty needed to bail myself out, so the jailor notified a bondsman.

As I waited to be released, I considered my situation. Now I would *really* control my drinking, having had this powerful motivation. Further, I would always carry a twenty dollar bill hidden in my wallet.

Why a man who could control his drinking would need bail money did not enter my mind. But something else did. What if, next time, it wasn't just public drunkenness, but drunk driving? Bail for that offense back then was \$250. "Next time?" The definite likelihood of another arrest had realistically occurred to me.

With incredible self-honesty for a man in the drunk tank I realized that if I were in a bar without cash or credit, I would dip into the \$250 and again be two dollars short of bail!

How close I was to Step One! I knew I would drink despite my present experience and despite any intent to control it. There in the jail I made a decision. Considering my financial situation at the time, I would give up — not *drinking* — but the idea of saving up \$250!

In court the next morning I pled guilty to the drunk charge, forfeited my bail to pay the fine, and headed

for a bar. After all, I had been through a very stressful situation.

Five more years of problems in work, relationships and finances were to pass before I stopped drinking. By what quirk of mind was I led so close to seeing the truth, only to turn from the light back into the darkness?

In the fall of 1957 I was a passenger in a friend's car when he took a turn too fast on a canyon road, and his car was totaled against a tree. The driver's wife suffered a serious leg injury, and I had deep head cuts and a concussion.

Out of the hospital in five days, I resumed drinking to find baffling and frightening changes in my reaction to alcohol. I couldn't get drunk, it seemed, and then the following night one martini would put me to sleep. Although I was still seeing one of the city's best neurosurgeons for check-ups on my slow-healing scalp nerves, I didn't discuss the problem with him. Deciding that the concussion was interfering with the beneficial effects of alcohol, I resolved to stop drinking until damage from the concussion had worn off.

I suffered the worst hangover of my life, and on the second morning experienced a hallucination. I saw a paper clip climb up the face of an alarm clock. Alarmed at this impossible phenomenon, I dialed a doctor out of the yellow pages, never thinking to call the surgeon familiar with my case.

"You're not talking to an alcoholic, doctor," I began. "I haven't had a

drink in thirty-six hours."

Whatever the doctor may have thought about this self-diagnosis, he advised me to try to get some sleep and to call him back if I had more trouble. I sweated out another day or two of misery. Not until later in AA did I realize I had gone into alcoholic withdrawal and the hallucination indicated I was on the verge of a seizure or DTs, which are often fatal.

Then I began to feel better as each day passed, clinging to my decision not to drink "for a while." On the ninth day I felt better than I had in many years – almost euphoric.

No creditors were hounding me, for I had paid off the most pressing bills with unexpected residual or royalty checks I received for television shows I had written two years before.

Ah! I was over the concussion! Maybe tomorrow I could drop in at the neighborhood bar and have a couple of beers with the boys!

In a split second that blissful feeling was wiped out by an instantaneous conviction that I could never drink again without disaster. It was Step One in different words, although I didn't realize this till later. It was as though the idea had been thrust into my brain from an outside source. Unbidden and unwelcome as I regarded this forecast of disaster, I accepted it without question. The next thought, however, was purely mine: "I will never have any more fun!"

Actually there had not been much fun in drinking for a long time. It was mostly hangovers, remorse, desper-

ate covering of bounced checks, lying to producers about missed deadlines for scripts.

Then a second instantaneous conviction pierced my brain without preamble: *I had to go to AA!*

That night I was at my first AA meeting. I hope I never forget the welcome I received from those friendly members of the North Hollywood AA Group. Far from being dull and drab, they were cheerful, cordial and happy. And as the speaker of the evening told his story, they often laughed. How could they laugh when they couldn't drink?

From then on I attended almost nightly and began to get acquainted with the regulars in the club house where the meetings were held. How widely they differed in personalities, in backgrounds and occupations. Yet they spoke a common language of affection, humor, honesty and helpfulness. The AA program did not turn them into identical clones. It was the new people, those coming in sick, shaky, scared, often resentful and defiant – these were the ones who seemed lacking in individuality.

From the moment of my message of disaster I was relieved of the desire to drink. But I was still on dangerous ground. Although the Steps were read at every meeting, along with portions of chapters three and five from the Big Book, I half-listened, impatient for the speakers to tell their stories.

When listening to speakers I had been checking off dramatic, foolish or dangerous events in their stories

and smugly congratulating myself that I wasn't *that* bad. I compared my best with their worst. I was indulging in this risky hypocrisy one night at a meeting when that Outside Source jammed these words into my consciousness: "If you are so smart, why are you here?"

Shortly thereafter I accepted my alcoholism, got a sponsor, and began to follow the example and guidance of successfully sober members. For some reason I was chiefly aware of those sober eight years or more. I recall being surprised to discover that some people dropped out and returned to drinking. Some of them came back, looking sheepish and sick. A few of them, gone even a short time, were almost unrecognizable. They saved me the trouble of learning about the progression of the disease from personal experience.

Few of them drank again because of a tragedy like a death, divorce, job loss or learning they had a serious disease. There were two main excuses. With an amazed expression one relapsed person would say, "I can't understand it. I was sober for months, and the thought of drinking never entered my mind. Then one night there I was with a drink in my hand. Without thinking, I drank it. Nothing happened, so I had another."

The old-timers helped me understand what had occurred. These so-called "slips" resulted because the members, besides not thinking of drinking, had also not thought of *soberity*. They had stopped applying the

Twelve Steps and consciously trying to practice AA principles in all their affairs. Just attending meetings, as some did, was not enough.

Other relapsers, some who had been sober many years, said, "I thought I could handle it."

Truly curious, I asked some of them, "With all that time sober in AA, what evidence did you have that made you think you could handle it?" I never got a reply other than an embarrassed shrug or a sullen glare.

I saw some very fine AA members relapse, men and women who had been productively active in AA. Gradually they became complacent, and drifted away from AA meetings and the reminders of our powerlessness, and the Big Book warning, "We are not cured of our alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition."

In the chapter on Step One in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill W. writes, "The principle that we shall find no enduring strength until we first admit complete defeat is the main taproot from which our whole society has sprung and flowered."

Could a person who has fully admitted complete defeat ever drift far away from the principles that keep an alcoholic from reverting to the insanity of drinking again? I certainly did not immediately understand the full significance of Step One despite what I believe was the merciful intervention of a Higher Power. My failure to learn from near-fatal experiences

shows I wasn't likely to remain sober merely on the conviction that disaster lay ahead. That was a warning devoid of hope or direction. By itself it was a message on the impenetrable wall or at the brink of a bottomless abyss. So, by itself, is AA's "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable." Two simple words transform it from a proclamation of doom into a guide to freedom. These two words are Step . . . One.

If there is something called Step One, it implies *more* Steps, whether one more or a hundred. There is a way over the Wall, a bridge across the Abyss.

Several years ago the Grapevine published an article by Abraham J. Twerski, a nonalcoholic psychiatrist and a rabbi. Familiar with the program and with recovering alcoholics, Dr. Twerski wrote that from his observation, the longer members remained sober in AA the more likely they were to be increasingly aware of their personal powerlessness. Thus, year by year, they are motivated toward spiritual growth and the seeking of God's will for them.

Chapter five of *Alcoholics Anonymous* opens with the words, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."

The path begins with Step One. Perhaps all of us will gain renewed power to climb higher if we occasionally look back at the depths from which we come.

Lou H., Greensboro, N.C.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

A Power in the Air



"As long as it was just me and Jesus," a friend of mine says, "we drank."

I laugh and agree it was pretty much

the same with me. I was in the category that the "Twelve and Twelve" describes as "the guy full of faith, but still reeking of alcohol. He believes he is devout. His religious observance is scrupulous. He's sure he still believes in God, but suspects that God doesn't believe in him. He takes pledges and more pledges. Following each, he not only drinks again, but acts worse than the last time. Valiantly he tries to fight alcohol, imploring God's help, but the help doesn't come."

The shoe fits, but not exactly. Pledges, for instance. I never thought much of pledges. In Ireland in my early twenties, I met a Cork City guy a bit older than me who said he couldn't show me the pub scene because he was a Pioneer and had "taken the pledge." It took me about a minute to shame

him into granting himself a week's leave from his wonderful pledge. We had a blast and I went back to the army, in Germany with a new line: "I'm drinking for all the poor souls in the world who can't." I don't know if my host ever resumed his abstinence.

I did, however – down all the days after that and even in those early years – quit my drinking from time to time. In fact, I would give up drinking each spring. For Lent. Forty days and forty nights of no booze, both hard stuff and soft. Including Sundays. Even though the Church does not require fasting and abstinence on the Sabbath, I was a bit holier and tougher. I also knew (in the back room of my mind where I keep certain truths bound and gagged) that if I ever granted myself even one day's leave from my sacrifice, I'd never make the distance.

See, I truly loved drinking. Drinking was an important part of my identity, my style. It was part of my own mythology. (As I moved through my all-too-ordinary life, the soundtrack in my

what we used to be like . . .

mind played "The Man with the Golden Arm," "Peter Gunn," and "Mack the Knife.") Booze had yet to turn and start to kill me. The percentage was still nine blasts to one mess, and the messes still didn't seem that bad. Not-drinking, then, was truly a worthy sacrifice for me to offer to my loving Creator in penance for my sins and those of the world.

Lent also dried me out, of course, and put me back in condition for the next three seasons of heavy hitting. (Another truth locked in the back room.) In effect, even in those "golden" years, I was using my faith to maintain my drinking. Not even in my back room did I know this . . . yet I knew it. If we didn't have awareness, we wouldn't need denial.

Over the next twenty years I kept giving up drinking for Lent. Gradually, though, my sacrifice involved only the hard stuff. Beer wasn't really drinking, and wine was . . . well, plain wine was mouthwash and fine wine was food. For a few years I figured, "No alcohol at all – but I can smoke a little grass to take the edge off." This developed in time into: "No booze and no coke, just a little pot." Finally, though, I saw the light, and went back to the straight and narrow: Pot and coke were illegal, hence immoral. The sixties were over, I would stop using them altogether. (Back room: I had snorted lines that had been stepped on with enough speed to drop me into a chair for an hour with cold sweats, a heart breaking through the skin of my chest, and the absolute conviction that I was

about to die.) Back to booze, then – booze, the joy of my youth.

And back to giving it up every Lent. Toward the end, I even began having two "Lents" a year, one before Easter with the rest of the Christian world and one in Advent, before Christmas, just for myself. (Back room: It's a threefold disease – Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's – and by now, turkey weekend was leaving me such a raw, quivering nerve-end of anxiety and depression that the prospect of the next two events in the Drinker's Triple Crown demanded strict measures of preparation.)

By the way: It may not surprise you to hear that at different times, between Lents, I had tried quitting or cutting back on my own, without the religious buttressing. I never made it more than a couple days. This I attributed to the pressures of life in modern times. I was sober for years in this beloved Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous before I saw what now seems obvious to me: When I quit for spiritual reasons, no matter how self-motivated and corrupt, I could go without a drink for quite a long while. When I went solo, I crashed and burned in no time at all.

It must also be added that each Lenten wagon ride was making me more unbearable to live with than the last. The vacuum left in me by the liquor filled instantly with self-righteousness, impatience, crankiness, self-pity, anxiety, depression, fear . . . all the rewards that come to alcoholics with dryness, or as we say in AA, "White-knuckling it." The same wife

and kids who were so happy to see me get off the sauce on Ash Wednesday, by Good Friday were throwing themselves prostrate on any altars they could find, praying, "For God's sake, give that man a drink!" No rolled-back stone ever signified Resurrection for me and mine more elevatingly than that first, light-filled Beefeater gibson straight-up in a wine goblet right after Mass on Easter Sunday morning. For the last two years before

I came . . .

I came to . . .

I came to believe.

the end, I gave up giving up things liquid for Lent, on the following impeccable logic: 1. Without drink, I behaved like a Nazi. 2. God did not want me to behave like a Nazi. Ergo, 3. God wanted me to drink. As long as it was me and Aristotle, I drank.

So pledges never impressed me much when it came to not-drinking. Nor did I ever see myself as "fighting alcohol," "valiantly" or otherwise. The common phrase "battle of the bottle" meant nothing to me, except as I associated it with obviously hopeless luses like Ray Milland in *The Lost Weekend*, or my grandfather, who went in and out of many drying-out farms before committing suicide while drunk at age 57. I was devout

and scrupulous, all right; I always prayed to God as I understood him – but never once did I ever pray to him not to drink. It just never occurred to me. I never saw drinking as the problem until after I was sober. Hell, I thought drinking was the only thing in my life still working! No, I simply prayed for the pain to stop. For my luck to change. I'd pray for other people's deaths or disappearances. And for my own. For long spells I'd go to daily Mass and Communion as well as on Sundays (hungover and whipped, but still coming back for more. I was down, but goddamned if I'd stay down). I'd pray for the pain to stop. For things to change. For mercy.

I'd pray: *Dear Lord – okay. It seems to be your will to be dealing me some awful tough hands. And I've been playing them as best I could all my life. Well, I'm sorry, but I can't take it anymore. This life is just too hard. It's too much for me. If you care anything about the innocent people you've put around me, you'll lay off . . . et cetera.*

Never once did I pray, *God, please help me stop drinking.* Because (I know now) I had the First Step backwards: I figured if only my life could be brought back under control (i.e., under my control), my drinking would go back to normal.

In AA rooms, I've often heard the Second Step broken into: I came . . . I came to . . . I came to believe. That's pretty accurate for how it happened to me, and the first "power

greater than myself" that I thought of was not God as I or anyone else understood or didn't understand him. It was AA, in the character of the fifty or so people jammed into a dingy storefront on Perry Street in Greenwich Village. As close as I had thought I was to the personal presence of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the other saints in my life, I did not at first think of any of them as the power helping me to stay stopped from drinking a day at a time. I thought only of those people gathered together in that store and the other rooms of AA in which I began to attend meetings.

There was a power in the air of those rooms. I could practically touch it. Whether or not I understood a single word in an hour and a half of talk – and there were many times I did not – I never failed to feel that power, or force, or presence. Whatever you wanted to call it, it was helping all these addicts do what they could not do by themselves: keep from drinking and drugging. And so far, it was doing the same for me. I didn't have to make any act of faith in this power, all I had to do was show up and stay open and willing. Evidently, I was a doubting Thomas who needed to see the wounds and touch them with my fingers before I could believe. And evidently it was being given to me to do so.

Around this time I began hearing how so many people struggled with the idea of God. And here I was, with the notion of a loving, caring, personal, and powerful God still, some-

where, intact. The door to the back room in my mind had come open a crack. A thin sliver of light fell across the floor.

Around this time I began looking at the "sanity" element of the Second Step. I was seeing just how crazily unsound my life had become. And beginning to see that it had to have been a power a lot greater than a bunch of me's in a room to have altered its course. But this begins to inch into my Third Step. I have come to notice how every Step has a way of overlapping on the one before it and the one after it. In this way, my Second Step confirmed the unmanageability of my life (First) at the same time it was pointing more and more light toward a fresh, new understanding of the God of my lifetime faith (Third). Of the power he truly has in my life. And of his willingness to use it for my own good, if I will only ask and allow him to do so.

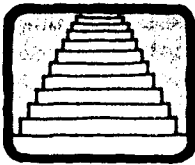
That's the good news. The other good news is that if you are on your Second Step and are having a hard time with any mentions of the G-word, relax. Don't worry about it. Do what I did: I came to see that I already had a higher power working in my life: alcohol. And if it wasn't greater than myself what was a nice guy like me doing in a place like this? The least I could do was give this other power a shot. It was working for these others, maybe it would work for me. And maybe it will work for you.

Anonymous, New York, N.Y.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Letting Life Unfold



Long before I came to Alcoholics Anonymous I had begun to lose faith in my own self-sufficiency. I knew that no matter how hard I tried, there were certain things I couldn't do, there were people I couldn't force to do what I wanted them to do, and there were things I couldn't even will myself to do – like stop having blackouts when I drank. Yet, I continued to try again and again, hoping that this time was going to be different. This time the stranger I picked up in a bar was really going to turn out to be Prince Charming and fall in love with me. This time I wasn't going to humiliate myself by wetting the bed or my pants. This time I was really going to impress "them" instead of doing things that made the people close to me cringe with embarrassment and make excuses for my behavior.

I vividly remember the night that

I knew to my very core that I could no longer even hope that my self-sufficiency and self-will would carry me through. I attended a women's support group (nothing to do with alcoholism) where I shared that I was concerned about my abusing alcohol. Afterward, I went out with some of the women to a restaurant. They all looked up to me. They believed the phony image of "self-sufficiency" I projected.

In an attempt to show their support of me, they all, one by one, ordered sodas. By the time the waitress got to me I had broken out in a cold sweat. I wanted desperately to hold on to the respect that others had for me, even if it was based on a lie. But I couldn't. I had to order a drink.

By the time I started drinking my second drink, part of me left my body and was hovering close to the ceiling of the restaurant, looking down on the woman I had become. Seeing the truth – which was that I was drinking



not because I wanted to but because I had to – was unbearable. In an instant I knew that my self-reliance had failed me and I no longer could even hold on to the hope that tomorrow would be different. There would be no tomorrow. I decided to kill myself before the world found out the truth about me.

However, the next morning instead of calling my doctor to get some sleeping pills to do myself in, I called Alcoholics Anonymous. Turning myself in to AA – “. . . as willing to listen as the dying can be . . .” – was

the beginning for me of trying to practice Step Three. But a lifetime of believing that if I didn't do it, it wouldn't get done, and that there was nobody I could trust except myself just couldn't be turned around all at once.

The key for me in Step Three lies in this passage of the "Twelve and Twelve": “. . . the effectiveness of the whole AA program will rest upon how well and earnestly we have tried to come to 'a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God' . . .” All it says is that I need to try. Before AA, whenever I tried something and didn't think I had done it right, I gave up. But AA has taught me that all I have to do is try, try, and try again. With each try I gain a little more experience, strength, and hope that I can share with my fellow AAs.

Over the years I've tried a number of different ways (learned from other

AA members) of working the Third Step, including: 1) Writing "turn-it-over" letters to God (I use a journal for this purpose and write God regularly about things that trouble or frighten me); 2) Using a God jar (when I start to obsess about something I have no control over, I write it on a piece of paper and put it in a container, so whenever I start to think about the problem, I remind myself that it's in my God jar); 3) Sharing problems with my sponsor and following her suggestions; 4) Sharing on the group level and being open to utilizing the experience, strength, and hope of others; 5) Using the "going to the hat" method of decision-making (for some very special situations that involve choosing between two alternatives, I write the alternatives on two separate pieces of paper, put the selections in the hat, pray for God to direct the outcome and give me the courage to act on whatever

way it comes out); and, of course, 6) Praying.

But it dawned on me the other day while reflecting on this Step that what's important isn't the outcome of applying any of these methods. What's important is knowing that in making the decision to try to turn my will and life over to the care of God as I understand him or her or it, I am affirming that no matter how it turns out, I don't have to pick up a drink.

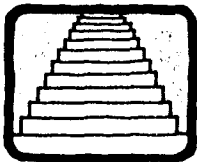
This doesn't mean that life is always going to turn out the way I would like it to nor that my life will be pain-free. It simply means that my life will unfold as God chooses it to and I don't have to drink either in celebration or despair. Because that's where the remaining Steps come in – to make it possible for me to obtain "permanent sobriety" one day at a time. And Step Three truly "opens the door."

Dorothy H., Plainfield, N.J.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

'We Set Them on Paper'



"In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper." That simple sentence in chapter five of the

Big Book slowed my reading one evening as I sat with a blank pad in front of me, making no progress on my Fourth Step.

At that time I had been coming to meetings for two years and had not had a drink during that time. My introduction to the Steps was at my first meeting where the Twelve Steps were printed on a yellowed old shade that hung behind the speaker. I thought that if this was all there was to Alcoholics Anonymous, I'd have it down pat in four or five weeks, because everything that was on the wall had been included in my religious education. The Fourth Step was no-

thing more than an examination of conscience while the Fifth Step was the sacrament of confession. With that settled, I sat back to drink my coffee and the days passed.

I found hope in the Fellowship and moved forward like a horse with blinders on, never looking back. But the sharing, especially at Step meetings, brought reality to me as my head cleared. Like all who had gone before me in the Fellowship, I could not escape the past.

For the first year, the first three Steps held my attention. Every time that I got to the Fourth Step, I proceeded to lose myself in the text of the "Twelve and Twelve." Why did I get lost there? Easy – just the mention of the seven deadly sins – pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth – and guilt raises its head. Guilt did help me not pick up the first drink

though it kept me from understanding the rest of the text in the "Twelve and Twelve." Privately I wanted to finish all the Steps so fast I'd make the Guinness Book of World Records, but publicly I nodded my assent when people said, "You should do a Step a year." I found myself writing in circles every time I tried to list all my sins.

One day, anger became my companion. It stayed day and night. My sponsor said that his sponsor claimed the Fourth Step was the Step for anger. Why didn't I take another look at what the Big Book had to say about it?

That night I discovered the sentence, "In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper." Nothing about guilt or sin here. No examination of conscience or sacrament of confession, just resentments. The Big Book says "resentment destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease. . . ."

I began at my earliest memory and came forward through my life. My list was thorough. No one I knew well was left off, nor were institutions with which I had had contact. I was a walking resentment.

As I got to the middle of my list, my need to justify my resentment with a short postscript disappeared and I attempted simply to discover whether

my anger was based on threatened self-esteem, money, ambition, or personal relationships.

When my list was complete I began to discover a startling truth – I had really been dependent on everyone. In this context the words "selfish," "dishonest," "self-seeking," and "frightened" took on new meaning. I appeared to be as powerless over the things I feared as I was over alcohol.

But I had only to turn the page of the Big Book for the instruction to make a list of my fears, ask my Higher Power to remove my fear and direct my attention "to what He would have us be." The Big Book says that after completing the Fourth Step, "you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself." This was true. Yet these truths were not accompanied by guilt. Instead I felt a deep sadness at the desperation with which I had acted. It was the beginning of an acceptance of myself, shortcomings, wrongs, and all.

The Fifth Step stood ahead – the road to "perfect peace and ease." I was ready to call my sponsor and set the time for it. We made the date two weeks from then – I wanted to stay on the old, familiar road a little longer before sharing my inventory with him.

Bernie B., New York, N.Y.

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

The Long Haul



Before I completed my first Fifth Step, I was a sprinter in the game of life, not a long distance runner. It seemed that I never really finished anything. Off the line, I was good. I learned quickly and worked hard. Everyone would be impressed as I started out, and expect great things from me. I believe today that some of the greatest harm I did to those who loved me most was this ability I had to get up after a failure and start again. Each time I would get up, do well at the beginning, and everyone would take hope. "He is going to make it this time," they would say, and we would all believe it. Then I would lose interest, get distracted, drink, and once more let everyone down, including myself.

When AA found me, I was blessed to be brought into a group that was strong on the Steps as they are shared in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Sponsorship to them was defined in the same way as was the purpose of the Big Book itself: "to show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered . . ." They used the book and their own experiences to hand-carry a small group of us through the Steps.

After explaining my illness in terms I could relate to, then demonstrating by their daily walk that the promise of a new mind and a new life were real, they carefully led me to the choice that either God was everything or he was nothing. Through skillful, loving, and very direct confrontation my sponsor helped me face my greatest fears about turning my life entirely over to God's care and direction. I became convinced that anything God has in mind for me is better than anything I would have in mind for myself.

So I asked my sponsor, "How do I make this real?" He told me that God would reveal himself to me as I revealed myself to myself and sent

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me off to do a searching and fearless moral inventory.

As often happens with me, I set about this task with the wrong motive and did not read any instructions about the method. Two hours later, when I had finished my first inventory, I took it back to my sponsor to take the Fifth Step. He looked at it and said, "This is garbage. You wrote this to impress me. Get away." I was stunned.

But I had spent two hours writing down some of the most dramatic things I had done in my life, and by God, someone was going to hear this. So I picked another man who was much more liberal in his approach, and set about telling him about my high drama. I would tell him something I had done, and he would gently say, "Oh, that was not that bad." As this continued, I began having a series of spiritual awakenings. I began to see the truth, and the truth was, I had once again picked someone who would tell me what I wanted to hear, so I would not have to do anything about changing. I saw that if I did not stop this now, I would soon die a very ugly death. I am not, and was not, afraid of death, but to die an ugly death meant that for some period of time just before, I would have to again live a very ugly life, and this thought was more than I could handle.

I returned to my first sponsor, who showed me precisely how he and our founders wrote inventory. I came to understand that if I resent you, then you own me and how resentment is

the grand-daddy of all spiritual diseases because it separates me from God.

So, I wrote my second self-examination without knowing who would hear my Fifth Step. My sponsor said it might be him, but I was not to write it with him or anyone else in mind, because I could color it. When I was finished, I was to pray, then I would know. My memory was still damaged, and my understanding was small, but the time came when I knew I had done all I could. It was as thorough as I could make it.

As I prayed about who I would ask to listen to this Fifth Step, using the guidance in the Big Book, my friend Jim came to mind. I had a strange new feeling for Jim. I wanted things to be better for him, and for him to feel better. Jim had a problem I did not have. He did not know why he was in this prison. I did. I had done what they said I had done, and could remember the act full well. Jim could not. He had done what so many of us had been afraid we might have done. In a drunken blackout, Jim had killed someone with his car. They could tell Jim about this, but he had no memory.

I was told that I should pick someone to hear my Fifth Step who would be unaffected by my story, and Jim was too preoccupied with his own woes to be affected by anything I might tell him. Also, I wanted to help Jim in some way, and I had somehow grasped the truth that the best way for me to help another alcoholic is to

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share the garbage of my life with him.

It made for quite an afternoon! I took my shabby little inventory, and Jim and I went up to the school and while I told him about the selfishness and shabbiness that was me, my



friend just listened. When I ran dry, he would prompt me a little, and we made a few more discoveries about each other.

I went into that room a man who had always felt alone and different. I had always been so focused on myself that I made other people into whoever I needed them to be and never granted anyone the dignity of just being whoever they were. However, before the afternoon was over, there were two men in that room: me and a man named Jim. I have not felt alone and isolated since that day, and I know that it helped him as well.

I returned to my cell to review what I had just done, and experienced another spiritual awakening: I had finally finished something! I knew that in many respects I had just skimmed the surface, but for now I had done the best I could with what I had. I had finished something!

That was twenty-five years ago, and since that time I have listened to literally hundreds of Fifth Steps myself. And there is nothing new in any one of them, though there is always something new as a result of each one.

There will always be attitudes that get between me and God and between me and other people, but I have not improved or changed the method I learned in the Fifth Step of uncovering, discovering, and discarding such things.

I am now a long distance runner. I am in for the game.

Don P., Aurora, Colo.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Buttons, Oranges, and 16 Cents



I was the kind of drunk who arrived at the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous with the conviction I had no defects at all. I claimed, "I never stole, cheated, or swindled."

Once my ego was deflated somewhat I was able to admit that yes, perhaps I did have these same defects – but not at the extremes that others talked about.

But, as Step Six says, "We who have escaped these extremes are apt to congratulate ourselves . . . But when we face up to the less violent aspects of these very same defects, *then* where do we stand?"

In my drinking days I would go grocery shopping and put thirteen oranges in a bag, claiming it was a dozen. I had this idea that people owed me something, that these stores had a lot of money, that the prices

were too high anyway. I recall, too, trying on clothes in a department store, finding something I liked and switching price tags so I could get away with a lower price. "That wasn't stealing," I reasoned in my state of self-delusion. And why should I report all of my income on my unemployment insurance cards? "I paid into it, didn't I? How am I supposed to live on this?"

It was last year that I told my sponsor I was having a lot of trouble understanding Step Six. She asked, "Are you entirely ready?" I said, "I don't know. I'll have to think about it." I thought, "Entirely ready for what?" Four days later, after reading up on Step Six again, I realized how simple it all was. It was just as she had said: "Was I entirely ready to walk on the road that headed to perfection?" I believed at that time I was.

Sometime in my ninth year of sobriety I bought myself a new shirt. I

wore it a few times and lost one of the colored buttons. I thought to myself as I did in the past, "That shirt is brand-new. I paid a lot for it." I planned how I would return to the store and steal a button from the same kind of shirt. Yes, there I was trying to twist a button off a shirt hanging on the rack. My young son was tugging on my arm, saying he wanted to go look for a toy in another store. He wasn't paying attention to what I was doing. Then he added, "I won't steal it, Mom." We had talked about stealing earlier that week, at home in a family discussion. His words hit me. I thought, "What on earth am I doing?" I didn't steal the button.

Over the past few months I have had a number of tests to see how "entirely ready" I am. It was again with the "less violent aspects of these defects."

I sat with a receipt in my hand from my babysitter, changing the amount so I could cheat social assistance out of some money. The old thinking was back but I said to myself, "No, you've got to be honest."

Not long after this, I had to make some long-distance personal calls and I figured why not make them during work and record them as work-related calls. The old thinking was: "You can get away with it. A lot of people do it." But I couldn't. I thought, "You're on a different road now."

Then there was the magazine I had seen at a local clubhouse. I noticed an article in it that I wanted to read. Instead of asking to borrow it, I

shoved it in my purse. I used to do that in my drinking days.

I suppose the icing on the cake was when I was grocery shopping and saw two cans of soup, one for 99 cents and the other for \$1.15. They were the same brand but the flavor I wanted had the higher price on it. You guessed it, there I was trying to switch price tags. But I decided against it and took the higher priced can to the checkout. The cashier recognized the brand and immediately charged me only 99 cents without my even opening my mouth.

I left the store feeling smug and drove to pick up a receipt from a junkyard where I had bought a part for my car. The receptionist said she had just run out of receipts and could get me one the next day. I didn't trust her so I asked for something written on blank paper. She laughed as she wrote it out, adding, "I'd never gyp anyone for seventy dollars. I wouldn't sink that low! If I was going to cheat anyone it would be for a million dollars." There I stood, receipt in hand, thinking of myself and the lousy 16 cents I had just cheated the store out of. Step Six says, ". . . most human beings don't suffer these defects at these rock-bottom levels," but standing in the junkyard, right then and there I felt like rock bottom.

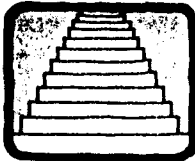
Step Six further states, "It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk. The only question will be 'Are we ready?'" I believe I am now ready to walk.

L. D., Cutler, Ontario

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The Words and the Music



The room was round with a vaulted ceiling. The lamp that had been at the peak of the ceiling was no longer there. Water from the rain seeped in. About every thirty seconds a drop would fall on a small rug directly below. The only light was from a large candle held high by an ancient candelabra. The smell of incense came from a table set against the wall. Chairs were set in a circle around the room. The occasion was my AA birthday and the Seventh Step meeting led by "Flaquito," a tall, slender, long-haired youth whom I sponsor.

We took turns going around the room, sharing our character defects, where we were with them, our experience of the Seventh Step, and where

we were with it. The last person was sitting on the rug in the middle of the floor and just finishing his sharing when the two of them walked in.

Sean and Mac, sponsor and "baby," are both in their early twenties. Sean has six years and Mac has two. They both have ponytails, like sports, work hard, and are finishing off junior college and getting ready to go off to different universities to continue their education. I know them both well. All of us in the group are sponsor and baby, sometimes several generations down.

They took their turns sharing, in that deep, sincere, frighteningly honest way they have. They told of their fears, their failures, their struggles, small victories, and great hopes. Sometimes when I hear them share, it brings tears to my eyes. And when

they pray out loud, from the depths of their being, I am sure that God must cry.

There was a long silence as everyone let the experience of the beauty of the sharing sink in. Honesty is of such beauty. Then something else happened. Sean and Mac turned to me.

"Jim, we've been kidding you for months now about getting another sponsor and working a real program for a change. When are you gonna do it?" I protested that I had a sponsor, saw him once a month, and was following direction. They kept pressing me. What I was doing wasn't enough and the sponsor I had was too old and ill to give

me what I needed. Manuel broke in with an observation on one of my character defects. This was my way out. It was easy to defend myself from this one and it would take the heat off. But Sean cut me off. "Jim, this discussion isn't about that, it is about your need to get a new sponsor and get serious about the program." "Yeah," said Mac. "You used to have the words and the music, but now I only hear the words, no music. You don't sound real any more." They wouldn't get off of it. They wouldn't let me go. They had me cornered in a round room.

They didn't threaten, though I know they could. I could feel



their concern, their caring. But that's not what did it. I looked at them and said: "You two know me and care about me. I'd be foolish not to listen to you." But half a surrender was not enough. They kept pressing. In the dim light of the candle, I could see the serious looks on their faces, the reflections in their eyes. I could feel the intensity in their voices. We had been through a lot together. We knew each other well. The love I have for them surged up within me. That's what did it. I gave in. Not because they loved me, but because I loved them. The words came up without thought, from deep inside me: "I'll do whatever you want." I had surrendered, one more time.

We were all quiet. Finally Sean broke the silence: "Come here, Jim." He met me in the middle of the room and gave me one of those big, long hugs he gives when things are just right. Then Mac. Before, he had been my "brother baby." We had jumped

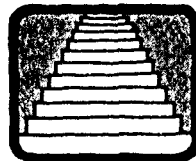
through the same hoops, gone through so much together. A drop of water fell on my head. I hardly noticed it. I was flooded with all the things they were saying without words, like: "Next time Jim, don't be so hard on yourself, surrender faster . . . You know that and you know why." We were silent for a long time, just listening to the rain outside, and our feelings and thoughts inside.

"Flaquito" had been observing all of this, his eyes popping out of his head. This kind of sharing-caring was new to him. I gave him a copy of the Seventh Step. He knelt down in the middle of the rug and began to read it by the light of the candle. We all joined in by memory.

As one who believes in logic, I'm inclined to think that things will go a certain way, "by the book." In AA they don't happen that way. It is not the language of books that counts. It is the language of the heart.

Anonymous, Los Angeles, Calif.

Humbled by Humor



After seventeen sober years, one deeply engrained shortcoming remained. I decided to try really hard . . . for the umpteenth time. On my knees at bedtime I was ready to pray. I had planned all the usual heavy-duty mea culpas, replete with guilt and shame, pleas for forgiveness, promises to pray for those this shortcoming had harmed, apologies for not letting go, praises ad infinitum for my God's great mercy on this terrible sinner – err, shortcomer – and a very long grocery list of things I wanted to say to God, ending, of course, with the

usual half-hearted request that he remove this shortcoming of pride and lust.

An epic Step Seven prayer. Maybe later in life, I thought, I would reprint it as an aid to newcomers.

I began.

"Lord, I'm imperfect but if I ever get to heaven, you can make me perfect." And just when I said "perfect," something happened.

Involuntarily, I passed gas.

Shock at flatulence in the presence of God!

I laughed. More shock at my laughter! I laughed some more. I laughed and laughed until tears streamed down my face. I tried to begin my

prayer again but still laughed. "God, thank you for humor. Good night," I said, collapsed onto the bed, and laughed myself to sleep.

Now that the puritans and censors have ripped out this page and left in a huff, let's continue.

Since that night, God has removed this shortcoming. The connection? Humor unlocked the door. We only laugh about things which are dear to us. That's why so many jokes are centered on sex, politics, and religion – our most precious relationships with our family, our fellow man, and our God. Humor is a great sign of recovery and healing, and until we can laugh at our past, we will not recognize our imperfections or be humble. "Humor" and "humility" both have the same word ancestor.

My favorite quote from the Big Book is this: "First of all, we had to quit playing God." I apply it to each Step. In Seven, I present myself to God as human, halfway between heaven and hell, neither a god nor a devil. And I ask, expecting an answer, that he remove "any defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows." I don't ask him to remove shortcomings which will make me perfect. I will die with several shortcomings, which means I will die human – and, I hope, humble and humorous.

The Big Book warns us that "we are not saints." My friend, the Akron archivist, told me she's someday going to write a treatise entitled

"Character Defects of the Saints." We need to be reminded that our character defects keep us humble and dependent on God.

"H" words surround Step Seven and me. I'm "home" in Seven. You have to have a home before you can leave it. Which, to me, means I cannot enter the outside world of non-AA in Steps Eight and Nine, unless I'm at home with my god and myself in Step Seven. Home is a place where I can always be myself, a sober alcoholic. If there's no home, I'm lost, drunk.

The most popular AA prayer – "Help!" – is what I ask God for in Step Seven. Not "Help me remove" but just plain "Help." We ask and God answers: Yes, No, Maybe later, Only these. For years, I refused to recognize God's "No" concerning my long-term deep, dark shortcomings. Over the past six years, he has blessed me with over thirty pigeons so apparently that defect didn't prevent him from using me to do his bidding. And, of course, the majority of those newcomers were just riddled with my shortcoming. God has a sense of humor!

Well, folks, Step Seven begins "Humbly asked" . . . but lately, for me it starts, "Humorously ask . . ."

Years ago, a Grapevine contributor used the wonderful phrase "the whisper of humility." I pray you hear it in Step Seven.

And I pray you also hear God's laughter.

Anonymous, Wheeling, W.V.

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them. all.

A Deeper Surrender



Almost three years ago I moved from a relatively large urban area to a smaller town. At the time, I had just celebrated my second AA birthday and felt well-grounded in the program. My sponsor told me that I would undoubtedly miss my AA friends and the meetings where I had gotten sober, but he knew that once I was settled in the AA program in my new community, everything would be fine.

The move went well and before long I had started my new job. I began to attend AA meetings in my new community, but found it very difficult to adjust. My new home was a mill town, and as a "professional" person I found it hard to relate to anybody I heard in the meetings I was attending. To make matters worse, I did encounter one gentleman in a meeting

– himself a "professional" – who I thought would make a good sponsor. When I asked him and he declined I was crushed.

This began for me a rather long difficult period during which I attended meetings but didn't commit myself to any friendships within the Fellowship. As soon as a meeting was over, I'd be the first one out of the door. My weekends were invariably spent in the nearest large city, where I used the hustle and bustle to distract me from the reality that I was becoming increasingly isolated and alone.

After about a year of this I finally reached my bottom. Following a community-wide AA event, I found myself walking out with the man whom I had asked to be my sponsor when I first moved to the area. As I shared about my many troubles – not the least of which was his refusal to sponsor me – I started crying as pent-up emotions spilled over. He listened at-

tentively and then nonchalantly suggested that I ask him again to be my sponsor. I thought this was nervy – he ought to be asking *me* – but I complied. He agreed to sponsor me, but wanted me to start working the Steps all over again. I was, of course, insulted.

Like it or not, I was going through the Steps one more time, just to satisfy my new sponsor, one of the last of the great Big Book thumpers. After a period of time, as I adjusted to his style of sponsorship, I got more comfortable. All went well until one day, as we sat in a local coffee shop discussing my Eighth Step amends list. As he scanned the names – almost all of whom were colleagues where I worked – he suggested that doing my Ninth Step with these people would involve telling them that my amends was part of a program of recovery from alcoholism. It was now that I learned the true meaning of the words "aghast" and "thunderstruck." I was speechless. How could I possibly share the fact that I was a recovering alcoholic with people who worked under me? Word about the fact that I was an "alkie" would spread all over work. I was finished. My sponsor left me sitting in the coffee shop to stew in my juices.

It was several days of sheer agony before I began to recover my wits and discover, for myself, that I would have to go through with making my Ninth Step amends as my sponsor suggested or risk drinking again. There was no escape. And so finally,

How could I possibly share the fact that I was a recovering alcoholic with people who worked under me?

late one afternoon, I made my way to my boss's office. I had decided that I should share this dark deep secret first with him before word reached him from another source once I started my amends-making. To my astonishment, he was warm, understanding, and sympathetic. I left his office feeling several tons lighter, and the way was cleared for me to make all the amends I needed to make.

My first sponsor used to say that to survive in the AA program, you had to continue to surrender at deeper and deeper levels. I certainly understood that intellectually. But it's only through day-to-day living that I've really come to appreciate what that means. The surrender process was essential for me when I finally took my First Step; it's equally indispensable to me now as I learn a little more each day about how I can live comfortably in my own skin.

B. B., Longview, Wash.

The Last Burning Embers



This past February, I celebrated sixteen years of sobriety and during this time my life has been for the most part very wonderful.

In my drinking years I did many things I was not to be proud of later, and for all but one I had made amends. For this one event I could never find a way to start the amends, so I just prayed about it. Back in 1963, I had started a fire which destroyed a construction company. The fire was set by throwing a lit bottle of gasoline into the structure.

About a year ago, I was promoted to a new job in a different city and I no longer had to drive by this place. I thought I'd finally be able to forget about this event. I found a new AA home meeting, and every Saturday morning and Sunday night I was there. Our Sunday night group is a very special men's meeting and someone with long-term sobriety was needed to lead the meetings. I took over the task.

Things were going very well, and this past Friday one of the new members and I met at the club and I asked him if he'd like to go to lunch. We started talking and he told me that he was from my hometown; in fact, he used to live on the same street as the construction company had been on. I said to him, "I really feel funny when that street is mentioned, because I started a fire there back in 1963." He paused and then said, "That was my father's company and I have always said I would kill the bum if I ever met him."

I was so embarrassed I could hardly speak. We finished talking and then left. I went to speak with my sponsor and he to speak with his. That evening I read and reread Steps Eight and Nine. I prayed about what to do.

At the Saturday morning men's meeting, I asked for the topic of Steps Eight and Nine and told what had happened. As I listened to what members were saying, I felt God was instructing me on how to make this amends.

It became more and more evident

that I needed to speak with the owner of the construction company now. Not only did I have an amends to make, but his son was carrying a secret that was also my responsibility.

Sunday morning came and I called this new member and asked for his father's phone number. I also asked about his father's health condition and everything seemed to be fine. When I hung up the phone, I fell to my knees, crying, and said, "God, this going to any length is getting harder. I can't handle it." But I soon quit crying and felt that I could call. As I dialed the number I was praying. Then a voice said hello.

"Sir," I said, "my name is Ross and I just met your son and have found out how to reach you to make an amends to you.

"Sir, in 1963 you had a fire at your construction company and I was the one who started it. I never, until now, had a way of approaching you."

He replied, "I'm sure you paid dearly for your actions and I hold no ill feelings toward you. To call after all these years takes the courage that my son will need to stay sober. You are a fine example for him."

I said, "I was sure when I moved to this new town I'd be able to finally forget my actions of the past. I was shocked to be blessed with this opportunity to set right my deeds."

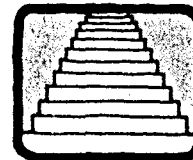
"Well, Ross," he said, "you can now forget and sleep in good conscience. Please continue to follow your God's instructions. Enjoy your sobriety."

We hung up and I called the son and thanked him for helping me with this final amends. Since then I have felt better than ever.

Alcoholics Anonymous has never led me astray and I'm so grateful to be a member of a Fellowship that continues to better people's lives.

Ross H., Ann Arbor, Mich.

My Three Miracles



My name is Ron. I am an alcoholic. Forty-six years ago, I was born in Detroit, Michigan, the seventh of eight children. My father and mother

were hard-working people who did all they could to support our family. I was the black sheep of the family. From as early as I can remember, I felt I didn't fit in. Alcohol played a major role in our family; weddings, births, funerals, holidays - any time

the family got together. I was taught how to drink at a very young age and was led to believe that manliness was measured by how much you could drink, cuss, and fight. I stayed that way until I found my way to AA in August 1989.

My active alcoholism resulted in two sick marriages and two divorces; the first, with two children, by the time I was twenty-one. I left my son and daughter in 1970 and only saw them twice in twenty years. My second marriage lasted nine years until I ran away from my two daughters, who were seven and four years old, in order to escape the responsibilities of being a parent. I chose my alcoholism over my families. I am now in my third marriage, with no children; it's a true test of my sobriety.

The "miracles" of the program that I need to share were very spiritual – and traumatic – in my recovery.

My father died at age fifty-seven in 1963 from an alcohol-related disease. I was eighteen and a full-blown alcoholic. I don't remember my father dying, only vaguely remember the wake, and don't remember the funeral – I was too drunk. For over twenty-eight years I resented and blamed my father for my problems with alcohol to the point of hating him.

In September 1991, the first miracle happened. While working Steps Eight and Nine, I realized I had only made cursory amends to my father and desperately needed to get rid of my resentments toward him. I de-

cidated to go to Detroit to make a graveside amends to my father. This was done after a lot of prayer and meditation and talking with my sponsors and friends in the program.

After asking my mother where my father was buried, I proceeded to the cemetery. It was a beautiful, sunny, cool September day that I sat on my father's grave and told him how sorry I was and asked him to try to understand. I cried and talked to my father, and God physically released me from the resentments. It was the most beautiful feeling I have ever experienced. My father and I are now friends again – twenty-eight years after his death.

The same weekend in Detroit, God felt it necessary to load me up with experiences. While giving an AA friend a ride, I had the opportunity to see my first wife for the first time in thirteen years. We just happened to drive down the street where she lived. My ex-wife told me my son (age twenty-four) was in prison in northern Michigan and my daughter (age twenty-three) was in a local hospital with a kidney infection.

The next day I decided to go to the hospital to visit my daughter whom I hadn't seen in thirteen years. The fear was astounding. I had no idea what her reaction would be, even what she looked like. I called my sponsor in Atlanta for help – no answer. I called another AA friend – no answer. I called my wife – no answer. I got on my knees and called God – he answered.

When I got to the hospital, I walked past my daughter's room so I could get a look at her, and she was beautiful. Our eyes met but she didn't know I was her father. I went to the nurses' station to find out her condition and was going to just write her a note and leave, but God wouldn't let me. I was scared, anxious, confused. I explained my situation to the attending nurse and she understood my fear and pain. She touched my arm and asked if it would help if she went in the room with me. It was as if God was there with me when we walked in that room together. My daughter and I are now friends. That was the second miracle.

I returned home thinking God was done with me, but he wasn't. He made it possible for me to get in contact with my son in prison.

An amends letter was written to my son. After having my sponsor look it over, I sent it. My son called me and his first reaction was of confusion. Why was his alcoholic father writing after all these years? I explained the best I could and my son said he understood. A few days later he telephoned me. He was filled with anger, rage, and hate. He called me every name in the book – SOB, bastard – and yelled at me for not being there when he needed me, never sending him a birthday or Christmas card, never calling to see if he was okay. It was the most deserving gut-wrenching call I have ever received. He needed to make it and I needed to receive it.

On Thanksgiving weekend 1991, with my son's consent, I visited him. He is incarcerated in the northern peninsula of Michigan, an eighteen-hour drive from Atlanta. When I got to the motel, a mile or so from the prison, I got scared and was going to turn back. I was in the motel room alone, crying and asking God for help. I got on my knees and screamed for guidance. God led me to a page of the Big Book where it says "We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being careful not to criticize them." I went to the prison to see my son. It was a strained and cautious visit. I was scared, not knowing what to say or do. Again God gave me the words to explain to my son. I told my son, "The reason I did what I did was that I chose my alcoholism over you and your family." There was no other explanation for what I did. We are still trying to establish a friendship. But we are communicating! Another miracle.

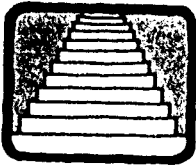
This was the most difficult but most rewarding three months in my recovery. I was told that AA is a simple program but not an easy one. I am glad that my friends in AA never misled me.

These miracles were possible because of God's grace and the Fellowship of AA. A closing comment: I was told (and it's in the Big Book) that there will come times in our recovery when only God can be there for us. This I know to be true.

Ron C., Tucker, Ga.

Step Nine

The Mending Process



During my first month in Alcoholics Anonymous I did what so many have done before me – I decided, without benefit of sponsor or sanity, to immediately make amends. For years I had been attending church every time the doors opened, hoping something would help me (it never occurred to me to quit drinking). In my prayer group was a woman who irritated the bejabbers out of me. How I tried to help that woman learn to pray! I behaved very badly. Upon getting dry she was the very first person I decided to make amends to. I called and said something like, “Dora, I just wanted to tell you that I love you,” and she promptly replied, “Thanks one whole heckuva lot” and hung up on me. I was crushed!

Each of the Twelve Steps has required, for me, a new surrender. And Step Nine was no different. For a long

time I agonized because nothing seemed to be happening as I wandered through Steps Eight and Nine. There was no comfort, no sense of having “taken” Step Nine. I walked around for a time saying, “I’m sorry.” But that didn’t feel right. That had been one of the favorite responses after every drunk and overdose. Those who had heard it over and over during those awful years were more than a little skeptical of this repeat phrase.

Finally it seemed to me the only choice I had was one more surrender, one more throwing in the towel. I can’t, he can, we will.

I never surrender gracefully. After being told by one of those quiet, serene old-timers to pray for willingness, I went home, stormed, ranted and raved, and generally behaved like five years old instead of fifty. Finally a sponsor’s admonition to “read the Big Book” dawned. I read. I cried. I finally fell to my knees and said to

old HP, “You already know my needs and wants, so from now on I’ll do my best – just please help me.” No more bargains, or threats, or drunken pleas. Another surrender!

I got my list out. At the top were two daughters and two sons. One daughter I had already started making amends to by being sober, caring, and responsible. I could see her acceptance of me. The three other children were another matter. One son I hadn’t seen in fifteen years, the other two not for seven years. How to make the approach?

The morning after my ranting and raving, I awoke to a hot August morning with a great sense of peace – yet a feeling that the day would bring something.

At eleven o’clock my phone rang. My daughter’s voice on the other end was saying, “Mom, I’m going to have a baby. Can I write to you?” She lived 700 miles away. She told me her youngest brother was in the Navy, and her oldest brother was married and expecting his first child.

And so it began. The God of my understanding gave me the opportunity to begin the mending process. What a lot of hill climbing that has been. And as with most hills, sometimes it’s up and at times it’s straight down. Then there are the plateaus

when it seems like I’m just marking time.

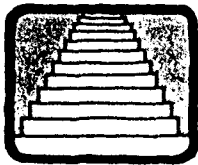
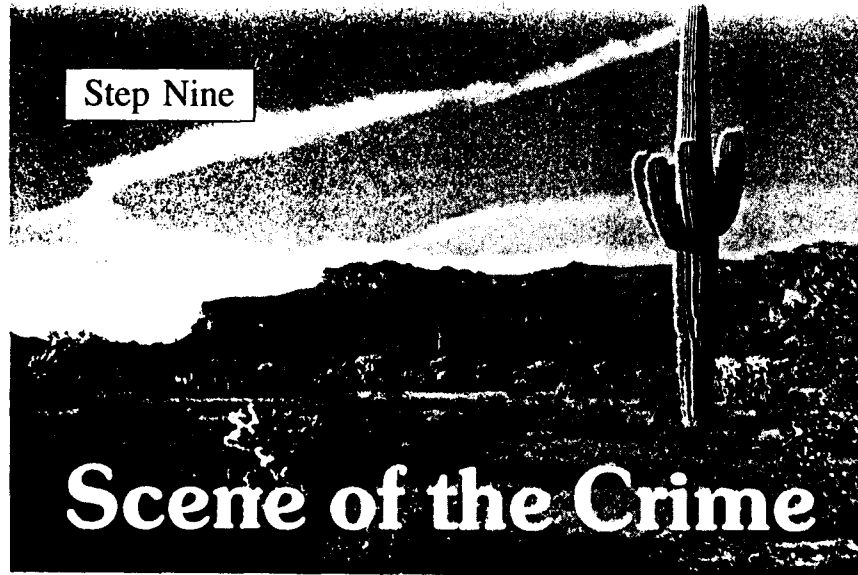
The pregnant daughter and youngest son are now “home again.” The oldest son – that’s another matter. I wrote him a letter trying to tell him how sorry I was that I left him when he was twelve years old. Two years after the first attempt, he allowed me to see his wife and son, but wouldn’t see me himself. Sometime later he developed Hodgkin’s disease. Through the years, I’m told, he also developed alcoholism. As far as I know, he has chosen not to treat either of his diseases. He still will not accept my amends, fifteen years after my first attempts. There are so many times I wish God’s timetable was the same as mine. But this I know for sure –

when my Higher Power thinks my son and I are ready for each other, we will be reunited. I have undying faith. It has happened before. It will happen again.

The great revelation for me was that direct amends are not a thinking or wishing process. Direct amends are action-oriented. Words are necessary for people to hear that I am trying to mend my ways, but it is the living out of the principles of this program that counts.

Corinne H., Raleigh, N.C.

*Made direct amends
to such people
wherever possible,
except when to do so
would injure
them or others.*



The rocks looked the same. The light in the sky at sunset was as I remembered it; the stillness and silence of the pinyon-juniper forest had not changed. This was the day I returned to the windswept landscape of northern Arizona from which I had fled five years before.

When I left, I was running from my alcoholism. I went 4,000 miles north of this land of open skies and silence, only to find that my disease came the distance with me. Once into recovery, I stayed where I had landed, building a foundation through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for a life of sobriety and serenity.

But I knew, during the years I stayed in Alaska, that I would one day return to the scene of my crimes,

for I had an amends to make there. So I found myself, during a vacation in the Southwest, driving the familiar road toward my old home. The time had finally come to face a ghost from the past.

In Sedona, I passed that same laundromat where the violence had first erupted, back in 1981. I should have left him then, but I didn't. There were a million reasons for me to stay, but the most important was that he was my drinking buddy, my provider. We drank and battled and made up for three more stormy years after the laundromat scene. I had been too fearful to leave him, too addicted to turn my back. The heart-pounding fear of his violent nature came back to me as I drove through town. I found the nearest meeting.

Appropriately, the topic of the meeting was fear. When I was called

on, I told the group that I was going to make amends to a man I feared; I confessed it was possible that he might hit me again, or worse. Although five years had passed since I had escaped from him, I was not at all convinced that he would greet me warmly. Nevertheless, the amends had to be made. Step Nine said that I had to admit to him where I was wrong. I chose to do this face to face.

A man sitting across the table from me spoke next. "Fear keeps a lot of us from making amends," he said. "But I have found no other way to resolve those conflicts which arise from the harm we do to others. You can face the man with courage."

He smiled at me. "Courage is fear that has said its prayers."

In Flagstaff the next morning, I sat in a restaurant where I had sat a hundred times before, drinking coffee with shaky hands. The ghosts were moving and talking to me from the walls, and the fearful part of me wanted to run away again. I prayed for courage and went on.

Closer still to my old stomping grounds, I stopped the car along the highway, deciding to walk a couple of miles to reach a volcano crater. I hiked along, lost in my own thoughts, hearing voices from the past. Once over the lava wall, I entered the volcano crater quietly. An eerie wind blew, creating jet stream highways for the birds and sweeping the air clean. The sun passed behind a tall spire of rock at noon and a shadow fell across my lap.

The volcano crater was a place of stillness and meditation. Five years before, I had come to this same place to make the decision to leave the Southwest for Alaska. I had felt at once terrified and aroused by the prospect of a major change. On that fateful day, lacking the perspective of distance and sobriety, I had taken a long look at my life and made a guess about the best path to take. I remembered these things now, as I admired the silhouette of a big old ponderosa pine against the curve of volcanic basalt. And I asked again for the courage to go back to face the man I had hurt by my choice of paths.

Later that afternoon, I cruised slowly through the neighborhood in which he and I had once lived. I looked at each little wood house for a clue as to which was his. Part of me secretly hoped he would no longer be there.

When I saw it, I drove past, backed up, pulled into the driveway, and then very nearly pulled back out. His car was there. Children's toys littered the yard. His name was on a sign next to the door.

Maybe he's at work, I thought, panicking. Maybe his wife doesn't want me around. My feet walked toward the door of their own accord. My heart was pounding. My face stung as though he had already slapped me.

When he came to the door, he recognized me immediately. With only a slight hesitation, he invited me in, introduced me to his children, and

offered me a chair. Visibly nervous, I told him I couldn't stay long, but that I had some things to say.

He went to get a beer, offered me one. I suddenly wondered what I was doing there. His home was a slippery place. Sending up another quick prayer for my Higher Power to put the right words in my mouth, I began to speak.

"I've come to tell you what happened when I left you," I said. "I told you I'd come back. I was lying to you when I made that promise, because I knew in my heart that I was never going to return. My disappearance hurt you, and I apologize for that."

He began to protest, to rewrite that five-year-old piece of history, to tell me how it happened. I had to interrupt him and ask him to let me have my say; for a moment, it felt like old times, me arguing with him about the facts.

"I am sober now," I told him, "and it's important for me to come back here and tell you that the problems we had in our relationship were at least fifty percent my fault. I always blamed you for everything – for my alcoholism, for my failures, for my misery. Those things were not your fault. You were good to me in many ways."

He didn't know how to answer me. So instead he drank some more beer and asked about my family. As I sat in that man's living room I watched his stature diminish before my eyes. No longer was he a cruel and vengeful

lunatic. No longer did he possess the power to terrify me. He was just a man with an alcohol problem. The moment I saw him for what he was, I could forgive him, for his problem was no different than mine. He just hadn't found a solution yet. He wasn't *looking* for a solution yet. I asked my Higher Power to be with him, and all the anger and fear dissolved into pity for a man still battered by his disease.

Soon I got up and prepared to leave. I thanked him for taking the time to listen to what I had to say. Shyly, he stuck out his hand toward me. I grasped it, then impulsively stepped forward and hugged him.

I drove away from the house without looking back. My shoulders felt light, as if a giant weight had been lifted. Until it was lifted, I hadn't even been aware it was there.

The tortured autopsies I had performed on that relationship were finally behind me. For the first time, I was able to let him go. He did not hit me. He did not seduce me. His power over me was broken at last.

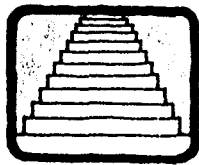
I enjoyed a buoyancy of spirit after that visit. By admitting where I was at fault, I was given the ability to forgive a man who had held me in bondage for years after I had left him. With forgiveness came a freedom that I had not anticipated. The amends had required nothing but courage, and a faith that my Higher Power would carry me where I had been too afraid to walk alone.

Kit K., Sterling, Alaska

Step Ten



Lost and Found



Several years ago, prior to getting sober, I was deer hunting in west Tennessee with a friend of mine.

During the course of the day's hunt, we got separated from each other and I suddenly realized I was lost. I had absolutely no idea of how to find my way back to my car. Panic set in and I began to wander aimlessly through the dense forest looking for a familiar landmark or a logging trail that would

lead me to the highway. I was no longer interested in hunting for deer. I only wanted out of that forest. Several hours later – exhausted, scared, and hungry – I emerged from the trees onto the highway just a few feet from my car. The relief I felt was immense.

One day while meditating, I happened to recall this dilemma in the forest and I realized that when I don't know where I'm going, it's usually because I don't know where I am. Consequently, I get diverted from the important things. Instead of building,

creating, and working toward goals, I revert to merely coping. For me, it is necessary to maintain a constant spiritual point of reference. This means doing an honest daily inventory.

The first time I realized the importance of the Tenth Step, I was standing in front of a judge on a charge of driving while intoxicated. I had been found guilty in two lower courts but had appealed both decisions. I'd rationalized that I was innocent because I'd been a victim of entrapment. This judge proved to be no less wise than the others. Not only was I found guilty, I was given extra jail time and fined an additional five hundred dollars. I'd been sober for over three months before this final trial took place and I had let fear and false pride stop me from admitting my guilt.

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

That painful experience took place over eight years ago and today I am still having trouble with Step Ten. The admissions today, however, are not quite as dramatic as the drunk driving issue. Today the issues are ego, resentments, control, and being judgmental. The prices I pay for neglecting my Tenth Step are anger, loss of serenity, and loss of spiritual direction. I know that if I am remiss in working this Step, I will eventually build a formidable wall of darkness

around myself that shuts me off from the sunlight of the spirit of God.

The Tenth Step helps me remain in the present. By immediately dealing with my daily problems and avoiding a buildup of emotional trash, I avoid the anxiety and stinking thinking that can result from procrastination. One day at a time is still a way of life for me. I only have today. Yesterday is history and tomorrow is only an illusion, but if I am diligent and honest in my daily inventory, tomorrow will surely bring new opportunities for which I will be prepared.

I have a goal which, I am sorry to say, I've only been able to achieve with varying degrees of success. That goal is unconditional love for my fellow man. I guess I am still carrying too much emotional garbage around to be able to accept others just as they are. I've made lots of progress in this area but my ego still keeps me at its mercy. At least I have some idea of what the problem is and can use the Tenth Step as a powerful tool in my struggle toward spiritual progress. That – along with the help of a forgiving God, a loving wife, and a sponsor who seems to be able to accept me as I am – gives me hope. Without hope, I would surely drink again.

Charles M., Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Step Eleven

Tuning In to Our Higher Power



I had heard the last half of the Eleventh Step many times in meetings:



“ . . . praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out,” yet I often wondered just how one can learn about God’s will.

One day during an Eleventh Step meeting someone spoke of “tuning in” to God’s will through regular periods of prayer and meditation. A picture of the TV set at home flashed across my mind. I saw myself twisting the knob to change channels, and with this came a new approach (for me) to this part of the Eleventh Step.

When I want to pick up the picture from a television station, I don’t start by asking the station engineer to tune the signal to the place on the dial where my TV is set. Instead, I turn the knob at home to find the channel that carries that broadcast signal. In other words, I adjust to the station’s setting instead of expecting it to comply with mine. Might not the same thing be true for the signals that come from my Higher Power?

Viewed this way the entire purpose of prayer and meditation becomes that of focusing on God’s will for me instead of asking for this or that according to my will at the moment.

Instead of expecting my Higher Power to change things to suit me (the equivalent of asking a TV station to move its signal to the channel where my dial is set), I need to focus my daily period of quiet meditation on creating a condition within myself that opens me up to, and accepts, God’s will for me. The first step in seeking God’s will is that of becoming receptive to it!

Since that day when the image of the TV set came to mind I’ve felt so much more in tune with the entire purpose of the Eleventh Step. The act of focusing on God’s will – as we are told to do in the second part of the Step – increases my success with the first portion that deals with improving my conscious contact with God as I understand him.

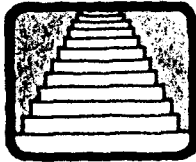
The “Twelve and Twelve” tells us that when we catch a glimpse of God’s will for us, and focus on the real and eternal things of life such as love and truth, we are no longer deeply disturbed by many smaller things that surround us in our daily affairs. Tuning in to a Higher Power truly leads to greater serenity – and to a much richer way of life!

George B., Alexandria, Va.

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Twelve

The Woman Who Had Everything



Forty-eight years ago I took the First Step to get into AA. But it was the Twelfth Step that kept me there.

In the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill W. said, "For me to stay sober, I had to help alcoholics to get sober." That is the Twelfth Step.

lasted for years.

While I was involved with helping someone stay sober, I forgot I was extremely self-conscious, forgot to feel inferior, worthless, and useless.

One day while I was volunteering at the clubhouse, a call came for someone to take a woman in to the hospital. She was in desperate shape and it must be as soon as possible. I said, "I'll go."

In Maria Louise's duplex apartment, I saw a whole new world. I had never seen anything like it - unless maybe in the movies. There was beautiful French period furniture, crystal chandeliers, a magnificent Chinese rug. It was a sight to behold.

ation. I had always believed I was an alcoholic because my mother had died when I was three, because my father made me leave home when I was fourteen at his new wife's request, because my family wasn't affluent - and here I was faced with a young woman who had everything. She had her mother and a beautiful home and wealth. And that didn't give Maria Louise sobriety. That instant changed my thinking about the causes of my alcoholism.

After a while, Maria Louise was persuaded to get in a taxi and go to

a posh eastside hospital. After she was put to bed and was medicated, the nurse gave me the responsibility for seeing that she drank orange juice almost constantly. It was part of the treatment.

I sat by her from four in the afternoon until one in the morning. It was an important opportunity to care for someone with all my heart, body, and soul. As a reward I had a warm good feeling that I shall always treasure. That was the beginning of a new good life for me.

Nancy, Kennett Square, Pa.



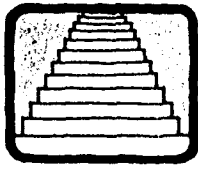
In those days I had little or no faith, but Bill was a living example that I had to believe.

For the next five years, everyone who came my way got the Twelfth Step treatment whether they wanted it or not. In time I lightened up a bit and began to make friends who have

It was also a scene right out of a Tennessee Williams play: a once-beautiful blonde in a state of frantic despair and fighting mad. Across the room there sat her little mother on a blue satin loveseat. She was holding her daughter's suitcase on her lap, trying to be helpful in a hopeless situ-

Step Twelve

Inward, Outward, Upward



Thinking about the Twelfth Step brings to my mind our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service. These make up my unwritten IOU to Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps . . ." This, for me, is the *inward* result of working the program. As a result of taking the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability, I have been changed on the inside. Major defects of character have been reduced in intensity and more minor defects have been removed. This is not to say that I am perfect – far from it! I still have a long way to go, but by the grace of God and by the principles of this program I have come a long way, too. I still like to go through "seasonal housecleanings," which the "Twelve and Twelve" talks about in chapter ten. Being human, I am going to make mistakes, I am going to have

good days and bad days; I will screw up. But this is all okay. It is all part of the learning and growing experience in living sober.

I am able to look in the mirror and accept myself, like myself, and even laugh at myself. This has been brought about by the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and God as I understand him.

Thus we have the *I* of the IOU. This is Recovery, the first legacy.

". . . We tried to carry this message to alcoholics . . ." for me refers to the *outward* working of the program – carrying the AA message. Well has it been written, "When all else fails, work with another alcoholic." In working with others, I am taking out insurance against taking that first drink. By caring and sharing with others, I provide a firmer foundation for my own program and I get out from myself and away from my own little selfish world where I am the center of the universe. Each time I try to carry the message to another

alcoholic whether by Twelfth Step calling, answering the phone, or making coffee and cleaning up the AA meeting room, I am helping myself. It is not up to me to keep anyone else sober; it is up to me to keep myself sober (with God's help, of course). This is Service, the second legacy, in its most basic form. Thus we have the *O* of this IOU.

". . . and to practice these principles in all our affairs." Now we come to the *upward* result of the program. It is referred to as "growing up." When I poured alcohol into my system as an immature teenager, then later as an immature adult, I stunted my own

emotional and spiritual growth. This even affected my mental growth. I look back to my post-secondary education, and I see that the lowest mark in my first term was higher than my highest mark in the second term. I was already an active alcoholic in my second term.

Thus, I cannot say that I experienced much that might be seen as emotional or spiritual maturity. I was ego-driven and self-centered even well into my sobriety. At times I must still keep my ego in check. If I don't,

others might help keep it in check (isn't that what sponsors are for?). So, for me, an important part of my recovery is about finally starting to grow up after all this time. This is the *U* part of the IOU.

I relate this to the third legacy of Unity. This is mainly because of the Twelfth Tradition which states: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." In trying to practice these principles, I am maintaining my recovery and a spiritual way of life which works "come hell or high water." My own recovery depends on AA unity (Tradition One). I shudder to think where I might be today if not for AA.

This comprises the gist of my IOU to Alcoholics Anonymous. I trust that this is a "forgivable loan." As long as I do my part in AA to give away what I have received, I am contributing to the "principal" of this trust. Maybe I will never be able to repay all I have received from Alcoholics Anonymous, but I can certainly do my part to help the still suffering alcoholic.

Norman C., Winnipeg, Man.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

A Father Forgives Himself

The road to sobriety is not an easy one. It wasn't for me. God in his wisdom planted several disturbing realities in my path so I could come to terms with the fact that I am an alcoholic, and that to continue drinking would ultimately be the death of me.

The upcoming birth of our second child was the beginning of the end of my drinking career. I didn't see it that way at the time. I perceived it as a celebration where I could spend a few days at home baby-sitting our two-year-old son Jamie, while wallowing in the forty-proof waters of my favorite pastime. For after all, I helped create the new child coming into our lives, didn't I? Shouldn't I be rewarded, patted on the back for a job well done?

Darn tootin' I should. It wasn't a wonder I was so useful in helping my wife, Linda, pack for the trip to the hospital that cold day in January. I repeated over and over again that I wouldn't drink, that I would manage the affairs of the house quite well, and both Jamie and I would profit from the experience. Inwardly, I knew it was a lie. I had no more control over my alcoholic drinking than

I did over an earthquake or a flood. Yet, nobody could tell me that. For after all, I was in control.

I was okay that first night. I drank enough to keep the screaming down and even managed to visit my wife in the hospital. *Tomorrow will be even better*, I kept telling myself. But I knew I was only fooling myself into believing what I wanted to believe.

The next day, after being told by the doctor to come into the hospital right away to assist with the induced-birth, I left my son with the neighbors and I took a mickey of vodka with me. Between helping my wife, going through the motions of assisting her in stabilizing her breathing – plus running back and forth to the wash-room to finish the vodka – I managed to get through the birth, unscathed. By six that evening, we had become the proud parents of a beautiful baby girl. We named her Natalie Marie, as

we had planned. Meanwhile I was looking forward to celebrating once I returned home and fetched my son from the neighbor's place.

During the next few days, I slipped in and out of blackouts, like a thief in the night making his rounds. I fed Jamie, tried to look after him as well as I could, but the drinking became the priority. Jamie had more naps than a normal two-year-old is ever expected to have. "Lie down, Jamie. Daddy's got important things to do." The quart of vodka in the living room kept calling to me like a sea siren.

One night, after missing another visiting time with my wife and new daughter at the hospital, I woke to a crashing sound in the kitchen. I had been lying on the couch in the living room, bottle of vodka within arm's reach. I sat up, groaned, and staggered out to see what in blazes was going on. I was stunned by what I saw. Jamie had managed to crawl out of his crib and had come into the kitchen looking for something to eat. Maybe he had tried to wake me. Maybe, after seeing he couldn't get me up, he decided to do a little food-hunting on his own.

Maybe God had a hand in it, too. *Make some noise, Jamie. Wake him up. It's high time your father took a good look at himself.*

Leaning back against the kitchen table, I looked down at Jamie and what he was doing. He had opened a bottom cupboard and broken a jar of jam on the floor. He was sticking his fingers into it, raising them to his

mouth and licking them. How he did it without slicing his fingers on the broken bits of scattered glass on the floor is beyond me. "Ohmygod," I remember muttering to myself. "What the hell have I done? What the hell am I doing?" I realized instantly how I had been neglecting my son, as I had been doing with my wife and daughter at the hospital waiting for a visit from us.

I cried myself through the rest of the vodka... I had another excuse to drink. Poor me. Pour me another.

I immediately raided the fridge for Jamie, anything to bury the crime and put it behind me. God, however, had other plans. My neglect hooked another link of guilt into a long and endless chain. After Jamie went to bed (this time with a full stomach), and after making excuses to his mother on the phone for not showing up to see them for yet another night, I sat on the couch for a long time and thought things out. God had opened the doors of my mind for a quick second. *Psst! Have a look, Mike. Can't you see what your drinking is doing to those you love? Don't you*

see how it affects them?

I cried myself through the rest of the vodka, agreeing with that bit of wisdom with several nods of the head. It didn't make a difference. Not that night. I had another excuse to drink. Poor me. Pour me another.

After Linda and Natalie came home and put a short end to the chaos in our home, I went back to work. A sick and shaking dog needing alcohol more than the breath of life, I tried to walk in the corridors of a normal existence. An impossible task for me. I was drinking uncontrollably now. There was no stopping me. God and the long arms of Alcoholics Anonymous were the farthest things from my mind. I couldn't see the light called hope. How could I? I had removed the bulb from the socket. I continued my downhill slide. I now needed alcohol to survive.

I was too sick to drink, too sick to stay sober, and heavily fevered over with a plague of guilty memories. I couldn't take any more. I wanted to die. I wanted to live. I wanted out. I wanted in. I wanted mindless serenity. Instead, I was given hope. Within a few months of Natalie's birth, I finally threw in the towel and jumped off the slave-ship called alcohol and came through the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous once again.

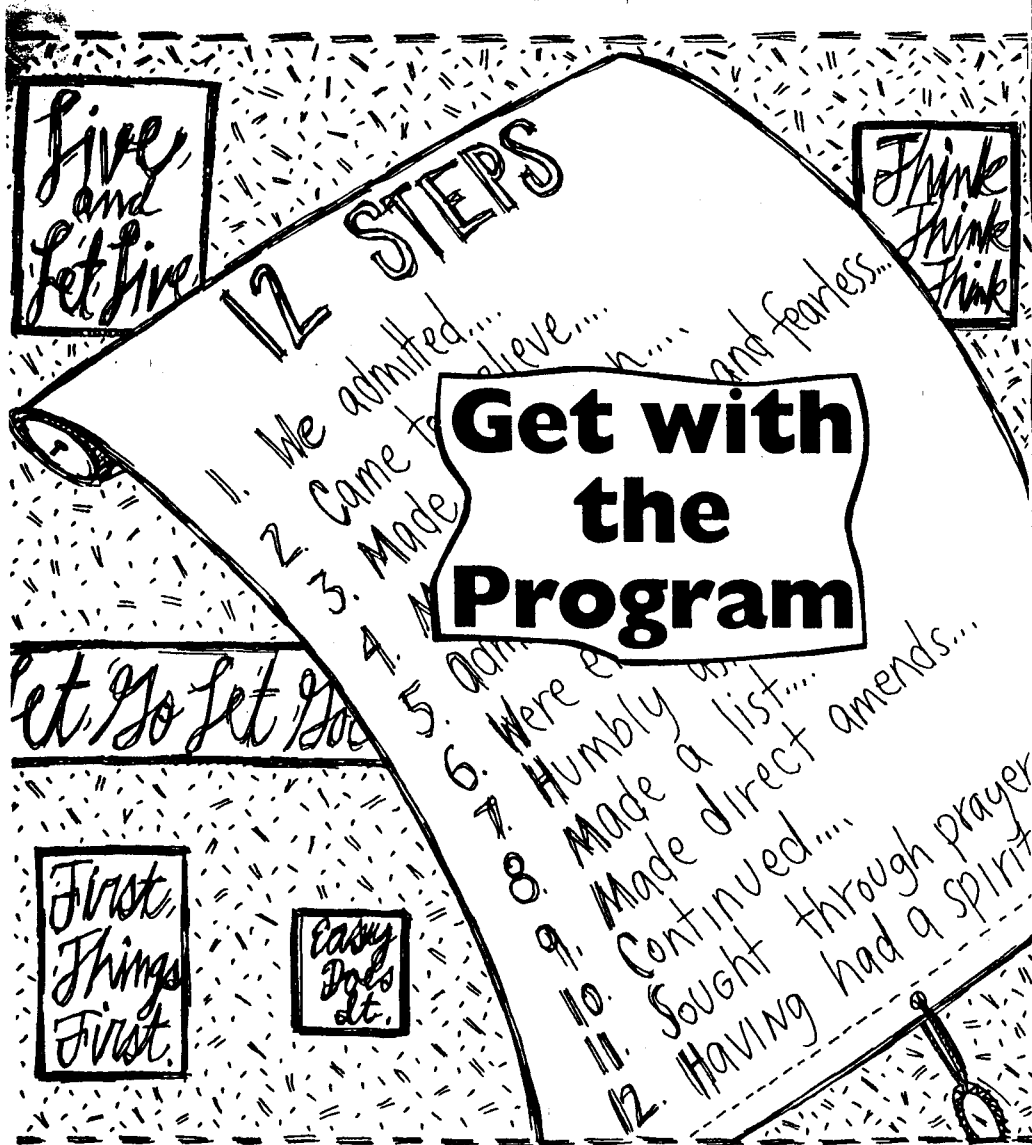
No, the path to sobriety wasn't an easy one for me. I fought it every inch of the way. I couldn't let go of the crimes against my family, forgive myself for my alcoholic behavior. I didn't believe for an instant that I de-

served sobriety. Not for what I did. Not for the hell I put my family through. I warranted death. Long hours of torture. Endless and public ridicule. Instead, as I stumbled through the doors of AA, I received a hug and a handshake. It took a lot of meetings, a lot of caring and sharing, a river of tears and a number of heart-wrenching executions of Step Five to come to terms with myself. It took that and more to learn to finally forgive myself. To come to believe that, once I picked up that drink, I was no longer myself but a victim of obsession, a slave in a galley with a long oar on the ship called alcoholism.

My greatest fear during those early years of sobriety was that my son and daughter would grow up and remember what a lousy guy their father was when he drank. I sweated those thoughts out for over a thousand twenty-four hours.

Today, I know they don't remember what I used to be like. All they know is what it is like now. We live a comfortable existence: Jamie, Linda, Natalie, and I. My kids don't remember Dad-the-drunk, the selfish beast whose thirst for whiskey outweighed his abilities to look out for them. They like the way their daddy is now. They know what I am. They know what I will be for the rest of my life. That I am an alcoholic. That I should continue to attend meetings to keep this dreadful disease of mine at rest.

Mike McP., Fort McMurray, Alberta



When I first got to AA, I heard a lot of talk centering around the word “program” – as in, “That’s how I work

my program.” But what the heck was a program, anyway? I knew I needed one, so I decided to ask someone about it. I asked Jane who was setting

up chairs and making the coffee for our evening meeting.

“Jane,” I asked, “What’s your program?”

“I go to fourteen meetings a week, I’m secretary for five of them, I answer phones at the central office three nights a week, I have one sponsor for each of my character defects, plus a Big Book sponsor, and a backup to help me when the others aren’t around.”

“Incredible!” I said. “How long have you been sober?”

“Ninety-three days, nineteen hours, and twenty-seven minutes,” she said. “And I’m doing just great!”

Well, I loved to hear what Jane said at meetings but I was exhausted just watching her go by. So I did what most of us do when a question is beyond us – I called my sponsor.

“Read the Big Book,” he said. “Chapter five says something about ‘program.’ See if you can find it.”

I somehow failed to see it but I sure came to love that chapter. Then, one crisp fall day as I was driving to work and listening to one of my AA tapes, I finally heard it: “Here are the Steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.” Son of a gun, the Steps *are* the program!

One of the dictionary definitions of the word “program” is “any organized list of procedures; schedule.” And that’s exactly what the Steps came to be for me.

First of all, nothing can begin unless I take Step One. I haven’t yet figured out what happened the day I finally went to my first meeting – that

hadn’t happened in the previous twenty years – but I went, and I’m still here. I had to take Step One and quit drinking to start the process of physical, mental, and spiritual recovery.

Step Two was the next logical place to go. I started to understand that while I didn’t believe in churches, I had to see that something or someone was working in my life that hadn’t been there before. The insanity part wasn’t hard to grasp – I had scars on my arms and news clippings in my desk to prove it. Then, as my mind further unclouded, I could accept that my life had gotten on track and that the new “engineer” was doing better than I ever had. Step Three fit into the schedule perfectly.

Step Four follows Three because, with someone like a Higher Power on my side, what could I possibly be afraid of? While doing Four, I wrote about meeting my soon-to-be ex-wife. My mind was thinking that she was attractive and had many personality traits that complemented mine as my pencil wrote, “I was looking for someone to take the place of my mother.” I dropped the pencil! Those words hadn’t been in my conscious mind. “For heaven’s sake,” I thought, “She even *looks* like my mother. Five foot three, brown hair and eyes, little dusting of freckles. Well, I’ll be . . .”

Step Five is fantastic. Once I had the character defects identified I wanted to do Five. With all this stuff out in the open, no one could trip me up with some awful discovery of something in my past. What a feeling of relief. Now Six and Seven became

possible and necessary. I very much wanted to get rid of the stuff that didn't work. That's the stuff that hurts! I wanted to become a friend among friends, a worker among workers – a contributing member of the human race.

The first Seven Steps, then, got me okay with me and with this Higher Power character. But I discovered that I still lived in a world of people I had to face every day. . . . and there were problems in this. Step Eight would identify those problems and get me ready for Nine. Eight was my preparation for speaking to persons I had harmed, which was a really big task for me. These were the folks that I dreaded seeing. And of course it was in seeing *them* that my greatest healing was realized.

I don't work Step Ten; it works me, especially when I'm screwing something up! My stomach starts to tighten and I can't put it off to the end of a day. I've got to stop right there and take a different tack or I'm going to be absolutely miserable until I do. A visitor to my home group meeting once said that Step Ten allows him "to clean up the wreckage of the present." That's pretty on the mark in my experience.

Ten has to come before Step Eleven because I can't get quiet to meditate or pray until I've dealt with lingering problems from the day just past.

"Here are the Steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery."

Prayer and meditation. Talking to God, as you understand God, and then listening for the answers. Amazing! You just kind of know the folks who work this Step by who

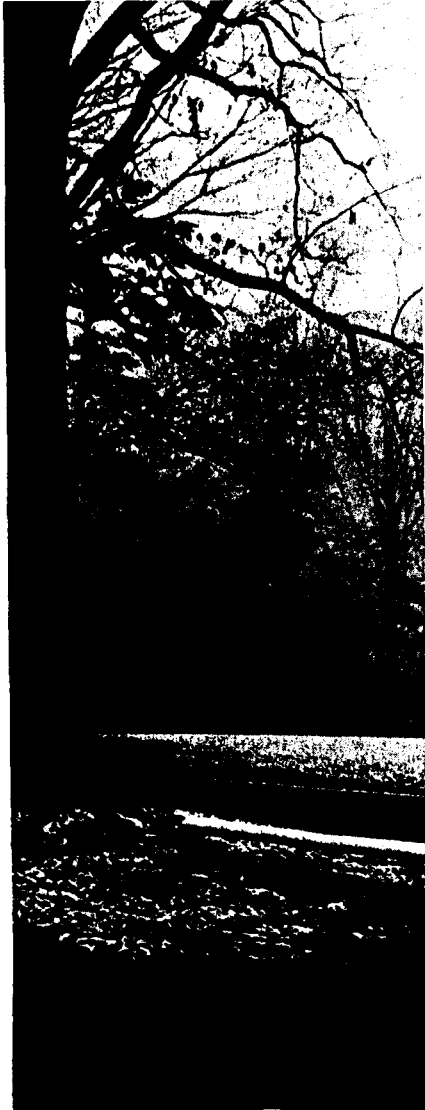
they are. They have an inner calm about them that tells everyone they're actually connected to a power greater than themselves. I'm getting there but I've still got quite a way to go.

Now for Step Twelve. My "spiritual awakening" is still underway and will be for the rest of my life. Sometimes I "carry the message" by just being a sober presence in an AA meeting, a presence that says to another alcoholic that there *is* hope. And the practice of "these principles" is evident in my daily doing of whatever I do in a manner that doesn't harm myself or others.

The single greatest thing I've gotten from following this program is the relationship I have with a Higher Power as I now understand it. At a meeting, I overheard a lady saying that "AA is like a wagon train. Some of us drive wagons and some of us are scouts. And whenever the scouts come back, they tell us it's really bad out there. But if you ask the wagonmaster for help, then you can drive a wagon – and you don't have to be a scout." I think she's on to something and I intend to keep coming back until I find out what it is!

Dennis O., Naples, Italy

'The Bondage of Self'



When I came into AA some years ago, I was told: This is a selfish program. In order to stay sober, it was suggested, it would be a good idea for me to keep the focus on myself and my own recovery. Down the road, as I got better physically and emotionally, I could become involved in service and Twelfth Step work. This was an exhilarating and freeing bit of advice, because all my life my caring and concentration had been for others – a codependent you would call me today.

From that time on, I became, for all intents and purposes, and with your permission, an obsessively self-centered, self-serving, self-focused sober alcoholic. Some might describe me as “an extreme example of self-will run riot.”

Oh, I did a bit of service here and there when asked, because I was told to never say no to AA, but it was drudgery cleaning those ashtrays and setting up chairs. Besides, I preferred to let others do the work so there was more time for me to tell you my “911 problems” before and after meetings.

This inflated sense of self persisted for about five years. I was locked inside a potential heaven turned to hell, and couldn't figure out why. It's been said that ninety percent of our psychological life is spent in unawareness. I was up to one hundred percent.

One dreary day at a meeting, I was wailing to someone about how lousy I was feeling, and he told me what

had helped him in achieving serenity – my elusive goal. He went on to explain that he had learned to put himself aside, to rise above his own problems so that others could survive and rediscover life. The simple act of reaching out to another drunk, he said, made him naturally high.

In desperation, I grabbed on to his sage advice and my life was never the same again. To realize that part of my recovery from a “seemingly hopeless state of mind and body” is being helpful to others started me on an upward spiral of spiritual growth. To drop out of human involvement as I had done, from an over-concern for maintaining my own sobriety, was not the answer.

My change of heart began simply. I began asking questions of others before and after meetings, and they responded. Through this process I became more tolerant of others' shortcomings and opinions. I tried to take a sincere interest in others and listen to them as they had been listening to me and, slowly, self-seeking began to slip away. The Third Step prayer in the Big Book says, “Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do thy will.” Buddha said, “Make of yourself a light.” The writer Ann Herbert says, “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty.” I say, “Dear Higher Power, for today let it all begin with me.”

Vivian J., Portland, Ore.

When Tornadoes Touch Down

I thought I would never grasp Step Three. It almost undid me. I fought and fought and fought some more. I flailed around in a self-induced cloud everywhere I went, like Pig Pen in the "Peanuts" cartoon. I couldn't seem to get enough fast answers, so I kept returning to my standard menu of willfulness and defiance.

Thank God a peaceful, wise AA in my home group quietly sought me out after a meeting one night: "If you're having such a painful time with Step Three, Katherine, you might consider going back to Step Two." Of course that had never occurred to me. Yet those simple words offered me profound relief from the storms within. Little did I know then that tornadoes would touch down again at Step Seven.

Step Seven has proven itself to be among my most difficult Step assignments. For me, no personal inventory or amends seem to compare to its fear or pain. Over and over I pray to be entirely ready and think that I am, yet when I actually face myself in Step Seven, I ultimately discover one thing that is so much a part of me I am unwilling to have it removed: Whatever would I do if I perceived myself to be loveable? Who would I be then? Thus I continue to thrash around in my unloveable self. And quietly unloveable I remain today.

Yet I feel newfound hope in spite of myself. One day, I sense, I will experience the relief in Step Seven, just as I have in Step Three – even if I continue to thrash around needlessly today. "Thrashing" seems to be my process. I have come to know that all is well regardless of the tornadoes and foolishness I create. I also know that if God wanted to remove my perception of unloveableness from me without my permission, God certainly could. So while my shadow-boxing continues today, somewhere amid the confusion, pain, and loneliness is a growing sense of mercy and faith.

So I continue to journey onward half-blind in sobriety. But the gift of sobriety itself lights my way. You have learned to overcome yourselves, so there is hope that I will too. I can only fight the bounty of goodness, blessings, grace, and mercy in my life for so long. One day in God's time I will come to know my own truth. All is well.

Katherine M., Quincy, Fla.



**Time
for
Transition**

The two phrases that kept rattling around in my head that morning were “praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out” and “I can no longer bring my best to this relationship.” The “relationship” in question was professional – my job.

I went through my morning routine pretty much as I always had, spending time in prayer and meditation, getting dressed and running out the door to catch the commuter coach into the city. I was returning to work after a

few vacation days. A planned trip to an AA event in Tulsa had to be cancelled at the last minute, but it had been a restful weekend.

As the bus made its way along the expressway and passed the harbor, I did what I’d done for years, listened to a tape related to being sober in AA. That morning it happened to be Steps Ten through Twelve from the “Twelve and Twelve,” and I was aware of a powerful sense of calm and peace within, of freedom and relief. When I got off the bus and

strolled through the concourse, surrounded by literally hundreds of commuters pouring off trains and buses and rushing past me to their jobs, my inner peacefulness was almost eerie, but not altogether unfamiliar. It was one of those I’ve-been-in-this-space-before feelings. I can remember the old-timers telling me about stuff like this happening “in time.” My sponsor had been suggesting that I focus on that one phrase from Step Eleven, “praying only for knowledge . . .”

So it was no big surprise, I guess.

The end result was that, just before going into the regular morning staff meeting, I announced that I could no longer bring my best to this job and requested that we establish a timetable for transition to termination. To this day, I am stunned

that those words fell out of my mouth. There was no new position waiting for me, but I somehow knew the time was right to leave. My patterns in the past (while actively drinking) had been to just walk away without a word, or stay so long that all I’d do was focus on what was wrong with everyone else. I was very good at taking *your* inventory.

Later in the morning, I got a call from Bob, our area chairperson. He was scheduled for a district outreach

meeting that night, and the two people who were going to go with him had to cancel at the last minute. Without much thought, I offered to fill in. As it happens, this district meets in what, as a line from a James Taylor song has it, “used to be my town too . . .” For years, it had been strongly suggested that I *not* go back there, for many valid reasons, unnecessarily setting myself up for pain being one.

Yet the words, “I’ll go!” just fell out of my mouth as had “I’m leaving” earlier that morning. Was this God doing for me what I can’t do for myself?

At this point, I realized that a call to my sponsor was probably overdue. I’ve been brought up in AA to utilize my sponsor as a sounding board *before* I go and do

something, and yet here I was calling to report actions taken – and rather serious ones at that. Not exactly my style, nor how she and I work together.

“Isn’t it just incredible how the Steps work for us?” was her initial response. “You’ve been asking for knowledge of God’s will for you, and it’s been shown to you!”

That night, Bob and I exited off the highway onto Main Street of my old home town. I’d be less than hon-

*I was aware of
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est if I didn't say there wasn't a huge lump in my throat. Letting go isn't without pain. I had loved this small country town and its people very much. On the other hand, it felt a bit like I was recalling someone else's life.

But getting outside of myself and giving back to AA what was so freely given to me works every time. Bob did his presentation, I had the opportunity to pass on information about our upcoming regional service assembly, and for two hours I completely forgot everything else. Amazing how that works.

Just outside the hall where this district meets is the starting line for an international marathon, a place where I'd stood as a spectator many times. I wasn't sure what the tears were about as I looked around – being there again after ten years, giving notice at work that morning? The fact that it was December 7, my daughter's twenty-seventh birthday? A daughter with whom I've had no contact since getting sober (by her choice). Whatever the cause, the tears brought a

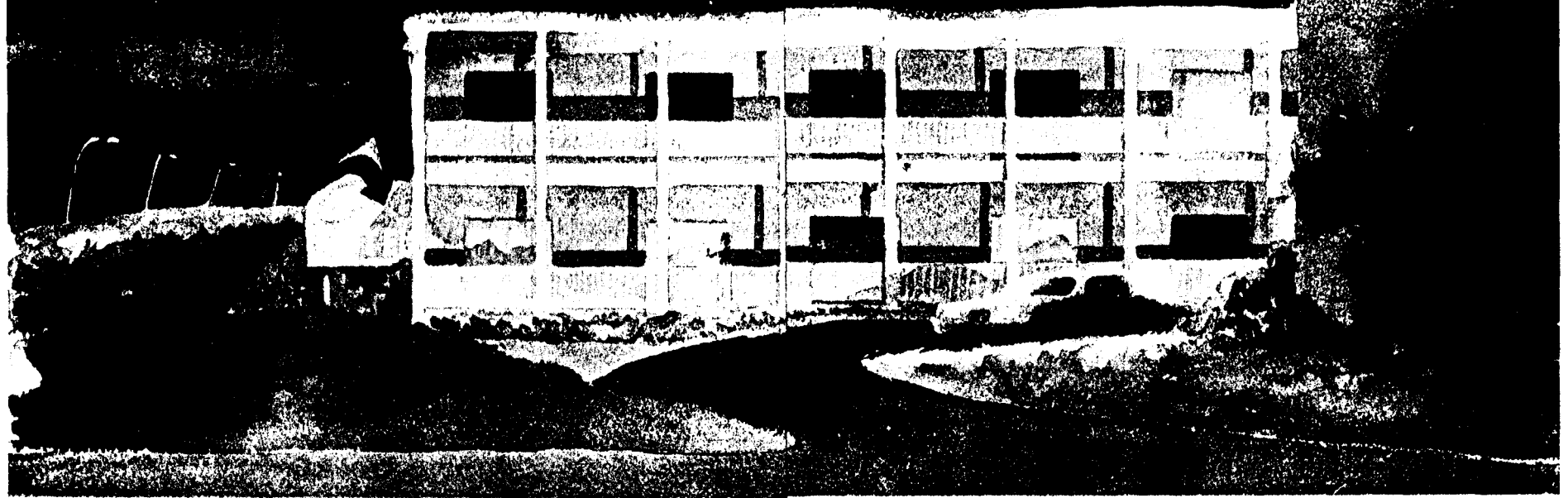
sense of relief more than anything. It was a time to step into a new chapter of this incredible journey we call sobriety.

A year and a half have passed since that eventful day. When asked to share at meetings, I pass on how much richer my life is for having had the opportunity to work in my former field for six years. Each day challenged me to apply the principles of the Steps to my thoughts, actions, and attitude. Some days were better than others. I grew up a lot emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

I'm in an entirely new professional setting now. It has not been dull. I don't drink and I go to AA meetings. I'm even more aware of just how powerless I am over other people, places, and things. Change has challenged me to turn more than ever to my home group, my sponsor, my service work in AA, my sponsees, the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. To the God of my understanding, asking only for knowledge of his will for me . . . and the power to carry that out.

Annemarie M., Raynham, Mass.

Accepting the Invitation



I was sitting in my usual spot when the call came in. My mind was drifting into those recesses where fear, anger, and frustration lurk.

When my sponsee asked me to go on a Twelfth Step call with her, I said "sure" at once, because that is what I had been taught and I wanted to make sure she got the same lesson: "When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."

We were told the lady was in a local motel and that she had many years in the program. My mind jumped around to what could I possi-

bly say to someone with that many years and me so few. What happened? Did she quit going to meetings? Did she not do inventories? Did she isolate? All those warnings I heard in meetings, came rolling over me.

My sponsee and I said our prayers and asked God to guide us and give us the words to help the poor, distressed lady.

When she opened the door to the motel room, all I saw was an older lady who was in obvious emotional, spiritual pain, and my first reaction was, as it has always been: to put my arms around her and give her a big hug.

She had recently lost a spouse and was coming through our state on her

way back home after the burial. Her grief had reached a point at which she needed to talk to another AA woman to help her through her pain so that she could continue her journey.

My sponsee and I listened while she shared with us her experience, strength, and hope, and especially her pain. I was able to share with her the grief I felt (and still feel) for the loss of my father. Together our burdens were lifted.

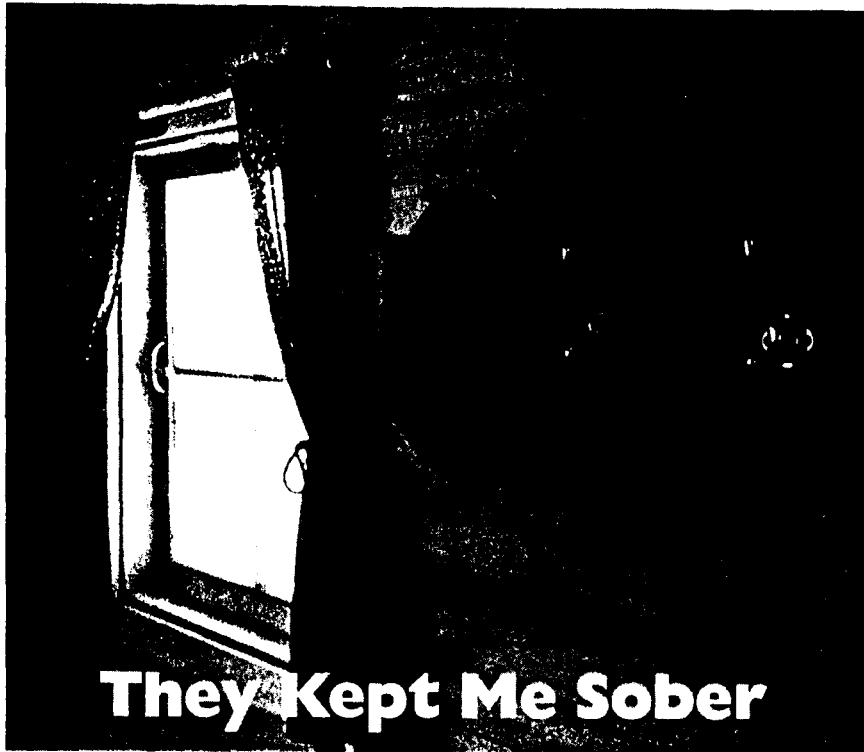
As we sat sharing, one alcoholic to another, we saw that beautiful transformation in our lady as strength and courage straightened her back and the smile slowly crept into her face. Our lady had not had an alcohol

relapse, but rather an emotional relapse. Fortunately, though, her time in the program gave her the sure knowledge of where to find help before she picked up a drink.

I knew I had been given a special gift. The lady is now a part of my life and it doesn't matter if our paths never cross again. In my God's giant jigsaw puzzle, our pieces were fitted together just for that brief moment in time and my life was changed.

My sponsor told me early in sobriety, "Accept the invitation and you will grow." I accepted the invitation to go on a Twelfth Step call and I in turn was twelfth-stepped.

Jolene N., Okmulgee, Okla.



They Kept Me Sober

The first successful Twelfth Step call I took came from a woman who was a high muckety-muck in the WCTU. She had chopped up plenty of beers in her time but was unable to stop her son from drinking. She told me that he hadn't been able to quit drinking after he came home from the war. She said if I'd come over and see him, she'd be sure he was at home. This was early in 1947 and we were taking anything we could get, so I called on him.

I told him, among other things, that if he didn't take a drink that day I'd

come back and take him to a meeting that night. Sure enough, he didn't take a drink then, and when he died in 1990, some forty-three years later, he died sober.

My second successful Twelfth Step was with Eli. I'd been friends with Eli since we both attended the same school in 1927. He lived in Los Angeles and I lived in San Francisco. I'd made several business trips to Los Angeles, but I hadn't called Eli because I knew him to be quite an opinionated gentleman. I knew I couldn't tell him anything, let alone that some-

thing like AA would be good for him, so I left him alone and prayed for him.

Then Eli and his wife had a big fight over what color rug they were going to buy for their living room, and he came up to San Francisco on a drunk. He telephoned me when I was out somewhere trying, without luck, to get somebody into AA, and my wife told him that I had joined AA and hadn't had a drink for over a year. This Eli had to see.

At 8 P.M., we opened the door and Eli fell in. We had a lot of experience with drunks by that time, so we threw a blanket over him and he was still asleep when we went to bed around ten o'clock. The next morning we found Eli in the kitchen making a pot of coffee to mix with the bottle of whiskey he'd brought with him. He wanted to know all about the AA that I had joined and all about how I of all people had managed to stay sober for a year now. I told him that if he didn't take a drink that day, I'd take him to an AA meeting that night. He stayed with us until his wife came and got him seven weeks later. In seven weeks we had enough of Eli to last us a lifetime – and then some.

Eli stayed sober until he died in the summer of 1979, some thirty-two years later. He was my best friend. His widow is still alive and I see her from time to time when I get to Los Angeles.

Now I should tell you about Bill. Bill kept me sober. His mother-in-law called me one Saturday and asked me to come and get Bill and stop him

from drinking any more.

I asked her to put him on the phone. She said he was too drunk to speak and her daughter was in the hospital and she was taking care of the baby. She said that her own life in Sacramento was going to pieces and that the chief of police had told her to call me. I said that I'd be right over. (Bill is still trying to find out what the chief of police had on me).

After Bill got sober, his wife ran away with his brother whom he was supporting at the time. His youngest son died of a drug overdose, and his oldest son stole his girlfriend's car and took it out to a beach and committed suicide there. Bill finally married a girl from AA and has lived happily ever after. I just attended Bill's fortieth AA birthday party.

Some time ago Bill and I were going someplace and it was raining hard and Bill was complaining bitterly that the windshield of his new car was leaking and so was the windshield on his yacht. I complained that the windows on my new office building were also leaking. Then he started to laugh real hard. He said we were complaining when we ought to be counting our blessings. He kept me sober these many times. I thought that if he could stay sober I sure could. It was the best Twelfth Step call I ever made.

I am now eighty years old and live alone in an old folks' home. As of October 7, 1993, I have forty-seven years of sobriety.

Jim W., Santa Rosa, Calif.

Serendipity and the Twelfth Step



As I was leaving the parking lot from my Saturday noontime AA meeting a few years ago, I saw a man across the street fall off his bicycle. He hit his head on some rocks and lay there bleeding from his forehead. He was still lying on the ground when I got there. I noticed the smell of booze right away. I figured that he was probably an alcoholic.

I helped him clean up the blood and gave him a ride to his home,

which turned out to be a stone's throw from the Alano club. I stayed and talked with him awhile and explained that I had been leaving an AA meeting when I saw him. The next Saturday I dropped by his trailer on the way to my meeting. He had just gotten off working a night shift and had a can of beer in his hand. I asked him if he wanted to go to the meeting. He said, "Okay," and I said, "Let's go."

When we got to the meeting, he

came inside and sat on the floor leaning against the back wall. When the meeting started there was a call for newcomers. Joe spoke right up. "I'm an alcoholic," he said. His speech was slurred. It was the first time in several years of sobriety that I had seen anyone obviously drunk at an AA meeting.

I took Joe to another meeting and then several months went by. I tried dropping in on him, but he had moved away. I left my phone number with one of his former neighbors so he could call me. He never did. I thought we had lost him. I started attending meetings in another part of the city. Then a couple of years later I went to a "happy hour" meeting at the club house and there was Joe with several months of sobriety under his belt and a sparkle in his eyes.

Serendipity often gives us unexpected opportunities to do Twelfth Step work. The Eleventh Tradition tells us that our public relations are based on attraction rather than promotion. The same principle – attraction, not promotion – works well with Twelfth Step work, too. AA is for people who want it, not for people who need it. If this weren't true, we could simply go into bars and promote AA to people who might need it – though it's not likely we'd find a sympathetic audience. Instead we can pick up on opportunities to carry the message to albies who have their denial shields temporarily lowered.

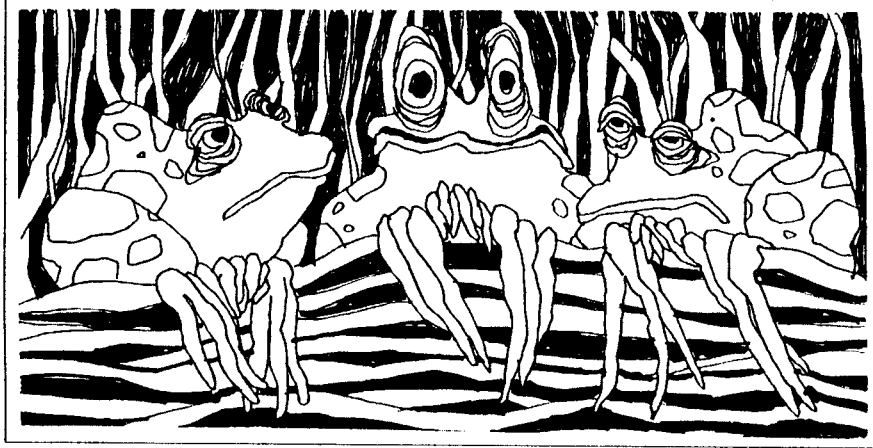
During my early days in the program, I twelfth-stepped a lot of friends – former drinking buddies of

mine. I knew a lot more drunks back then. It's true that you "can't give away something you haven't got," but anyone who's been in the program only for a few weeks may be feeling not only shaky and scared but also hopeful and a little bit grateful, possibly even elated at their second lease on life. If this is the case then they've certainly got something they can give away to their old drinking pals. And they have more credibility than ever, because they have just made the change. An old-timer might seem unbelievable.

My easiest Twelfth Step ever was to tell my wife it was okay to break my anonymity to a friend whose husband drank too much. Over the next few years we sometimes dropped by their house. I figured that if this fellow wanted to bring up the subject of drinking, I'd be glad to share my experience, strength, and hope with him. Another case of attraction not promotion. He never did bring it up, but I know I was thinking about Alcoholics Anonymous every time I saw him, and he probably was too. I went out of my way to be friendly to him and interested in what he was doing. A few years later my wife told me this man had been sober for some time. Perhaps I had helped pass the AA seed just by giving permission for my wife to break my anonymity.

It's easy to carry the message to alcoholics. Just reveal to them that you are a sober member of AA. If they want what you have, they'll know where to get it.

Rod S., Tempe, Ariz.



Three Frogs on a Log

Leading a discussion meeting one day, a member of my home group used a vivid example to clarify Step Three. Mike explained that he had had trouble with that Step until his sponsor gave him a simple illustration:

"Three frogs are sitting on a log. One of them makes a decision to jump into the water. How many are left?"

"Two," Mike responded.

"No," his sponsor explained. "The frog didn't jump; it only made a decision to do so. The actual jumping, if any, took place later. So there are still three frogs on the log."

Mike then explained how his sponsor tied this to Step Three. When an alcoholic makes a decision to turn his will and his life over to the care of God, this isn't accomplished immediately. It's by working the remainder of

the Steps, Four through Twelve, that alcoholics make good on that decision. The process of applying the rest of the Steps rids us of the bondage of self and brings us more and more under God's will and care.

One reason I like to hear Mike give the frog analogy is that he accepted it far more sensibly and practically than I did when I first heard it.

It was thirty years ago in Los Angeles, and I was newly sober. The speaker at my home group had been sober twenty years. That meant he was among the first alcoholics in that city to stay sober in AA when there were very few successfully sober men and women.

When he told the frog example, I could hardly wait until the meeting was over so I could explain to him that his story was unscientific. (I am more em-

barrassed to admit this than to admit some of my drinking behavior.)

"You were wrong about three frogs being left on the log," I began. "In all probability, there would be no frogs left."

The speaker's eyes widened. At the time I thought it was in astonishment at my knowledge of frog psychology.

"Here's why," I continued. "A frog's brain is not complex enough to make a tentative decision. Its primitive brain is unable to hold alternative courses of action in store for future use the way human beings can. Frogs act on instinct and impulse. If a shadow passes overhead, it may well be a hawk. So the frog jumps. If something in the water looks good to eat the frog jumps. And the other frogs reflexively jump to be safe or to get in on the meal. Result, zero frogs on the log!"

The veteran AA looked at me, then turned and walked off, shaking his head.

What I didn't realize until several years later was this: while it's true that

analytical frogs won't survive, the same thing is true of analytical alcoholics.

Like most newly sober alcoholics, I made the mistake of analyzing the wrong things. The old-timer was too polite to tell me that if I kept up that kind of pseudo-analytical thinking I could drink again. That I stayed sober wasn't due to my efforts but to my Higher Power and the patient, dedicated men and women of my home group.

Back in ancient Greece, when Aesop was telling his fables, there was probably an over-informed, literal-minded egotist in the crowd. I can hear him explain to Aesop that a cow couldn't talk to the dog in the manger, and if a cow did speak it would do so in cow language which the dog couldn't understand. The dog, therefore, wouldn't be morally enhanced by the cow's sermon.

In my mind's eye, I can see Aesop listening, then turning away speechless from the man who was too bloated with facts to absorb wisdom.

Lou H., Greensboro, N.C.

STEP 9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

LETTING THE SHADOWS LIFT

I hit my bottom twelve years ago in the living room of my parents' home. The final months of drinking were a seesaw between boredom and terror. Each night I was filled with the conviction that tomorrow would be different, but in the morning these hopes were forgotten with the first drink.

Shame led me to drink in bars, out of sight of my parents, and when I did drink at home it was only when my mom and dad were at work or fast asleep. Because of this, I believed I had sheltered them from my personal hell. How wrong I was.

The morning finally came when my hatred for the woman in the mirror was

so strong that I beat myself black and blue, wishing to die. The next day I called AA.

Within my first year of sobriety, without a grasp of even the first three Steps, I tried to make Ninth Step amends to my parents. I didn't know "the exact nature of my wrongs" and I had no real idea what needed mending. I was only aware of strife between us, and I wanted the discomfort to go away.

So I went to my mother with a mental list of "remember whens . . ." Remember when I didn't come home for four days? Remember when I did come home bruised and exhausted? Remember when I came home and the car

didn't? Remember when the car came home full of mysterious scratches, and I was nowhere to be found? Remember when . . .

I guess I was planning an itemized confession of sorts. But as soon as I opened my mouth, my mother stopped me cold. "Just do one thing for me," she said. "Don't ever bring up the past again." Her voice was sharp with anger, and rightly so.

I shared the story of my failed attempt at making amends with my sponsor and others. They pointed out that the Ninth Step says that we make direct amends except when to do so would injure other people. Not only did my mother not owe me a hearing, I had no right to drag her through a list of painful memories just

to relieve my own guilt. Certainly she didn't want to hear a detailed play-by-play of her daughter's self-destruction.

So how would I make these amends? I was told to begin by honoring my mother's request to not bring up the past. As the Big Book puts it, "There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could."

I heard a lot about "living amends." I

was told that all any parent wants is for his or her child to be happy. I was to show my parents a happy daughter.

But how? I wasn't happy. In fact, I was miserable.

The Promises tell us "we are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness," and that "we will suddenly realize

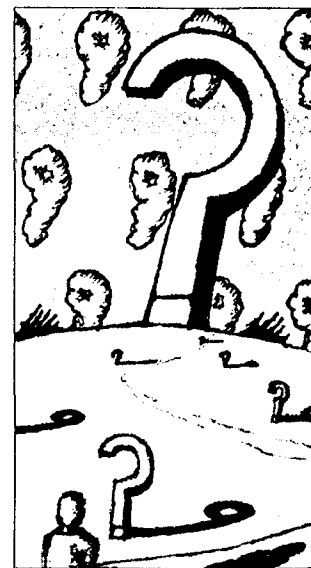
that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." These Promises, I was told, would follow the working of the first nine Steps, and it was suggested that I work those Steps in order.

Over the last twelve years, the Steps of AA have worked in my life, just as I was told they would. The Promises have come true for me in ways I could never have imagined. My family relationships have improved to the point

where an onlooker wouldn't know there had ever been a problem. Yet there was still a shadow between my mother and me.

Through inventory, I learned that "the exact nature of my wrong" was my selfishness. I had wanted my mother to know how bad I felt, but had never asked her how she felt. I am the one who owed her a hearing.

Mom recently came to stay with me for a five-day visit. While here, she



Step Nine

brought up the past. It's not surprising that she didn't talk about the specific incidents that I had tried to bring up years before. Rather, she talked about her sleepless nights of tears and fears. We talked about the whispered discussions she had with Dad at four in the morning, when they could hear only static on the TV and knew that their daughter was drunk and passed out again. She talked about Dad's denial and his eventual despair when the evidence that his only daughter was an alcoholic became too great to deny.

Mom talked. I listened. She shared her pain, and in the same breath said

she was proud of me. The living amends had worked.

Each morning of her visit, we sat on the front porch in shared meditation. We talked about the God of our understanding, the source of my sobriety, and the source of our strength. We sensed God's spirit flowing around, through, and between us. I felt a forgiveness and freedom I had never felt before, and I believe she felt it also. The shadow of shame was replaced with the sunlight of the spirit. God had truly done for me what I could not do for myself.

Sue F., Seymour, Ind.

STEP 3

*Made a decision to turn
our will and our lives over
to the care of God as we
understood Him.*

LIGHTNING BOLTS AND FURY

“God as we understood him”: This was just one of the many confusing statements I had heard in AA rooms. “You’ve got to give it away to keep it” was another. “Keep it simple,” an old-timer told me in his most assured way. Then in the very next breath, he said: “If you don’t have your own higher power, you can borrow mine.”

What does this “God as we understand him” bit mean anyway? For the longest time I had doubted whether these coffee-suckin’ scholars had any spiritual conviction whatsoever. I wondered why they felt it necessary to qualify their belief in God. This “as we understand him” business was the most

feeble profession of faith I’d ever heard.

But it occurred to me that maybe I had these AAs all wrong. Wasn’t it possible that they were just trying, with this Higher Power concept, to let some agnostic folks down easy? These holy rollers can be very clever. They know the surest way to scare off one of the lost sheep is to hit him both barrels with the redemption spiel — especially when the wayfaring stranger is still reeking of booze. Instead of fire and brimstone, this underhanded group of Bible-thumpers would slowly indoctrinate their pigeons with the piecemeal “God of our understanding” method. I pitied those who were glibble enough

to fall for such a lame con job.

But that was their problem. The religious fanatics in the program wouldn’t dare pin me down on theological matters, although at times I wished they would have. I had good answers for them. After all, I’d been raised in the Catholic Church. For as long as I could remember there had been a living, breathing deity in my life. He spun the earth on his fingertips, and every now and then, to make his presence known, he heaved lightning bolts through the darkness. The nuns let me know early on that my sole purpose in life was to worship and glorify this God. And their purpose would be to spread a little of God’s angry wrath in the here and now — whether I understood the divine plan or not. Stark fear alone drove me to the top of my catechism class and to the honor award each year. My understanding of God became well-reputed. My awards served as inscribed testimonials. So who needs a bunch of reformed drunks teaching him religion? Not me.

I squirmed in my chair whenever one of our more pious members would allude to Bible passages during meetings. Unfortunately for him, a friend of

mine shared my view that even the most casual scriptural reference had no place in AA. The two of us became so indignant with certain religious group members that we even discussed, as a protest, starting our own recovery program.

Despite my resentment toward certain people in the program, I was getting somewhat well (through osmosis, I guess). I had been around the program for a good while and was attending meetings on a regular basis. Early on, I was mercifully relieved of the drink obsession. I read the “Twelve and Twelve” with zeal and made great progress on my character defects in general. However, I had a problem with one of the Steps.

Each time I read the Step book, I would irresistibly skip from Step Ten to Step Twelve. Though I had read Step Eleven many times and had no difficulty in understanding it, the whole concept seemed too high-minded for me: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.”

“What mortal man actually thinks





like this?" I wondered. I believed that this Step was for people who were ready to sell all their worldly belongings and relocate to the desert for a strict diet of locusts and honey. St. Francis was surely an admirable man, but I needed a more current role model. I was light years away from reciting his prayer with any real conviction. In fact, all of my prayers were perfunctory and hollow. It was hard for me to talk to God. I figured that a hardheaded realist like myself was not worthy — and that was my problem.

I felt unworthy in many ways — not only before God, but in quite a few other areas of my life. Though I hadn't had a drink of alcohol in years and the program was starting to work for me in spite of myself, there were many other problems. I still dragged a deep-seated inferiority complex around like an anchor. My low self-esteem made it tough for me to get along with people at work (and with people in general), which made holding a job difficult. On an intellectual level, I figured I had as much on the ball as most folks; but for more practical, everyday purposes, I couldn't

accept myself as being the equal of others. I'd felt this way for as long as I could remember. This oversensitivity stagnated my development in business and social circles. It made me deeply resent myself and others, and led me into deep depressions.

Further reinforcing my feelings of self-doubt was the progress I saw newcomers make in the program while I continued spinning my wheels. I began to wonder if I could even make a good recovering alcoholic.

My salvation came one meeting in the words of a humble AA old-timer.

I remember him saying, "I have found that the happiest people in the program are those who claim to have a strong Higher Power."

His declaration was an eye-opener for me. My Higher Power was not strong. I hadn't allowed him to be. My relationship with him was so poor that he couldn't possibly exert his strength and power in my life. At that point, I realized that just like the many aspects of my character that were defective, so was my concept of God.

I knew that countless generations of

people all over the world had found God. They discovered him in many places and in a variety of ways: in their churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues — and through twelve-step programs. I hadn't found him at all.

I began to wonder if the Catholic Church had failed me. The "God of our Fathers" had worked for my mother and her mother before her, but in my alcoholic mind, I had decided that this God simply wouldn't work for me. The whole notion of a faith that works had eluded me. My understanding of God was precise and intellectual — and nothing more. Though I could hardly believe it possible, for all intents and purposes I was an agnostic. I realized that I'd have to rethink the whole God concept.

"Maybe there's something to this God-as-we-understand-him thing," I thought.

I knew that my aversion to the God of my childhood had kept me from practicing Step Three in the way it is written, turning my will and life over to the care of God. Yet at times, I strangely assumed that I had. I began to realize that it wasn't enough to simply understand the Step: action on my part would be necessary.

My problem with Step Eleven also became quickly evident. How could I improve a conscious contact that didn't exist in the first place?

I asked myself, "If there truly were a God, what would he be like?"

Maybe he'd be like some AAs say: a

loving, caring creator, a personal God that I could contact at all times. I wondered if this was not too simplistic to be real. If I could borrow another's Higher Power, could I not create a similar one of my own? I found that I could.

I started praying to my new Higher Power every morning. To my great amazement, the silent and informal prayers began to work. It was like discovering that I had a powerful and dependable friend who was capable of drastically improving my life, yet for years I had doubted his influence and therefore ignored him. No longer were my prayers like whistling in the wind. Through practice, they now gave me great peace of mind.

Reapplying the Steps with my new God-consciousness led me to the spiritual awakening I thought I'd never have. As a result, I've learned the meaning of a new word: humility. The word itself has a personal meaning that brings to mind the Serenity Prayer. When I was able to accept myself, others, and the world around me all being the way they should be, God began to change the things about me that I could not change myself. Through the gift of this new perspective on life, my Higher Power has relieved me of my feelings of inferiority. Now, I'm not only sober, but happy.

"God as we understand him": to me, this was a feeble profession of faith, a folly, until I myself found God in just that way.

Mark P., Bristol, Va.

Principles to Live By



My adolescence was spent cultivating a drinking habit, and I had no time to develop principles of proper action. I had read what others thought, but I used that information only to rebel against convention. Today, I need a set of principles that will not fail and will make possible a new life without drinking. I've found these principles in the Big Book and in the Twelve Steps.

The first principle of honesty is given even before the Steps in chapter three: "We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholic." I had come to believe this while I was in the county jail shaking off my last drunk. I was an alcoholic, not just a heavy drinker, not a victim of bad luck and circumstances, not a product of an unsympathetic society. I was an alcoholic and would

probably die drunk. I recognized my status and understood I could do nothing about it.

I found my way to AA shortly after release from jail and was given the principle of hope. Without hope the truth of my situation would have been devastating, but I met others who had drunk as I had. They were now sober, some of them for years. They were sober because a power greater than themselves had restored them from the insanity of drinking. If I did as my new friends had done, I could have what they had.

However, my newfound hope would degenerate into wishful thinking unless I developed additional principles. The first of these came from the Third Step. Faith that God was concerned for my well-being was foreign to me. I hadn't been able to grapple with God out

there in the universe, much less God in my life. Now for hope to be realized, I needed faith that God would enter my life and take away the need to drink. Faith that comes from turning my will and life over to the care of God is the principle that gives me strength to continue in our Fellowship.

The decision to turn my will and life over to God's care meant nothing without the Fourth Step. Alone, it had no more effect than my thousands of promises to quit drinking. I had to discover what my will and life were so I could turn them over. I had to find the courage to write my inventory and discover who I really was. That courage came while I was sitting in the parking lot of a liquor store thinking about my next drink. I saw that I would either ask God for the strength to do my inventory or buy a bottle.

If I think that I'm the source of my courage I become a braggart. My gift of courage must be tempered by humility. Fortunately this principle is the root of our Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Steps. I must humbly admit my defects to myself, God, and another person. Becoming ready to have God remove my defects and asking him to remove them is even more humbling.

Steps Six and Seven, along with Eleven, teach the value of patience and the principle of patience tunes me in to the harmony of God's world. The Seventh Step prayer asks God to act in his time for his purposes. I can only continue to pray and work as if he has

removed my defects while I wait for him to act as he sees best.

Alcoholism required me to function without regard for others in my life. Recovery requires me to consider all those about me and accept responsibility for my actions now and in the past. Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten give me a way to do this. This principle of responsibility makes me a contributing member of society.

Love is the principle that guided my first friends in AA. They welcomed me, without question, into their Fellowship. They were not concerned about anything except that I was a drunk. I was asked if I wanted help, if I had a place to sleep that night, and if I'd care for a cup of coffee. I was allowed to be myself, as best I could. No demands were made, no expectations were declared, no conformity was required. I was simply invited to share what they offered. Love, as the component of the Twelfth Step, is the most godly of the principles on our path of recovery. It is the one principle that makes AA what it is, a Fellowship of the Spirit.

The authors of the Big Book talked of principles, and in their wisdom, left it to each of us to discover what those principles are. The overriding principle is, of course, sobriety, which I have found to encompass eight other principles of honesty, hope, faith, courage, humility, patience, responsibility and love.

Greg H., Moreno Valley, Calif.



Beginners Meeting

Step One: Gateway to Freedom

Lying face down on my dirty living room carpet, hands manacled behind my back, I listened as the sheriff's deputies ransacked my home looking for contraband. I heard one deputy remark, "Boy, this dude sure likes to drink. Must be forty empty liquor bottles on the kitchen floor."

Terrorized, my mind raced, trying to remember if there was anything illegal in the apartment. Unfortunately, a week-long drunk prevented any lucid thought at all.

How had I gotten myself into this situation? I had no idea. My world had become a one-bedroom apartment which I protected with half a dozen

loaded guns. The hideous Four Horsemen — Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, and Despair — had moved in as nonpaying roommates and refused to leave. I lay in a pool of incomprehensible demoralization, not knowing what to do.

One day a week later, bright and early, the doorbell rang. I looked out through the peephole and saw it was John, a former crime partner I hadn't seen in over six years. He looked very different, was quite fit, and his eyes sparkled. Afraid of what he might want, I conversed with him through the door. He told me that the reason for his visit was to make amends to me.

After further discussion, I finally opened the door. John was stunned at my deterioration. He spent the rest of the day carrying the message to me, telling me the story of his miraculous recovery in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I finally agreed to go to an AA meeting with him that evening, though I couldn't see how it could possibly help me.

At the meeting, I heard the First Step for the very first time: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable."

The word powerless hit me like a bomb blast. It described my situation with alcohol perfectly and completely. My life was more than unmanageable, it was illegal.

The best part was the word "we." I was no longer alone. Others before me had made the admission of powerlessness and had been set free from years of alcoholic misery. If John could work the AA program and stay sober for six years, then I would have to try my best to do it, too.

Later on I got an older member to help me work the program and formally took the First Step. My sponsor told me that my unmanageable life was a re-

sult of self-will run rampant. He went on to say that the only things I had any power over were my behavior and my attitude.

Believing that I was powerless ultimately reduced the size of my world — down to me in the moment. My sponsor explained that alcohol was but a symptom of deeper problems. He also went on to explain that I was selfish, childish, grandiose, emotionally sensitive, and had a number of character defects that stood in the way of serenity and peace of mind. But he said I had a choice: to live life reacting to everything with childish emotions, or to try working the remaining eleven Steps and learn how to live a life guided by spiritual principles.

*My
unmanageable
life was a
result of
self-will run
rampant*

Today I am learning how to develop a better sense of honesty and to accept my alcoholism with all its ramifications. The obsession to drink was lifted almost immediately and the grace of God continues to shine down on me as I learn how to live life on life's terms. The First Step was the gateway into a new sober life that I could never have imagined.

Anonymous, Gainesville, Fla.

STEP 1

*We admitted we were
powerless over alcohol —
that our lives had become
unmanageable.*

‘THE TRUTH OF MY HUMANITY’

Camping out with a women’s spiritual growth group miles from civilization, I stood in the moonlight staring into the fierce crackling fire. Someone threw another log on; ribbons of flame shot up and disappeared into the black sky. As the ceremony progressed, a wineskin appeared. A woman near me threw back her head and a stream squirted into her throat. The wineskin passed to me. I grinned, shook my head, and passed it on. We beat drums and sounded eerie noises on conch shells — I felt my power and connection to the universe.

A memory flickered of the day many years ago in a rooming house on Re-

vere Beach when I had tried to get a cork out of a wine bottle, and, desperate, had finally broken the neck to get a drink.

What freedom I have now compared to those last days before I slunk into an AA room and choked out the words, “I’m an alcoholic.” For a long while after that, I went to a meeting every night where a few old-timers made it clear that I had a progressive illness — I would always be allergic to alcohol and the first drink was the one I had to stay away from. Today I don’t feel as fragile as when I thought my car would automatically drive me to the liquor store. But I hope I will always watch for the unguarded moment because the

disease progresses in my body whether I drink or not, and unless I practice a Twelve-Step recovery program the disease will eventually win.

As an example of this, a few years ago I had an operation and the pain medication I was given in the hospital had me floating and ready for more. I found a comic book in the hospital lounge which seemed full of deep mystical messages. My body has no conscience.

But Step One says we’re powerless over alcohol — it doesn’t say we’re powerless over our lives, only that they were unmanageable. Belief in this principle is necessary for me to rebuild my life.

The admission that we are being controlled by something outside ourselves is the first step to regaining control through aligning with all the creative forces in the universe. These forces couldn’t enter our beings while we were stubbornly trying to play God, but the admission that we must surrender the substance we think keeps us alive strengthens us. Step One is not humiliating to me today; it is just a painful reminder about the truth of my humanity.

My past looked sordid: I had stolen from my friends, and lied to my husband, children, and employer. But once I recognized that these were symptoms of my illness, admitting powerlessness

was a relief. I stopped blaming the universe for my unmanageable life and faced the truth that I drank like an alcoholic because I was an alcoholic, and that the unmanageability in my life resulted directly from this.

I foresee that Step One will always be the foundation of my recovery program. Step One forces me to let go of the artificial foundation built out of self-justification and pride and allows the truth to make me strong.

My life will always be unmanageable, with my convoluted thinking, unless I check in with other recovering alco-

holics. Without continually checking my thinking, I tend to complicate everything and in little or no time become full of dire foreboding.

So, in surrendering to an ongoing need for Step One, I surrender to my humanity and my need for others’ caring insights.

Janice N., Franklin, N.C.



STEP 2

*Came to believe that a Power
greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity*

LETTING THE POWER WORK

My first memory of a Step Two discussion was in a meeting at the treatment center where I began my recovery. A sober alcoholic told me I had to start at the end of this Step, because it didn't apply to me unless I believed I was insane. Fortunately, I had no problem with that belief. I really had thought all along that I was simply insane and that one day they would just lock me up and throw away the key so I couldn't harm myself or others. In fact, I was relieved to discover that I had the disease of alcoholism. At least there was a reason for the insanity.

Research into the meaning of the word "insane" resulted in an even

stronger conviction that Step Two did indeed apply to me. Looking at my behavior during the last few years of my drinking left no doubt. I still blush to remember some of it, and quite frankly I am grateful for some of my blackouts since they mercifully kept some of my misdeeds a mystery to me! But I fully understand that it took everything I did to get me where I am today.

In the beginning Step Two was simple: I knew that my way was not working; I knew that my sister was going to AA meetings and that her life was mysteriously getting better. I knew where she came from, so I thought, "If it works for her, it just might work for me." That was it: go to meetings and

do what sober alcoholics tell me to do. My first sponsor was perfect for me: she'd had the same problems with the God thing that I had. She told me not to complicate it: "Just believe that I believe," she said. "In fact, you can use my higher power until you find one that works for you." So I did.

As I stayed around AA and didn't drink one day at a time, I began to see something working in my life, but I still had a real resistance to the God thing. Fortunately, AA members told me I didn't have to call it God. At about two years sober I had to do some really serious higher-power research. I had to find what worked for me. It no longer was enough to rely on

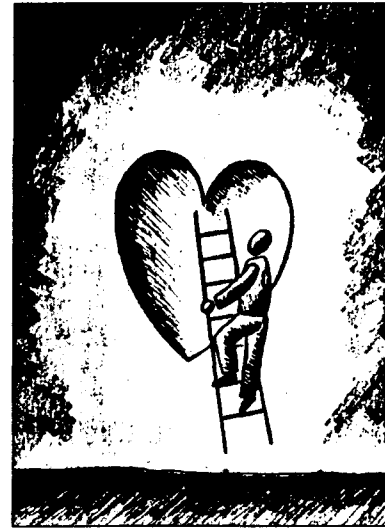
others' beliefs; I had to find my own. I'd really never given chapter four, "We Agnostics," a close reading, because I didn't think I was agnostic. I believed there was a creative intelligence out there running the universe, but it had absolutely nothing to do with my life, and I resisted talk about "God" because of a fear-ridden fundamentalist childhood. However, when I read "We Agnostics" (and Bill W.'s story), I found that it was all about me. It defined very quickly my problem: to find a power

greater than myself.

It isn't enough to believe in a higher power: I have to believe that it will work in my life, that it will solve my problem. That's a tall order for a recovering fundamentalist who heard only the punishing, negative, vengeful nature of God. Simple, though: my sponsor told me I could choose my own conception of a Higher Power and I could call it whatever I chose. At first it was scary: I thought that punishing, negative, vengeful God would get me if I did something so blasphemous. But by this time I could see the loving, caring Higher Power that had brought sobriety and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous to me. I

could see miracles not only in my own life but also in the lives of newcomers who followed me into the program. My own experience proved to be the source of my beliefs.

I am careful not to talk about the specifics of my beliefs in meetings — even the meeting in print. Remembering that I resented people talking about Jesus when I was new, I have to respect others' rights to have a Higher Power different from mine. And while I will share my personal experience one-on-



Step Two

one with people when it is appropriate, I never do so in meetings. I still believe that it is not important what I believe; it's only important that I believe something and, more importantly, that I allow it to work in my life.

Often that is difficult for this recovering fundamentalist, because I still flash back to the negative God who will damn me to hell for even thinking wrongly. My Higher Power today is loving, kind, and generous, with a great sense of humor when I make mistakes, which is often. Never is that power punishing or vengeful, and always it loves me as a parent loves a child, fully, freely, unconditionally. Never with judgment. In fact, it's the kind of love I first experienced in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Came. Came to. Came to believe. My sponsor said it is a process. Just show up. Let the fog clear. Let my own experience lead me to believe. And I have. My spiritual awakening has been of the "educational variety," which is all I could handle. And it is still occurring. Whenever I have trouble turning my will and life over to the care of God as I understand God, it's always a matter of Step Two. When I have problems working Step Three (or any Step, for that matter) I have to go back to the Step before it.

Thus, for me, however I am with Step Two determines how I am with the whole AA program. When I can let my Higher Power work in my life, all is well.

Margaret A., Seoul, South Korea

STEP 3

*Made a decision to turn
our will and our lives
over to the care of God
as we understood Him.*

MY EARS OPENED, BUT MY MIND SHUT

I spent the first nine years of my life not hearing any sounds: I was born deaf. At the age of ten, I was sent to Ottawa for an operation in order to give me some hearing. The doctors opened up my left ear, and I was able to hear. I was one very scared kid when all these new sounds came rushing into my head.

I believe that's when my troubles began, because then I could hear the mental abuse my father was dishing out to me and the rest of the family. I had felt it before, but now it affected me very deeply. We weren't allowed to show any feelings or question anything we were asked to do: we just did it. I soon learned how to withdraw

from people, because I believed everybody was like my father. I was a shy, scared little boy at that time.

At the age of fifteen, I got drunk for the first time on the best wine a dollar could buy. I knew right then that I'd found the answer to all of my problems. When I was drunk I wasn't shy. I could talk to girls; I soon learned the difference between the two sexes.

My personality changed to one of a con man and a thief. I learned how to use people to get what I wanted. If I needed the money to get more booze, I stole it. I was involved in the drug trade for a while. I'd do anything to keep the booze coming my way.

Blackouts soon became a way of

life. I would come to in cities hundreds of miles away, days and weeks later. It was in one of these blackouts that I picked up a lady. Ten months later she found me and had a big surprise for me — I had become the father of twins. However, I didn't take responsibility for the children. I thought the lady was playing mind games with me.

My drinking continued to get worse, as did my stealing and con games. People were pulling away from me — even my drinking friends — because they couldn't trust me any longer. I got in trouble with the law many, many times. Jail became my home away from home.

People tried to help me, but I wouldn't accept their kindness. I just wanted people to leave me alone.

My son died in 1974, at the age of two. I had

seen him only twice because I was too busy drinking and doing my thing. I felt guilty because of my behavior and drank more. The mother of the children and I got to know each other, and had a sick kind of love for one another. The disease of alcoholism took her life in 1976. This was another good reason to drink more. I got to

know my daughter quite well, and when she was six years old, a drunk driver drove his car up onto the sidewalk and took her life. I got very angry at God and the world, and did things that I should be doing life in jail for. I totally gave up then and set out to die. Booze flowed down my throat like water.

The final blow came at Thanksgiving of 1984. I was gang-raped by four men. I felt very much that it was my fault, and I no longer felt like a man. I was beginning to realize that my way of doing things had gotten me into dangerous situations, and my drinking was my biggest downfall.

Then I set out to kill those men. I went home and got my handgun. For the next months, I kept trying to find them. I'm very grateful that my Higher Power didn't allow it to happen.

On Christmas Eve 1984, I was pulled over by the police because they had learned I was carrying a gun, and they wanted to talk to me about it. The officer who stopped me was a member of AA, and he gave me the last break that I was going to get. He said that he didn't see the gun in the car. Then he radioed in that he was



Step Three

taking a coffee break. He talked to me, and somehow what he said got through to my sick mind.

I had my last drink that night, though I spent two years — on my own — trying to get my life back in order. I got nowhere. That's when I finally came into the program.

I need AA every minute of the day. I love the Fellowship, and I know

without it I'd be back on the streets or dead. I go to at least six meetings a week, and I'm active in the program.

With God's help I have turned my life around. I can be trusted now, and I find myself trusting other people. I know that if I stay close to my God and work the program, everything will be well.

George P., Pakenham, Ont.

March 1995

Waiting for Godot

Step Three can cause some of us a lot of problems. At one extreme our will can get in the way if we do not conscientiously follow this Step. Bill W. wrote about the misuse of willpower, saying how "we had tried to bombard our problems with it instead of attempting to bring it into agreement with God's intention for us." In this case, we follow the same old destructive path that got us into trouble in the first place. Maybe we made a decision to turn our lives over to God's care, but that's as far as it went. It's like a promise on the part of Congress to cut spending, then running up an ever-growing deficit.

Or we can take the opposite tack: wait for God to do for us what we are unwilling to do for ourselves. We say, "Well, I'll change when God gets around to doing it for me." There's no personal responsibility, only apathy. There may be willingness but no follow-through.

God will make the flowers grow, but we have to tend the garden. There is no easy way to change our lives around. I found this out the hard way. I attended AA meetings for years waiting for something to happen. I wasn't sure just what, but I thought as long as I went through the motions eventually I would find sobriety. And eventually I did, but not until I accepted the fact that I would have to do some work. That work, for me, was the acceptance of responsibility. I was responsible for that first drink, and I was responsible for living my life according to God's plan.

So it is for all of us. There are no shortcuts.

Sidney B., Deerfield, Ill.

STEP 4

*Made a searching and
fearless moral inventory
of ourselves.*

'LIKE A HANGNAIL IN A PICKLE FACTORY'

My original sponsor in Alcoholics Anonymous was the "Fourth Step Monster" of my home group. This man actually carried Fourth Step kits in the trunk of his car — a legal pad, ballpoint pen, and inventory guide stuffed in a manila envelope — and he wasn't shy about giving them out, either. Whenever someone in a meeting made the mistake of admitting to thinking about maybe getting around to contemplating the possibility of perhaps someday doing a written inventory, I swear my sponsor began salivating. As the meeting closed, he would swoop down on the unsuspecting pigeon like an attacking eagle, and carry the poor

soul off, kicking and screaming, to our "meeting after the meeting" at the hamburger joint around the corner. Not a pretty sight.

Once ensconced at a table in the restaurant, my sponsor would offer one of those kits to his hapless victim and begin sharing his experience, strength, and hope about the inventory process described in Steps Four through Ten. He would note that few of us recover from alcoholism without a thorough and honest inventory. He would share his own experience with untreated, tinder-dry alcoholism — "as irritating as a hangnail in a pickle factory" — that eventually drove him to work the Steps as suggested. He would talk at length

about the freedoms that lay just beyond that inventory process, too. "This is what we get if we work these Steps," he insisted. "This is payday!"

I came into AA because I desperately wanted what you people had, and through some miraculous coincidence of humility and honesty, spurred by self-inflicted suffering, I became willing to go to any length to get it. Now this round mound of sound I called my sponsor was telling me I had to do a written inventory. I was willing, so, okay . . . I started writing.

I couldn't follow the guide in his Fourth Step kit, and at that time I couldn't make head nor tail of the simple example laid out in the Big Book, but in reading *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* I found a format I could use. With it I was able to get those "big chunks of truth" about myself down on paper. I scribbled it out, narrative style, as honestly as I could. I wanted to do it perfectly — my sponsor had impressed upon me the importance of thoroughness in inventory work — but he also pointed out that perfectionism can be a stalling tactic, and just as destructive as not writing at all.

We finally sat down to do a Fifth Step together. An evening was set aside, the coffee was poured, and my sponsor looked at me and said "What is the worst thing on that list? What is the one thing, more than any other, you would rather not tell me?"

I had said I was willing to go to any length, and I was, so I took a deep breath and told him the big one — the deepest, darkest, to-the-grave secret in my life. I experienced a hot rush of shame, and the terrible vulnerability of being completely exposed. I was afraid to look at him but when I finally met his eye, he just smiled and said "There! The worst is out of the way, now. The rest should be easy."

In the hours that followed, I told this man — a man I held in high regard, and whose respect and affection I craved — the entire and unvarnished truth about who and what I was, as best I could tell it. All my pimples and perversities, my fears and frustrations and failures were laid out in the light, for my God and this man to see. It was risky business, but I was determined to see it through.

And as my sponsor had predicted, it was easy. I'd tell him I'd done such-



Step Four

and-such, and he would tell me about the time he'd done so-and-so. It wasn't a case of "Can you top this war story?"

It was, instead, the deliberate dismantling of my terminal uniqueness. By sharing his experience, he showed me that nothing I'd done was so terrible, unspeakable, or unforgivable. In the course of that evening I learned I was not alone. My sponsor loved and respected me when we sat down to talk, and loved and respected me even more when we stood up to say good-night.

I was a reporter for a newspaper at the time, with an assignment to review a nightclub act that night, so I didn't exactly follow the directions in the Big

Book. Can you imagine? What I did, instead, was go to the nightclub, get my story, and then go home and — as the

Big Book suggests — find a place where I could be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what I'd done. I offered up the Seventh Step prayer, also as suggested, and went to sleep.

I didn't experience any immediate rush of relief as a result of that first inventory — the weight of the world did not lift off my shoulders all at once — but the promises in the Big Book began to come true in my life. I began to feel the freedom my sponsor had spoken of and knew I was heading in the right direction.

Bill J., Temple, Tex.



STEP 5

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

STEPPING STONES TO THE SPIRIT

Before writing my Fourth Step, I had come to see the program as one of action and results. The more action I put into my recovery, the more heartening the results. The more prodigious the results, the more I'm encouraged to put in even more effort. It snowballs. All the while, as I change, the desire for a drink becomes more and more removed.

My sponsor pointed out the phrase in the Big Book that comes immediately after Step Three: ". . . we launched out on a course of vigorous action." The first step of action is "personal housecleaning." I had to get square with myself before I could move forward in my life — and eventually

get square with others. So I spiritedly, though not hastily, wrote a Fourth Step in three sittings. It comprised sixteen typed pages.

My sponsor encouraged me to be "fearlessly honest" in doing my Fourth, in the knowledge that God would guide me, if I asked him, in recalling those events in my life that would reveal the exact nature of my wrongs. Indeed, my memory did respond as I wrote a stream-of-consciousness review of my life. I just let thoughts and recollections flow and resisted the temptation to go back at any stage in my writing. I made no amendments, no revisions, no deletions. Breaks in historical sequence were unimportant for, I

believe, God was prompting my memory as he saw fit. When my Fourth was complete, I didn't reread it until I did my Fifth Step. "At once," as the Big Book says, I had a face-to-face meeting with another person. In my case, it was my sponsor.

We met after church on a Sunday in September 1992. He asked me to read my Fourth to him while he drove us along the tree-lined parkways of Westchester County. It was a bright, warm afternoon, but as I read, I only occasionally looked up and soon lost all sense of bearing as to where we were on the county's sprawling parkways.

When I was about a third of the way through, the car stopped suddenly. I looked up to see the wall of a wooden garage.

"Do you know where we are?" my sponsor asked.

"No," I replied.

"We're at Stepping Stones, Bill W.'s house," my sponsor said. "I didn't plan this. I don't even know if it's open. But I realized we were nearby. I haven't been here in years, but somehow I found it."

As it turned out, the house, near Bedford Hills, N.Y. and available for visiting by appointment, was open at the request of a special guest. Nell Wing, Bill W.'s former nonalcoholic secretary, was there hosting a small party of friends. I had

had the pleasure of meeting Nell a few weeks before, and I reintroduced myself and introduced my sponsor.

During our tour of the quaint, two-story house Bill and Lois called home for nearly thirty years, my strong, overall impression was of comfortability. This place felt lived in. It was clean and neat, but not museum-like. All was still in place as if awaiting the return, someday, of Bill and his



wife. What stood out especially for me were Bill's old Royal typewriter and the etched champagne glasses on a shelf in the kitchen.

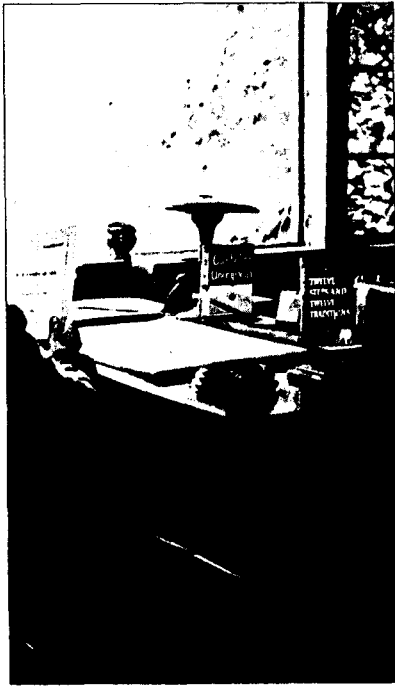
My sponsor and I walked a hundred yards or so up a sloping, grassy hill to an unassuming, one-room structure built of painted cinder blocks and featuring a large picture window. It looked down on the family house and a deep,

Step Five

tree-filled gorge.

The inside was lined with solid wood paneling, dull walnut in color. Bill's large oak desk and swivel chair were at the back of the room. On the desktop were two dried-out fountain pens in a marble stand and a brown blotter, along with an old goose-neck lamp and a wooden mail tray. The right-hand edge of the desk was marred by a dozen cigarette burns where Bill had obviously used the desktop as a makeshift ashtray.

A box spring and mattress, covered by a quilt, rested directly on the floor beside one wall. My sponsor settled into a leather chair in the far corner of the room, and I sat in Bill's chair at his desk, and looked



out through the picture window to the plush green vista below.

"My workshop stands on a hill back of our home," Bill wrote in *The Language of the Heart*. "Looking over the valley, I see the village community house where our local group meets. Beyond the circle of my horizon lies the one world of AA." Bill called his studio "Wit's End." It was where he med-

itated, read, and wrote. I sensed that this was a special, inspired place, and honored by the opportunity — alone with my sponsor, God, and perhaps the spirit of Bill W. — I read the rest of my Fourth Step.

The full impact of the day's events didn't strike me until later. My sponsor had told me to go home and read the Big Book. After taking it in hand that night, it seemed to nearly open by itself to the very page where it says: "Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our

shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps."

What first caught my eye, though, was the preceding paragraph where it says, "Once we have taken this [fifth] step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator.

Step Five

We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe."

I paused after each sentence. I had read this paragraph countless times before, but this time, every word, every phrase held new meaning for me. I didn't so much *read* the words as I *felt* them. They became a part of me.

In my mind's eye, I saw a stage with hundreds of people moving to and fro. No one stood out, not even me. I was just another player on the stage of

God's world. I wasn't the director, nor the writer, nor the star. I was merely an actor asked to perform his role to the best of his abilities. Everyone else on the stage of life was doing the same. All were equals.

I was completely comfortable and at peace with myself. I was warmed physically and soulfully. The void inside me had been filled to overflowing with spirituality. I had an inner sense that I truly belonged to something much bigger than myself. My awareness had gone beyond myself. I had, for the first time in my life, become truly conscious of God. I was still. God was near.

Anonymous, N.Y.

STEP 6

*Were entirely ready
to have God remove
all these defects
of character*

INSIDE OUT

If Alcoholics Anonymous were a self-help program, Step Six might read something like this: "Became determined in our minds to overcome all our character defects."

Mercifully, this is not what we are asked to do in AA. In fact, no action at all is called for in Step Six. I cannot imagine more passive language than "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." We are not admonished to reform our character, to make deep and sincere resolutions to change our objectionable behavior, to give up anything at all, nor to take on new responsibilities or even new attitudes. The words of

the Step sound more like a progress marker on the road to recovery than a call to more action.

Being entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character was almost a rest stop on my trudging the road to happy destiny; a pause that I desperately needed. For too long I had really tried to be a better person. Attempts to control my drinking ended in total defeat and a sense of hopelessness and aimlessness. Then I came to AA. At the very first meeting I got a tiny glimmer of hope — a softness that I didn't understand or particularly seek. I was so tired of trying that the relief in simply giving up was as near to joy

as anything I had ever experienced.

But in the AA meetings I attended people talked about a lot of things other than alcohol. They talked about honesty. I couldn't be totally honest because (I thought) if people really knew what I had done, and was still doing, I might lose my job or at least be totally disgraced. People talked about asking for help, but I pretended to be self-sufficient. They talked about fear and I acted brave and strong. Whole meetings were devoted to discussions of gratitude. I felt more self-pity than gratitude, but I said I was grateful and continued going to meetings.

Nearly every topic, except the First Step, filled me with guilt, shame, and fear, but I hid it well and resolved to try even harder. I approached AA exactly as I had lived for so many years before and during my drinking. "I will do this thing," I thought, but I was never quite able to pull it off. I got so very tired of trying!

All these things that troubled me so much came out in my Fifth Step: my selfishness, dishonesty, repeated failure of self-reliance, and my fears. Once again, I hit a kind of bottom. I not only was defective but I couldn't do anything about it. Nothing!

I didn't feel lost anymore, or hope-

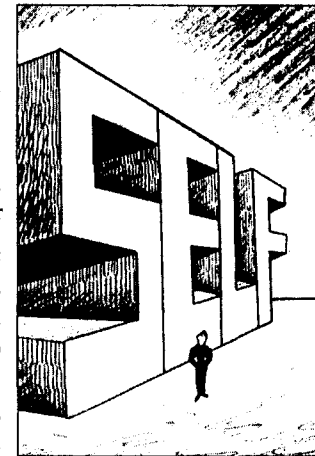
less. Neither was I filled with the kind of faith in a Higher Power many in AA expressed. The idea of God doing for me what I could not do for myself was agreeable to me, but I didn't know what to "do"! Step Six said that I was now entirely ready to have that happen. I believed that, and it was true.

The relief I felt at this time brought real joy, a change from the inside out. Then I thought about how God might do these things for me. Thinking about it didn't help at all; in fact, pondering the matter only produced new doubts and questions.

I worried about wanting something with an urgency akin to alcoholic craving and that God's way of removing

that defect would be to deny me the fulfillment I sought, or that I would be compelled to do things I really didn't want to do. I feared that a certain grim asceticism would be imposed upon me. Self-denial never held any lasting appeal to me!

These doubts and fears were not things I could share with anyone — not even my sponsor who had heard my entire Fifth Step. I feared he would think I was unwilling — the very worst offense in AA! I felt pressured to get on with the real action Steps, Eight and Nine. So I did the very same thing



I did with every other Step up to that point. I took a chance! The chance I took was that this thing just might work out for the best. Maybe, just maybe, what God had in store for me would be good and maybe I would even like it. At last, after years of trying to figure out what was right and then trying even harder to do it, I was entirely ready to have God remove all my defects.

That chance was certainly worth taking. After all, if life became too grim I could always reclaim control and try again on my own. For one week, morning and night, I said the Seventh Step prayer. The words "My creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. . . ." reminded me of words from a hymn that we sang in church when I was growing up: "Just as I am . . . I come to Thee." I didn't have to do anything! I was me, still living in a lot of the mess that I had made. That was okay for the moment. But I knew that change would have to occur and that I would need to participate in the process.

Change did occur. I was surprised, as I continued with the next six Steps, that what really changed about me was my "wants." The urgency of self-gratification left me. Personal ambition (a quality I always valued) became focused on being useful to God and others. I found myself telling the truth most of the time and found that others valued that more than my super-human efforts of the past. I have stopped

fighting, I hate no one, and I now know the meaning of the word serenity. God is doing for me what I could not do for myself.

Sometimes people try to make the Sixth Step into an action Step. I hear statements at Step meetings like "It does no good to ask God to remove your defects unless you are willing to take the action necessary." Another oft-quoted adage in meetings is "God helps those who help themselves." However, I have no reason to believe that at all. The more I tried to help myself the more self-reliant I became and the farther I was from any real dependence upon God. When this self-reliance failed (as it inevitably did), fear possessed me and I drank. What I find to be true now is that God helps those who *trust* him.

Of course action is necessary. We do not try to escape from life's demands. My problem, though, was trying too hard to figure out what to do, then trying too hard to do it on my own, depending totally on my own resources and imagined strengths. The point of Step Six is that we stop this self-centered imagining and planning. We don't ask to see anything in the future, make no commitments to specific goals, and surrender ourselves to a future yet to be revealed. Without this break from busy action I could not have continued with the AA program. With it, I am changing — from the inside out.

Fred H., St. Thomas, V.I.



*Humbly asked Him
to remove our
shortcomings*

'AN ALCOHOLIC AND A CHILD OF GOD'

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” This would have been a perfect epitaph for my headstone if my drinking had killed me before I got to AA. It was something I was constantly told; it was a feeling about myself that, although I didn't like it, I came to accept. I became very ashamed of the life I had made for myself and the hurt I was causing to others. I was told that “real men” didn't do what I was doing; didn't say, act, or behave as I did. Being compared to a “real man” and being told that I didn't fit that category hurt my already faltering self-esteem, but the look of shame and disgust on a loved one's face was even more painful.

It was the shame I had for myself that fueled my drinking. Foggy memories of the night before led me to drink again; I'd get drunk Saturday to forget what I did Friday. My shameful feelings also kept me from asking God for help. Many times I would start to turn to God, but out of my own ignorance would stop. Why, I thought, would he want to have anything to do with me?

My Higher Power, although I didn't realize it at the time, felt no shame for me, only love and compassion. But it was not until Step Seven that I noticed a major change in the way I approached God. I no longer had that feeling of shame. I went from standing in front of God with my shoulders

slumped, my head hanging down, and an overwhelming feeling of disgrace, to kneeling in his presence with my head bowed, hands folded, and feeling very humble. I no longer begged and pleaded; I asked and listened. And I accepted.

I began to realize that all things are done in God's time. If my Higher Power's answer to me was “no” or “not now,” I humbly accepted his answer. I knew that his answer came not out of

shame, punishment, or disgust for me. Knowing that there was one who loved and cared for me unconditionally was the spark of hope I needed to start my journey into a new life.

Today, my feelings of shame and disgrace have disappeared. I'm no longer concerned if I am considered a “real man.” I'm an alcoholic and a child of God. And I know I'm loved and accepted as both.

Rikk D., Steger, Ill.

STEP 8

*Made a list of all persons
we had harmed, and
became willing to make
amends to them all*

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

As one who has been going to Step meetings for years, I think we sometimes get hung up on the letter of the Steps and maybe miss the spirit. The opening paragraph on Step Eight in the "Twelve and Twelve" broadens the scope of Steps Eight and Nine with one simple declarative sentence: "Steps Eight and Nine are concerned with human relations." Yet most discussions focus on making a list and going to people and making direct amends.

What about the larger question? What about *why*?

The "Twelve and Twelve" says something else of overwhelming importance that often gets very little attention in discussions of Step Eight. It says that beyond making a list and becoming willing to mend fences with others, I must try to extract from a close examination of my human relations "every bit of information" about myself that I can. The idea is so important I'd like to quote it in full: "In many instances we shall find that though the harm done others has not been great, the emotional harm we have done ourselves has. Very deep, sometimes quite forgotten, damaging emotional conflicts

persist below the level of consciousness. At the time of these occurrences, they may actually have given our emotions violent twists which have since discolored our personalities and altered our lives for the worse.

"While the purpose of making restitution to others is paramount, it is equally necessary that we extricate from an examination of our personal relations every bit of information about ourselves and our fundamental difficulties that we can. . . ." And a little further on it says, "Calm, thoughtful reflection upon personal relations can deepen our insight. We can go far beyond those things which were superficially wrong with us, to see those flaws which were basic, flaws which sometimes were responsible for the whole pattern of our lives."

What a testament! How much more interesting and meaningful than merely a hit list of harms done and apologies in order. A list is a good start. But if that was all there were to it, I'm afraid the program would be pretty much like running the one-minute mile. You start here. You end there. You sweep off your side of the street and then what?

I can only speak for myself but I

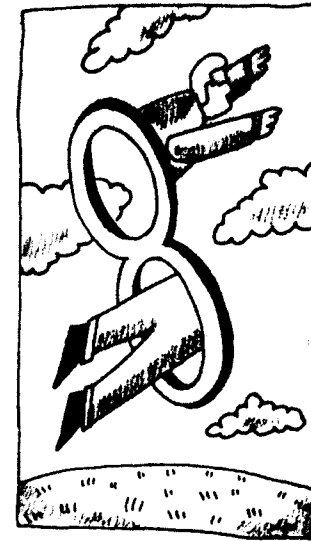
know from talking to a lot of other drunks that a lot of us never got up one morning and decided to do the program. Every time I came around to Steps Eight and Nine, I always felt cramped and hedged in with a lot of little spiritual hoops to jump through. I couldn't make a personal connection

with the Step. I knew what "they" wanted me to say; but I didn't know what *I* wanted to say. The paragraphs I have quoted pointed the way.

This isn't a game of spiritual hopscotch where I go from one amends to the next, knocking them off like hitting beer cans on a rail fence with rocks. There is a dynamic, exciting dimension to this Step that, as it says, goes far beyond the superficial. To get all caught up in the wrong, the

wronged, and the "street sweeping," I may be efficient, I may be thorough, but am I really realizing all that this Step has to offer?

When I came to Step Nine, I had the same problem. I do have some great Step Nine stories to tell at Step meetings; but I can remember telling them and feeling very empty because it was like a recitation. It was as if I had done my homework and was now giving a book report. There's so much



Step Eight

more to making amends than just going and saying I'm sorry.

What Step Eight has done, and continues to do for me, is to make me conscious of my relations with others. It allows me to pay attention to how I behave with myself and others. It encourages me to focus on how I'm related to others and to myself. It allows me to see how fear, delusional thinking, and grandiosity made it impossible to have any kind of sane partnership with another person.

The "Twelve and Twelve" says that self-examination, meditation, and prayer can form an unshakable foundation for life. So self-examination, like everything else in AA, is an ongoing thing. Step Ten says that the time spent in looking at my relations with others will not be a joy-killer but very rewarding. It will make all the other hours of the day more interesting. And so it does.

With Step Eight in my life, I don't have to be afraid of resentments, hurt feelings, or misunderstandings. I don't have to hide from these things. They are the lighthouses that describe my boundaries as an individual. Even my defects of character are interesting, because they reveal me to myself (as long as I don't turn my back on me).

So the list of harms done is not only not scary, it is the beginning of an adventure in living sober. No more fight or flight. I can stand still and deal with what is really happening. But there's another list I have to make and deal

with in Step Eight if I'm going to have this healing of memories that happens when I start to look at human relations. This is the list of people who have harmed me, in real or imagined ways.

I've heard people say, "Never mind about that. It's who you harmed that counts." But if I really believe I've been harmed and simply deny it, then I'm practicing something that helped make me ill to start with. I'm trying to do something I don't believe in order to be accepted . . . in this case by people who hold a different view of Step Eight. All my life I acquiesced to ideas I didn't believe, in order to be accepted. But the Big Book offers this challenge: "Don't let any prejudice you may have about spiritual ideas keep you from asking what they honestly mean to you."

What about these feelings of having been abused, what about the depression that comes when people don't treat me the way I think they should? Am I to brush this aside because it's the "right" thing to do?

I grew up with no clear boundaries and no sense of personal autonomy. I never knew how to stand up for myself. Sometimes it seems I'm being asked to accept unacceptable behavior and it pushes buttons from a childhood where most of the adults were alkie and much of what went on was abusive. That "acceptance" started me on the road to my own alcoholism. If I'm going to have the best possible relations

with others it has to be on a basis of honesty, self-honesty first and foremost.

The "Twelve and Twelve" says we never knew how to form a true partnership with another human being. Experience has taught me that part of this learning process involves having the courage to tell those I care about that I don't like the way they are behaving, that I have a grudge or a resentment or hurt feelings. I could never do these things before, so I drank. Now that I'm sober, if I don't change my old ways, I could drink again. So I have something I call Step Eight-and-a-half; I made a list of all persons who had harmed me, in real or imagined ways, and went to them and talked things out, except when to do so would cause more harm.

I don't do this with everyone, only with people who matter — friends, family, loved ones. The deep-rooted tendency to fight or run has to be abandoned. The ability to stand still and stay with someone even when things are rocky is difficult, but Step Eight has shown me that every troubled human relation is an opportunity to get to know myself a little better. It's an invitation to face the truth about myself and the world around me in a way that will, if I persist, leave me rightly related to myself, to others, and to God.

This Step is much more than a checklist of spiritual debts. It is just what Bill said it is: the high road to a new freedom.

Jim N., Agawam, Mass.

STEP 9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

'PEACE WITH THE PAST'

I have had many beautiful experiences in my ten years of sobriety in the program. The most beautiful of all: a Ninth Step amends I made to my college girlfriend, Mary Beth.

Mary Beth and I had an on-again, off-again relationship throughout our four years of college. We met during freshman year and fell in love immediately. You'd have to have been eighteen, lonely, and homesick to understand how important she was to me. But my drinking and emotional instability, my difficulty in imagining her point of view and giving consideration to her, did us in by the end of the year.

Sophomore year we tried again, with similar results. Then in the middle of our junior year, I sobered up for the first

time, and things looked better for us. But that summer I drank again, and when I returned to school that fall I became irritated with her, blaming my increasing unhappiness on shortcomings I imagined in her. Once again, Mary Beth and I broke up.

I stopped drinking only a month after starting up, for even I could see the change alcohol made in my temperament and outlook. I was never a happy drunk; I was usually mean and ornery. I even tried AA that fall. But I didn't like it, so I quit after thirty days. Nobody was going to tell me how to stay dry. I could do it on my own.

But being dry wasn't enough, I found. After four months of not drinking, I was more lonely and frightened

that I'd ever been in my life. And I was terribly confused: My first period of sobriety had gone so well, my life had turned around immediately — even though I wasn't in AA. Why not this time? I prayed to God to help me.

My prayer was answered. One day I happened to be with a group of people who were learning about organizations to help those who were down on their luck. An AA member was among those who spoke to us about their organizations. He seemed so happy, so peaceful. That had a big impact on me — it was such a contrast to my own misery and desperation.

I resolved then and there to give AA another try. I put it off for a week or two, of course, but finally I was so unhappy I did the unthinkable: I went to a meeting.

When I got there, I didn't know what to say. Everyone realized immediately I was a newcomer, so they held a First Step meeting. When it was my turn to speak, I tried to tell them how awful I felt, how lonely and desperate, how much I hated myself, but I couldn't. To my great embarrassment, I began to cry. I just couldn't help myself.

That was January 17, 1985. I've stayed sober and attended AA meet-

ings ever since then. For the rest of the school year I clung to Mary Beth. I tried to convince myself she felt the same way about me, although anyone could plainly tell her feelings for me were lukewarm at best.

It shouldn't have been a big surprise when I got a letter from her the following autumn telling me she wanted to cool it. She was in graduate school while I was still unemployed and aimless. The letter was devastating to me, and I responded as only an alcoholic can: I went into a rage of self-righteous indignation.

You know how people say you should write your feelings down in a letter, then tear it up? It is good advice. I didn't

take it. After filling both sides of six pages with rage and accusations, I held the letter for three days then mailed it.

I didn't hear from Mary Beth for a long, long time after that. Realizing my mistake, I sent her a halfhearted apology six months later. She didn't respond. Then I got it; in her book, I was a jerk.

A year went by, then another. I continued to stay sober, and my life changed dramatically for the better. Every now and then I thought of Mary Beth and felt bad about my behavior to



Step Nine

her. I wrote more letters to her, and this time I didn't send them, believing that I had no right to intrude further on her life.

After five years of this, I still didn't feel at peace. Finally I realized something had to be done, so I wrote another letter to her. I described to Mary Beth the journey of my sobriety and all the changes it had brought to my life. I apologized with all my heart to her for the way I'd treated her, and I asked for her forgiveness. This time I mailed the letter.

She wrote me back within a week.

On the outside of the envelope she wrote, "Peace with the past." Inside, she applauded the changes in me, told me how her life had gone — and gave me her forgiveness.

Not every amends has gone so well, but no matter whether it turned out well or badly, I've found each time the peace for which I searched. I'm no longer haunted by the memories of my mistakes and the injuries I inflicted on others. Thank God for AA: it saved my life, then taught me how to live it without regret.

Anonymous, Sheboygan, Wisc.

STEP 10

*Continued to take
personal inventory
and when we were wrong
promptly admitted it*

PIPELINE TO SOBRIETY

Somewhere around two years of sobriety, I found myself in the perfect job. It was directly related to my trade (marine machinist) and conferred on me the authority I thought had been my due for quite some time. I was the government inspector of private contractors who repaired U.S. Navy ships.

While on a routine inspection tour of a ship, I noticed sea water dripping on one of the newly repaired fire pumps. It seemed to be coming from a loose fitting in a small pipe which ran above the pump. I got the contractor's pipe shop foreman to come and have a look at it and he said he could probably get it fixed fairly soon.

Two days later I observed the condition to be unchanged except for a greenish, slimy, buildup of corrosion on the pump case.

Setting my crown at a rakish angle and sweeping my royal purple cape around my shoulders, I proceeded to my office to show this guy what it meant to mess with one in so lofty a position as "I."

The quality deficiency report that I drafted was truly a work of art. I made sure that the foreman's name figured prominently in the write-up so there'd be no doubt as to who the responsible party was in this deal.

A day or so later, two coworkers of mine who were in charge of pipe repair

came to my desk and pointed out that maybe I'd "shot from the hip" in this case. They said that they'd spent years building a good working relationship with this particular foreman and that I just might have undone it all in one day. I began to get that hollow, sinking feeling in my stomach that accompanies a deflating ego.

During lunch, the door to my office flew open and in stormed the aggrieved party. He slammed the rotten pipe fitting on my desk and shouted, "There! That's why I couldn't fix the thing! I had to get a whole new part! And besides, this pipe wasn't even part of the contract — I was going to fix it as a favor to you! I've been working on Navy ships for over twenty-five years and have never been written up before!" Whereupon he spun on his heel and stormed back out of the office.

I was speechless. There was not the slightest doubt that I had blown it. I thought, "Oh brother! I'm completely in the wrong here. There's at least five more months to this contract; how am I going to face anybody in this shipyard? The word's already out and I noticed a couple of yard workers snickering an hour ago . . . I never thought it might have been about me. How am I going to straighten this out?" I actually felt like crying. My heart was pounding and I was so embarrassed I had a hard time looking at the others in the office. After several Serenity Prayers, I calmed down to the point at which I could "continue to

take personal inventory."

I called the quality assurance department and had my report stricken from the record as if it had never been written. Then came the hard part, the "promptly admitted it" part. This meant a face-to-face confrontation — not my forte by a long shot. But I knew that nothing less would do.

Proceeding to the part of the ship that the foreman was responsible for, I met several shipyard workers who had heard of the situation and who were not in the least reluctant to tell me what they thought of it. I explained what I was up to and what I'd done so far to rectify the incident and I think they were a little surprised. They knew I didn't really have to back down. (Of course, most of them don't have to live a life of rigorous honesty, either.)

Arriving at the foreman's desk in the forward machinery space, I saw that he wasn't in the area. I experienced a momentary feeling of relief as I thought, "Well, I guess I don't have to do it right this minute." But as I turned to leave I bumped right into him.

"John," I said, "I'm here to apologize for this whole incident. I really blew it." At this point my knees were knocking and my breathing was shallow and rapid. Psychologists call it the "fight or flight" reaction. I continued, "I just looked at the repair you made and it's first-class, as is all of your work. If I'd just taken a minute the other day to talk to you about it, none of this

Step Ten

would have happened. I was wrong and I'm sorry. I've contacted quality assurance and the report has been canceled. I hope you can find it in you to allow us to have a professional relationship for the rest of this contract, if not a friendly one."

John said that he wasn't real proud of the way he'd reacted either and that if I could overlook his outburst we would definitely be able to work together. I give him all the credit for being magnanimous in light of what I almost did to his career.

Several of the crew witnessed the exchange and the word spread quickly through the shipyard that there was something different about this civil servant.

What I know is that not long be-

fore, I'd have lied, cheated, and sworn to high heaven that the whole thing was *his* fault — whatever it took to convince myself that I was right. And what I have instead is an incredible feeling of the weight of the world lifting off my shoulders. As I walked off the ship that day, I could look every yard worker in the eye. Best of all I could look myself in the eye and I knew I was right with myself and my Higher Power.

It's been said that if you always tell the truth, you don't have to remember what you said. A visitor to my home group told us that he loved Step Ten because it allowed him to "clean up the wreckage of his present." It's truly the Step that allows me to sleep well.

Dennis O'N., Bothell, Wash.

STEP XI

*Sought through prayer
and meditation to improve our
conscious contact with God as we
understood Him, praying only
for knowledge of His will for us
and the power to carry that out.*

LETTING THE SPIRIT JOIN IN

Practicing our Eleventh Step develops my ability to do one thing at a time. At meetings, people are sometimes amused when I say that. One man told me, "That's ridiculous, everyone knows how to do one thing at a time." Later on, when I asked him how he meditated, he said, "I can't stop my mind from racing long enough to do that." That remark demonstrates the purpose of the practice.

I wasn't born with the quiet mind needed to meditate. I work hard to develop it. The problem with me is that I'm alcoholic and as *Alcoholics Anonymous* says, "we alcoholics are undisciplined."

So the real problem is lack of discipline.

My first sponsor showed me that I couldn't wait until I felt better to work the Steps. He said, "You must work the Steps in order to feel better." And so my work, my new purpose in life, was cut out.

When I decide to sit still, for twenty minutes, it is alcoholic mind that has the ability to distract me. Distraction usually comes to me in the form of a thought or a subtle sensation, a twitch, or an urge telling me to stop meditating and to do something else. Quieting this alcoholic mind is why I meditate. Following through on a decision to sit

still for twenty minutes — no matter what happens — is spiritual practice.

With the purpose of discipline in mind, and without regard to the results, I have a simple method that I use for meditation. Allow me to pass it on.

Before assuming the posture to meditate, I set a timer for twenty-one minutes (twenty-one is a spiritual number). Next, I say a prayer and ask God, as I understand God, for clear contact. Then for twenty minutes twice a day, morning and evening, I sit with my back straight, in my quiet spot, with reverence for the practice. With my chin held level, and my eyes closed, I focus on my breathing.

The only thing that exists now is the breath. When thoughts enter my mind I simply label them as "thinking." I don't chase after them.

On the out breath I say, "be done."

This is my formal practice of our Eleventh Step. However, I'm an alcoholic and when something is good, I want more; so I've learned how to meditate even when I'm not sitting in my formal practice.

For example, I keep rhythm with my footsteps when I'm walking. Doing one

thing — walking — with my body, and paying attention to it with my mind, gives my spirit a chance to join in. When I pay full attention to what I'm doing, I'm meditating. I'm united — body, mind, and spirit — with a single-

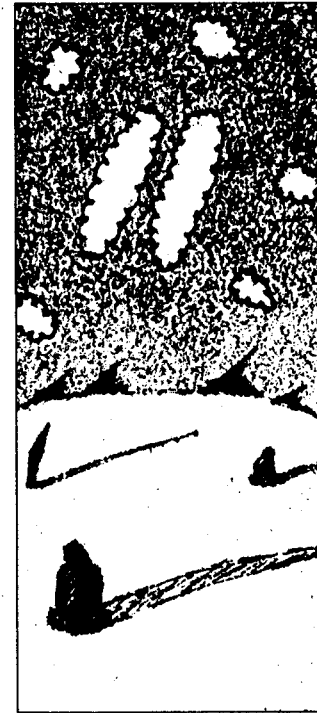
ness of purpose. This helps quiet my alcoholic mind.

Another example is when I do the dishes. I no longer view the dishes as an unpleasant task. I see them as an opportunity to meditate. In fact, I stretch the job out. I touch the warmth of the water. I listen to its rich flow. While watching the formation of bubbles I feel a loving God. I concentrate on washing the dishes and not on what I'm going to do next. The most important thing is what's in front of me — now.

One AA member who frequents my home

group describes mindfulness this way: "Wherever you are — be there." Likewise: "When I walk, I walk; when I do dishes, I do dishes." You'd be amazed at the opportunities that are given for meditation during a twenty-four-hour period. Being united in body, mind, and spirit is spiritual; it keeps me sober.

Tom W., Buffalo, N.Y.



STEP 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

DON'T DRINK, AND CHANGE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

“There are only two things you have to do to stay sober,” the old-timer with the gravel voice told me. “Don’t drink one day at a time and change the rest of your life.”

I’d been hitting one or two meetings a week for about a year and was binge drinking between shrinking intervals of white-knuckle abstinence. What the old guy said sounded grandiose enough to keep me interested. The rest of your life — just the kind of adventure that appealed to a crusader like me. This one-day-at-a-time stuff was for lightweights.

Fingering the white chip I carried around to impress AA people who

took me aside at meetings, I thought maybe I’d get one of those things for real some day. That would be the first day of the rest of my life. This rang true with the sixties jargon I’d often used to give my drinking and drugging the status of a political statement and spiritual quest.

When I finally did pick up my “real” white chip, the circumstances of my life had deteriorated enough that I was grateful just for the daily reprieve I got at meetings from fear and self-loathing. Losing a marriage, home, belongings, business, money — for a while I didn’t want anything more than for life to be semi-normal.

But now, at eleven years, listening to

speakers who are a year or two sober, I am reminded of a phase of my sobriety that I sometimes long for. Newcomers have an urgency in their voices and an intense, earnest look in their eyes when they talk about what life is like for them. I remember the passionate awakenings and lightning-flash realizations I experienced from working the Steps with my sponsor.

An older man recently told me, “This is the third day of the rest of your life.” On the third day of the rest of your life, the lessons of the first day don’t carry the same voltage. The failure, pain, loss, and guilt that forced me to those actions and which gave the simplest advice an after-ring of profound wisdom — that’s all easy to forget when life today seems like it’s been too normal for too long.

But when I get complacent enough, the drive to satisfy instincts first gains momentum. I start looking for something outside myself to get that jolt I liked so much, slamming down a few quick shots at the beginning of a bender. I have this nagging memory that drinking once worked well for me, but even drinking I was distant, self-conscious, apart from. I thought this is how the rest of my life would be: quiet, des-

perate isolation interrupted occasionally by a good drunk.

In the beginning of sobriety I worked the program the same way, “doing up” the Steps quickly, the same way I did up shots of tequila and Panama red, waiting for the magic moment when the right chemicals would suddenly

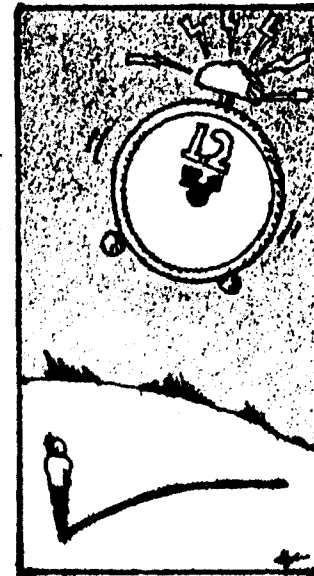
open a door in the invisible wall that separated me from whatever I was doing or whoever I was with.

Booze did actually sometimes give me what I know today is relief from the burden of self. I did a few small things while drunk that I’m still proud of. But our Eleventh and Twelfth Steps have provided a much more practical and sustainable experience with it.

Trouble is, I’m missing that feeling of selfless

engagement now in sobriety. At one, two, and three years sober, I spoke frequently at meetings and commitments. And I remember others laughing with me and thanking me after meetings for the fervor of my story and my commitment to carrying the message. True to form, though sober long enough to know better, I still want the old electricity without the discomfort and hard work that produced it.

That profound feeling of connection



Step Twelve

with the truth of what I'm saying at the very moment I'm saying it eludes me now. I have a lot of AA advice and quotes and page numbers from the Big Book on the tip of my tongue. And I'm grateful for what I have today. But on the third day of the rest of my life, I have memories of burning with a hotter flame.

Fortunately, I also have the continuing guidance of Steps Eleven and Twelve, and of other sober alcoholics. Understanding that I haven't arrived on a spiritual plateau, that I can only make progress, gives me the willingness, the vitality, and sometimes the

sharp yearning to live this one day as if it were the first, not the third, day of the rest of my life. For my jags of envy and fantasy about days gone by, I know that the answer is still more spiritual growth.

The old-timer who told me about changing the rest of my life is still around, and he still reminds me that, one day at a time, it just keeps getting better. Having done the high-voltage alternative about as much and as long as I could stand it, I think I'll just live today as if he might be right. If it works all right, I'll try it again tomorrow.

Anonymous, York Harbor, Me.

Not Everybody Makes It

The small New England town where I lived in the early seventies was a wonderful place for me. I was a sober alcoholic with about a year of AA under my belt. There were plenty of meetings, a telephone hotline with lots of Twelfth Step work, and an ample supply of willing old-timers. I retain a mental collage of AA friends, an old church, a paneled meeting room, a steaming coffee urn, and a friendly parish cat with twelve toes on its forepaws. Of course, I have allowed time to soften my memories of those early days, and I more easily remember the best times over the not-so-good.

I cannot, however, think of those New England days without dwelling for a while upon Jimmy. I'm not sure exactly where we met, but it was probably at an AA meeting. Jimmy was a short, almost frail Irishman, with a spring in his step and a smile on his

face. He was forty-something and a native of one of the surrounding towns. He was well liked by all for his cheerfulness and positive outlook. My wife and I were attracted to Jimmy from the beginning. He quickly became a friend and companion to our family. He rode to meetings with us, occasionally joined us for meals, and celebrated some holidays with us in our home. We shared about the program, sobriety, our lives before AA, and a hundred other things. Eventually I became his sponsor.

Jimmy had some great tales. He told of wild, running drunks lasting for days, and described for us a collection of hobos, jail birds and ne'er-do-wells and their exploits. And he recounted two occasions when he was found in the wrong place at the wrong time, and how he had paid dearly for it. But there was another side to Jimmy. His history of sobriety was mottled. During the

three years that we resided in that small town, he would accumulate a few weeks or a month or two of sobriety and then a relapse would recur. In his forty-something years, he had experienced over one hundred in-patient stays at substance abuse treatment facilities.

Far too much of my time with Jimmy was spent in the large smoke-filled dayroom of the hospital. My wife and I would visit often to call on people we'd taken there as a result of our Twelfth Step work, and we'd always spend some time with Jimmy if he were resident, bringing him some cigarettes or reading material, and on one occasion, celebrating his birthday. We'd sit in the dayroom and talk AA and swap our tales. He'd invariably complete the mandatory twenty-eight days of treatment and return to society. A new attempt at sobriety would follow, with a dedication that was painful to observe.

Jimmy would make his daily AA meeting and sweat through the compulsions that we've all experienced. He and I would do our "sponsor" stuff and he'd seem to learn more with each cycle of recovery and regression. During one cycle, he found a job, and for a while he flourished.

The last time I saw Jimmy was on a warm summer night in the mid-seventies. Jimmy had called and said that he needed to see me. He was having another compulsion to drink and needed to talk to his sponsor about it. I invited him to the house. I met him at our

front door, and we migrated to the sidewalk as we talked. Our discussion, I'm sure, was similar to a million other talks between sponsors and their charges. I offered to take Jimmy to a meeting, to go somewhere for coffee, or to just go into the house and discuss the matter until the compulsion passed. But in the end, Jimmy said with a sigh and some finality, "Wally, I just want to be drunk more than I want to be sober." I asked if there was anything else I could do or say, or if he needed a ride but he said, "No." I was now speechless and felt drained and helpless.

Jimmy turned and began to walk away into the dark summer night toward the center of town. Between the street and the sidewalk was a line of large maple trees. Among the trees were regularly spaced street lamps and each lamp cast a diffused circle of light through the foliage onto the sidewalk below. I stood and watched Jimmy's slight figure recede into the distance. He passed from a circle of light to darkness to another circle of light as he walked away.

I must have watched Jimmy slowly disappear for almost ten minutes. His passage from light to darkness and back to light was like his life. I tried to understand him and his final words to me. What could I have said that I didn't? Could I have reacted differently and made an impact? Were there problems like "grave emotional and mental disorders"? Was the "capacity to be honest" involved? Soon after that night,

AA Grapevine

my career took me and my family to another state. I have never heard from Jimmy again.

Time has passed and you old-timers have taught me some things, and perhaps made me wiser. Today I know that I could only offer sobriety and AA to Jimmy; it was for him to take them for himself. Each of us has our own personal sobriety which we construct to fit our own set of needs. And not all of us are fortunate enough to achieve sobriety. Today, I try to practice acceptance

and not question why things are the way they are.

I must admit to some hopeful thoughts when I turn the clock back to that dark summer night. I hope that Jimmy has found his sobriety. I wish him serenity, the unconditional love of a home group, and a warm circle of friends. And I thank him for all that I have learned as a result of our three years of friendship and sponsoring. And I remember him.

Wally K., Idaho Falls, Id.



Beginners Meeting

Open Your Tool Kit

When I entered the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, ending my relationship with King Alcohol, I discovered I had a serious problem. I now had to deal with all the difficulties of the real world, and I had no practical set of tools to get by on a daily basis. The prospect of being happy, joyous, and free was not yet a reality. It appeared, and I accepted, that life without the numbing effects of alcohol was going to be scary and miserable. At least, I wasn't gagging in the morning and peeing in my pants. As difficult as early recovery was for me, it was clear that the tornado of my alcoholism had

ended and new damage inflicted on others had stopped.

What I realize now, and what I think is so very important for newcomers to understand, is that the whole world of Alcoholics Anonymous — meaning the Twelve Step program, the fellowship, the service work, and the path to a personal higher power — provides us with a full set of tools that allows us to go through life without finding it necessary to take a drink. Think about that. To be able to get through all of life's realities without finding it necessary to take a drink! Births, deaths, weddings, funerals, getting a job, losing a job, promotions, demotions, hurt

feelings, good feelings, going on vacation, staying home sick, making a friend, losing a friend, arguments, nice long talks on the beach, Cubs games, business trips . . . That's a lot of reality for me to feel in its fullest without escaping through artificial numbing. So what are these new tools I was given as a free gift in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous? This is what I've learned.

1. Share your feelings. When things hurt on the inside (fear, frustration, anger, etc.) pick up the phone and call someone and honestly tell them what the problem is. When you're confused and trying to figure something out by yourself for hours or days, do yourself a favor and call someone and ask them for help. If you start to

consider the pluses and minuses of taking a drink, act with the same sense of urgency that you would if your house was burning down — i.e., go immediately to a meeting or call anyone in AA, and tell these people what you're thinking. The 911 attitude is called for.

2. Remember, it's progress not perfection. One day I was struggling with something I knew I needed to do but couldn't get the courage to take action

on. I beat myself up continually for not doing it and had a miserable day. I called my sponsor, Lenny, and he started telling me about something that he couldn't do that day but was likely he would get to tomorrow. There was acceptance and peace in his voice on this subject and I knew I'd found a powerful tool. Maybe I can't do it today but maybe I'll be able to tomorrow. I'm a human being who's going to make a lot of mistakes; the sooner I realize and accept this, the better my life will become.

3. Make new friends. It became very clear to me, after some pain and learning, that if I'm going to travel this new path of recovery, it will be much easier and more enjoyable if I'm in the company of a bunch of people go-

ing down the same road. We need people who understand what we're talking about and who want to live a life that is happy, joyous, and free — and are willing to take the necessary steps to get there. I have to get rid of my old ways and ideas, and it will be much harder if I continue to hang around my old gang. We need to find new friends and do things with them that celebrate our road to freedom.

*Births, deaths,
weddings,
funerals,
getting a
job, losing
a job . . .*



Beginners Meeting

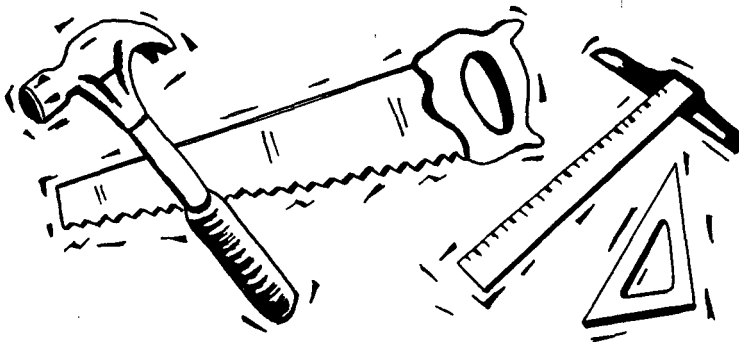
4. Let go and let God. My friends in my home group taught me to find a friend in God. They said, “you’d better find a relationship with him so when you’re alone in some new environment you have someone to talk to — someone who cares about you and whom you can tell your problems to.” Here is the big key for me: I do believe there is a God of the universe, all-powerful and loving; the question is, do I trust him? Do I talk about turning everything over to him and then in my thoughts and actions continue to play God myself? Unfortunately for me, I like playing God most of the time. Heck, I’ve done it for a long time, it feels comfortable. But you know what? Yesterday it became crystal clear to me, God is a much better manager than I am. The sooner I really turn things over, the sooner I will receive serenity. Powerful tool!

5. Help somebody. Really, anyone will do. In my old life I was convinced that the more I did for myself, the happier I would be. Wrong! Selfishness and self-centeredness are the root of my problem. The words from the Big

Book sink deep into my heart: the cure for the problem is to help others. I particularly find it useful when I spend time with a new member of AA, especially one who is crying from the pain. Humility and gratitude seep in and all my “big problems” shrink in a matter of minutes. It’s really interesting, isn’t it? Help others and you help yourself. One day I was going to work and a lady was having a hard time getting her kids through a revolving door. As always, I was in a hurry. But I stopped and helped her and she gave me a smile and said, “Thank you very much.” I keep thinking that this twenty-second action was the most important thing I did that day, maybe that week. When you are into yourself, your problems and your world, pull this one out of your tool bag. It’s a beauty.

As we walk down the road of recovery, we will undoubtedly run into life’s struggles. We can get through these bumps if we remember to open our AA tool bags and find some tools, are willing to use them, and humbly share them with others.

Anonymous, Roselle, Ill.





**Youth
Enjoying
Sobriety**

Amends Are an Action

Recently a lot of changes have been happening in my life. During times like these I am often forced to take a look at the way things were at one time in my life and to compare them with the way things are today. As always, I am quite impressed with the impact that the Twelve Steps have had on my life.

But one particular change really stands out in my mind. I was reminded of it recently while I was standing next to a lake that my father used to live on.

This lake signifies the place where my amends to my father began. At the time I was only fifteen. It was during my second stay at a treatment program for alcoholism. Part of the program was

for us to take a home pass.

One day my mother suggested that I take a pass with my father since I usually took them with her. Of course I hadn't thought of that. And so I did — just he and I. I was a little nervous because I'd never spent that much time with him alone in my life up to that point.

After he picked me up, we went to his house. We decided to spend the entire day together talking, so the first thing we did was take a long walk around the lake near his house. That was the first time I ever remembered spending so much time talking to my father. I don't even remember what was said, but I believe it was the beginning of my amends to him.

I don't ever recall saying that I was sorry. We both just explained to each other where we were coming from. For the first time in my life I saw that my father was very human. I'd always pictured him as a person who was there to lecture me about my grades not being good enough.

About a year and a half later he invited me on a family vacation to a local national park, a place we'd been to years before when I was still drinking. While we were there I made an effort to spend as much time as I could with him. We hiked, went fishing together, and even attended a campfire sing-along program.

Upon returning from the trip, he told me that he wanted to talk to me before I went home. He explained to me that if I had any doubt in my mind that I still owed him amends, as far as he was concerned they were made. He also told me that he loved me and respected my way of life. The way of life he was referring to was the one I had been learning in Alcoholics Anonymous for the last year and a half. At this point in my sobriety I realized the truth in my sponsor's be-

lief that amends were an action and not a simple apology. He had told me that my actions would speak louder than my words.

Finally, a couple of years later I was on a hike with my father when I suddenly felt the need to thank him for something. I wanted to thank him for

never questioning a difficult decision I had made to leave a family function in order to go to an AA meeting. His response was that he had never seen someone change to the extent that I had and that he attributed it to my participation in Alcoholics Anonymous. Basically he felt that if AA allowed him to have his son back in his life, he didn't want to keep me from it.

All of these instances remind me of one thing — the power of God and the Twelve Steps to change a person's life from one of utter despair, loneliness, and disaster to one of peace, joy, and usefulness. Since that day by the lake, our relationship has grown stronger and deeper. He is truly one of the best friends that I have in my life. I thank Alcoholics Anonymous for this.

Erik R., Santa Ana, Calif.

*For the first
time in my life
I saw that
my father
was very
human*



A BIG BOOK ON DEATH ROW

In 1981, I was serving in a southern prison, doing the last few weeks of a five-year sentence. I'd been in that prison for nearly five years, and I'd been locked up, except for four months, since 1968. I'd made a decision that something had to change. As I drew near my release

date, I was determined to get out and stay out. I was nearly thirty-five, and had been locked up since I was twenty-two. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. All of my seven felony convictions were related to alcohol or drugs. They were all violent. I wasn't a social drinker or a friendly drug user.

My job assignment, in 1981, was "Death Row Trustee." This entailed janitorial duties, and other jobs, on Death Row. There were about eighty men under sentence of death at that time. There hadn't been an execution since 1965, but the rumor was that one was happening, very soon.

One young man on Death Row I got to know very well over the months I worked down there. He was about thirty and had been on Death Row for six years. He'd killed a liquor store clerk for a few dollars and two six-packs of beer. The clerk was twenty-one years old when he died.

I noticed my friend reading a big blue book almost every time I went by his cell. One day, out of curiosity, I asked him what the book was. He showed me the Big Book. It was the first time I'd ever seen it. He told me of his membership in AA. The prison allowed him to attend in-house meetings. He was active in the prison group. He had a "civilian" sponsor who visited him fairly often. He told me he was "working" the Twelve Steps. I didn't have a clue what he meant, but figured whatever it was, it must be okay. This man was always upbeat, even though he was facing death. He always had a good word, and the other condemned men liked him.

One day I came by his cell. I had three weeks to go before my release. I was excited and a little frightened. I noticed he looked a little down. I asked him what was wrong. He told me

they'd denied his last appeal, and his execution had been scheduled for the following Wednesday night. It shocked me. He was going to be the first to go. Death Row was strangely quiet that week.

Wednesday came, and I was mopping the tier. The guards came, about five of them. They opened my friend's door, and he was led out. He stopped by where I was working. He smiled, told me it was time. I shook his hand.

At midnight, plus one minute, they executed my friend. The following morning, I was taken to the "death house"; I had to clean the place up. The guard on duty told me my friend had gone quietly. He told me he'd requested that the father of his victim attend the execution and had spent his last hour talking to the man. When they had him strapped in the chair, the guard told me, he looked out to where the witnesses were seated, and said, "I'm really sorry. Thanks for letting me tell you."

I've been out of prison for over fourteen years. I'm sober for almost ten years. When I take sponsees through the Steps, I emphasize how important Step Nine is. I tell them the story of my friend, now long dead. If they express concern about making amends, I tell them of the toughest amends I ever heard of anyone making.

I know my friend is in Heaven. I've thought of him many times over the years. I hope he's doing well.

Mike P., El Cajon, Calif.



Sharing the Pain

*The Fourth Step
helped open
the doorway to
the past*

When I was in treatment, I set a goal to do a yearly Fourth Step. I became convinced that the only way to stay sober was to do a yearly housecleaning. But looking back over three years of sobriety, I can see that my initial goal may have been a little too ambitious. In fact, I've just finished my second Fourth Step after almost two years of procrastination.

I found numerous excuses for putting it off. I was fearful of opening up my dark little closet and once again pulling out all my dirty secrets from the past. I could remember the pain I experienced

from the last time I did a Fourth Step, and I didn't want to face it again. I wanted to say I'd resolved those issues and didn't need to drag them back into the sunlight.

I'm still sick enough to think that no one else has a story as bad as mine. It is only through my Higher Power putting people in my life — people who've had similar experiences to mine — that I've finally been able to start sharing and feeling less special and unique.

At meetings, I started to casually throw out the statement that I was working on my Fourth Step. I'd say

how I felt the need to do an honest and thorough inventory and that my continued sobriety depended upon me taking this action. I told my sponsor that I was working on a Fourth Step, and she was supportive, encouraging me to do my best. What I wasn't saying was that when I picked up pen and paper, my hand just wouldn't write about the darkness and misery of my past. During my few attempts at writing, I'd reach in and pull out a particularly unappetizing aspect from my past and write about it as fast as I could, so that the pain, fear and terror wouldn't grip my soul again.

People began appearing in my life. One person came to a meeting one night and for some reason, started calling me. I gave her rides to meetings and we talked. One afternoon, I drove downtown and passed her walking on the street. I stopped and asked if she needed a ride home. It turned out she'd been praying for someone to stop be-

cause she was exhausted from walking. I believe that the Higher Power was working that day, not only in her life, but in mine. As we were driving, she turned to me and said that she needed to tell me something but didn't know how.

I turned to her and said, "Just say it."

She told me about a horrible, abusive situation and loss in her life, one that she was still being victimized by. It was such an unexpected and shocking disclosure that I pulled the car over to the curb, stopped, and asked her to repeat what she had said. I'm very grateful for her trust. It gave me the strength and hope I needed to talk about my own experience. There's something about shared shame and pain that lightens the load of guilt and hopelessness.

I now can comprehend the promise that "we will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it."

Carolene B., Natchez, Miss.



Beginners Meeting

Starting Over with Step One

A member of my home group suggested I write my story for the Grapevine. At the time I thought he was nuts, because I had just had another relapse. I thought I was a four-time loser in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today I think that I'm one of the lucky ones who made it back. I can thank my Higher Power that he kept me coming back. Today I feel like a winner.

My first two attempts at treatment and the AA program were made to get people off my back. I was a good liar and a good con artist and it worked for a while, until I'd do something even lower than the time before. After two treatment centers and coming close to

losing my family, I entered a treatment center for the third time because I'd truly lost myself. I thought there was something that the treatment centers were forgetting to teach me about Alcoholics Anonymous. But as you people knew, I wasn't ready to listen.

I left the third treatment center with a strong willingness to do whatever AA members told me to do. I went to ninety meetings in ninety days, I got a sponsor, I worked the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability at the time. I talked to God every morning and asked him to help me stay sober, and every night I thanked him for keeping me sober. Then I chaired meetings and got involved in Twelfth Step work. I was

attending three meetings a week and finding happiness in sobriety.

After two years of sobriety, I'd forgotten the pain of my last drunk. I'd stopped listening at the one meeting a week I was attending. The Steps were something I'd already worked and I didn't continue to work them on a daily basis. I stopped asking God for help and I stopped thanking him for keeping me sober. I continued to hang out with recovering people, but I wasn't telling them how I was taking my sobriety for granted. I didn't think that after two years I'd pick up again. I believe now — after hearing relapse stories and after relapsing myself — that I was setting myself up for the very thing that I didn't think would happen to me. I'd stopped doing the things I had done to stay sober and happy. I wasn't treating my disease of alcoholism.

So I went back out for one day. It wasn't where I had left off two years and three months before; it was worse. Before I entered my third treatment program in 1992, after twenty years of drinking, I had no desire to live. Within that one day, the guilt and disappointment I felt were overwhelming. Again, I had no desire to live. I thank my Higher Power for getting me home before I acted on my willingness to die.

The next morning, I called some people in my home group. They showed me a fellowship and friendship I'd never seen before. They weren't angry and disappointed that I had gone back out; they were just glad to see me back. They accepted me with open arms (in fact they've accepted me at times when my family did not). They picked me up and took me to meetings; they hugged me and told me they loved me. I only hope I can be that kind of person someday.

Today I know what I want and that is to stay sober and do what the people in AA tell me to do. I thought I'd always feel angry and disappointed in myself, but I thank God for taking me down fast and hard, and for showing me once again just how powerless I am over alcohol.

I'm doing ninety meetings in ninety days, I'm asking God for help every morning (because I know I can't do this myself or get too confident), I call recovering people every day, I read my daily meditations, I'm starting over with Step One, and I'm thanking God at the end of each day for my sobriety. I'm doing what the members of Alcoholics Anonymous tell me to do, to live one day at a time and to never stop treating my disease of alcoholism.

Becky S., Sunnyland, Ill.

*I'm one of
the lucky
ones that
made it
back*



Along Spiritual Lines

The Old Three-Six Combination

I wanted to make certain I was spiritually ready to do Steps Three through Seven. Everything had to be perfect. I wanted time to meditate, to think clearly. The week my husband and sons had planned to be away on a ski trip would be ideal. The house would be quiet and I could work without interruption. This was my plan — surely God couldn't object to my planning ahead. Nothing less than painstaking preparation would do.

For months I had prayed for discernment of God's will — at the same time fearing that I might get the answer. Would I have to give up all my worldly goods? And would I end up tacking

“Praise the Lord!” at the end of every other sentence? Perish the thought — that's not my style. I knew I was still swimming against the current. “I am not worthy,” I said to God over and over.

Since I didn't fear doing Steps Four and Five but was still having problems with Step Three, I planned to pay attention to it after I'd worked Four and Five. I figured I'd know more about myself then and I'd be ready to do Step Three, which would then overlap with Step Six. This Three-Six combination would be a real knockout of a spiritual experience! And Step Seven would follow smoothly, naturally.

Sunday. My husband and sons left early in the morning, and after going to church as usual, I wrote down my plans for the week. I decided to attend as many noon and evening AA meetings as I could in their absence; this would help me stay sober. Then, unafraid, I spent three hours writing my inventory and was satisfied that I'd been thorough. As expected, I gained a new insight regarding my alcoholism and felt some relief. What I had written, however, also seemed to reinforce my lack of self-esteem. “Lord, I am not worthy of your love,” I said.

That night, I attended an AA meeting and asked my sponsor to do Step Five with me. The date was set for the following Wednesday morning. Good, I thought. That would give me another two days to prepare.

Monday. At a noon AA meeting, my sponsor expressed the importance of striving for progress rather than perfection. I'd heard her say this once before. I knew she'd perceived this was a problem for me in my attempts to understand Step Three. To me, a satisfactory completion of Step Three was predicated upon knowing with certainty what God wanted me to do, and it meant absolute, unconditional surrender and obedience on my part forever. Period. When I did Step Three I was going to do it my way, by God, or not at all!

Tuesday. That night at a meeting, I was very glad to see a man whom I knew had been anxious and depressed

several days earlier. I'd prayed for him and hoped for my sake that the Big Book I'd given him had made a difference. And here he was — okay and sober. Whether or not my simple gesture had helped him or not didn't matter now and this surprised me. I was just glad to see him.

My sponsor was also there. She and I mused on the timeliness of the topic which had been picked for that meeting: honesty and Steps Four and Five. She suggested I reread the Big Book sections on Steps Four through Seven before retiring that night. But what about Step Three? Time was running out; I felt no closer to a discernment of God's will than I did before and I still feared the answer.

Later, when I climbed into bed with my Big Book, I prayed for guidance. I wanted to be well-prepared. Suddenly, the music alarm on the bedside digital clock/radio went off, startling me. I checked the buttons and confirmed that the alarm had been set for 8 AM. I pushed another button to read the time. 12:46 AM. This is crazy, I thought, and pushed the off button, but the radio continued blaring. I stared at the clock: still 12:46. Bemused, I wondered if perhaps God wanted me to listen to the lyric of the song being aired. Nope, too tacky and no connection. I unplugged the radio, and returned to the Big Book, but I couldn't concentrate. Suddenly, I made a strange decision. I got down on my knees and said, “I give up. Do with



me what you will." It was strange because I didn't mean it. Instantly regretting my words, I said again, "Lord, I am not worthy." I climbed back in bed and read for a while longer until I grew sleepy. Before turning off the light, I made another strange decision. I decided that, for a while at least, I wouldn't plug the radio back in. Plugging it in would only confirm that it simply had gone berserk — and that would spoil things.

Wednesday. A few minutes before my sponsor arrived at my home, I decided to read the Third Step prayer, even though I'd planned to do it in conjunction with Step Six. I thought: "Who knows? It might take." So I got down on my knees and read, "God, I offer myself to Thee — to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

I went over my inventory with my sponsor, and though I'd been thorough and honest, I didn't feel the overwhelming relief I was supposed to. She was very reassuring, however, and pointed out that I would regain my self-esteem in time. And again she gently reminded me that I should strive for progress not perfection. I didn't tell her about the clock/radio incident — possibly because it now seemed insignificant, possibly because I was afraid she

might laugh at me. Before she left, she instructed me to do Steps Six and Seven straightaway. Alone again, I knelt on the living-room carpet. I didn't feel right. Perhaps the hard kitchen floor would do the trick. So I knelt on the kitchen floor and read the Seventh Step prayer, even though I didn't feel ready. How could I? I was not worthy. Immediately afterwards I went to a noon AA meeting feeling disappointed. I'd failed again. A vague discontent stayed with me for several hours. I told myself, "You're trying too hard." So I busied myself for several hours doing something different, and by day's end I felt better.

Thursday. As planned, I met a friend for an early lunch. Though I enjoyed her company, I felt the urge to get away and go to the noon AA meeting. It wouldn't matter if I arrived late. I wanted to be there even if to only catch the closing with the Lord's Prayer. Wednesday's discomfort had vanished and I was in a good mood. As it turned out, the meeting was running overtime. I listened eagerly to three or four alcoholics before my turn came. Before I knew it, I was cheerfully relating my clock/radio story. We all laughed. Perhaps the others laughed because I had entertained them. For me the important point was that I stopped taking myself so seriously. On the way home, I started laughing again and I thanked God. Many wonderful thoughts raced through my mind, most of which I've forgotten. I realized how

impossible it would be for me not to act at variance with God's will from time to time. I wasn't perfect — and suddenly that was all right. My childlike reactions to the clock/radio constituted a reaffirmation of my faith in God; prostrating myself at my bedside was a manifestation of my need to want to do God's will — and that was a step in the right direction. But needlessly I had complicated matters! I felt God's love

and shivered tearfully. If he could accept me as I was, who was I to resist?

When I got home, I felt the need to write it all down. I stopped only long enough to redo Steps Three, Six, and Seven. Only this time around it felt right. Not perfect, but right and good. I felt God's love and that was all the nourishment I needed to keep me sober this day.

P.A., Temple, Tex.

Step 1

We admitted we were
powerless over alcohol
— that our lives had
become unmanageable.

Living to Good Purpose

I've heard it said that Step One is the only Step we have to take perfectly. Perhaps this idea comes from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*; on page 68, we read: "Only Step One, where we made the 100 percent admission we were powerless over alcohol, can be practiced with absolute perfection."

Thank God, in my case perfection was not required. My taking of the First Step was an educational process, a gradual realization that this Step did apply to me. I can't tell you at what point I consciously took Step One for the first time, but I know when I attended my first AA meeting I was sure

I wasn't an alcoholic. I simply didn't match the picture in my mind of what an alcoholic was.

I'm one of those fortunate people who was introduced to AA by being taken to my first AA meeting. I didn't attend that meeting because I knew I was powerless over alcohol; I came because I was terrified of the man who brought me there. I knew this man had been locked up in a state mental hospital for being violent toward women. While there, he started attending AA meetings brought in by members of the local H&I committee, and when he came home on leave he informed me that we were going to a meeting. I

wasn't about to argue with him. (Today I believe that my Higher Power sent this man into my life. He went back to the hospital the day after introducing me to AA, and I've never seen him since. I don't know if he was an alcoholic, but I thank God he knew I was.)

I don't remember what was said in that first meeting or anyone who shared, but at the end of the meeting an attractive, well-dressed lady came up to me, introduced herself, and asked, "Do you have a problem?" Of course I said no. I was sure I had many problems, but alcoholism wasn't one of them.

The problem wasn't that I hadn't reached my bottom — I had hit it and then dragged! I was ill, homeless, unemployable, and at that point of despair in which I knew nothing would ever make life better for me. I'd been a daily drinker for about three years. I weighed eighty-five pounds, had wine sores on my arms and legs, and couldn't remember the last time I'd taken a bath, brushed my teeth, or washed my hair. I knew my life was unmanageable, I just didn't know that alcohol had brought me to this state. I thought I was mentally ill, immoral, and the victim of poor choices and bad companions. But not an alcoholic!

Within a few meetings, I began introducing myself as an alcoholic. After all, I was smart enough to figure out that was the way to be accepted in this outfit! I wasn't sure what these sober alcoholics had, but it was certainly bet-

ter than what I had in my life. But I still thought I was different, that if these people had my problems, they'd drink too!

The awareness that I was an alcoholic came gradually, through identification with the stories that were shared, and through the recognition that my life was getting better. The only thing that had changed was that I wasn't drinking — and my life began to improve. I became aware that I was an alcoholic at about six months of sobriety. I was terrified. I thought that if I was alcoholic, if I was powerless over alcohol, I'd have to drink again. That fear launched me into willingness to attempt the other Steps.

What I didn't realize then was that I was beginning a lifelong process of applying these principles, one day at a time, to all of life's experiences, not perfectly but to the best of my ability.

Step One is just as important in my life today as it was at the beginning of my sobriety. Each day this Step reminds me that I'm still powerless over alcohol. I have a daily reprieve from the disease of alcoholism only as long as I'm willing to continue to do those things which keep me centered in my own recovery.

Each year brings me new challenges and opportunities and contributes a new understanding of myself and others, and of the process through which I can live to good purpose. And that process always begins with Step One.

Mickey H., Springville, Utah

Step 2

**Came to believe that
a Power greater
than ourselves could
restore us to sanity.**

Mesmerized By Sanity

When I first became a member of AA, all I did was stop drinking. This was a long time ago, and it was what the Fellowship around me advocated: you stayed away from the first drink a day at a time, shared at meetings, and this state of sobriety would enable you to solve all of your life's problems. My friends in AA, having been sober for some time, had something I wanted so I did what they did.

It worked fine — for a while. Then it stopped working. I became more and more discontent but denied it. After all, I was sober, wasn't I?

Too much of a coward, I didn't drink again but developed a second compulsion that brought me to my knees. This compulsion was only a symptom of my

huge emotional problems: I was angry, fearful, totally self-absorbed, manipulative and dishonest in my relationships, I loathed myself and the world, and most of all, I was deeply unhappy. I had created a normal life, living like my peers did, achieving in my profession, and dying inside.

At this point I moved abroad, and it was in the first AA meeting there that I had what I can only describe as a spiritual experience. I guess I was terrified of the new situation, alone in an unfamiliar environment, and that made me open-minded. I listened to a speaker sharing about her relationship with God (they spoke a lot about God at that meeting), and she had such clear, fearless eyes, she radiated such happiness and contentment that I was mes-

merized. Suddenly I understood what had happened to me: the reasons for my drinking not having been treated, my alcoholism had come back with a different symptom. I felt an incredible joy and relief, and a wave of self-love and acceptance. I could see now I was presented with the very tools that would help me overcome my alcoholism. I now think that my "relapse" was quite a healthy reaction. If I look at human beings as systems, mine had had to cease functioning. I'd so mistreated myself by imposing standards of perfection, thus making self-acceptance impossible, and I'd denied all spiritual and emotional needs, that the system had to signal — with my new compulsion — that all was not well. I was forced to take notice and act. I could regret the wasted years, or I could get on with life and get well.

My real recovery started that very moment. I started AA all over again, got a sponsor, and worked the Steps in the order given.

The program promised me sanity, and it became something very desirable. I saw sanity in people I actively sought out in the meetings. It meant

peace of mind, contentment, and self-acceptance. No more fighting the world and being eaten up by the rage, no more having to be Ms. Perfect who had all the answers. Looking back, I had no doubts that I could not do it by myself. I recognized that help had to

come from a power greater than myself. Or, as I once heard at a meeting, "The mind can't cure the mind."

So I thought about the power greater than myself that I wanted to trust and whose care I could turn my life and my will over to. Again, I was helped greatly by those who were there before me. The well people all had a very personal relationship with God, and clear ideas about what their God was like. I listened, tried, erred, and changed my ideas when necessary. For some

time now, my ideas about my Higher Power haven't changed but my understanding has deepened.

Has it all been plain sailing then? Of course not. Over the years, much has happened, life circumstances have changed, and I'm getting older. I find one pattern coming up again and again. When all is well, I get complacent. Prayer stops being a priority, I do

*... the reasons
for my drinking
not having been
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back with a
different
symptom.*

my Tenth Step less thoroughly, and going to a meeting becomes a burden. Fortunately, my threshold for self-inflicted pain is low these days, and I return to God as the source of sanity sooner rather than later. I've had some spectacular experiences of instant relief when asking God to take away obsessions. On the other hand, I've also experienced times when I had to ask again and again for the willingness to apply self-discipline to let go of self-destructive thoughts and actions.

These days I find that nothing is as precious as my sanity. I used to be addicted to drama and could only function on excitement and high levels of adrenalin. It's very different today. I really appreciate the quality of my life. I go through life at an even pace and enjoy being just one of the human race. I strive to serve in my work, to be a good friend and a responsible citizen. It's all very ordinary and average and sane, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

E.M., London, England

Step 3

Made a decision
to turn our will and
our lives over to the
care of God as we
understood Him.

A Remarkable Sensation

I was one of those AA newcomers who chafed at the "God parts" of the Twelve Steps. I thought it was beneath my dignity to believe in God. As a budding alcoholic in my early twenties, I had become infatuated with existentialism, a philosophy that contemplates the role of the individual standing alone in an absurd world. Existentialism seemed to dignify my feelings of isolation and uniqueness and to impart a kind of tragic poignancy to the drunken impulsiveness I liked to think of as acts of free choice. When I entered Alcoholics Anonymous, I desperately wanted to stop drinking and to turn my life around, but I was pretty

sure I didn't need the help of "God."

However, even during my first days in AA, I was wary of poking holes in the program, lest the whole fabric rip apart. I suspected that if I were to allow myself to make even one exception for myself — such as determining that I would ignore the God Steps — I might open myself to a justification to drink. Therefore, I determined to find a way to live with the whole AA program, including God.

But what did Step Three mean? "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." How on earth did a person make such a decision? Turning

my will and life over sounded like an enormously complicated procedure. And even if I could figure out how it was done, what would become of me if I complied? I worried that by following God's will, I'd end up doing something brave and self-sacrificing — and utterly repellent.

The "Twelve and Twelve" said that the only thing required to take Step Three was "a key called willingness." I thought I was willing. Imagining myself holding this elusive "key," I waited for transformation and felt nothing. The book also compared one's awareness of a higher power to electricity flowing, hidden and potent, through the circuits of a house. But I was unable either to feel the movement of this force or to find the switch that would activate it in my life.

The key finally turned, the electricity finally surged, in a way so quiet and simple I could never have consciously willed it.

At the time I got sober, I had been living with a man for several years. Our relationship had been in trouble for quite a while, and my new sobriety only aggravated our problems, for he

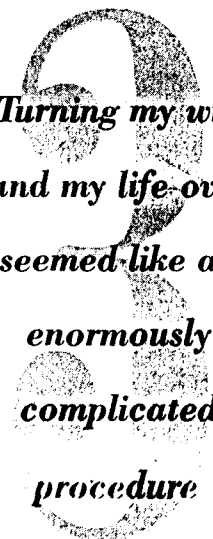
felt threatened by my growing reliance on AA, and I was uncomfortable with his continued drinking. I would wake in the middle of the night and discover that he had not come home, and I would fly into a two-pronged panic that he had died in a terrible accident

or that he was with someone else. I lay in bed with my eyes wide open, my heart racing until I heard his key in the lock.

One night began typically. I woke, realized he was not home, and felt the fear surface. Then something altogether different happened. I understood that I did not have to follow that route. Without even thinking about what I was doing, I said, not exactly to "God" but definitely not just to myself, "Whatever happens, let me accept it." Instantly a wave of calm washed over me. The panic evaporated. I

knew from the core of my being that, because I was sober and was not going to drink over this situation, I was fine. I trusted — something. I fell asleep.

That was sixteen years ago. When I woke up the next morning, I knew I had taken Step Three at last and I was filled with joy. Step Three has contin-



*Turning my will
and my life over
seemed like an
enormously
complicated
procedure*

ued to manifest in my life in ways that are ever more surprising and profound, for, as the "Twelve and Twelve" promises, "Once we have placed the key of willingness in the lock" and experienced that first opening of the door, "we find that we can always open it some more." Shortly after "turning it over" that night, I broke up with the man I was living with. A few years later I married a man I met in AA. I have stayed sober and continued to go to meetings.

And, interestingly enough, following a spiritual path has become increasingly essential to me. Contrary to my fear that taking Step Three would condemn me to a life of brave self-sac-

rifice, I find instead that it frees me to think and act as my truest self. My work, which is writing and leading wilderness trips, helps people explore the connection between nature and spirituality. In following this path, my own journey has flowed along several tributaries. Ultimately, however, the entire process comes down to Step Three: I stay sober and turn my will and life over to the care of God as I understand this wise and radiant entity which is manifested in my own soul.

There is an update to this story. One defect of character I battled for years was a bitter jealousy of other writers whom I perceived to be more successful than I. I had worked hard to let go of

this chronic ache, but it continued to be easily provoked. A few weeks ago, I did a guided imagery session in which I saw the black, bitter bile of professional jealousy being removed from me by a kindly monkey, who placed it in the earth, where it dissolved and became harmless. A couple of days later my young stepson called to say that his first book had been accepted for publication. I waited for the grip of jealousy, but, astonishingly, felt nothing but happiness for his success.

The next day I reflected on this phenomenon as I drove along the highway in my car. I was thinking about how inner change seems to come only when we are truly ready for it. And then I

heard, very clearly, a voice: Are you finally ready to let go and live your destiny?

An old, lingering part of me — that couldn't pass up an opportunity to bargain for what I want — rose up and I thought: Maybe if I say yes, I'll become a famous author.

Yes, I said to the voice.

No, it said. Are you ready to let go and give your life to God?

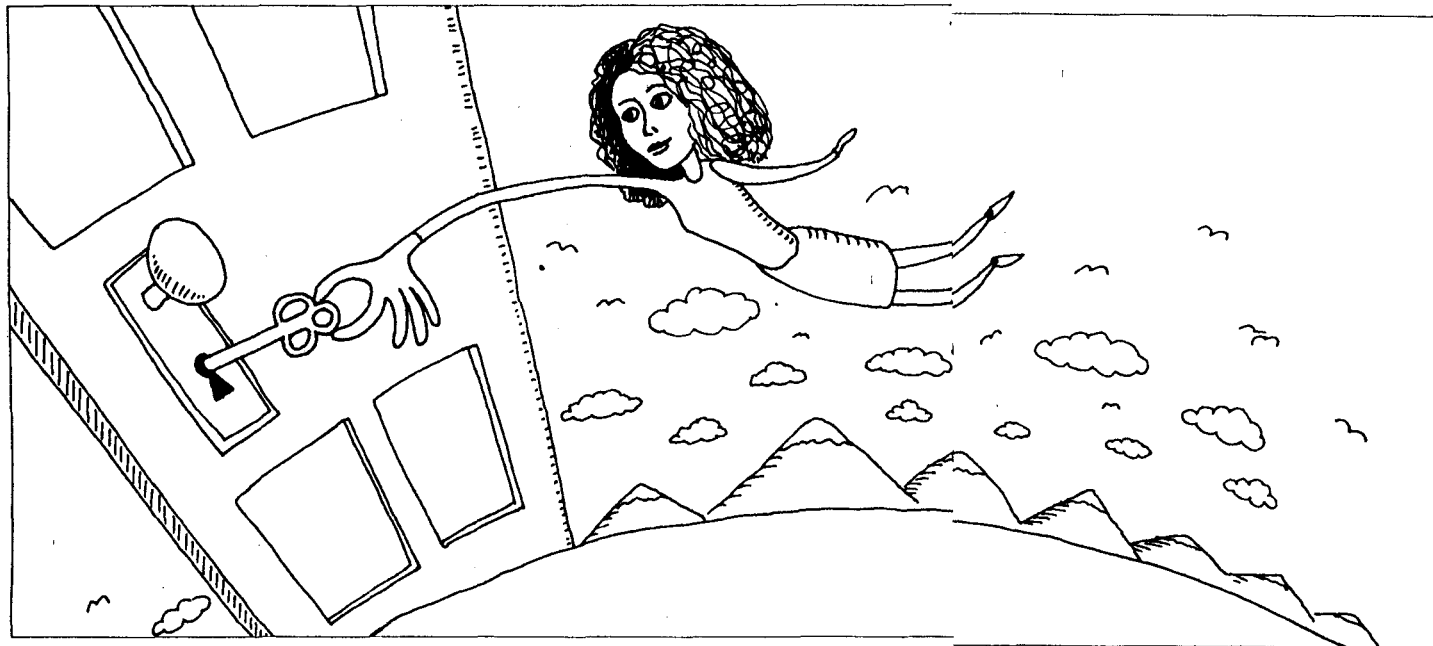
As often as my Higher Power had addressed itself to me directly in my years of sobriety, it had never before referred to itself as God. Certainly I had never called it that. The fact that it now did so shook me mightily. How could I argue?

Yes, I said simply. I'm ready.

I felt then a remarkable sensation. It was as if my entire body was being emptied of what it no longer needed and was instantly filled with something else. The sensation was of light and energy, a kind of tingling current moving through me.

Here was yet further evidence that AA's miracles can always deepen and crystallize if I don't drink, practice the Steps, and trust the process. As long as I am willing to do what I am called to do in any given moment and to abandon the effort to control the results of my actions, then I am following the path that my Higher Power — call it God, Good Orderly Direction, the soul, the life force, or anything else — has set out for me.

Trebbe J., Thompson, Pennsylvania



Step

4

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Naming the Negatives

The Fourth Step attracted me almost as I arrived at the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous. I came to AA full of guilt and remorse for all the bad things I'd done — for example, being an unfaithful wife, not doing my job to the best of my ability and still expecting the highest rewards, and being unresponsive to other people's needs. I was totally self-centered, while at the same time I was thought of by others as being a good wife to a man who drank too much and ran around, being loyal to a job for twelve years, and being so sweet (I never expressed an opinion!). But the way I was viewed by others was not the way I felt inside.

I heard AAs talking about getting rid of the guilt of the past by taking the Fourth and Fifth Steps. I wanted to get rid of my feelings of fear, frustration, and depression, and I became willing to go to any length to accomplish that.

The first thing to do was to make a decision that since I couldn't handle my own life (look at the mess it was in), I could find my own higher power to which I could turn over my life and my will. After that, I'd be able to look at myself and take responsibility for my past actions.

I certainly didn't know how to put names to my feelings because for years I'd practiced not giving information to others about how I felt and what I

thought. If I had problems, I was to solve them myself; hadn't I been taught to be self-sufficient? As I went to meetings and heard others talk about their feelings, I came to recognize some of mine. I came to understand that my natural instincts "for the sex relation, for material and emotional security, and for companionship" need not run my life in a negative way.

Early on, one of my ways of staying sober had been to write down my feelings and questions and new things I learned. At the beginning of my sobriety I would ride home from a meeting on a bus. My small notebook in my purse was there to write down any thoughts I'd had during the meeting I'd just left.

After about fifteen months (and a couple of journals), I went to someone with a good solid sobriety and asked for help in turning my notes into a Fourth Step. He suggested that we meet and I arrived, notebooks in hand. He started me talking, leading me in a discussion of my problems in the areas of sex, society, and security (as suggested by the Big Book). He suggested that I look at pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. We talked for about three

hours and covered every area of my life I had problems in. I found I could put names to my negative feelings and see their source.

What a relief to tell someone about myself without any threat of retaliation or condemnation. I realized I wasn't the worst, most immoral woman alive. I was no different from others who shared at meetings, neither worse nor better, and I wasn't strange or different. When I looked at my assets, I realized that I hadn't set out to harm others or intentionally behaved in an unacceptable manner. I wasn't a bad person; I was a sick person trying to get better. I was a worthwhile human being.

I was a sick person trying to get better. I was a worthwhile human being.

People talk about having a spiritual experience after taking the Fourth Step. What happened to me was that I learned about the person I had been. I looked at my "emotional deformities" so I could "move toward their correction." I now had a better sense of direction concerning what areas I needed to work on. As *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* explains, "... a brand-new kind of confidence is born, and the sense of relief at finally facing ourselves is indescribable."

Since that first inventory, I've taken many Fourth Steps. When my marriage was in trouble, I looked at my part in the problem, at where I'd been wrong. I had no fear in looking at my behavior because I'd been trying in sobriety to be a good wife and companion. I found that my dependence on someone I considered stronger was misdirected. I was frightened of life and hadn't grown up; I felt dominated but in some areas I myself was the one who dominated. I put demands on another person which couldn't possibly be met. I tried to manipulate my husband to meet what I thought were my needs, when I really didn't know my needs.

A few years later, when my marriage had broken up and I'd met someone in whom I was interested, I took an inventory of my relationships with the other men who'd been in my life (father, brothers, friends, lovers), whether causing trouble or not. I didn't want to get into a relationship where I made the same mistakes over again. In this

inventory, I found the same dependencies growing out of fear, self-pity, worry, greed, possessiveness, anger, and a lack of confidence in myself.

Today, when a particular problem can't be covered by a daily Tenth Step, I find it natural to use the Fourth Step. I start with the First Step and see where I'm powerless, I recognize that a Higher Power can help me, and I use the Third Step prayer as a preliminary move toward the Fourth Step. After taking a Fifth Step, I use the subsequent Steps to help me handle the problem.

The Fourth Step lets me look at myself, look into my fear of not getting something I want or of losing something I have, get a perspective on my character defects, and move forward to try to establish true partnerships with other human beings: all in order to be "one in a family, to be a friend among friends, to be a worker among workers, to be a useful member of society."

Sherry G., Riverdale, Michigan

Solutions in Sobriety

From Two-Stepping to Twelve-Stepping

The text of Step Twelve in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* tells my story: "... perhaps life, as it has a way of doing, suddenly hands us a great big lump that we can't begin to swallow, let alone digest."

Beginning in my eighth year of sobriety, the life I'd known began to collapse. I was nearly killed in a pedestrian accident, my wife got a divorce after twenty-three years of marriage, and my son slipped into heroin addiction. "What then?" asks the "Twelve and Twelve": "Have we alcoholics in AA got, or can we get, the resources to meet these calamities which come to so many? These were problems of life we could never face up to. Can we transform these calamities into assets, sources of growth and comfort to ourselves and those about us? Well, we surely have a chance if we switch from 'two-stepping' to 'twelve-stepping,' if we are willing to receive

that grace of God which can sustain, and strengthen us in any catastrophe."

I believed that God's will for me was to grow old with this wife and son as contented family members, so I fought all these painful changes at every step, heaping additional misery on myself as I tried to enforce my own version of God's will.

Finally, beaten and battered by events I couldn't control, I turned to Steps Two through Eleven to save my life. Without a closer look at my spiritual life, insanity, drinking, or death seemed like possible outcomes.

What I found was that to learn to apply these AA Steps successfully in the nondrinking areas of my life, I had to seek outside help.

I learned from Al-Anon and private therapy that I'm powerless not only over alcohol, but also people, places, and things.

Since I'd never been part of a

healthy family, as a child or an adult, my therapist taught me about healthy behavior in a healthy, sober family. I went back into my childhood, where my unhealthy behavior began, and worked a new Fourth Step with my therapist. As my feelings opened up, my gratitude and self-confidence began to strengthen. I felt happier and more productive in all areas of my life, and I began to feel closer to AA. I began practicing these principles in all my affairs, working Steps Two through Eleven.

AA hard-liners might tell me that the answers I needed were in AA all

along, and I wouldn't disagree. I would say only that it took outside help for me to unravel these matters for myself.

Today is the best time that has ever been for me. With more than fifteen years' sobriety, I'm secretary of my home group and engaged to be married to a group member with over seven years' sobriety.

Together and individually, my fiancée and I practice these principles and work Steps Two through Eleven in all our affairs.

And life, one day at a time, has never been better.

John M., Santa Barbara, California

April 1997

Midwest Style

From St. Louis, Missouri;

This is in response to June L.'s article ("We Tread Innumerable Paths," November 1996). My father moved to a retirement community in Arizona after several years of growing in AA in our hometown. AA was different in Arizona, and he didn't like the difference so he stopped going, and after that he kept relapsing.

It wasn't until I was in AA, over six years after his death, that I realized he could have started up a group for people who liked the Midwest style. I hope June will consider founding a meeting that handles the agnostic angle in the way that worked for her before. Others might well benefit from the option too.

In my own home group, believers feel free to talk about their personal conceptions of God, and nonbelievers feel free to talk about how the idea of God weirds them out. All are accepted because each is sharing his or her own truth.

Dan P.

Step 5

Admitted to God,
to ourselves, and to
another human being
the exact nature
of our wrongs.

Opening Doors

I was always in a hurry as an active alcoholic. I felt so rotten about myself in particular and life in general that any time a situation held pleasure, I wanted it quickly. The need for quick relief was so great I never cared what I had to do to get it, or whom I hurt in the process.

When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I looked at the Twelve Steps and calculated I could go through them one a week. It would only be a matter of time before these AA people began looking up to me.

The list of Steps didn't seem too difficult. I wouldn't have been in AA if I wasn't an alcoholic, but this powerlessness business was just for the real bad

cases. As far as my life being unmanageable, that was because of the sick women who were attracted to me. They took advantage of my good nature and kindness.

Steps Two and Three went the same way. Then I reached Step Four. Making a fearless and searching moral inventory of myself was asking a bit much. I was okay. What I wanted to do was finish the program so I could help these other people. I decided to go on to the Fifth Step. Then I read it and figured I'd better get out of the program before someone talked me into making a confession. There was just no way I could bring myself to tell anyone the exact nature of my wrongs. If I told

anyone about the awful things I'd done when drinking, I just knew they'd tell everybody. I could see the banner of my life story hanging across Main Street.

During all this figuring and manipulating, I was able to hear what people were saying about sponsors. I decided a sponsor might be the answer to my dilemma. I picked a man who was twelve years sober and talked about love and forgiveness. He would understand and help me with the Steps.

I remember giving him my first Fourth Step. I knew that in order to make him understand how serious I was, I had to tell him some secrets about my life. I proudly handed him one paragraph of wrongs. He looked at it and asked if this had been done to the best of my ability. I thought I had him snowed. Looking back I realize how patient he was. In fact, he knew then that I was going to get drunk again. But instead of judging me, he just kept saying, "Do the first Nine Steps to the best of your ability and there's a good chance you'll stay sober."

When I came back in from a drunk, a little more humble than before, my sponsor asked me if I knew why I'd re-

lapsed. I gave a million excuses; he gave two: "First, you're a drunk, and second, you didn't do the first Nine Steps to the best of your ability." We started back on Step One, and I became more willing. He told me to read the Big Book again and apply it to my life. He told me that the more I read it,

the more God would reveal what was truth and what was not.

Although I was more sincere at working the Steps, there were a lot of things I wasn't willing to accept. It was suggested that I stay away from relationships for a year, and not make any major decisions. But I wasn't about to be a puppet for anyone, and besides I'd been married five times — I figured I was an authority on relationships. At one time, I had three

women in my life at the same time. Luckily, all of these ladies are still sober, though I'm serving a twelve-year sentence as a result of my last drunk. Living with my selfishness, self-centeredness, jealousy, and anger must have been a nightmare for all of them. It was for me.

Finally, I went a year without a relationship and depended on the program during times of fear and loneliness. I

*The Fifth Step
taught me to
forgive myself so
I could forgive
others.*

did two more Fifth Steps before I was able to do one that was truly to the best of my ability. As I think about the process I went through, I realize that each of those Fifth Step experiences was needed. Each time I peeled off another layer of garbage, the more wreckage I got rid of. I gave a little and waited to see what I got back. Eventually I gave it all, holding nothing back.

I heard people share in meetings, and some of their stories reminded me of myself. It took time to realize just how much I was like them. I found out that most people in AA had already been where I'd been and experienced some of the same terror and frustration in their own lives. I never thought that someone could hear the things I'd done and still like me, but I was wrong. I didn't understand the relief that comes when we find that special person to share with. I didn't know he would look at me and say, "I've done that too."

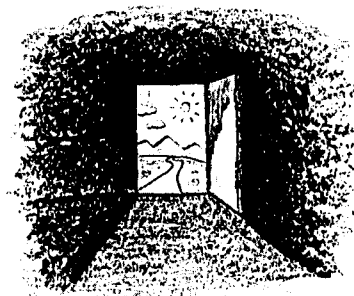
I didn't understand the kind of unconditional love this program offers. I didn't understand words like trust, forgiveness, understanding. I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes I'm not proud of — but I'm okay. Feeling okay — not completely joyous, happy, or free but simply okay is the most wonderful experience I've ever had.

The Fifth Step taught me to forgive myself so I could forgive others. It taught me that unless I have something, I can't give it away. The kind of love and joy that comes from this soul-cleansing process can only come from

one place — one source. The relationship I build with myself must first come from a God of my understanding. I was brought to the point where I could face my Creator and ask his forgiveness. When I had truly done that, I was able to forgive myself and make the confession I'd thought impossible.

I've started back through the Steps again. Being in prison makes it a little harder because the kind of sobriety that comes with time doesn't exist here. My sponsor is four hours away and I'm allowed only ten minutes per call. But I write as often as I can and, soon, I should be moving to a camp nearer my home, so my sponsor can work with me a little better. I am my own best friend today and have many friends I'm starting to build truly loving relationships with. Had I never taken a completely honest Fifth Step, I'd still be living in the same pain that haunted me for years. Trusting God has opened a lot of doors for me, and with him I've been able to walk through them.

Dale J., Jasper, Florida



Step Six

Were entirely ready
to have God remove
all these defects
of character.

stayed a little boy trapped in a man's body — a self-centered, selfish little boy who expected people to live up to his fantasies of them and got hurt when they didn't cater to every want and whim.

Although I had made a Third Step decision, I couldn't really turn my life and will over to my Higher Power because it didn't belong to me. Unknowingly, over the years, I'd turned my will over to all those people whom I felt had injured me in some way.

Fortunately I reached a point where I was choking on all this garbage.

With the help of my Higher Power and the AA program, I chose to grow up. It was about time! I opened up that imaginary closet in my mind where I kept these well-nurtured hurts and tossed them into my past, where they belonged. Into this newly cleaned-out space, I started storing my goals and the hopes and dreams of what I wanted to achieve in life. Now instead of looking backward into the dreariness of my past, I'm looking forward to a bright future because I've finally taken responsibility for my life.

Ron D., Canaan, Connecticut

Making Room to Grow Up

“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.” So reads Step Six. After the guilt and remorse of my last drunk had faded, I didn't think this Step had any application in my life. Now that I was no longer drinking I wasn't a bad person. Character defects? I couldn't see where I had any. My character defects were hidden behind all those hurts and injustices I'd saved up through the years and which I regularly brought out and relived with all the original emotion. Not only that, I accumulated any and every new hurt, real or imagined. In fact I took a kind of perverse pleasure

from feeling sad and self-pitying. I was giving power to people who were long gone. Then I realized that these people gave me my favorite excuses for why I did what I did or couldn't do what I should have done. I used them to justify my actions and blamed them for my failures. Every time something went wrong in my life or I failed to live up to some responsibility, I took out the list of abuses I'd suffered and used it as an excuse. I became very adept at hiding my guilt behind these real or imagined hurts. I was a chronic victim.

The problem with blaming my frustrations and failures on what others did to me is that it kept me small. I



**Humbly
asked Him
to remove
our shortcomings.**

Spiritual Recycling

I have never been able to identify with the way the "Twelve and Twelve" talks about character defects as things that need to be "removed." It just sounds so negative, like having your teeth out: what do you do when they're all gone? I'm not even entirely sure what a defect is.

So the problem for me is, How do I take Step Seven in a way that makes sense, and makes a difference in my life?

I've had to back off the idea of "Deadly Sins" and look at some of the other ways our literature describes character defects. I find it useful to identify ways in which personal change can bring my life into closer alignment

with the bigger AA picture. In particular, I consider what changes in me would place me in a better position to be of maximum use to others. When I ask that question, then Bill W.'s use of the word "handicap" becomes more personally relevant. What handicaps get in the way of right relations and make it difficult for me to be of use?

Before I can "humbly ask" God to remove "defects," I must have some idea of what those words mean to me, based on my experience with them.

Step Seven shows me that the misuse of natural desires makes me useless and unhappy. I've never met a truly useful person who was genuinely unhappy. As I became useful in AA, I be-

gan to move out of that awful isolation we AA's talk about. And being out of the isolation, I was exposed. It was a long overdue experience for a person who had lived in an emotional foxhole since childhood. My initial contact with the real world meant getting active with my group, and it was an emotional roller coaster. I'd never been able to be a member of anything, and my emotional handicaps came bursting forth. The resulting conflicts made me quickly and painfully aware of a lot of things I had been running and hiding from all my life.

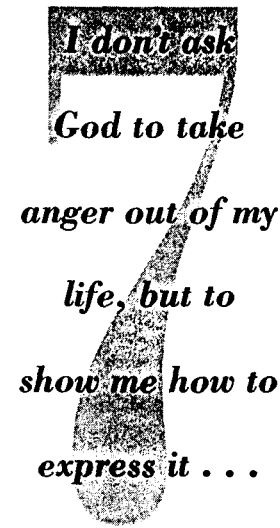
When I look at how fear and self-seeking affect my desire for sex, society, and security, most of the mystery that used to surround the idea of "defects of character" goes away. For example, I think not so much in terms of having lust "removed" as in coming to a more conscious and responsible attitude regarding how I allow my sex drive to find expression. I don't ask God to take anger out of my life but to show me how best to express it or let it go.

You might think that surely anyone would want to be rid of something like envy. What possible good can come from desiring what others have? Well,

when I was new, I was really envious of people who had long-term sobriety. I envied people who could be spontaneous and who were useful and well-liked. So it was how I responded to envy that mattered. What did I do with it? Did I just sit back and hate people who were useful and effective,

in AA? The willingness to change came when I was able to identify and own the cause of my discomfort. Then I could ask humbly. Without this willingness, I would have turned into a chronic and terminal bleeding deacon, running around trying to get people to see it my way. Of course I have tried that over the years, and the result was always that I ended up bored and alone.

Had I not learned to stop running around making things happen, I might have stayed with the old idea that getting active has to do only with what goes on around and outside me, instead of coming to see that it refers as well to what is going on inside. That calls for more calm, thoughtful reflection on human relations. Am I a worker among workers, a friend among friends? Maybe "active" means taking a night off from meetings to stay home



Step Seven

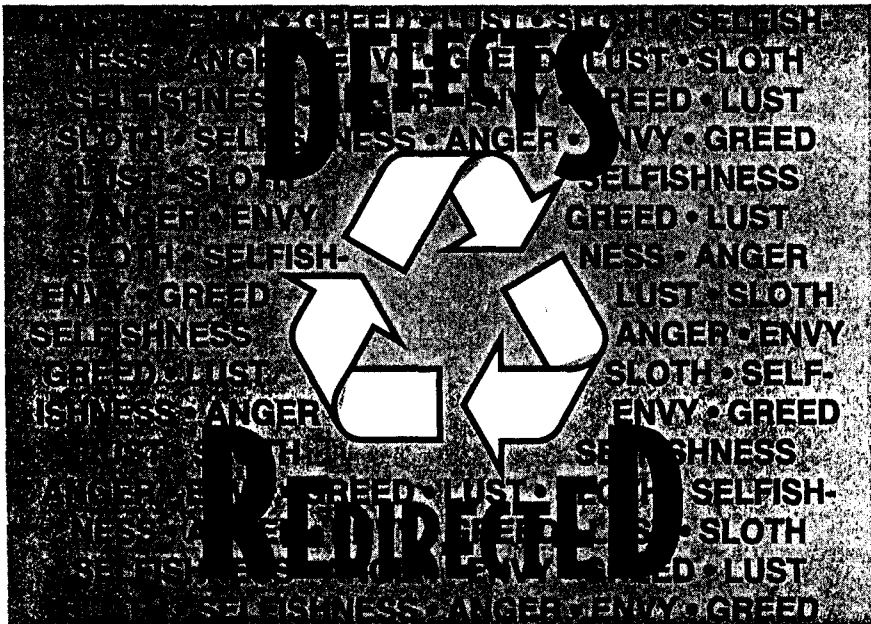
with a good book or a friend. Maybe my group really will get along without me for one night. If my "busy-ness" is a defect, maybe it's also a part of who I am. It need not so much be removed as toned down and redirected. My defects are the boundaries of just what I am capable of and capable of becoming at any given moment. Boundaries that I am unconscious of become barriers.

Maybe I am overly concerned with how people see me. But if I didn't care what people thought at all, I would have nothing to shoot for, no spiritual objective. Maybe anger is a dubious luxury and maybe it's a real human emotion that I've always avoided because I was afraid of it. Maybe my anger needs

not to be removed so much as brought into alignment with the new spiritual objective of right relations. Seen in that light I can ask for knowledge of whether to express it or let it go.

I have a more meaningful understanding of Step Seven today based on experience. I can freely and enthusiastically point others to this Step without that queasy feeling I used to have about it. I don't see Step Seven as being about removal so much as realization. I'm all God has to work with — I have to be enough. Nothing goes to waste in the spiritual recycling process we call Step Seven.

*Jim N., West Springfield,
Massachusetts*



Step 8

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

'The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten'

Neither our literature nor the most enlightened of old-timers can fully explain or define the meaning of "forgiveness," the powerful concept at the heart of the Eighth Step. Like everything else in our spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous, forgiveness has entered my life through my heart and not my mind. In my first year of sobriety I listened with a kind of puzzled yearning to meetings where it was being discussed. To this day, I find Eighth Step meetings particularly poignant. The men and women in my regular Friday night Step

meeting are so simple and direct when they speak of how they have hurt others and how in almost all cases, relationships have healed. There's no room for posturing as we speak up about our recklessness, self-centeredness, dishonesty, lost or soured marriages and families, and violence of various kinds. More than a mere chronicle of bottles and blackouts, these stories of "twisted and tangled relations" with other people bring home the lonely tragedy of alcoholism and the miracle of our all sitting peaceably there on folding chairs with the Twelve Step shades on

the wall above our heads. Sometimes as I sit listening to these tales told in the language of the heart, I remember a quotation from the Book of Joel: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." Individual pain and guilt has been alchemized into something very grand that makes us collectively well.

As a group we are at our most human in those Eighth Step evenings. And we seem to be held most closely by the Higher Power.

My own drinking days were all mixed in with my marriage to a man who, when I met him, was only recently married to another of his several wives. I was young, scared, and thirsty; I can see now that I never would have fallen for him if I hadn't been an alcoholic and if I hadn't liked the way he fixed my glass of Scotch. The wife before me was a very nice person who worked in the same office as I did. As I got involved with her husband, I didn't stop to think about the pain I was causing her. I ducked into a doorway if I saw her coming down the hall. I had the worm of conscience, I'm sure of it, but I stilled it with another drink. Af-

ter he and I had lived and drunk together for some years, he left me in turn for someone else. In a karmic way I felt just how the wife before me had suffered because now I suffered the same myself. She wasn't alcoholic; in the years of my own marriage she had absorbed the blow and moved on with

her life. But for years and years after I was alone again I got stuck in whiskey-soaked self-pity, tormented by an obsessive hatred of that man. This almost killed me; it made me hit my bottom, and I am eternally grateful to him for that.

I can see this story now, but for the first few years of my sobriety I was in an awful fog. I got smart feet, though. I was going to meetings, getting active,

sponsoring and being sponsored — doing the right things. I had been brought up in England in a rather ladylike way. Without the Scotch inside me, at first I couldn't tell whether I was angry or not. I would study that yellow booklet called *Living Sober*, which had many interesting pointers in it, including "shapes and colors" that anger might possibly come in: cynicism, rigidity,

I got stuck in whiskey-soaked self-pity, tormented by an obsessive hatred of that man.

snobbishness, and sarcasm were on a list that helped me to see that rage didn't necessarily mean shouting obscenities or knocking people down. I realized that I was mad at my poor little mother, and at my sister as well. (Honestly, I can't quite remember what that was all about, and I think today that I am very lucky to have these ladies in my life.) I did a Fourth and Fifth Step, and still I kept on getting upset. My skin was very thin, and I was tormented by the "bondage of self." I got mad at people in AA all the time. They rearranged "my" cookies; they would wound me to the quick by going off after the meeting arm in arm with some other friend. In the rooms, it seemed there was always someone glaring at me, or I would be glaring at them. (I'm happy to report that this is also not a problem today at all.) The idea that for us alcoholics there can be no such thing as a "justifiable resentment" is a concept that has come home to me as slowly and through as much painful experience as the concept of forgiveness, its twin. "Where other people are concerned, we have to drop the word 'blame' from our

*... for us
alcoholics
there can be
no such thing
as a "justifiable
resentment"...*

speech and thought," it says in the "Twelve and Twelve." I was still at sea and ill at ease in my relations with other people when an old-timer, hearing me share, asked me whether I had got round to making my Eighth Step list.

Glad that there was an action that might relieve me of my discomfort, I dug out my index card of "cringes" — people who, for a variety of reasons, I would feel embarrassed to see again. Then I transferred some of the still-smouldering resentments from my Fourth Step. Since I had taken that inventory, I had run into my ex-husband on the street, after many years without a glimpse. Something told me to give him a hug, and I'm glad I did because he died not long after that. I put the name of the ex-wife on my list, as well. But it took several years for me to become willing to make amends to her. We had gone on working in the same office without speaking to each other. I was walking down the hall one day, carrying my briefcase, which contained my Eighth Step list — by now a rumpled and creased piece of paper I had often unfolded to cross off names of people I had made amends to in various ways. I had been

asked to lead a meeting on the topic later that day, and I wanted to take the list along. I noticed that the door of the woman's office was open. I stepped over the threshold as if pushed from behind by an invisible hand. I told her I was sorry for the pain I had caused her; she was gentle and more than generous with me. We talked at length about the man who had betrayed each of us — and whose life was not improved by the way I hated him and drank at him for years. I understood things about my life with him that I could only have understood from talking to her. I felt profound compassion for his demon-haunted life. I went off to lead my meeting, and I spoke about that encounter. One of my woman friends was sitting nearby; she was nearing the end of a pregnancy and her belly was enormous. Soon she and

her AA husband would be blessed with the arrival of a baby boy. Sitting next to her was another friend — a man who had gotten very thin. I was shocked to see him, for I could see that he had started to die of AIDS; in a month or so, we would be taking meetings to his hospital bed. I felt privileged to be at the meeting, to be alive, to be a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous. At the end, I held the hands of these two friends as the group stood saying the Serenity Prayer. In my bones, I felt the promise of the Step: that it is the beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God. As for that ex-wife, I am happy to count her among my friends today. The other night, she came over to my house. I cooked a nice dinner for a group of us; we laughed a lot.

K.F., New York, New York

Step 9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

'The Fire Has Gone Out'

I didn't have to be told that in the years of my drinking I damaged those closest to me. My wife's tears and the pain on my children's faces as I erupted again and again in alcoholic rage played a large part in bringing me to crisis and then into recovery. I knew I needed to make amends to them. I wanted to put my involvement with my family on a healthy, functioning, and mutually-rewarding basis. There was work to be done, and lots of it.

The Big Book turned out to be right: my wife and children were generous in accepting my apologies, eager to help me heal, happy that the long nightmare in which we all had lived was

now over. But that was only the beginning of the process of making amends to them. My apologies, no matter how sincere, were not enough. I'd damaged my loved ones and deprived them of the kind of husband and father they had a right to expect; now I needed to grow out of self-centeredness and selfishness, and to learn to look at the world from their point of view in order to understand what I might do for them. I had to find new ways of communicating with them. All of this took time, to say nothing of that rare quality, patience! It wasn't by accident, I realized, that we undertake the Ninth Step only after we ourselves have be-

come strong enough to embark on the kind of spiritual work that amends-making requires. Perhaps we can expect the Promises to come true only after we've started making amends within the family.

As difficult as this process sometimes was in relation to my wife and children, it took on a new dimension when I turned to making amends within my family of origin. In my own immediate family, the major damages were done by me, and I was the one who needed forgiveness. But there had been no knights in shining armor in my family of origin. My alcoholic father damaged my codependent mother and she damaged him; frightened and angry as I was, I damaged both of them and they damaged me. Aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents — mutual damages seemed to be everywhere. Everyone was a player, and in all honesty — perhaps because I'd left home in my mid-teens — my contribution to those damages had been relatively small.

But I still needed to clean my side of the street, and I saw that I had to begin by forgiving those who had hurt

me. With smoldering resentments still eating at me, I couldn't be really effective in making amends. I hadn't expected it, but forgiving others for the injury they had done to me was a necessary part of my Ninth Step.

But what would it mean for me to forgive those relatives of mine who had made my childhood so unhappy? Clearly it was more than merely mouthing the words, "I forgive you." But what more? And how was it to be done? The Big Book, so helpful in many other matters, didn't really give me the direction I needed. Neither did the "Twelve and Twelve." In a small handful of places, both sources mentioned the necessity of forgiveness — of asking forgiveness of God and of other people, for example, and of

forgiving others as well as oneself. In two places, the Big Book even implied that we should forgive and forget. Forget? Forget being beaten? Forget being sexually molested? Forget being neglected? Forget being publicly ridiculed and shamed? These childhood experiences were burned into my memory. Even if I could forgive those who had harmed me in these ways — and the Big Book, unfortunately, didn't tell me

*'Can you reach
around your own
pain and touch
her hurting
spirit?'*

how to do that — I didn't think forgetting would be possible.

It turned out, however, that after eleven years in AA, I learned something about forgiving someone, and so what forgiveness means. I learned this lesson by finding myself in a kind of do-or-die situation in which forgiving turned out to be the only good option available.

My mother had died suddenly and I had to return to my original home for her funeral. In the confusion of the next few days, one idea kept nagging at me: I would have to meet, I would have to be involved with, my father's sister, Aunt Margaret. Aunt Margaret! During my childhood, although she was sometimes kind to me (but there weren't many of those times), she was more often unkind, missing no opportunity to criticize me cruelly, even to the point of publicly embarrassing me. Negative in her attitude toward me, bullying, judgmental, insensitive, at times malicious — all of these came with Aunt Margaret! In my mind she'd become a living symbol of much of what my unhappy childhood involved. To have to deal with her — and I could no more avoid doing that than I could avoid going to my mother's funeral — was to raise the ghosts of an unhappy past.

Frankly, I didn't have the emotional or spiritual "energy" to handle Aunt Margaret on top of my own confused and conflicted feelings over my mother's death. "I don't know how I can do

this," I said to my sponsor. "I don't know how I can handle the funeral, that whole crazy and sick family of mine, and Aunt Margaret at the same time!"

"Can you try to change the way you see her?" he asked. "Can you see her not as the tormentor of your childhood, but as a pathetic human being who has always wanted something she never got in your grandparents' alcoholic household — simply to be loved for herself? Can you reach around your own pain and touch her hurting spirit? Can you show love to her?"

"But I don't love her," I replied.

"I didn't ask you to love her," he said. "I'm suggesting that you act lovingly toward her, or at least try." I remember thinking: I can try — but it won't work.

I had no sooner arrived at my family's house, where I stayed during the funeral period, when the door opened and there was Aunt Margaret, an odd half-smile on her face. Here it is, I thought. This is it. God, give me some help with this. I went to her. "How kind of you to come," I said. "Thank you for doing this for me. It is very good of you." I hugged her close. (I didn't lie. Everything I said was true.) Aunt Margaret began to cry and I did too. She loved my mother and she was grieving. The old dragon was then just an old lady, perhaps frightened that her own death might not be very far away. Some time later that evening, as she was leaving, I said to her, "I'm going to

the funeral home tomorrow to make final arrangements. I'd really appreciate it if you'd come with me to help me through it." She readily agreed (was she surprised I had asked her?), and that established what was to be the pattern of my involvement with her over the next few days. I took opportunities to invite Aunt Margaret to be with me, whatever it was I was doing. I was signaling that I wanted to have her by my side. I was behaving lovingly.

Since then, seven years ago, there have been changes, significant ones I think, in our relationship. I call Aunt Margaret on Mother's Day and at Christmas and on her birthday. When her husband died suddenly, I called frequently. She writes me and I write back. No, she's still not my favorite person and it hasn't happened that I've come to like her, much less developing a warm, intimate relationship with her. Perhaps it never will. Perhaps, too, it would be different if I were living near to her rather than across thousands of miles, and had to relate to her frequently and face-to-face. That might severely test my re-

solve to keep acting lovingly towards her! But the reality is that while memories of the past flicker from time to time, the pain of those memories is no longer there. The fire has gone out.

In all of this, Aunt Margaret never once asked for my forgiveness. Probably she doesn't know that she needs any forgiveness from me. So I've learned the surprising truth that I can forgive people even if they don't ask for my forgiveness, even if they don't realize that they need it. Forgiveness seems to depend more on the love of the one who does the forgiving than on the lovable-ness of the one being forgiven.

One last learning. I discovered that there is a meaning of remembering that goes beyond its minimal sense of just being able to recall. To remember in this sense means to refuse to let go — to keep something from the past alive, to give it weight in the here-and-now. In that sense, I no longer remember the pain Aunt Margaret caused me. I've forgotten it.

Jamie C.,
West Henrietta, New York

Forgiveness

seems to depend

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of the one who

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of the one

being forgiven.

Step 10

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Fighting the Dragon of Procrastination

Let me employ all possible care not to mistake the bridge for the land: the Tenth Step is not a stopping place. It's a connecting point between my efforts to get to know myself better and my desire to get to know God better — God as I understand him.

But that wasn't the way I saw it to start with. It looked to me as if Bill W. had run out of steam and in order to round out to twelve (the magic number), he put in another inventory Step.

Because of my religious upbringing, and my later revolt against religion, the wording of the Fourth Step in the "Twelve and Twelve" had been very difficult for me, with its emphasis on the moral. More helpful was the Big Book because it talks of "personal" rather than "moral" inventory, thus freeing the way for this battle-scarred veteran of the religious wars.

On Step Ten in the "Twelve and Twelve," I found discussion of "spot checks." I'd been doing that from the

beginning of my AA life. But with a difference. I did it only when I thought of it, usually when I was hurting. Now my spot-checking became more conscious and regulated. As a result, I was better able to deal with such problems as criticizing, losing my temper, sulking, and seeking to dominate.

There was one problem, however, that I seemed unable to come to grips with: resentments. My fellow AAs frequently talked about the nature of them and how they dealt with them. And I would listen politely and sympathize that they still had what evidently was a serious problem for them. Viewing myself as the most benevolent man on the eastern seaboard, I could not face the

fact that resentments were coming out my ears! Thank goodness, I was finally able to make a breakthrough but only as a direct result of regular attendance at AA meetings and practicing all the Steps to the best of my ability.

I found it helpful to review the foregoing Steps, in the light of the one I was focusing on. As I came to believe that I could be restored, I began my

brand-new adventure in faith. By making an act of trust, I was admitting again that my power-driven ways — my reliance on self, to the exclusion of accepting any kind of help from outside myself — did not work.

My undertaking of a fearless and searching personal inventory was yet another exposure to the deflation at depth that Doctors Jung and Silkworth saw as requisite in the recovery of an alcoholic. In my willingness to detail the exact nature of my wrongs (and of my virtues, as well), my old defect of intellectual arrogance was dealt another major blow.

In the Sixth and Seventh Steps, I mustered faith and trust and willingness, drew heavily on the hope and courage that my fellow AAs shared with me at meetings, and — in the fashion of our AA pioneers — on my knees asked that my character defects be removed.

In the amends Steps, my intellectual pride was put on the spot as I reached out to others, both in and out of AA. My plea was for forgiveness and for the chance to set right my harmful actions

'Promptness' is of fire-alarm importance whenever, through Step Ten, we find ourselves to have been in the wrong.

done in actual drunkenness or through emotional drunkenness in sobriety.

There is one thing about the Tenth Step that confounds some of us. The leader of a Step meeting at my home group summed it up: "I don't mind admitting when I am wrong," he said, "but why do I have to do it promptly?"

In a series of pieces on the Steps published by the Grapevine some years back, the author had this to say: "'Promptness' is of fire-alarm importance whenever, through Step Ten, we find ourselves to have been in the wrong. If we delay admitting the wrong it may bury itself . . . and fester into misery."



For me, the need for promptness cannot be stressed too much. I don't know about you, but I have a distorted perception of time. It comes into play whenever there is a question involving remedial action that ought to be taken. Time structures seem to crumble, and once again the dragon of procrastination has his day. At such time, the need for promptness becomes an academic matter, and I can rationalize quite easily why I should defer action or not take any at all.

It is fairly easy to spot this distortion in others; since it is so evident in myself. But whether it's the Tenth or the Fourth Step, I owe it to myself to keep the focus on me. My taking of your inventory is not going to help me one bit. And it certainly won't help you.

W.H., New York, New York



Step

11

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Attitude Adjustment

“And let’s always remember that meditation is in reality intensely practical.”

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 101

If I’d been instructed to pray and meditate, and then to wait around for however long it took to see some results, it’s not likely I’d still be doing it. That’s not me. I’m not results-oriented necessarily, just untrusting, impatient, and scornful of magical thinking. I need to see some immediate connection between my

actions and their results, even though, in twelve years of sobriety, I’ve come to accept that the results are mostly out of my hands.

So the claim that meditation and prayer are intensely practical caught my attention in the beginning. I became willing to try something I didn’t understand or believe in for the in-

tensely practical reason that, on my own, I couldn’t stop drinking. My sponsor insisted that prayer and meditation could enlist a power greater than myself in my efforts.

I tried it, didn’t understand it, didn’t believe in it. And it worked anyway: I stopped drinking. I wasn’t the only one in my life who noticed this practical result. My immediate family — with whom I share a good deal of intellectual arrogance and emotional insecurity — were relieved to see me sober, but equally skeptical that my “religious conversion” would last any longer than the few months I’d previously devoted to any of a dozen other passing fancies.

Twelve years later my arrogant family is still skeptical but trusting that this prayer business keeps me out of trouble. And I believe in prayer but still don’t understand it. I’ve seen enough intensely practical results to give the devil himself pause to reconsider his convictions. Yet I still forget. This practice makes extraordinary things happen in my life that, when I’m not paying attention, appear ordinary. Precisely because they are practical,

the results of my prayers are often easy to miss or misinterpret. So I need reminding.

Yesterday at work, for instance. A small task I performed (outside the purview of my job) corrected a mistake my supervisor had made. Instead of thanks, my effort received a written reprimand for stepping out of bounds. After thinking over the situation, I apologized for not consulting said supervisor first, admitting where I’d been wrong, but secretly expecting thanks in return for saving this person some trouble. None was forthcoming. I was warned not to cross the boundary again. Fellow employees smirked, knowing that the new guy — Mr. Sure-I’ll-do-that — had had his hand slapped.

Something I’ve learned from my inventories is that, given a resentment to work on, my mind has a life of its own. This one set the mental gears churning. I knew two things would work to turn off the mental noise: First, saying out loud to another sober alcoholic all the crazy things my mind was working over; second, out-shouting the mental grumbling with prayer.

I’m not results-oriented necessarily, just untrusting, impatient, and scornful of magical thinking.

The latter seemed a practical solution under the circumstances. I went back to work, with the Serenity Prayer and my resentment toward my supervisor cranking at equal volume on my brain.

I wasn't paying attention to the content of the Serenity Prayer, just repeating it for the comfort of its sound. But in retrospect I see that, fancy diction aside, it is an unqualified and uncompromising demand. There is not humble consideration for "if it be Thy will," or "in Thine own time" in this prayer. One might just as well say, "Hey Big Guy! How about some serenity, courage, and wisdom so I can make a few changes down here? And I don't mean tomorrow."

In this light, I understand better why I took to the prayer right from the beginning of my sobriety. I also understand why my Higher Power keeps a special place in his heart for alcoholics — the same way I do for little children and wild animals.

Back on the job, about two hours later, still grumbling and mumbling, I rounded a corner of my workplace and nearly walked into a man I knew from AA but hadn't seen for three years. In the few minutes we both could spare from work, we caught each other up on recent events. I heard myself telling him about some extraordinarily fortunate things that have happened in my life these past few years. And I didn't fail to notice that, when I went back to work, I felt much bet-

ter and the cement mixer in my mind had ground to a halt.

I went directly from work to my weekly Step study group where we were reading Step Eleven. When we came upon the passage about meditation and prayer being intensely practical, the recognition struck that I'd been too busy to notice.

I'd been disturbed by what I considered to be the unfairness of life. I'd said the Serenity Prayer over and over — in essence a direct request to God to grant me serenity, courage, and wisdom. As in all my experience, God didn't reach down and inject me with what I thought I needed. Instead I was given an opportunity to take some action. Without realizing what I was doing, I recounted a substantial and growing gratitude list to an old acquaintance from the Fellowship. I noticed that I felt better afterward. I probably worked better too.

I've seen quicker and more dramatic results with some of my prayers, never for material things, but frequently for the spirit and attitude I need to stay in touch with life's abundance and opportunity. This I've found to be intensely practical. With an open mind and loving heart I never fail to see that I've been provided more than enough for a life of meaning, dignity, freedom, usefulness, and hope. Practically speaking, it's a life second to none.

Anonymous, York Harbor, Maine

Step 12

PART 1 Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps . . .

As I Am

The thing that kept me coming back to AA was that no one told me to change myself. Before AA, my life had been totally controlled by guilt and shame. Now, for the first time in my life, people just wanted me to be me and said that if I followed the AA program, I'd change in spite of myself. I did what they said: I worked the Steps, went to meetings, got a sponsor, got into service work, and changed. I found AA to be a guilt-free program. Because I couldn't change myself but had let my Higher Power and AA change me, I couldn't take credit for growth or feel guilt over

setbacks; after all, if I could change myself, I wouldn't need a program.

Because of Step One, I could look at my past and instead of feeling guilt about what I'd done, see how much I had grown that I did not do those things now. Step Two told me that I would come to believe, not that I had to make myself believe. Step Three said that after I came to believe, I could let that Higher Power take over. Step Three gave me the faith to take an honest look at who I was (Step Four) and put my life in perspective through sharing (Step Five). In Steps Six and Seven I humbly asked that

Higher Power to change me (not give me the power to change myself). In Steps Eight and Nine I used those changes in me, along with my Higher Power, to make amends for past wrongs. Step Ten keeps the slate clean. Step Eleven reminds me who is in charge and keeps me in touch with my Higher Power. Finally, by Step Twelve, I have had a spiritual awakening that makes it natural for me to help others and live life happily in accord with my Higher Power's sense of direction.

This is how it has worked for me since October 29, 1987. I never saw the changes in me until my fellow AA members pointed them out. About six years ago I was asked to be district secretary. I admitted to the group that I could not spell, but they said if I could read my own writing, it would be okay. Most of my life I had avoided writing because I was so ashamed of my spelling, but my sponsor told me that my fellow AAs knew better than I did what I could do, so I took the assignment. As a result of this I later got the service position of area secretary (I bought a word processor with a "spell check" function) and this gave me the courage to go back to

school. I am now a senior in college with a major in computer science and a minor in English, and I've gotten straight As. I'd always done poorly in school, partly due to my spelling but also due to my lack of self-esteem. I'd never ask a question because I feared it would make me look dumb; I'd make my handwriting terrible, hoping that people wouldn't notice that I didn't know what vowel to use; I'd only use easy words — in short, I tried to hide who I was. I would never have gone back to school if my fellow AAs hadn't shown me that spelling wasn't everything, and that I'm all right just as I am.

Shortly after I took the district secretary assignment I was asked to take over the position of treasurer. I cried and begged them not to give me this position because I was afraid I would steal their money. I told them that all of my life I had to avoid being around money because I couldn't control my urge to steal. The group told me this wouldn't be a problem anymore and they were right. I never would have known that the compulsion to steal had been removed from me if I hadn't

I couldn't take credit for growth or feel guilt over setbacks; after all, if I could change myself, I wouldn't need a program.

Step Twelve

listened to my fellow AA members.

Five years ago, when I was chair of the greeter's committee for an area event, someone asked me why I was smiling all the time. The surprise was not that I was smiling but that I hadn't known it. In the past I always knew what my face was doing for I lived in an act. My Higher Power and AA had ended that act and for the first time in my life, I realized that I was comfortable and happy just being myself.

I could go on and on about how the program has changed my life behind my back, and is continuing to change it. But the important thing is that I let it do so. For me, the biggest stumbling block to my growth is trying to change myself; as soon as I do that I'm back in the act, and I open myself up to the guilt of failure or the false praise of self-sufficiency. My job is simple: go to meetings, use my sponsor, do my service work, and let the Steps work me.

Will K., LaFarge, Wisconsin

Step 12

PART 2
... we tried
to carry this
message to
alcoholics ...

For me, the biggest stumbling block to my growth is trying to change myself; as soon as I do that I'm back in the act, and I open myself up to the guilt of failure or the false praise of self-sufficiency.



'Ironies of Grace'

When I was a young woman, I went to Rome to study music. By a quirky set of circumstances, I ended up living in an apartment in the manse of the American Episcopal Church on Via Napoli and Via Nazionale, a dwelling generally reserved for visiting bishops. It was a wonderful spot for me, not only because of its central location, but also because there was a beautiful old library upstairs that held a nine-foot Steinway grand, and I had the privilege of practicing there on a daily basis. My roommate was studying flute and we had a great time studying our music

and hanging out with other young American artists and students, with actors from the Living Theater, and with Italians we got to know. This was during a period when my drinking was working very well for me, keeping terrifying feelings under a lid, and allowing me to bubble up as an artistic and social being.

On certain days, as we left our building to go out into the city, we noticed nondescript people coming in and heading for the basement. I thought nothing of it when the church secretary told me they were headed for a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

All this made a fleeting impression on me. I simply wasn't interested. I completely forgot it for years — something like twenty-five years. Then I got sober. In spite of having professional reasons for going to Italy on a regular basis, I'd put it off until my sobriety had set in enough for me to feel comfortable returning to the site of so much of my drinking. Other people visit Rome and see the Forum, the Coliseum, and Piazza Navona and think about history, art, politics, what have you. But when I first returned to Rome sober, my itinerary was awash in memories of drinking: in this trattoria, in this piazza, in this café. I was thrilled to learn there were AA meetings in Rome, and I hopped in a taxi in order to get to one on time.

The taxi took me straight to my former address, the very building where I had done so much of my youthful drinking. Just as so many had done before me, I headed for the basement room this time. Someone asked me to chair the meeting and to tell my story. Part of it that day was about my former connection to the palazzo we were in and the irony of returning there as a member of AA. The others in the room laughed but hardly seemed surprised. I have learned that things like this happen all the time to those of us lucky enough to have found recovery. I call them ironies of grace.

Today I am experiencing yet another irony of grace. In my drinking days, during one of the periods when I was living in Italy, I once took a vacation trip



up the Dalmatian coast of the former Yugoslavia. This is one of the most beautiful places on earth, and I remember parts of the trip vividly. One of my clear memories is of staying the night in a campground where my boyfriend and I met a Yugoslav family. They were incredibly friendly and hospitable, and we spent the day water-skiing on their boat. We did so much of that, I remember, that the next day our arms felt as if they were about to fall off, and we could barely steer our car. This sensation may also have had something to do with what we had drunk. The father of the family had ample quantities of home-made slivovitz, a fiery white liquid that really did the trick. I drank myself silly and woke up the next morning with a head that felt like it had been cloven in two. I don't remember what I did that night, but I remember how drunk I was. The next day's pain wasn't just from the water-skiing.

Now that I've been sober (to my amazement, and by grace) almost nine

years, my life has undergone many changes the Steps provide, and, as a result, my outward behavior has changed. The promises of sobriety are being fulfilled. My work, among other things, has taken new directions — well, relatively new. I'm back in the former Yugoslavia, in the nation-state of Croatia, to which I have returned for professional reasons related to humanitarian and scholarly work that have nothing to do with music.

My first trip back was in 1993, while the war was still raging. I came to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, which was calm, and to which I would return three more times before the war ended. As I have learned to do when I travel, I looked in the phone book as soon as I could for anything that resembles Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm not very good in Croatian, but I did find a couple of numbers to call. I got a call back from a psychiatrist who spoke English and who ran one of the large recovery programs here. These programs are not AA-related and don't make use of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions or any of our other tools. I must admit that I don't know how effective they

are. They may work well for some people; I surely hope so. My own experience, however, was to attend a meeting of a bunch of pretty wet-looking fellow alcoholics in a small room in one of Zagreb's suburbs. As an invited guest of the psychiatrist, I was asked to tell my story, so the folks at

that meeting heard about the determining role of AA in my own recovery. I was surprised to learn that the psychiatrist who was leading the meeting was not himself an alcoholic. I also observed that the people who wanted to find sobriety looked at him for all their guidance rather than to each other, as we do. This psychiatrist, who I believe means well, explained to me that, since AA was "a religious program," there

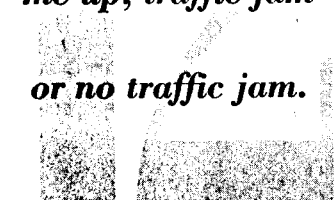
were countries "like Croatia and Latin America" where it "couldn't possibly work." Well, attraction rather than promotion. Besides, who am I to know what other people need? All I can say for sure is what works for me. I left a Big Book with them and returned to my hotel, glad that I didn't have to drink.

The next day, while attempting to cross a busy street in the center of town, I saw that traffic had gotten

*When I first
returned to Rome
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ries of drinking...*

jammed up at the intersection. Most of the drivers were taking this brief inconvenience with aplomb, but one man who just couldn't bear it was leaning on his horn, having what we might call a rage attack. I glanced over and saw that the furious noisemaker was none other than the psychiatrist upon whose sobriety and even serenity so many alcoholics seemed to depend. Now, I don't for one minute think that sober alcoholics never become angry. I am aware enough of my own experiences not to be that naive. But I must say that, at that moment, I was grateful beyond words that my own sobriety didn't depend on the angry psychiatrist, or on anyone else, for that matter. AA had given me a way to let God hold me up, traffic jam or no traffic jam.

AA had given me a way to let God hold me up, traffic jam or no traffic jam.



ing to my AA needs. I had come, for example, with no phone numbers and no International Directory. My sponsor was in California, and the closest meetings I knew about were in Venice, an eight-hour train trip away. I went dry for two and a half months. Then I decided to confide in someone I'd met at the U.S. Embassy, a person whom I

thought I could trust with my story in general terms. We met in a café, I told him my story, and I asked him if he would be willing to place an ad anonymously in the embassy newsletter. He said that he had many friends who had been helped by AA; he would be glad to do so.

Next, on a trip back to the United States, I went to meetings during a stopover in Zurich. Here were sober alcoholics who

attended regular meetings! The friendship they extended to me, which continues long distance over the phone and by e-mail, and whenever I can stop in Zurich, brought me back with a surge of warmth, and I recognized that I couldn't go on much longer in Zagreb without meetings. In New York, I visited the General Service Office and had some wonderful talks with the people who work there. They gave me

a pamphlet about getting a meeting started. I found the suggested wording for an ad particularly helpful. I attended an AA meeting at GSO and other meetings all around Manhattan. I went to California, met with my sponsor, and attended meetings there. When I returned to Croatia, I knew what to do.

My embassy friend placed an ad in the newsletter that said, "Think you might have a problem with drinking? Perhaps Alcoholics Anonymous can help. Call [my phone number]." The next day I got a call from a young woman who had arrived in Zagreb two weeks earlier to work at the embassy. She had several years' sobriety and had been very keen to find a meeting and very worried that there might not be one. We had our first meeting together in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel. Then she found another AA person, someone who had been living here for several years and who had grown hesitant to start a meeting out of a sense that to do so might put him at risk with official power structures. He came to our second meeting, where he expressed his relief and joy at being at a meeting again after several years.

A fourth alcoholic in recovery has turned up, and, since wonders never seem to cease, we now have a rent-free meeting place in the center of town, thanks once again to some inquiries made by our sympathetic friend at the embassy. It looks as if we've been given a wonderful opportunity to work the

Twelfth Step, with a clear demonstration that the reason for doing so is always to improve the quality of our own sobriety first. None of us came to Zagreb with the intention of being missionaries; that would go against the principles of the program. Nor did we come with the specified mission even of attracting people to AA; we are here for professional reasons. But now we are thinking of new ways to make our meeting times known to the English-speaking community here as well as of ways to make the program available to alcoholics who want to stop drinking and don't speak English. This Twelfth Step work, which none of us asked to do, has already been a terrific blessing to me.

I'd been under the assumption that no meetings had existed here before. Well, the other day I got a letter from a cloistered monk in Slovenia, an American, who had found my address in the Loners and Internationalists Meeting publication. It turns out that he'd lived here in Zagreb several years ago and started up a meeting back then. When he left Croatia, however, the only other sober alcoholic he knew in the country was a German-speaking Croat who lives in a town just outside Zagreb. This Croat doesn't have a phone, but we're going to try to contact him, too.

Here's the point: our efforts won't be so historic after all, as we aren't the first sober alcoholics to hold AA meetings in this country. But being here now, when there are apparently no meetings

Step Twelve

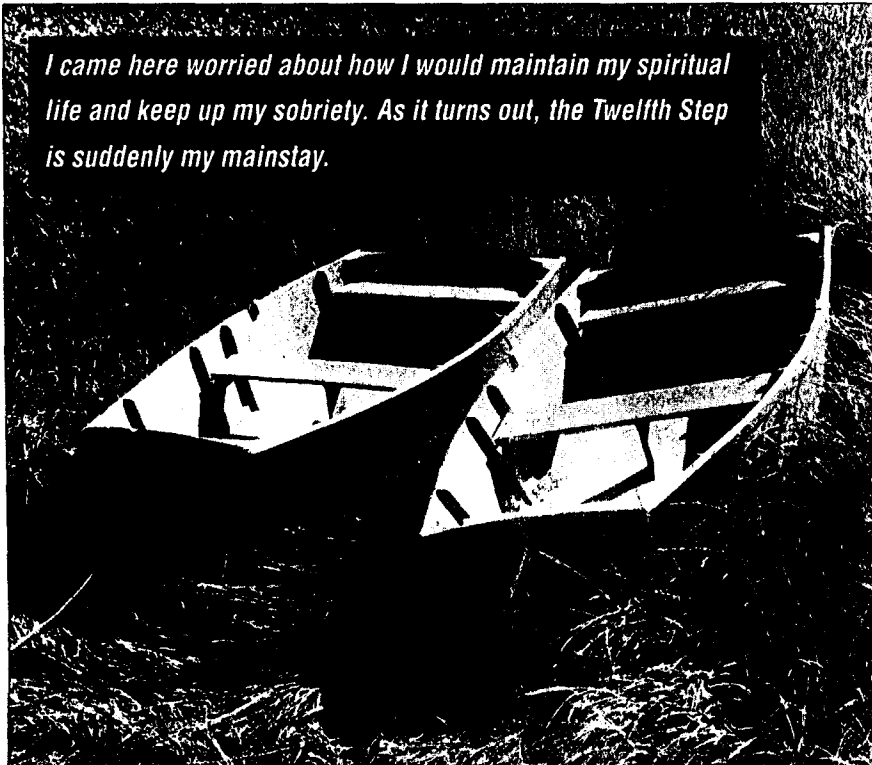
other than the ones we hold, is an unexpected gift of sobriety. I came here worried about how I would maintain my spiritual life and keep up my sobriety. As it turns out, the Twelfth Step is suddenly my mainstay. It has brought me to a temporary sponsor here, to meetings that are getting ever more regular, to several other alcoholics who are working the AA program, and to a feeling of spiritual cushioning I surely needed and can get only through AA.

I want to sign off by sending my love

and best wishes to all the members of my home group, The Happy Hour in Syracuse, New York, to all my old friends in California, in Palo Alto and Berkeley AA, where I got and stay sober, to my new friends in Zurich AA, and to all the members of the Fellowship who attend meetings who have helped me maintain my sobriety all over the world. I woke up today part of the miracle, and I have you and my God to thank for that.

Beverly A., Zagreb, Croatia

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Step 12

PART 3
... and to
practice these
principles in
all our affairs.

Taking the Time to Listen

“Deck the halls . . .” danced in the air as I walked into the club where our AA meetings are held. I was glad to be there. It was a chance to see many familiar faces, a breather from the “normal” world.

I felt particularly good, with a “I’ve-just-done-a-good-deed” kind of feeling. Mentally I had done an inventory. I’ll share it with you: First, I had over three years of working as a temporary sponsor resource person. I’d worked on the archives committee for the state convention. My one-on-one

sponsorship was adequate. I greeted visitors when they attended our meetings. I drove people to meetings, to detox, to treatment centers, and went on Twelfth Step calls. I collected clothes for AAs at the rescue mission and spoke at rehabs. I’d become immersed in helping the sick, suffering alcoholic. Yes, I felt good.

Did I have a tiny flicker somewhere in my heart that something was missing? If so, I ignored the feeling.

The meeting began and many of the smiles on those faces changed as members shared the pain of the sea-

Step Twelve

son. It seemed that the very joy pouring forth in carols, well wishes, and colored lights was the catalyst for sadness.

I heard stories that touched my heart. Not pity-pot stories but stories of life: relationships broken, jobs lost, children ill, confusion that replaced the sane thinking of someone with long-term sobriety. Mental illness plagued one, cancer another. Their stories were no less tragic than the alcoholic detoxing in a downtown center.

I saw them as if for the first time. Then God nudged me: "Look around you. These people need love and support. Charity begins at home." I thought of the times I'd given a home group member a quick hug and sailed out the door to help a newcomer. The term, "If it doesn't work at home it doesn't work" took on a new meaning. The members of my home group are my family.

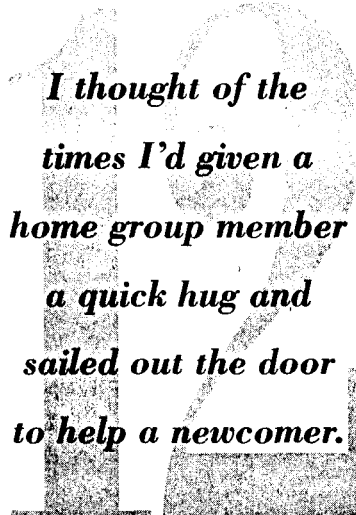
The sick, suffering alcoholic sits in my chair, sits in the chair next to me, or across the room. Newcomers don't have a corner on being sick or on suffering. Maybe my hands don't shake

as they once did. I can actually get the coffee cup to my mouth without spilling it. I may look strong but I'm not; but my strength depends on my spiritual condition, which depends on my attendance at meetings and for that I need you.

After all these years I still may not say how I really feel. I may fear rejection. My head monsters may be dragging me around by my thoughts. I may still say, "I'm fine" when I'm dying inside. If I hide my pain, the others probably hide theirs, too.

Now when I look into the eyes of the person next to me and ask, "How are you?", I will take the time to listen. I want to keep in mind that at any given time, each of us may need the same love and support as someone who is attending their first meeting.

Sandra E.,
Jacksonville Beach, Florida



*I thought of the
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