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The Fellowship's
RECOVERY MAGAZINE

share

Produced for members
by members

Our Meeting Between Meetings



Building a new path...

THE TWELVE STEPS

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.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we *understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
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.
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 TWELVE TRADITIONS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. 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.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



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The Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous
in England & Wales

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our meeting in print

SEPTEMBER 2020

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the 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 and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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editorial

Dear Reader

IN the spirit of Step Nine, these last few months have seen us take responsibility for the well-being of ourselves and others by facing the challenge of new ways of connecting with and supporting one another. Now, as the world faces the challenge of coming out of lockdown, so too our Fellowship faces the dilemma of reopening face-to-face meetings. Already we are 'building a new path' on which we can implement Government and venue requirements, whilst continuing to embrace the spirit of our Fellowship and our Traditions. Though Tradition Nine starts with "AA, as such, ought never be organized;" our aim is to reach all who want sobriety. Once again, we will be in a period of transition – finding with honesty, openness and willingness how best to continue in the spirit of service in our Fellowship.

The theme this month is sponsorship. As we embark on our Step Nine, many of us find the guidance of our sponsor to be vital. In being totally honest, "*Let's not talk prudence while practicing evasion.*" (12&12 p.87), we allow our sponsor to give this guidance – for me, this required a deep and trusting relationship. Equally true, as sponsors we can ask, "Am I helping those I sponsor find what works for them?". The current leaflet 'Sponsorship: Your Questions Answered' can be extremely helpful to both sponsee and sponsor.

Let's remember Dr. Bob's words, "*Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words "love" and "service." We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind.*" (Farewell Talk, Sunday, July 30, 1950). As we go forward, our Programme ensures the Fellowship will embrace these challenging times with tolerance, patience, kindness and love.

**** * * * *

NEXT MONTH: STEP TEN

We invite articles on your experience, strength and hope. This month we are particularly looking for those on Steps and Traditions Eleven and Twelve for the November and December 2020 issues.



STEP NINE:

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

STEP NINE BRIGHTENING AN AFTERNOON

IN my experience, there are two ways of tackling Step Nine – well and badly. I’ve tried both, and I certainly do *not* recommend the ‘badly’ option. For a start, I was drunk.

Take 1 – Step Nine – drunk option

I came into AA because my wife was divorcing me. I was still drinking and, after a hazy meeting or three, I realised there were some scrolls hanging on the wall. The only word that registered was amends. I had no idea about stopping drinking, getting a sponsor, reading the Big Book and working through the Steps.

Suddenly, I recalled an awful memory when I reduced a poor hospital café assistant to tears because I complained loudly about what I thought was her

poor service. Such was the viciousness of my tongue when I was drunk. I decided I *had* to make amends to this poor lady – completely ignoring my long-suffering wife, son, work colleagues and neighbours. So, I bought a box of chocolate mints, went to the hospital and checked that the lady concerned was still working in the café. She was and on duty, so I joined the queue. When it was my turn to be served, I blubbered some kind of nonsensical apology, and thrust the box of mints towards her.

Her eyes nearly popped out of her head – she must have thought she was being accosted by the Stalker from Hell. I ran off, firmly believing I’d made a bad situation a whole lot worse, which I no doubt had.

“...we cannot buy our own peace of mind at the expense of others.”
(12&12 p.86)

Take 2 – Step Nine – suggested AA version

Eventually, I got sober – thankfully the compulsion to drink had gone. I read through the Big Book, got a sponsor and worked through the Steps – thoroughly and in the correct order.

When it came to Step Nine, I worked from my list compiled during my Eighth Step, in consultation with my sponsor. I paid close attention to the entire Step, especially “...*except when to do so would injure them or others.*” (BB p.59). I trod very carefully, and the first person I made direct amends to was my long-suffering former wife. She forgave me, and has never gone back on her word. Neither have I. No café assistant came to mind. However, nearly three years later I was a patient

in the same hospital recovering from a mild heart attack. After a couple of weeks, I was allowed off the ward to visit the shop and café downstairs. I never forget faces, and I was surprised to see that the same staff member was still working there. I don’t think for a moment she recognised me.

“We needn’t wallow in excessive remorse...”
(12&12 p.88)

Several years had elapsed and I was a different person. I was kind, considerate and sober. I didn’t drink, one day at a time, wasn’t rude and didn’t shout at people.

Some afternoons, I’d pop down to the cafe and spend time with the lady as she cashed up or mopped the floor. We’d share a pot of tea and some cake, and laugh at the occasional joke or two. That was how I made my amends – hoping to brighten someone’s afternoon instead of reducing them to tears.

ANON

Hints and Tips for a Sober Christmas and New Year

The Share Team would love our readers to share their own Hints and Tips about staying sober over Christmas and The New Year.

- What is your experience?
- What works for you?
- What would you suggest for a newcomer?

Send your Hints and Tips to: AAShare@gsogb.org.uk

Or post them to: The Editor, SHARE, General Service Office, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ

Deadline Friday, 4th October 2019. For publication in our December issue.

STEP NINE

MAKING AMENDS

HAVING put pen to paper as suggested by my sponsor and made my list, I arranged to visit him at his house to discuss Step Nine. The list of people's names came out of me re-reading my Step Four. We met one morning, made coffee and settled down in the smallest bedroom of his modest terrace house – this room had been designed for this purpose as his wife was a member too.

I started to read through my list of names, and began to explain why I wished to make amends to each one. At this point my sponsor cried, “STOP”, which I promptly did. He continued, “You read the list of amends and I will be the one to tell you which ones you should do.” At this point he changed everything, He explained to me how what I had read out to him so far were examples of me just feeding my own EGO, I was going back into people's lives uninvited and ‘showing off’ my new found sobriety. The criteria used to decide who I should contact was – how would I feel if I bumped into this person when walking along the seafront? To answer this question honestly, I had to dig deep to my self-honesty – another new experience for me.

“...be absolutely sure we are not delaying because we are afraid.”

(12&12 p.89)

So, it turned out that my sponsor wanted me to make amends to the people whose names I had NOT read out originally.

In my early days of sobriety I did make a phone call to a man whose life I had caused a lot of pain, the result of which was he asked me, with a thinly veiled threat, “Never to contact him again”. So far I have kept this promise – for thirty-five years.

I wrote four letters to people explaining what I was trying to do and received two positive replies, I met up with these people and said my piece, I got one very good response and a fair one. There were others I could not contact at all without causing pain, so my sponsor asked me to pray for them. At this point he told I was doing this Step – not to make myself look good in the eyes of others or to make them feel better, but the point was to help me remain sober, to clear more debris from the past.

When we finished our discussion on who I should contact and how, I left his house and walked back to my home (I did not drive or own a car in those days) but I felt better, lighter somehow. I had a future, a new Programme for living.

COLIN T

STEP NINE

HOW IT REALLY WAS!

IN Step Eight I had written my three columns of those to whom I was willing to make amends (column one), those I wasn't too sure about (column two) and those whom I definitely did not want to make amends to (column three). A couple of ex-boyfriends were scrubbed off the list as seeing them again might injure them or others due to being in new relationships or moved away. Then the people I had listed in column one, mostly close family members and a few close friends and with willingness and the God of my understanding in my sight I set to it. Husband first and he was very supportive and just asked me to stay sober... one day at a time. Then, the first of my step-daughters, aged 25 years and boy, did this provide her with an opportunity to let ME know how my drinking had affected each and every member of the family. I was taken aback, but I listened and heard how I had stolen others' peace of mind, disregarded their trust, made a career of dishonesty and blatant lies, embarrassed her and others at social gatherings, placed my granddaughter in danger (left a mug of wine behind the sofa) and regularly hurled verbal abuse. I was initially stunned

"...a complete willingness to make amends..."
(12&12 p.89)

into silence, but now working the Programme I listened, and listened intently. Some of the events I could hardly remember, but my step-daughter continued to enlighten me on every detail. Since getting sober in a treatment centre, I had started to realise that perhaps my drinking had affected others, but never to this extent!

This was the start of my journey on the road to humility, not thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less and starting to think of others more. This takes a lot of practice for this alcoholic, but I am willing and I keep trying. Today, my relationship with my step-daughter has grown and she often says how proud she is of me and has been one of my best advocates of AA over the years.

Learning to listen continues to play an important part of my recovery. After my first thought, I pause and listen to God for my second thought and whether or not I need to say anything at all. I listen to my Higher Power through meditation, especially when I need direction to make decisions... the right answers come, always checking with my sponsor too who keeps me right-sized. Thank you, AA, for setting me free.

MICHELLE, Plymouth

STEP NINE SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME OF RECOVERY

WHEN I arrived in AA, well over twenty years ago, in a complete and utter broken condition, full of self-pity, pain, depressed, and again suicidal, I had no idea how AA worked. I didn't realise that it is a free, spiritual Programme of recovery, involving things called Steps, sponsorship and service.

At my first meeting, I got hope. I was taken for tea afterwards. I talked about the problems in my life and how I could not stop drinking. The blokes I was with said that they had been the same way. One of them bought me a Big Book. They said that I could change, that there was a way out. I could see that they were not only sober but they had a happy air about them. They asked me if I was powerless over alcohol and when I said I was, they then said that I needed to find a Power greater than myself to help me stop drinking. This was all a surprise to me but pain had made me very teachable and so I listened and put into action the suggestions, or spiritual tools, they passed on

“We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit...”

(BB p.77)

to me. They said they got on their knees each night and thanked a Power greater than themselves for keeping them sober that day. They also said that each morning they also got on their knees and asked that same Power to keep them sober that day – all so they could help other alcoholics. It all seemed strange but I just did what they said. They were great examples of AA and gave great words of advice but my big teacher of course is pain. I did it that night and the next morning and have done it morning and night since – that was over twenty-fours ago and I've not had or wanted a drink in that time.

I went to lots of meetings, got involved with service and started to hear about sponsorship. After about six weeks, I got a sponsor, who beautifully and fantastically took me through the Twelve, life-saving, spiritually-enhancing Steps. After doing the first seven, he introduced me to Step Eight, which of course leads on to Step Nine. Step Eight says, “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and

became willing to make amends to them all.” He advised me to do it in three columns, as I had done Step Four. In the first column, I was to put the name of person I had harmed, in the second, what I had done, and in the third, and most importantly, write how I would have felt if the same things had been done to me. There were about forty names on the list, all of whom I was willing to make amends to. I read it out to him. He right away removed some of the names because he felt they would be hurt or discomforted by me going to make an amend to them.

This is in line with Step Nine, which says, “Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.” Also, *“Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit.”* (BB p.79). I took his advice as regards making my amends. He had already been through the process

“...we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past.”

(BB p.77)

himself, and was a great fount of not only spiritual knowledge but also practical knowledge. He advised me to do my amends one at a time. I was to arrange to go and see them. In line with the ‘Just for Today’ card, I was to dress becomingly, in my case this meant

wearing a suit. When I saw the person, I was to say that I was now going to AA, that it was a spiritual Programme of recovery and that part of that process is to look back at my life and make amends whenever I thought it appropriate,

and in their case I thought it appropriate. I was then to ask them, “If they were able to accept my apology.” At this point I was to stay silent and listen to what they said and if they wanted to discuss the situation.

Making my amends, I found wonderful and very uplifting. Everybody I went to only wanted the best for me. They were glad to see that I was getting on with my life and living it on different terms. Over the years I found this generally to be the case, when I hear of other people going to



SHARE is now available online on the AA Website.

The link is: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Coronavirus-News>

You can then find a link to download the magazine – **Our Meeting Between Meetings** – needed now more than ever!

make their amends. Some of the people I knew – for instance family members – but others were the representatives of concerns or organisations that I had harmed in the past. They were all kind and helpful.

Like myself when I first arrived in AA, they had heard about it but did not know how it worked and had no idea it was a free, spiritual Programme. A few said that they knew people who could benefit by going to meetings. One chap said that I had restored his faith in human nature. When I first started to make amends, I was a bit nervous but as I did them,

I became more confident. I also started to be even more grateful to God, for giving me this new, wonderful, sober, spiritual life. The Promises (BB ps.83&84) are after the completion of Step Nine. When I first read them, I thought they would be impossible to achieve but they have all come true in my life and I am very grateful. However, the greatest gift I have received since coming to AA, is to connect with a Higher Power, a God of my own concept, who is with me every second of every day. Thank you, God, thank you AA, always in my prayers,

DENNIS, Ealing

TRADITIONS CHECKLIST

Tradition Nine



AA as such, ought never to be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

1. Do I still try to boss things in AA?
2. Do I resist formal aspects of AA because I fear them as authoritative?
3. Am I mature enough to understand and use all elements of the AA programme – even if no one makes me do so – with a sense of personal responsibility?
4. Do I exercise patience and humility in any AA job I take?
5. Am I aware of all those to whom I am responsible in any AA job?
6. Why doesn't every AA group need a constitution and byelaws?
7. Have I learned to step out of an AA job gracefully – and profit thereby – when the time comes?
8. What has rotation to do with anonymity? With humility?

SPONSORSHIP

I AM an alcoholic in recovery and have been for 45 years. I think it's important to qualify that, so newcomers know this does work long term. I have no intention of ever drinking before I draw my last breath – if I follow this Programme as I have done for four decades then there is no reason why that should not be achieved. Newcomers are an integral part of the workings of AA, but just part of the mix, not drinking ODAAT is the goal, and that works.

Sponsorship has been with me from day one. The person who carried the message to me is still in contact with me daily and was my first sponsor in prison. I had various sponsors in the early days, but the man that seemed to work for me was a little Belfast man and we stuck together for 40 odd years till he passed last year. He took me through the Twelve Steps of AA and always made sure, through the BB and 12&12, that they were studied as opposed to just read. It went from an academic study, into action and then became a way of life. He was a patient man as I am severely dyslexic and was a slow learner, plus I was a very damaged guy too. He had a discipline surrounding contact, ground rules about contact and as I had made an unconditional surrender, it had to be heeded.

*“...amends...
should always be
forthright and
generous.”*

(12&12 p.88)

Twelve Step contacts in those day were mainly face-to-face as there weren't many meetings then, no mobiles etc. He took me on those calls to carry the message and get sufferers to meetings. I also had to meet with him regularly to off-load sober rubbish and have the home group that I attended weekly that he was at. Before I shared anything in my life of any importance, I had to run it by him, to avoid confusion

on getting too much conflicting advice from others. It was all about the building up of a relationship with him. He sponsored me into service, into sponsorship myself. Over the years I have sponsored some great guys who are now friends and when sharing, it's always based on equality, they are helping me to stay stopped too. He taught me about the structure of AA, about the Traditions, how they protect our Fellowship, that I was responsible, that I was a guardian of them and never to be afraid to speak out even in a minority. He taught me that you don't keep it unless you give it away, that if I don't work it, then I cannot give away what I do not have. He told me, “Grateful Alcoholics Don't Get Drunk.” He was a great ego deflater and helped me keep a balance – being a man of extremes.

I have family in recovery and since my sponsor passed, I use my brother and a few close friends for offloading. I will always need to be rid of the sober rubbish – after not drinking, for me it is about peace, mindfulness and comfort. I do miss my sponsor but we all have to move on, and I celebrate

his life and recovery. He was always there for me and what a legacy to pass on, with 56 years of sobriety. Respect to him.

I am a very grateful alcoholic and will continue to pass on what he gave to me. Thank you.

GEORGE, East Sussex

WHO'S HURTING?

CHOSE my first sponsor largely because she spoke of her Higher Power regularly when she shared and, as I was struggling with a concept of God, I thought if I do what she says and she has a hot line to God I'll be getting Him by proxy. Also, she was the type of woman I was bitterly envious of – attractive, well-dressed, boyfriend, confident – I thought it would be personal growth for me to ask her. “Wasn't I being openminded?”, I thought. Look at me.

She introduced me to SHARE amongst other things when I was stressing out about the literature and not being able to remember ‘pearls of wisdom’ in the Rooms seconds after they'd been said. How can I get well when I can't remember anything? With SHARE I could read and reread the articles. It wasn't going anywhere. It was my ‘meeting between meetings’. One of the phrases that

“...earnestly asking God's help and guidance...”

(12&12 p.89)

leapt out of the page at me was, “The person I was, drank. The person I was, will drink again.” Pure gold. It shouted CHANGE. I had to change. And I set out to do exactly that. I'm told by someone who knew me back then that I was hard work. I didn't mean to be but I was always asking how, why, what, when, where...and not listening to the answer because I was already thinking up the next question. What I remember my sponsor asking frequently when

I was disturbed was, “Who's hurting?” and it applies as much today as it did then.

I was ‘let go’ at six years and had sponsor number two for two years when they became poorly. My next sponsor was my longest lasting, 14 years, and how I survived that time I'll never know. By the grace of God, I guess and the love of the Fellowship and by getting in the middle of the

lifeboat, sticking with a home group, and throwing myself into service at all levels of the structure. All the advice given by sponsors one and two. Who was sponsor three? I, Self, Me.

I was 22 years sober; how could I ask someone now and I've done the Steps, I should know how to fix myself and if I can't then I'm clearly not doing something right. I'm off a Step or off the Programme, therefore I'm a bad ungrateful person. What a hard time I gave myself but I really didn't know any other way – and somehow, I stayed sober, one day at a time. Finally, in 2016 I hit a rock bottom. How do I know? Because I was willing to go to any lengths and ask the person who was glamorous, slim, much younger in sobriety than me, younger in real years than me, whose drinking story was so different to mine – but who shone with spirituality, to sponsor me and do what she suggested. She had what I wanted. She was/is loving, forgiving, non-judgmental, compassionate, honest – all the things that I couldn't be to myself and much more. To coin a phrase from AA – 'she loved me better' – and has shown me how to love myself and forgive myself.

“There may be some wrongs we can never fully right.”

(BB p.83)

Who's hurting? I was/still can be, so there's something I'm doing that I shouldn't be doing or something I'm not doing that I should. Suddenly, instead of beating myself up for being bad and misbehaving and not getting it right, it was suggested that maybe the thing I was doing was being too hard on myself and the thing I wasn't doing was loving and forgiving myself for not being perfect. I took some convincing but when I finally gave in to this idea the change in me in these last three years has been nothing short of miraculous.

Today I had the great privilege of speaking with a sponsee who was in pain and I was able to draw on the love and example of my sponsor and offer compassion, understanding, identification and I hope it helped her. It certainly helped me. When the pupil is ready the teacher will appear. God works through people. Progress not perfection. One day at a time. These aren't clichés. They are my experience. Oh, and keep coming back.

LESLEY B, York

Share-isms

My drinking was like sitting in a rowing boat early in a tornado: it took me to my rock bottom.

PASSING IT ON

THOUGHT I was doing pretty well. All I needed to get my show back on the road would be a sponsor. How to find a sponsor? – look for someone who’s got what you want. That dignified old chap in a suit who seemed so calm. I plucked up the courage. He said, “It would be a privilege, Dominic.” I was ecstatic and felt so good that I thought I deserved an afternoon off and relapsed. I did not feel quite so grand when I phoned my new sponsor and told him. I got the first of a series of shocks from this man. These shocks changed my thinking and my life completely. I have not had a drink since. My sponsor was uninterested in my sob story, my theories of why I was an alcoholic and why I might have relapsed. Within seconds, he cut me short. With expletives deleted, he said, “Dominic, you are an alcoholic. Are you now willing to do something about it? Are you prepared to go to any length?” I said that I was willing and we arranged to meet.

It was action replay at the first meeting at his house. Eager to impress, I pulled out from my pocket folded A4 pages of my tragic life story and began, only to be interrupted, “You can leave it there, Dominic. I have never heard such a load of self-centred, self-justifying rubbish in my life. Go away and do it in columns.” He asked briefly if I was going to meetings, praying and asking for help from a Higher Power.

I was, and off I went. I began facing up to the possibility that I might have been wrong in how I had approached life. At our next meeting, I was shocked when my sponsor shared his own story – he was showing me what honesty looked like. And tough love. And the possibility of a life without drink based on spiritual principles, not self. I was starting to have a relationship with another human being, just as he was, and just as I was.

I found I was just another human being too, with strengths and weaknesses. And began learning to take care and love myself better. Since a little boy, I had hoped I would never have to look at my fear of life. And done my best to cover the fear with work, money, sex, possessions, plus drink and drugs. But I was ready now to take responsibility for my life for the first time. And I began to find courage to walk over that bridge to normal living as I shared Step Five and began to live out the rest of the Steps. Other men have since asked me to be their sponsor. I always say, “It would be a privilege. Let’s arrange to meet up.” I follow the approach which my first sponsor took with me. I later found it written down in “Working with Others” (BB Ch.7).

I take special care to say – one alcoholic sharing experience, strength and hope with another is the foundation of AA...we meet on level ground, one human being

to another, with love, courage and integrity...I'm not interested in being a guru, or friend for life. We'll walk alongside one another for as long as we wish. You're free to go any time, and so am I. Maybe at the second meeting I share my story and listen to theirs. I ask if they have had enough yet, and are willing to go to any length. I ask if any length includes open-mindedness to believe in a Power greater than themselves and

a willingness to live by spiritual principles. I do not get into any debate about God, but do share my spiritual experience freely.

And I finish...you owe me nothing – except, if you get something out of our time together, please pass it on. May we all know more of the joy that comes from giving away this message that was so freely given to us.

DOMINIC J, London

DEFINED BY WHO I AM

ONE of the most difficult challenges in my sobriety was being involved in disciplinary proceedings involving a work colleague who was drunk. It was during a weekend when none of the senior managers were around. I knew that trying to cover it up was not an option. This in turn would reflect badly on me. What was I to do? Well, the matter was quickly taken out of my hands – also working that weekend was my Higher Power. A sharp-eyed boss gently inquired on the Monday morning, and I had to tell the truth.

I was asked to write a short report for Human Resources, and I knew I had to do two things – be truthful and fair. I wrote the memo as if the person concerned was reading it. I knew that I had just to lay out the simple facts – no opinion, no

innuendo. When the colleague concerned read it, she told me it was extremely fair. I confided in one of my managers that I was a member of AA, and she was respectful and understanding. I took my colleague to her first AA meeting, and introduced her to some of the women members who had been around a while. After a few weeks, my colleague told me AA wasn't for her. "I don't want to be defined by my alcoholism.", she told me. I tried to explain that I wasn't defined by my alcoholism – because I didn't drink any more, one day at a time. But I don't think she could quite understand.

When I drank, I was defined by my alcoholism. Now I don't drink, I am defined by who I am. I hope that's as a sober, honest person.

ANON

BECOMING JUST THE RIGHT SIZE

HELLO, I'm Marjorie and I'm an alcoholic, sharing with you in these strange and challenging times. I would normally be at work at a very busy little guest house cooking breakfasts for lots of busy people – some workmen, some families on holiday breaks. It's now about six weeks into this horrible corona virus that's currently put the country in lockdown in our homes. My job means me getting up very early so what better time in the morning peace to put pen to paper. After seventeen months of staying sober, I have started working on Step Four with the guidance of my fabulous sponsor who agreed to sponsor me about three months after starting my journey. This is something I highly advise, connecting with another alcoholic to be there to help and guide you (us) through this wonderful but sometimes very difficult life-changing path we take to a life beyond our wildest dreams. That is something I truly believe today, life for me now is honestly wonderful. The past was some sort of existence I called normal which was held together by my children being born – the only things that kept me alive. By the grace of God and some miracle they have grown up okay and are quite well. In fact, without

my daughter and her husband, I wouldn't have found AA, they never gave up on this pathetic wreck that I became, which I'm sure you identify with. The day my daughter walked me to, and actually came inside, that Room full of recovery and a life that changed – me back into her mum that she knew as a child before alcohol took over my life completely. My world was all about however, whatever, I could do to get a drink inside me. Stealing money from my mum, lost good jobs, friends, all my family. I lied about everything, anything and nothing was too much for me to get the only thing I cared about.

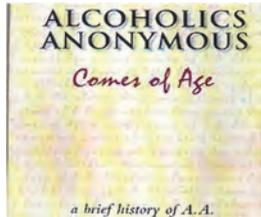
My marriage and relationship – they were my children's dads, both lost. I didn't care, it wasn't my fault, they were all terrible to me, nothing to do with my behaviour, I was fine. I sat in that Room on a Tuesday afternoon shaking with fear and regret – so ashamed that I ended in this place. I don't remember what was said that much, just how kind and welcoming people were. The way they looked me in the eye, with no judgement or disgust. I knew I would be okay now; I wasn't alone anymore; I had found my way home. I was at long last on my way to becoming just the right size.

MARJORIE

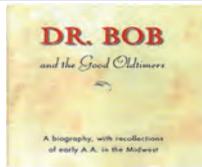
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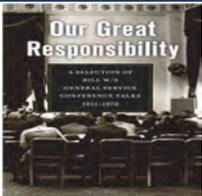
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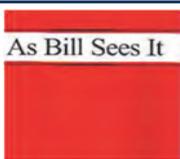
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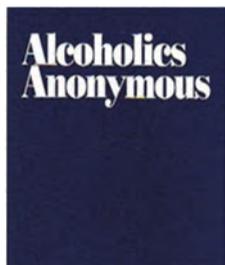
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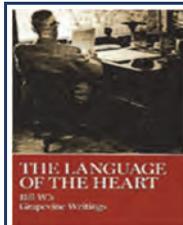


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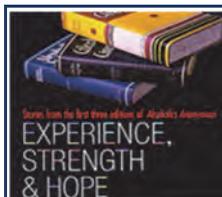
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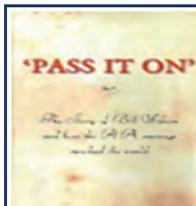
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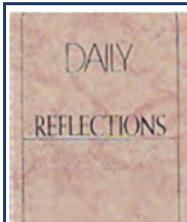
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TRUST IN MY SPONSOR

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

WHEN I first read Step Five, I was five days sober trying to just make it to the end of the meeting without leaving and running to the office. It seemed so monumental that I couldn't understand what was being asked of me. What did it mean, how did I do that, what wrongs? I wasn't wrong, the rest of the world was wrong. So many questions, and no clue how to find the answers.

Then swoops in a sponsor! The blessing of the way the Steps are written is that Step Five is fifth for a reason. If I had embarked on Step Five when I first read it back at five days sober it wouldn't have worked. By the time my sponsor had guided me to Step Five, I had my first experiences of a Higher Power in my life, I had got into the habit of completing my daily suggestions and I had made my inventory – fearlessly and thoroughly I had examined myself and, with the guidance of my sponsor, I felt the inventory was complete.

I was now ready to undertake Step Five. The Big Book discusses the need to take this vital step

with someone who can keep our confidence. Looking back on my Step Five experience, I realise now that everything I had done up until that point was enabling my trust in my sponsor to grow. Being in open communication with her, taking the Third Step, her guidance throughout my Step Four experience, had led me to a place where I didn't have to question my

“...we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.”

(BB p.83)

trust and I felt comfortable sharing these things with her. That statement is so incredible! Some of the things I comfortably shared with my sponsor were things I felt I couldn't tell anyone, things I felt would push me to the edges of society and would land me in rejection. So, to feel comfortable (if not a bit embarrassed at times) was a revelation I never expected.

The actual process of reading out my Step Four inventory to my sponsor under the presence of God was very practical for me. I sat with my sponsor at a beach picnic table and read her those four columns, as laid out in the Big Book, and as I read, I felt more and more relaxed. Of course, there were those resentments, fears, sexual conduct which I felt were

more embarrassing or I felt shame around. However, the incredible thing about the way alcoholics inherently understand each other is that while I was reading out these ‘awful’ things, things that I had done that had followed me around like a cloud for years, my sponsor started to laugh. I was naturally horrified at her finding humour in these horrific things, but she just told me that she had done the same things, she had similar resentments, similar fears, similar experiences. She identified with my madness! She told me that I was just a bog-standard alcoholic, I wasn’t a bad person. I had just been an alcoholic running around with no Programme.

Once I’d finished reading out my inventory, my sponsor advised me

“But we don’t delay if it can be avoided.”

(BB p.83)

on having an hour or two to quietly reflect on everything that I’d done so far, just as it says in the basic text. That couple of hours were probably the most peaceful hours

I’d had for many years. The idea that someone else in the world knew all the ins and outs of my mind and hadn’t turned their back on me, was so profound that I only really see its importance now. With that Step my trust and relationship with my sponsor was cemented in place, knowing I’d never need to hold back feelings, giving me the firm ability to be as honest with her as I need to be to continue living in this incredible Programme.

CAITLIN, *Road to Recovery*,
Plymouth

SHARE is our story, share yours

There are many AA members who are unable to go to meetings; the housebound, some single parents with children, those in the armed services, on oil rigs, in prisons or hospitals, who rely on SHARE for their meeting between meetings – and sometimes instead of one. Please take the time to write and share your experience, strength and hope with them.

Whether you are a newcomer, old-timer, or just an ordinary member we would like to hear your story just like at any other meeting. Not only that but putting pen to paper can enhance your own sobriety and that of the whole Fellowship.

You don’t need to be a polished author. Spelling and grammar will all be amended if necessary. You can write just a few lines or more, up to about a 1,000 words, but we do not publish poetry or obituaries.



Each issue of SHARE always features that month’s corresponding Step and Tradition (January Step/Tradition 1 through to December Step/Tradition 12). We need your article at least two months before the relevant topic is due to appear, for example, for Step or Tradition Three (March) by mid-January, and so a.

Send your contribution to: The Editor, SHARE, General Service Office, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ Or e-mail your article to: AAShare@gsogb.org.uk

ISOLATION AND STRUCTURE!

MY name is Matthew and I am an alcoholic. Before coming to Alcoholic Anonymous I lived in fear, blackout and isolation. I drank in darkened rooms alone, I pushed family, friends and well-intentioned do-gooders away. I had fear around people, shop assistants, making telephone calls and any form of conversation or conflict. My drinking escalated to where I became so far removed from reality, I lived in constant blackout isolation. I had no structure to my day, I woke up either drunk, hung over or dreading the consequences of the days before. My life had no path, no structure – just self-centred fear, wrapped with resentment and self-pity.

After getting to an AA meeting I was given a daily plan of action – wake up and pray for a sober day, review my gratitude list, read the Big Book, call newcomers like me and call my sponsor on time. After doing these few simple suggestions I woke up – I felt some hope, I started to recognise my alcoholism and reading the Big Book educated

me around the disease I suffered with. I had a structured day, I set my alarm in the morning and went to bed at the same time nearly every night. I had something to do, I committed myself to AA and my home group, attending three meetings a week. I had a purpose. I worked the Steps and now live in the last three. I still maintain my sobriety by sticking to the simple suggestions and structure my sponsor gave me. I keep it simple; I stick close to my home group meetings and will attend other meetings if only for the newcomer.

At this current time, I know I need to maintain my sobriety by keeping my daily structure, setting that alarm, keeping it simple, taking longer on my suggestions and developing my relationship with my Higher Power. Reaching out to the newcomer the best way I can. I no longer fear the company of others or myself. My gratitude for AA and my home group lies with the actions I put in to it.

MATTHEW W,
Road to Recovery, Plymouth

DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future. To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united; for on AA unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

FREEDOM TO LIVE MY OWN LIFE

I WANTED to stop drinking for years... well I wanted all the horrible bits to go away if truth be told... but I didn't connect drinking with my behaviour and all those consequences. I don't know how I first came across AA, but after some abortive attempts on my part, I went to a meeting with a desperation to stop drinking and heard my first identification. However, with an arrogance so deeply ingrained, I didn't put any effort in; I thought the answer was just to go to meetings and all would be given to me, I didn't know I had to work for it!

It took me 18 months of coming in and out of AA (I now know how fortunate I was to make it back each time) before I recognised I needed to change. I couldn't do it on my own. I needed help and guidance. I thought by turning up to meetings I would miraculously get sober, via osmosis. Whilst I had been open-minded to change, I was not really willing to put the work in, nor be truly honest with myself. My final drink gave me that gift of desperation to do everything that was suggested. I asked someone to sponsor me. His ability to deal

with life sober and be content was incredibly attractive to me. Whenever I'm back visiting family, he often reminds me how he could see in my eyes I was ready - how they pleaded with him for help!

He showed me what to do, in the way he had been shown, and I did what was suggested, sometimes willingly and other times reluctantly, but I did it. Little by little I changed. As I look back to that time, I wonder where I found faith to trust

*“Let's not talk prudence while practicing evasion.”
(12&12 p.87)*

in AA and God; the strength to face up to my defects of character, personality traits if you will; the thoroughness to search through the nooks and crannies of my warped mind and share every aspect with him in Step Five; the courage to genuinely put the wrongs of the past right with those I had harmed; persevere working every aspect of the Steps every day. I did it all with the love and support of my sponsor, with his experience and guidance and a loving God in my life. That is what made all this possible. But sponsorship is more than working through the Steps. When I lost a job in recovery, my sponsor listened to

my moans. When my mother passed away, he let me cry. When life got too much, he let me rant. My sponsor doesn't need to tell me what I need to do now – in talking things through with him (or via email as my current sponsor travels a lot) – the process of sharing with another recovering alcoholic – the answer to my problems normally comes to mind.

My sponsor didn't manage my recovery for me; he didn't set the agenda, nor dictate the timeframe; he didn't tell me what to do nor how to do it. He simply laid out his experience, together with the tools of this Programme and gave me the freedom to

live my own life. I asked him to help me and he did willingly... and I was willing to do as he suggested. I haven't been asked to sponsor many people. Those who I do give me so much more that they possibly realise. I try not to dictate the pace of work or tell them what to do. I try not to be the director or manager of their recoveries. I make myself available for them whenever they ask and happily pass on what was so freely given to me. I thank them for their trust, and my sponsors both old and current for their love and kindness in helping this alcoholic be happy, joyous and free (well most of the time!)

GUY, St Ives Cambridgeshire

Tradition 7

In view of current circumstances if members wish to make contributions directly to GSO please find details below.

Members can make their contribution direct to GSO by bank transfer see below.

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LIVING WITH REALITY

MY name is Gary, I'm a big drinker, a problem drinker, a power drinker, a binge drinker. I've dressed it up many times previously. I will start again... My name is Gary and I'm an alcoholic. The fact of the matter is I couldn't ever say no! and one drink was too many and 20 drinks was never enough. I'm currently serving a 16-year minimum life sentence for murder – nearly 13 years served in ten different prisons in England. I started drinking around 13-14 years old, getting into lots of trouble at school and with the police – all drink related though I didn't realise it. I found alcohol gave me confidence – without alcohol I felt naked in certain social situations, with alcohol I felt invincible and to hell with any anxiety or indeed consequences. In my early twenties I went to a nightclub to celebrate my birthday. Just the excuse I needed to drink myself into an entitled oblivion – which I did. As a result, I killed a man! Now, even though I was a bad lad, I never intended to kill him, I intended to cause him harm. In English law, if you intended to cause serious harm and someone dies as a result then that is murder. I was rightly found guilty at trial, In the early years of my sentence it was everyone else's fault. It was the fault of witnesses, the police, the courts, the victim even. I continued to drink in prison. I learned how to make 'prison hooch'. About three

years into my sentence, I got drunk during Easter Bank Holiday and on the Monday I assaulted another prisoner for something trivial. I realised in the segregation unit as I sat in an empty cell looking out at the moon that I had a major problem with alcohol. I asked myself 'Why does this always happen to me?'

I've not drank alcohol or prison hooch since this incident almost ten years ago.

When I reflect back on my life, my actions and choices, I can see the power alcohol had over me. The first drink always got me drunk. The drink revolved around my whole life – my whole life revolved around drink. The drink was all encompassing. It consumed me emotionally and physically. It was the greatest love/hate affair of my life. The drink came before everything. I took someone's life and got a life sentence, and that still wasn't enough for me to 'stop and think'. Wow, I've got a real problem here. Alcohol turned me into a green-eyed monster. It made me the most violent, hate-filled, resentful, unreasonable and uncaring person in my life. It made me hurt all the people I loved and more. Yet even ten years on, drink free, I still get transient cravings occasionally. I find myself thinking this away by saying out loud, "What good times?" as I look at the four, cold walls and steel

door that's been reality for around 13 years. That's the malevolent, devilish, demonic disease still chirping on my shoulder. My drinking didn't just destroy my life as I knew it, it destroyed another man's life and it destroyed two families' lives, his and my own. Such a waste, so sad. Utterly horrendous and tragic. I still remember the look of terror vividly in the man's eyes as I attacked him. That image is indelibly etched in my mind, probably forever as I've seen it every day since. That regret will be life-long. The shame will be life-long.

Whilst I've been in prison, I've attended AA meetings as often as I could, although this has been sporadic due to availability in some prisons. In all honesty, I've previously not taken much notice of the Twelve Steps, nor have I accepted the whole God thing. I'm not a religious person. However, it's been many years since I sat in an AA group meeting. What I did love was the sharing and being able to be with others with similar problems. I recently wrote to GSO and requested some information and asked if it was possible to get a sponsor while in prison. I got a response really quickly and a copy of the May 2020 issue of the SHARE magazine. This felt so positive. It gave me hope and strength. I enjoyed reading it so much. I then saw an advert for SHARE in prison, where people were asked to share their

"Good judgement will suggest we ought to take our time."

(12&12 p.86)

experiences in prison. I felt I should start as I mean to go on. Hence me writing this.

My God, my Higher Power is not something often perceived as religious as such. All I see from my prison window is the sky, the sky at night, the stars, the moon and the sun (now and then). They're my Higher Power. They're my gods. They are where I physically look to, they're all I see of the outside world. They change all the time, like my thoughts and feelings. They inspire me, they give me hope. They are the same but ever changing.

They set the mood. They are all seeing and all powerful. They hold so many dreams and wonder, they are always there even if not seen. All of this can contribute to sobriety and serenity also. As I reflect, I wonder whether the moon (God) spoke to me that night in the segregation unit some ten years ago? I'd like to believe that's the case. I feel hopeful and excited to be now engaged with AA Fellowship. I'm looking forward to a sober future and to correspond with my sponsor. I'm looking forward to meeting like-minded drink-free souls. I'm now going to study those Twelve Steps and work through them continuously, so I can fully grasp the importance and deep and meaningful value of them. I'll put my twiddling thumbs to use by turning the pages of the SHARE magazine.

All the best and stay sober.

GARY C

WHOSE RECOVERY IS IT?

MY first experience of the Rooms was in February 2019 while in rehab – three days sober, second time in rehab, I'd never been interested in AA due to the God reputation it has! The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions banners behind the chair kind of backed that up – having words related to God in most of the statements. The day I got home from rehab I dutifully went to a meeting which was a little daunting – 29 days sober walking into a small local meeting where everyone knew everyone else. It had always been a group of us from the rehab, going into these massive West London meetings. The welcome was very friendly, much more so than in the large London meetings. Did a few meetings a week, shared a bit, didn't see the point of repeating the same old readings every meeting and what the hell was the point of the 15-minute break, why not just do the extra 15 minutes and move on. Didn't read the book or anything else, just kept coming back.

I stayed sober long enough to get my two-month chip, just before waking up in hospital after drinking two litres of vodka and a packet of sleeping tablets. I have no knowledge of anything after starting the vodka, it was certainly not a premeditated suicide attempt, but I'm told they could not get an

output from me for two hours so I guess that means it was close to being suicide. Over the next nine months I continued to go to AA, but struggled to string together much more than a month sober at a time. Just going to meetings and sharing didn't work to keep me sober. After five or six months I got a sponsor, I chose an old timer who had successfully sponsored many people but I never progressed beyond reading bits of the Big Book with him. After about nine months in the Fellowship had yet another relapse – this one was major, waking up in a police station with criminal charges. After that I had a hardened resolve to progress with the Steps. The Higher Power required for Step Two made starting even Step One (which I'd admitted years ago) difficult. I wasn't working and had time, I was doing between two and four meetings a day. Over the next month or so I came to see my way of resolving my Higher Power and became desperate to commence with my Steps. But for one reason or another my original sponsor still made no progress on my Steps. Then early in lockdown I had a massive relapse which again resulted in police cells and criminal charges.

This was the final straw, I parted ways with my original sponsor and asked someone I'd only seen in the wonderful video conference meetings to be my sponsor. He gave

me his 'rules' to be sponsored by him. I almost bit his hand off – the 'rules' made absolute sense to me. So later that day we had a chat on the phone so he could get to know a bit about me. After the call he sent me what he wanted me to do on a daily basis, a reading to do, a daily journal etc and also the work he wanted me to do towards Step One. I followed the instructions and completed them overnight (the wonders of insomnia). Then a couple of days later we had another chat and finished off with the Step One prayer, and finally, after 15 months of going to meetings but only a week or two of actually working the Programme, Step One was completed.

I then received the work required for Step Two. Did that over the next couple of days, had a chat and Step Two was done. No 'Road to Damascus' moment or bolt of lightning, but just felt a lot better – thought it was just the relief of finally getting progress on the Steps. Received the work required for Step Three, had my divorce settlement coming up so expected it to take a bit longer. The day before the Financial Dispute Resolution meeting was scheduled, I had a lot of questions to answer for my solicitor, but in between those I did the Step Four work, which probably helped keep my head straight. The following day came the dreaded meeting, most of the day was spent

on the phone to my solicitor and barrister, with a bit of virtual time in court. Net result was nil – the day ended up with no progress. A few weeks previously I'd have been yelling, shouting, swearing, breaking things, even before I drank. Where I'd have ended up after that I dread to think!!! But, throughout the whole day, I never once thought of, let alone wanted, a drink.

Over the following weekend things got very stressful again, I even had to go out to the shops in the afternoon – picked up some bits for breakfast, ordered my fags and despite the booze being behind the counter I didn't even think about a drink let alone crave a drink. I've still got all the consequences to deal with – the operations are indefinitely delayed, the sciatica and arthritis are getting worse, currently the divorce looks like it will go to a final hearing, over six months away, with high financial costs. I'm on 18 months' probation, six months alcohol treatment, with two criminal cases outstanding – one which may result in the loss of my driving licence!

But today I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and feel a lot better about everything – the last thing I want to do is have a drink and hope that will continue, one day at a time.

ANDY L.

STOP PRESS!!!

GSO York have decided to make back copies of SHARE magazine freely available to prisons by applying to GSO via your Region.

WHAT IS A SPONSOR?

A Woman's Perspective

DO I need a sponsor or even want one? A sponsor is someone who has been in recovery for a while and is willing to share that experience with you on an individual basis. She will take a special interest in you and will be willing to explain and go through the Twelve Step Programme with you, also the Twelve Traditions. Time is something a good sponsor will give to you and the close support you get from your sponsor as you begin to live sober is beyond measure.

It was suggested to me to go to as many meetings as possible and listen to the women who I felt an empathy with and who had a similar story to my own. Someone who is seen to be working the Twelve Step Programme in their daily life and who has a period of continued sobriety. Instead of looking for a sponsor how about listening for one – listen to her sharing about her own recovery and if you want what she has, ask – it's a privilege for the sponsor too. It's never too late to get a sponsor and the joy you both receive from your relationship can only be revealed when you work in unity.

“Good judgement, a careful sense of timing, courage, and prudence...”
(12&12 p.85)

At first, I was very hesitant about asking anyone to be my sponsor as I had a great fear of rejection and was afraid of this if the person I asked had said they could not be my sponsor. Eventually after much pushing from a fellow alcoholic I made the decision to ask someone and she said yes. Having a sponsor helped me adjust to a way of life without alcohol, any problems I had I was able to talk to my sponsor about them, even the silly little things about something that had happened in a meeting or what was a GSR, what is intergroup – she explained all these things and more to me and encouraged me into service which keeps me sober and still does today.

A sponsor is not a social worker, doctor, counsellor – a sponsor is simply a sober alcoholic who helps a newcomer solve the problem of how to stay sober. As you get to know one another maybe you will find that a great friendship develops and you may keep this sponsor for a lifetime or you may move to another but keep your friendship. There are no rules regarding sponsorship and you can change your sponsor at any time, although it is not good practice to

change just because she suggests something you may not like – after all she only has your best interests at heart. A sponsor was once a newcomer too and so has the experience as to how you may be feeling about all sorts of things, generally you will meet for a chat about what you are expecting from your sponsor and what she can give you in respect of her own recovery – after all she has been where you are today. I would suggest you buy and read a very helpful AA explanatory leaflet which is available for about 80p

about questions on sponsorship. If your group does not have them available ask the literature person to order some, she/he will be happy to do so.

ANITA S, Nottingham



CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)

Alcoholics Anonymous UK is constantly updating information on our AA UK Website

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Coronavirus-News

This includes:

General guidance about Covid19

Help and guidance about
On-Line meetings

Links to On-Line AA meetings

Link to update meeting details

Guidance about On-Line
Anonymity

Links to Share and Roundabout
On-Line

Help for Newcomers

Tradition Seven

Literature orders

Other websites claiming to be
connected to AA

GSO requests that we avoid calling the London, York or Glasgow office for general enquiries but rather email to: **gso@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk**



A year's worth of AA inspiration, one day at a time

2021 Fellowship Diaries & Calendars NOW AVAILABLE



Produced by members for members, the 2021 Fellowship pocket diary and wall calendar are full of Fellowship inspiration, with quotes from AA literature on every page.

Once again, the calendar features stunning photographs from AA members across the country – vivid reminders of the gifts sobriety gives us.

Both the calendar and the diary represent great value at £4.95 each including postage. To order, please complete the form below and send it with your payment to: Fellowship calendar/diary, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ.

In order to make payments direct through your bank please use the following information: Sort code: 40-47-31 Account no.: 63930408

Once you have instructed your bank to make payment, email – name, address and how many copies of calendars and/or diaries to: carolinedavy@gsgob.org.uk This will enable us to match the payment when it arrives.

FELLOWSHIP CALENDAR/DIARY ORDER FORM

Please use BLOCK CAPITALS to help us get your details correct – thank you!
Please send me calendars at £4.95 each Please send me diaries at £4.95 each
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made payable to 'General Service Office' for £.....

My name

My address

..... Post Code

SHARE INTERVIEW

WITH OIL RIG KEITH



Conducted via email by Ian

Q How long have you been sober?

A 21 years.

Q What brought you to the Fellowship?

A I was a mess, my life was a mess, my head was a mess, I was emotionally thwarted. I was at the jumping off place, couldn't live with alcohol and I couldn't live without it.

Q Have you been sober since you came in?

A No, I came into the Fellowship at first in 1990, got sober at the end of 1990, stayed sober for about two and a half years, and as life and AA weren't giving me what I expected and of course, rightly deserved, I picked up a drink which then led to a very disastrous nearly five years stage of slipping and sliding.

Q Could you give a brief description of your drinking before you came into AA?

A My drinking before 1990 was problematic and dysfunctional, I drank to relieve worry and boredom, I couldn't cope with my head and thought processes

and racing brain, I couldn't handle my emotions. I was a bender drinker so could stop in between bouts, my fear and anxiety was through the roof, and the Army had already sent me for detox that didn't work. But even then, it was nowhere near as bad as it was to get from 1993 to 1998.

Q How old were you when you first took a drink?

A Nine or ten – it was punch. My first real drink which ended in blackout, I was 14.

Q How long did you have an issue with alcohol which needed addressing?

A Looking back, I have had, and still have a highly addictive personality, alcohol never started to cause me any external problems until around 22/23. And it just escalated from there, manageable periods and then more binges, more trouble, but the worst was yet to come... I feel physically sick to my core at just the thought of going back to that nightmare way of living, of feeling, of thinking, as we

often hear, Thank God for AA and thank AA for God. (Group of Drunks, Good Orderly Direction, Great Out Doors)

Q When you came into AA what did you think? Did you get anything from your first meeting?

A I couldn't believe that there were people who thought like me, felt like me. The honesty amazed and puzzled me and I felt like I was at last at home and there was hope. At my first meeting a guy shared that his Higher Power was an apple twig cutter under a tree and I thought he was nuts, why not just call it God like me? And we all have the choice of what our own Higher Power will be – how amazing is that!

Q So that was a quite positive example?

A The fact that I was no longer alone, not the square peg in the round hole. The people were amazing, talking to me, shaking my hand – wow, what an amazing Fellowship we have.

Q So, what's life like now Keith?

A Well, I won't lie and say that all my sobriety has been a doddle and easy, I got married in sobriety, had three amazing sons, my career and qualifications took off. And sadly, for just over five years now I have been going through a bitter nasty divorce (not on my behalf, as I still have a Programme to work, thankfully).

I love the peace of mind I have; I love me (most of the time), I love the person this Programme has encouraged me to become and the person I can yet become through more love and more change. And all I have to do is not pick up a drink just one day at a time, get to my home group meetings and other meetings, carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic as and where I can, try to practice this Programme in my daily life. What a very small price to pay for an amazing way to live.

Q If any newcomers are reading this what would you say to them?

A You are an amazing person, with an illness that does not want you to get well. You deserve so much more and you can become so much more through not picking up a drink a day at a time, an hour at a time or just for the next five minutes. I promise you that YOU are worth this no matter what your head tells you, no matter how you feel, there is a life awaiting you beyond your wildest dreams. It may not seem that way in times of despair and fear, and anxious thoughts, and feeling sorry for yourself, but you are more than worth the way of living that is on offer. You can do this and you have the whole-hearted support of our amazing Fellowship. Get to meetings, get well and become the amazing sober person you were always meant to be.

shareback

If you have identified with anything in SHARE, or wish to express a personal opinion based on your experience, share it with us. Write a letter of not more than 300 words and enclosing a contact name and address (not for publication) to:

Share Back, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ.
or **E Mail** AAShare@gsogb.org.uk

SIMPLICITY

WHEN I first felt that my recovery was on a sound basis, I wished so much to be a sponsor but was not asked. A few weeks later a lady asked me to sponsor her and I was delighted. Little did I realise how much I needed to learn about other people, not to give advice but to share my own experience. To listen properly to what she was telling me and reply, to be calm and helpful without criticising. This took time and I made many mistakes, but I learnt to trust my instincts and act on them. My instincts have sharpened over the years.

The other great lesson was not to be upset if things didn't work out and either she relapsed or moved to another sponsor. Guilt has always been one of my defects and to learn to detach with love and be objective, was hard. This was when my faith in a Higher Power came to be the most needed thing in my life and which keeps me so grateful for AA and the Fellowship.

ANONYMOUS

HONESTY

MY name is Paul and I am a grateful recovering alcoholic.

I have always felt it a great honour and privilege to be asked to be a sponsor. I take this role very seriously and understand the importance of doing it thoroughly. Before I start the process, I always spend a bit of time talking to and getting to know the sponsee, to get them to understand what is going to happen and the reasons for that. I also let them know that if at any point they feel it is not working, they can always sack me and I them but I can say that I have never had that happen. I also let them know that there may be times, if I feel it needed, that I give them a gentle nudge to get on with a Step.

One thing I always make clear is - this will only work if they are as honest as they can be at all times (you know the old saying - honesty being the best policy). May I also say that all the people I have sponsored have also become good friends and remain so - the trust and confidence that sponsoring brings, creates a unique bond between both parties.

But how do you become a sponsor? Well my experience came from my own sponsor and not being afraid to talk to them about the decisions I was making, I still quite often speak to my sponsor to get his wise council on things, he never lets me down.

PAUL N, Lincoln

MY EXPERIENCE OF SPONSORSHIP

DURING my career I had a lot of experience managing and mentoring other people. I was 'strict but fair' and in general I think I did the job quite well. I worked systematically with set tools and I got good feedback, my mentees developed self-confidence and skills, moved up in their profession.

But when I came into AA and got my AA sponsor, I had a different role to play and it was a difficult transition. There was the set agenda, (not set by yours truly!) of the Twelve Steps which was/still is really the most rigorous process.

And my sponsor worked with 'tough love', there was nowhere to hide, no quarter given!

Over the years she has helped me to see and know myself properly for the first time in my life: who I really am and what my motivations really are. I had to examine everything under a microscope. I had to question myself, discover and dissect my defects. This had never been necessary before – as clearly, like Mary Poppins, I was practically perfect in every way! I've had to develop new ways of approaching problems and I've learned that problems sometimes take years to solve!

This has been (and still is) a hard lesson in humility for me, but also a wonderful journey in developing mutual trust with my sponsor and the friendship we have forged. As I share with her, she also shares with me and so, she says, she too benefits from the process. I feel blessed.

PATRICIA D



THE TWELVE CONCEPTS

for World Service

1. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.
2. The General Service Conference of AA has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.
3. To ensure effective leadership, we should endow each element of AA – the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees and executives – with a traditional ‘Right of Decision’.
4. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional ‘Right of Participation’, allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.
5. Throughout our structure, a traditional ‘Right of Appeal’ ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.
6. The Conference recognise that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.
7. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the AA purse for final effectiveness.
8. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of over-all policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.
9. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.
10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.
11. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.
12. The Conference shall observe the spirit of AA tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never performs acts of government and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.



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