

December 2020

£1

The Fellowship's
RECOVERY MAGAZINE

share

Produced for members
by members

Our Meeting Between Meetings



Carry the message

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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- ◆ Contributions referring to local AA matters, conferences, assemblies, public information and conventions will be refused unless they share a *personal* point of view, based on the recovery experience in AA.
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our meeting in print

DECEMBER 2020

In this issue...

STEP TWELVE	
Luck And Miracles	4
Concept Twelve	6
<hr/>	
Taking The First Step...	9
...To A Better Future	11
Living Sober In Lockdown	12
A Way Forward	14
New Year's Resolution Again...	18
Christmas Is Still Magical	19
A Phone Call Saved My Life	21
Christmas Gift	22
My First Christmas	23
How AA Is Perceived	23
Promises, Service And Sobriety	25
Do Not Be Discouraged	26
The Full Picture	27
<hr/>	
The SHARE Interview with Kirk T, Whitley Bay	28
<hr/>	
Editorial	3
AA Conference Approved Books	
New Items and Revised Prices	i
Literature Order Form	iv
shareback: Letters	31

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Back cover photo: Ducks – Adrian T



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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

WELCOME to our December issue, the last month of 2020, an extraordinary year. For some of our readers this has been an extra extraordinary year as they have come to our Fellowship and found sobriety in lockdown. Sobriety when most of our face to face meetings have been closed, a year where we learned how to work online meeting software, "You're on mute!" So welcome to all of you who have found our AA Fellowship and to those who have come back to us.

The AA message in the year 2020 has been carried to you somehow, perhaps by the AA Website, the AA telephone service, a friend, a helping agency, the AA email or Chat Now service, by a nurse, doctor or someone in your human resources department as a result of AA Public Information activities or perhaps in an Online meeting. We get about us Alkis, carrying our message of hope to those still suffering from this horrible illness.

The second part of our Twelfth Step is about practicing these principles in all our affairs. What on earth does that mean says a newcomer? For me it is doing the next best thing as I go through my day. Sobriety has been a learning process and as they say, "We learn through our mistakes." Naively when I first came into the Fellowship I thought, stop drinking, stop making mistakes, life becomes good again. How wrong can you be? I have made many mistakes in sobriety but in sobriety I do have a chance to learn from them, take inventory, ask for help, make amends where appropriate and move on. If I continue to do something that I don't feel comfortable with then I'm probably not practicing these principles in all my affairs and it's time to make changes.

**** **

NEXT MONTH: STEP ONE

We invite articles on your experience, strength and hope. This month we are particularly looking for those on Steps and Traditions Two and Three for the February and March 2021 issues.



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."

STEP TWELVE LUCK AND MIRACLES

MY name's Bill and I'm an alcoholic. I'm a port contact in loners. My sobriety date is 6th Oct 1997 and my home group is Hanham Hall, Bristol, UK. Many years ago, probably about 20, when I was a relative newcomer, I commented to my sponsor just how lucky I was to be sober and that the miracle of a changed life was so amazing. I expected a cool, happy and complimentary reply. But that was not the case. We all know those times when our sponsor looks at us in a way we just know, maybe, just maybe, we've said the wrong thing. What I was told has always stayed with me and I'm going to share it with you now.

"There is no luck" he said, "in your sobriety, and certainly there are no miracles. Luck and miracles are things that just can't be reasonably explained." "And" he went on to explain, "I can explain

"...this is an experience you must not miss."

(BB p.89)

everything that you have in your sobriety today. It's called a Twelve Step Programme. You've put the work in, and you've got your recovery out in direct proportion to the service, Step work and enthusiasm you've put in." I now know that every drink I ever drank, each resentment I ever felt, each fear I ever felt, each negative painful experience I ever encountered, each lost opportunity I created, each consequence of my actions, all the deep-seated guilt I caused, all the anger I'd had a part in – were all part of my Higher Power's gift towards me getting sober.

One less drink, one less resentment, one less fear driven day, one less loss, one less consequence, I wouldn't have gone down low enough, and I wouldn't have got to a point where, for the first time in my life, I was able to admit complete defeat. I know today, each and every painful

experience was a gift, each drink was a stepping stone. All were to add up to that miracle of having a rock bottom without which I would either still be a drunk, or probably dead. So, the one miracle that we all possess in our lives, our sobriety and in our gift of a changed life, is that we were guided to a place where we were finally beaten. There was just no friendly direction left. So few people make it to the Rooms of AA and even fewer stay around.

But I did, and for that I'm truly grateful. Thanks for whoever was looking after me all those years. Thanks for feeding me an addiction and a selfishness that was damaging enough to bring about a life that was eventually

*"You can help when
no one else can."*

(BB p.89)

not worth continuing with. Why me? I don't know. But I do know one thing. That each and every sober member of AA was taken down low enough so we could then pick up the Programme, so that we could pass it on to another suffering alcoholic. It started with just two, Bill and Bob. And it hasn't finished yet. Let's all be grateful for our gift of sobriety, however painful that gift was to achieve because if the person before us hadn't been gifted a miracle, we may not have been fortunate enough to have had this wonderful Programme passed on to us. Let's all be blessed with an understanding of that old, old saying in AA, an attitude of gratitude.

BILL THE SHIRT, Bristol

Tradition 7

In view of current circumstances, members can make their contributions direct to GSO by bank transfer. Please find details below.

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CONCEPT TWELVE AND THE PRINCIPLE OF “SUBSTANTIAL UNANIMITY”

CONCEPT TWELVE

“General Warranties of the Conference: In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, wherever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.”

“ONE of the most remarkable documents I’ve ever read”. So said Nell Wing, who worked hand-in-glove with our co-founder Bill W as his assistant for his final twenty years. What was she talking about? the Big Book? the Twelve and Twelve? Neither, as it happens. She was talking about the Twelve Concepts, and specifically about the Twelfth, which summarises the ground rules for our spiritual democracy. For us AAs, it’s right up there with the Magna Carta or the American Bill of Rights.

Sometimes I have sat in a business meeting or group conscience session thinking, I really didn’t get sober for this. As my eyes wander the room searching for the emergency exit, they alight on the scroll with the

Traditions and particularly those words in Tradition Two, “*a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience.*” That really doesn’t seem to square with what I’m witnessing: lots of people talking at once, sharing opinions rather than experience, bad decisions being made in a hurry on a majority vote. Then I look again at Tradition Two and I notice something afresh: the word is MAY, not will. A loving God as he *may* express himself. So what does it take to turn *may* into *will*? How can we ever be confident that the conscience of our group is in tune with the spirit of the universe?

Back in the 1940s, our other co-founder, Dr Bob, once found himself in a business meeting in Akron, so the story goes. It resembled nothing so much as a

bar-room brawl, and according to another of those present, Dr Bob got up and put up his hands as if to say – enough, STOP! And then he spoke, “Gentlemen, please. We are still members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Let’s carry the principles of AA into these business meetings. ... Let one man talk at a time, and let us conduct this business meeting as a service to the Lord and a service to our fellow members of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

After Dr Bob died in 1950, Bill gave a lot of thought to the problem over the years that remained to him. The Twelve Concepts for World Service, which came out in 1962, were devised first and foremost as guidelines for the conscience of the Fellowship as a whole – for its General Service Conference. But they contain principles and spiritual truths which can be applied at every level of the service structure, in groups and even by members in our daily affairs.

One thing that particularly concerned Bill was what he called the “tyranny of the majority” – the risk that groups would take decisions that were *uniformed, misinformed, hasty or angry*. The best defence against this, he thought, was to pay really close attention to the minority opinion, which not infrequently turns out to have been right all along. So

in our business or conscience meetings today we could think about devoting less time and attention to those who agree, and their reasons, and turn the spotlight more onto those who disagree, and why.

This is all well explained in Concept Five.

“Throughout our world service structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.” (AA Structure Handbook GB 2020)”

“Never talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop...”
(BB p.95)

What this means in practice is set out in Concept Twelve, where it says that all major decisions should be made through a process of discussion, vote, and substantial unanimity.

So ideally, we keep on talking until complete agreement has been reached; unresolved dissension is maybe the sign we need from above that everyone should be working their Eleventh Step a bit harder. It has been well said that there are no emergencies in AA, but if the need for a decision is really pressing then a two-thirds majority will sometimes suffice. But even then, Bill gave examples of where early conferences had continued to talk though to consensus, even though a two-to-one majority was clearly available. This, he said, was evidence of *real*

prudence and courteous deference to minority views.

Why is any of this relevant to our primary purpose? Well, over many years now, I've witnessed conduct in business and conscience meetings which could have been calculated to put newcomers off – unless the idea has been to

stage some sort of showcase of character defects. If the principles behind Concept Twelve were better known, still better practiced, I feel confident that everything would run a lot more quietly and smoothly, and more newcomers would *keep coming back*.

ANONYMOUS

TRADITIONS CHECKLIST

Tradition Twelve



Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

1. Why is it a good idea for me to place the common welfare of all AA members before individual welfare? What would happen to me if AA as a whole disappeared?
2. When I do not trust AA's current servants, who do I wish had the authority to straighten them out?
3. In my opinions of and remarks about other AAs, am I implying membership requirements other than a desire to stay sober?
4. Do I ever try to get a certain AA group to conform to my standards, not its own?
5. Have I a personal responsibility in helping an AA group fulfil its primary purpose? What is my part?
6. Does my personal behaviour reflect the Tradition 6 – or misrepresent it?
7. Do I do all I can to support AA financially? When is the last time I anonymously gave away a SHARE or Roundabout subscription?
8. Do I complain about certain AAs behaviour – especially if they are paid to work for AA? Who made me so smart?
9. Do I fulfil all AA responsibilities in such a way as to please privately even my own conscience? Really?
10. Do my utterances always reflect the Tenth Tradition, or do I give AA critics real ammunition?
11. Should I keep my AA membership a secret, or reveal it in private conversation when that may help another alcoholic (and therefore me)? Is my brand of AA so attractive that other drunks want it?
12. What is the real importance of me among 2,000,000 AA members?

TAKING THE FIRST STEP...

I asked about my childhood, I'd have said I was happy, but a child doesn't know they've been abused until they learn what abuse is. My mother 'walloped' me until my late teens for the slightest wrongdoing and sometimes no reason at all. I was told it never did me any harm and I believed that right up until I had my own children when I could see there was a different way to parent. I hadn't seen it as physical abuse.

I was brought up in a house of secrets, fear and consequences. My parents fought and would hold kitchen knives to each other, they would scream and shout for hours, and go days without speaking. Whilst not fuelled by alcohol, it was driven by my mother's narcissism and little has changed. I had been physically and emotionally abused, I lived in fear of consequences. My emotions fuelled my drinking, but until I came into AA, I had no idea why I drank. I just drank!

There was no lightbulb moment when I had my first drink, my alcoholism was progressive over 30 years. I left home at 19, and didn't drink even regularly for a long time. I had an awareness of what an alcoholic was because of my job, but you have to be one

to really understand it as I now know. My thinking wasn't nearly as distorted in those days as it has become in recent years, but I have always been an all or nothing person, never do anything by halves, do it and do it 100%. Open a packet of biscuits and eat the lot, start a project and got to finish it, open a bottle and finish it!

The last 15 years I knew I drank too much, I'd give up annually for Lent but can see now, even by then I was a dry drunk. I'd dread Lent

(BB p.95) starting, counting down the days and six weeks would seem like an eternity. I'd revert to my normal drinking soon after, which was definitely more habitual than excessively heavy. Time went on but gradually things just got worse. I stopped for seven months once, promising myself I would drink normally afterwards but I didn't – again normal service resumed and worse. I was drinking every night and starting to plan, "Was there enough at home? Would it last? Could I drive past the shop without stopping to buy any? Could I make it to the corner shop and back while my husband was in the shower so he wouldn't know I had run out and was on to the next bottle."

"...we merely have an approach that worked with us."

I realised a couple of years before I came into the Rooms that I had trouble stopping once started, that it was starting to consume my head, but I didn't know why or what to do about it, I just knew I couldn't stop. I started to search AA online and pretty much worked out the game was up before I came in, it was just a matter of when. That was my Step One, but I didn't know it at the time. On the AA website one day, the yellow chat box appeared, I filled it in! I was at a very low ebb, I'd a terrible hangover and knew the only thing left was AA. I'd been to a meeting to support a friend eight years previously and the words, "If you don't take the first drink, you can't get drunk." really had stayed with me. I spoke to someone on the telephone line and committed to going to a meeting that night. I knew it is what I needed but had no idea quite how much it would help. I chewed over all day what I would say to my husband. He really didn't know how bad things were, my kids didn't know, no one knew. As I left, I handed him a note saying, "I'm going to an AA meeting..."

ANON

THEMES FOR 2021

Due to the fabulous response during 2020, we will continue to have an additional focus in specific issues:

JANUARY – 'Newcomers'

How did you feel as a newcomer to the Fellowship?

How do you support a newcomer?

MARCH – 'How to keep sobriety to the forefront'

You have a period of sobriety under your belt –

What keeps you living sober?

Does life get in the way?

JUNE – 'Prison'

Did you find sobriety in prison?

Have you enhanced your journey by doing service in prison?

SEPTEMBER – 'Service in my Home Group'

Were you sponsored into service?

Do you find AA literature helpful?

DECEMBER – 'A Sober Christmas and New Year'

What is your experience?

What works for you?

What would you suggest for a newcomer?

STOP PRESS!!!

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

...TO A BETTER FUTURE

... WAS told, "Listen to the similarities not the differences." and "Go to more meetings." I thought I was far too busy to go regularly and didn't think I needed to, but I did go again, and again and again. I don't remember the early meetings, but I just kept coming back and I wasn't drinking. All the while my head was in turmoil, grieving the aunt who'd been the real mother in my life, supporting my father with dementia who still lives with a narcissist, dealing with multiple agencies, doing a five hour round trip a couple of times a week, working and looking after a family. Even though I didn't drink and continued with meetings, I was slowly going more and more insane. After three months I got a sponsor and since starting to go through the Steps and starting therapy I can feel my head slowing down. The obsession to drink stopped quite quickly and thankfully I have never felt tempted, but I am now starting to

see why I drank. I thought I was OK, I thought I was normal, I had lots of friends, I worked hard and got on well with colleagues. But I can now see that I have all of that because they put up with me 'because it was me'. I can see the emotional roller coaster on which I have lived my life and I had to come to AA to learn what I didn't know.

I completely got the God thing – Step Two – I knew I couldn't do it on my own, I had tried that already. Step Three...I couldn't wait. Steps Four and Five...it took eight months to finally sit down and do Four and Five by video conference. I wasn't looking for a spiritual experience, I never felt I needed one. I have heard 'There is a Solution' countless times over the past 15 months, but after my Step Four, it was a light bulb for me. THERE IS A SOLUTION to the mess in my head, and that for me is in the Steps. I'm glad I waited, and I will keep going.

ANON



SHARE is now available online on the AA Website.

The link is: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Fellowship-Magazines/SHARE-Magazine>

You can then go to the relevant month and find the link to download that month's magazine – **Our Meeting Between Meetings** – needed now more than ever!

LIVING SOBER IN LOCKDOWN

I HAVE been reflecting on living sober in AA during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lockdown has been a huge challenge, like someone putting a mirror in front of me and saying, “Okay, now live with that, no distractions, nothing...!”. In many ways the feelings are similar to those of early sobriety. This time however, I already know the solution: Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and the Fellowship that helps me to work them into my life. All I need is willingness to apply them in this new situation. Admittedly the willingness is often rooted in fear and desperation but I am hugely grateful for it anyway and God willing it will continue. Lockdown has been a time of enormous learning i.e. embarrassment and pain followed by the opportunity to be honest, apply the Programme and find ways of resetting a sober and sane equilibrium. I am doing a lot of letting go and letting God and remembering who exactly God is – i.e. not me.

I host a video-conference meeting. Oh boy, is it stirring up resentments in me! I have found the variation in perception of and attitudes to the risks of Covid-19, generally, to be quite unnerving. My instincts and defects of character make

“Let him draw his own conclusion.”

(BB p.92)

navigating relationships in this context just about as close to hell as it gets for me, both inside and outside AA. I really didn’t want to do video-conferencing. Unfamiliar with the application and tech-phobic, I reluctantly offered to try because I needed my home group. The whole business freaked me out: the security issues; the sense of responsibility for the meeting taking place every week; the etiquette, from Room to video-conferencing; and then those “*erstwhile erratic alcoholics*” (BB p.xviii) sharing all their Covid-19 grievances! At times it felt to me more like a Covid-19 self-help group or a mass Covid moan.

Traditions – help me! Tradition Five “*...one primary purpose...*”, Tradition Ten “*...no opinion on outside issues...*”, Tradition Twelve “*...principles before personalities...*”. Alongside Tradition One “*Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.*”, Tradition Two “*...one ultimate authority... Our leaders are but trusted servants...*”, Tradition Three “*The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.*”. These tenets have for decades kept our Fellowship as safe a space as possible for us to get and stay sober. My job? To work with

the members of my autonomous video-conferencing group to continue these time-honoured Traditions in our new environment. And then there's the sharing! The words are the same as in any bricks and mortar Room. But there is so much missing. "Hello" and "Thank you" are tentative and variable. Non-verbal cues that indicate identification, solidarity and acceptance (or otherwise on occasion!) are gone: the nods, laughs, coughs, chairs-shifting.

One delight of lockdown is visiting virtual meetings further afield and the precious chance to hear solid shares that keep me oriented towards recovery. Another, is seeing people who I haven't seen in many years and remembering past days together in cold, damp,

mousey Rooms. It seems so long ago and yet such a very important time, those early years when we were all fresh in the lifeboat. The more I think about it the closer it comes to today, which is a good thing. The truth is that I know how long it is since my last drink but I don't know how long it will be to my next – and it serves me well to remember that. I think AA in lockdown has really taught me that. I would never have admitted to being complacent, but in honesty that's what I saw in the mirror when it was held up. And thank God for it – it might have saved my life. I am so glad I am sober. I can't, and don't want to, imagine what it would be like if I was still in the clutches of booze.

ANON

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. Don't forget 'Short is Sweet'. We love your articles but over 1,000 words will not be considered for publication nor do we 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 on.

Send your contribution to: The Editor, SHARE, General Service Office, PO Box 1,10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ or make an online submission via <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Fellowship-Magazines/SHARE-Magazine/Submit-a-Contribution>

A WAY FORWARD

AM George, an alcoholic. I like to think that today I am a realist. I am severely dyslexic and not familiar with technology but my wife is not too bad and we quickly adjusted to the AA video-conferencing meetings. This was not a problem – just another form of communication and under the circumstances of the pandemic, the only way to get to meetings. This is not about me or my wants – this is about me staying stopped and continuing to carry the message to the newcomer be it via video-conferencing.

I can scream and shout about preferring face-to-face meetings but it's pretty pointless if there are none at this moment in time. I cannot push these personal views onto a newcomer, it would be pretty irresponsible if I did because they have known no other way. AA's Pledge states, "I am responsible... When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible." So, I had to turn it over, step into unfamiliar territory and make this work. AA has never let me down in 46 years so why would it now. Only I can let me down and I'm only short-changing myself by not getting to meetings – advice I have been giving out all the time I have been in AA. My

"...take these troubles in stride and turn them into demonstrations of faith." (12&12 p.117)

trust and faith in AA is 100% even when things are not going my way.

I realise by the time this is printed, it may all have changed, but I think I could be witnessing a change in how AA operates. Not in the Steps, Traditions or AA service but how we deliver the message to the newcomer. Step One is an action step, I accept I am alcoholic and my life has become unmanageable

– that will continue to work for me 100% if I put that action in. The rest of the Steps are an 'inside job'. They are about me not drinking and

about change – accepting life on life's terms, I'm not in charge, the HP is – acceptance is the key. Not going to face-to-face meetings should not, if I am sober, affect my sobriety or recovery in any way. It's the Steps that keep me sober in reality and not the meetings. With no face-to-face meetings I use video-conferencing like the rest of the world – when meetings re-open, I will return. While using video-conferencing these past 14 weeks, I have met many people who make contact this way and are staying stopped – one member is three years sober.

Just recently there seems to have been a lot of relapses – including members who have been around a while. The format of meetings may

have changed but the disease has not – it will still kill you if you take the first drink. In my recovery this is not a choice or an option – after the devastation I caused and the lives I destroyed I have no right to drink. To combat the illness of alcoholism I have the most successful self-help group in the world to support me. It works, meetings or no meetings, with trust and faith in AA. There can be no excuses, as drinking for us can be as fatal as the corona virus and can kill.

Let's hope face-to-face meetings return, though I suspect not

*"So cooperate;
never criticize."*

(BB p.89)

as before – I think video-conferencing is here to stay, possibly parallel meetings so there is a choice. A lot of people have found video-conferencing a solution to day-to-day problems – late shifts, single parents with children, getting in late from work, juggling getting kids to bed, shift work, still on lockdown/shielding, disability etc. *"Modem-to-modem or face-to-face, AA's speak the language of the heart in all its power and simplicity."* (BB p.xxiv). It works if you work it and put the action in.

GEORGE, Eastbourne

(COVID-19)

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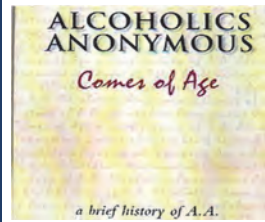
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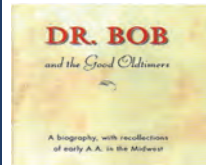
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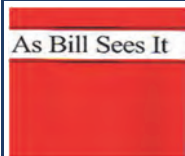
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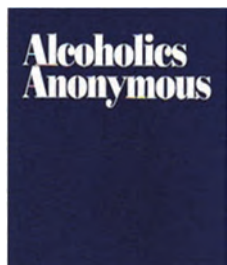
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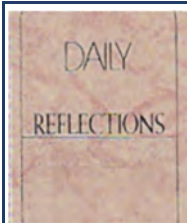
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We know many are excited about the 75th Anniversary Convention, please keep checking the website for updates and some random facts as they become available.

Email address: info@aa75.co.uk

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION AGAIN...

EVERY year towards the end of my drinking I would always promise and boast that one of my New Year's resolutions would be either to stop drinking altogether, stop drinking for January, only drink at weekends or whatever unrealistic plan I had put together. I had this intense longing and desire to be a normal drinker and felt that what was holding me back was my apparent lack of willpower – a huge weakness in my eyes.

How little did I understand about alcoholism at this point. So as Christmas approached each year, my plan was to drink as much as I could throughout the festive period and then stop. However, reality was very different. How could I not drink on January 1st, my husband's birthday? Surely that was allowed? Hence, I failed before I began!

Now Christmas and New Year are very different. Thanks to the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous, I now treat every day as the same and focus on twenty-four hours at a time. I don't project to the future anymore or worry about how I will get through occasions of celebration, of disappointment or just average normal days without a

drink. I remember in the early days of recovery how important it was to follow the simple suggestions given to me by my sponsor – to pray each morning for a sober day, to read AA literature, to phone her regularly, to speak to others in the Fellowship, to help the newcomer, to write a gratitude list and to

“...be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others...”

(BB p.102)

thank my Higher Power at the end of each day for my continuing sobriety. These are still suggestions that I carry out today and still do throughout the festive period as I would any other day.

I remember in the early days that it was vital to keep myself safe over the Christmas period so I avoided the work Christmas 'do', any New year parties, and just enjoyed a quiet family time. It was difficult, but it was important to shield myself from any unnecessary pressure and temptation. Even today, I still find that it is best for my recovery to avoid social occasions where drinking is the main focus. I also tend to avoid any festive food with alcohol as I do not wish to provide opportunity for temptation and it is easy to purchase alternatives without alcohol.

My main tip throughout the festive period is to keep connected

to AA. It is easy to allow oneself to isolate. We suffer with an illness that tells us often that we don't have an illness. I always keep connected to the Fellowship through regular meetings, conversations, prayer with my Higher Power and through my AA readings. This is vital for me

every day, but particularly so over Christmas. I am immensely grateful to AA for my continuing sobriety one day at a time. I now have a life beyond my wildest dreams. I wish you all a very happy and sober Christmas and New Year.

SARAH M, Kent

CHRISTMAS IS STILL MAGICAL

MY Christmases were a triumph. COOKING, DRINKING, PARTYING. Melon in port, pate in brandy, turkey in red wine, rum trifle. My children didn't care for it but... the main party was New Year's Eve when I really went to town – from toddlers, my girls passed round food and saw all that went on. Nightmare!

My first 'sober' Christmas, six weeks from my last drink, was unchanged. Same parties, same people but the food was alcohol free and I did not drink. I shook and trembled and gritted my teeth and went to bed leaving my guests. Did they notice? Lunacy!

My second Christmas was going to be different. All was changed. My elder daughter was at university, my second daughter (disabled) was in foster care and safe, my drinking buddy (my mother)

hated my growing sobriety and did everything to scuttle it – we were not communicating. I went to church in the morning and a kindly couple were horrified that I was cooking myself a burger and invited me home with them and their very elderly mum. Only 13 months sober, not very well at all, still doing it my way and selecting some Steps to work – others did not all apply to me. I could not imagine how bad that day would be. They were so kind and loving, understood why I could not take a miniscule glass of dry sherry or an even smaller glass of wine because of taking medicine. Why had I not heeded what my sponsor had said? They knew of my mother's little problem and were so sympathetic. I felt such a hypocrite as well as everything else negative. My mother was not as sneaky as I had been, most of my friends had

"Think of what you can bring to it."

(BB p.102)

known I was nuts but not a drunk – I was so clever you see. I left as soon as possible – I’m sure they all breathed a sigh of relief and maybe thought twice before inviting waifs again. No New Year’s party that year. I was learning a bit.

In the next few months, I began to hear and to get well. I was doing my Step Five with my lovely sponsor – to whom I am forever grateful for the grounding she gave me, ever patient but tough – when quite unemotionally she decided to leave the Fellowship but said that, although it was not for her, I should keep going back. At the time there was not another woman in my immediate area so I was sponsorless for a while with a red-hot Step Five being hidden from my mother – a lovely life that was, not. After a while, the right person came to my home group to share and agreed to hear my Step Five. I managed with women on the telephone, had a few jittery times but eventually at 18 months sober and pretty well, physically, I changed jobs. I had a roof over my head, was able to pay my mortgage but was away from a mother and a job that were both unsafe for me.

I got a level of acceptance and began to be comfortable. My children welcomed me. I got a dog – also a stray – then a nice visitor came to my Home group. Eventually we married when he was four years sober and I was three years sober. He was sixty-five years of age and I was fifty but we

had the Fellowship and my dog in common. We began by inviting a couple of lone members for Christmas dinner – one turned out to be drinking, so not so good and it was hard to get her out of the door. We had a lot to learn but learn we did. And so began our 30 years together which were spent in glorious Yorkshire. Each Christmas Day was open house when we invited a number and

“A spirit of intolerance might repel alcoholics...”

(BB p.103)

others arrived – between 18 and 45 one day – for food or just fellowship, fun and games too because there were often children. When I got too old to lift the turkey it had to stop. Those years were magical and the answer to keeping sober, sharing with love and joy – we had little in the material way but were loaded with so much given back.

Since my beloved died, sober aged ninety-five, I now spend a totally different time with my elder daughter who entertains 18 or so with the same food and games, the daughter who went out into the deep snow one Christmas Day to try to get back to university, away from me and was picked up by a passing driver and taken to a friend. How blessed am I? My girls don’t just speak to me, they love me and trust me and now and in old age, care for me. All I had to do was not take the first drink and get to a daily meeting. It worked for this battered soul – it will work for you, I PROMISE.

Love in Fellowship

JEAN F, Coventry

A PHONE CALL SAVED MY LIFE

FOR most of my life I liked the idea of helping other people but rarely did it. What stopped me were large dollops of self-pity, “Well no one’s helping me!” smothered in lashings of fear, “I’ll probably make things worse.” coupled with an unshakeable conviction that the world and all its people were terrible anyway so what was the point. I raged at the world for its lack of kindness and love, whilst offering very little myself and happily ignoring that given to me by my partner, friends and family. With this bleak view of the world, it is perhaps no surprise that my drinking took me to the brink of suicide on more than one occasion. Hungover mornings were spent drowning in fear, praying for an end to my existence. I attempted suicide twice, both times in blackout. I was desperate for help but did not believe any existed. I believed I was on my own and was not sure how much longer I could hold on.

What changed this was the Twelfth Step in action. I had been in and out of AA for years, thinking this was another thing that wouldn’t work. I would sneak into meetings late, hide at the back then bolt out the door before it had finished. I hated the idea that anyone would talk to me, but inside desperately

wanted someone to do just that. At one meeting I did something I’d never done before. When they asked if there were any newcomers I said, “Hello I’m Mark and I’m an alcoholic.” At the end of the meeting just as I was about to run out of that room, a Fellow stopped me, asked how I was doing, took my number and said he’d call me in a couple of days. When he called to ask how I was, I almost burst into tears. I’m still not sure why, but that phone call was like a hand being offered to lift me out of a great dark sea. I gratefully took it and I can say without exaggeration that this simple act saved my life. I remember that moment always when I see newcomers in the Rooms now. I remember the loneliness, confusion and desperation I felt. I also remember the power of what that Fellow did for me and I try to do the same. I go up to them. I ask how they are doing. I take their number. I give them a call. It’s not much but it is everything. That Fellow offering his time, support and hope has turned now into me doing the same with other alcoholics. They in turn will hopefully go on to help others too. That simple phone call, that simple act of kindness over years has blossomed into something powerful and huge and unfathomable. It is beautiful thing.

*“...we don’t have to be alone anymore.”
(12&12 p.121)*

Each day I remain in AA I see the Twelfth Step in action in many different ways. I see it in the stories and shares I hear, in the people putting out chairs and making teas at meetings, in my sponsor offering his time and support and all for nothing. I find it very moving. It is the love and kindness I was desperately looking for, happening every day all around me. On a trip

to Athens I noticed a quote from a poem by a famous poet written on the pavement outside a station. It reminded me very clearly of the Twelfth Step of AA which for me is an act of love. Of receiving the love and support from my other Fellows and of giving it away, humbly, willingly to those in need. It is what makes my life now worth living.

MARK R, London

CHRISTMAS GIFT

EVERY Christmas I am reminded of the last Christmas I spent in active alcoholism (although at that time I didn't know it). We had family staying and I promised I would not drink over that period. I don't recall adding the word 'never' to that promise, but I succeeded. On waving the family goodbye I went back into the kitchen and continued with my chores. My wife seemed happy and content with my efforts, so much so that she said she would take our recently acquired dog for a walk. On return things were definitely not as she left them. "Have you had a drink?" she asked. "No." I replied – but I had. Pour in alcohol and out pops a liar.

What I remember is that overpowering urge to drink. I was defenceless and would have walked through lead to get a drink. A week or so later I had my 'Peter you can't handle it' moment and have

never drunk since. All the twenty-seven Christmases since I have been happy and useful and have been able to join in the festivities without fear, through the power of the AA Programme.

What works for me is my regular reminder of what I am – a

"Outline the program of action..." (BB p.94)

recovering alcoholic who still remembers how defenceless I am against the

power of the first drink. My daily programme doesn't change because of the Christmas Season. In my alcoholism it is just another day, though I try to practice my faith. One of my favourite Christmas presents is a newcomer coming through the doors of AA. I welcome them and put them at ease and ask them to listen to our shares of Christmas' past. I doubt if their stories differ much – make sure they have literature and contacts and wish them many Happy Christmases.

PETER R, Colwyn Bay

MY FIRST CHRISTMAS

I WOULD like to share my thoughts and experience on what helped me with my first Christmas in sobriety. Last year was my first Christmas in the Programme and my first sober Christmas for around 25 years. And this year I also had my 40th birthday in lockdown, which presented a similar challenge.

I was only in a few months when my first sober Christmas rolled around and I – like I’m sure many others – began to panic. How would I cope? Christmas...without booze? Impossible! I spoke to one of the old-timers in the Rooms and he just looked at me frankly and said, “I don’t even know if I’ll be sober at Christmas. All I know is that I’m sober now and my life is so much better for it. I trust in my Higher Power and this Programme to work to keep me sober for today.” This really stuck with me and although it’s just another way of saying ‘One Day At A Time’, it really helped me. I prayed to my Higher Power to just help me keep it in the here and now. A day at a time. An hour at a time sometimes. And each time I say it, I feel better.

Each time I can look back on a day – or an hour – and see the change in me sobriety has brought, I feel better about myself. Which in turn gives me the strength to keep staying sober. And I also focus on my gratitude, which comes from how much better my life is now that I am sober. I am able to do so much more, be there for my family, interact with people... sobriety truly is the gift that keeps on giving. Focusing on this helps me deal with the occasional wobble or stressful time when otherwise I might turn to drink. So, for me what works is to think about what sobriety has given me so far. Focus on the day, the time just gone, and not obsess over the time to come. It’s certainly not easy and I don’t always get it right – but when I struggle my Higher Power gives me strength, my Programme provides guidance and all the wonderful people in the Fellowship offer invaluable advice. I am so grateful and proud to be sober, and it’s all because I keep coming back to meetings and listening to what I’m told.

ROBBIE

HOW AA IS PERCEIVED

I N the meeting this week a couple of members happened to mention that members of their family considered them to be part of a cult, even after 20 years in AA

in one case. I was thinking about this and started to wonder about the perception of AA as a cult. My starting point was that a cult (for me anyway) has a religious

connection – satanic cults for example or splinter groups of the standard religions. Looking at AA, and my experience of it over the last 28 years, I can find no real religious element in the meetings I have attended. A possible exception is an insistence by many groups on using a prayer from the Christian bible. But since the same prayer is used by two major world religions, this in itself is not indicative of AA being a cult. Indeed, my personal religious beliefs interested nobody in AA when I first came in. It was strongly recommended to me however, that I believe in something. What it should be was left up to me. The Big Book suggests that the new member might return to the religion he was raised in but makes no insistence on this. Atheist, agnostic or believer – I have seen all welcomed equally. In 1958 my mother became a member of a religious group, one which is a cult in the view of many. As a consequence, I grew up in the middle of a religious war in my home. Had AA had any similarity to any of the religions involved, I would have been dust on the horizon. Instead I was always given a choice, to participate in the Serenity prayer or not – as I chose.

As the religious element didn't seem to be the issue, I considered other elements that cause groups to be classified as cults. When groups 'worship' a strong and forceful leader, they can be seen as cult-like. But AA does not have leaders – the closest thing we have might be Bill W. but (a) he is dead and (b) nobody is going to kill themselves

"The joy of living is the theme of A.A.'s Twelfth Step..."
(12&12 p.109)

because he wants it. He wanted us all to live, live free of alcohol and live happily. Groups which have an enforced regimen of obedience to diktats issued by a central authority are also often seen as cult like. On this I can only say, anyone who has worked in a service position in

AA knows only too well how little interest the average group member takes in the activities of intergroup or Region. Orders from Conference or the trustees would probably be greeted

with hysterical laughter and a hope expressed that they wouldn't drink over whatever it was that was bothering them.

Cults tend to be greedy. Any money the cult member may have will probably have to be made over to the group and payment of salaries into cult bank accounts is not unknown. The price of membership in AA is long and expensive and is paid well in advance of any of us getting here. None of it ends up in the coffers of AA. Once here, AA quite specifically limits the amount of money a member may donate. Cults tend to run out of members. This leads to desperate attempts to hold onto those they have and a continual recruitment effort. Children are welcome, because they can really be brought to identify themselves with the cult. AA on the other hand makes no attempt to recruit. It only says, "If you have a problem with alcohol we can be found *here*." If someone decides to come and finds they can use what we can offer to recover, we are happy. If they decide that AA is not for them, then the answer tends to

be, “Good luck, and if you do need us, just call. We’ll be here.”

My personal experience of a cult, and of cult behaviour, does not match anything I have found in AA or its Steps, Traditions and Concepts. I think therefore the problem lies more in a misunderstanding of the difference between spiritual and religious, as many cannot understand that one can live spiritually outside of religion. Religious involvement *can* benefit spiritual growth, but such growth can, and does, occur

outside of religious confines. But for many the two concepts are perceived as one and the same and so AA’s emphasis on the need for spiritual growth to ensure long-term recovery is seen as a cult’s insistence on its religious dogma being followed. Some will continue to drink alcoholically, rejecting potential recovery in AA, in the fear that they would be joining a religious cult. If they do make it to a meeting, I hope they recognize, as I did, that it is nothing of the sort.

ANON, Germany

PROMISES, SERVICE AND SOBRIETY

HAVING had a spiritual awakening... a promise that if you work through all of the Steps with rigorous honesty, open mindedness and willingness, the Step Nine promises will come true, my outlook upon life has changed. Where once I found life a struggle, uncertain and was anxious a lot of the time, I now see life has a flow about it. The uncertainty is now adventurous as I now have faith in a Power greater than me and know that everything will be okay. Things might not turn out how Michelle would like them to, but so often they turn out better as the power in my life has the wider picture to hand.

Today, I pray to be useful and trust that I am exactly where I am supposed to be – seeing many instances throughout my day as opportunities to connect with

and be of service to others rather than difficulties to overcome. AA taught me how to be of service, I was greeter at my first home group, always helped to wash up and clear away at the end of the meeting. After one year I became secretary and am now treasurer and GSR of two separate groups. Being of service, spreading the message that was so freely given to me, I also have the honour of being a sponsor, sharing my journey and what my sponsor shared with me.

I continue to grow in love, fellowship, unity and service as I continue to work the Twelve Step principles in all my affairs and what a pay-off; sober, free and continually grateful for all the blessings in my life. I must give it away to keep it!

MICHELLE, Plymouth

DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED

It is always heart-warming to read articles in SHARE about the benefits of sponsorship, as it is throughout our Fellowship. But what about those occasions when attempts at sponsorship are – or at least appear to be – a failure? How do we deal with those?

About a year ago a chap came into our meetings for the first time, and almost immediately began attending on a regular basis. I had taken his initial call to the helpline during my telephone responder's shift, so I was doubly pleased to meet him there. Within a month or so he asked me to be his sponsor, which I was happy to do. He seemed to be a model protégé. He listened attentively to all I said about the Programme, the illness of alcoholism, and how to apply the Twelve Steps. He progressed as far as Step Four and to the best of my knowledge began writing out his inventory (this is often where newcomers grind to a halt in their Programme.)

A few days later I received a phone call from him – or at least I assumed it was from him because it was his number that flashed up on my handset. Actually, it was a call from his brother to tell me that our new friend had committed suicide a week previously. I was shocked and much saddened, not

only a really nice guy, but also to have made such a promising start on our Programme. Perhaps unsurprisingly I began to wonder whether I had failed somehow in my own efforts at sponsorship – Had I not done enough? Had I said the wrong thing? What more could I have done to avert this? etc etc.

I called my own sponsor. He was able to empathise since he told me the same thing had happened to him twice. More importantly he reminded me that just as we do not take credit for a sponsee's sobriety (once they achieve it) so neither are we to blame if they do not achieve it. Our responsibility is simply to try to carry the message to alcoholics – Step Twelve says nothing about the outcome of our efforts.

At the beginning of this article I hinted that this incident was an example of failure in sponsorship. Sad though it was, it was actually a success. Why? Because I stayed sober. *“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.”* (BB p. 89). In the final analysis, the benefits of the Twelve Steps are for the sponsor too, not just the sponsee.

STEVEN, Buxton

“...when we are willing to place spiritual growth first...”

(12&12 p.118)

THE FULL PICTURE

MY name is Adele and I am a very grateful alcoholic. When I first came to work on the Twelve Steps with my sponsor, I initially saw them as a test or exam, to be got through as quickly as I could. It took me some time, and the patience and guidance of my sponsor, to view the full picture. Thinking about the full picture had never been one of my strong points. Instead, I grasped hold of only the things that I wanted to do or hear. I hadn't cared one jot for the consequences, or anyone else's feelings.

That was then, but today I have learnt a better, kinder and safer way to go through the rest of my life. Instead of looking at the Steps as a one-off exercise to be cast aside at the end of Step Twelve, I know deep in my being that all the Steps are a code for life, and must be lived each and every day if I am to remain sober and to be the

"...we can begin to get right with ourselves and with the world about us..."

(12&12 p.129)

person I am happy to know when I look in my mirror. Step Twelve for me is hugely important. I was given my life back and experienced a spiritual awakening which I am very humbled by. I need to carry this message of hope and love by example to still suffering alcoholics, which is a gift that I have been entrusted with. I am privileged to carry out service positions, including phone service, which keeps my feet on the ground and reminds me of where I have come from and where I could go back to if I become complacent or arrogant.

I find many opportunities to carry the AA message to others, and for these opportunities I am truly blessed. If I continue to practice these principles in all of my affairs, then I will always be worthy to help others. What more can I ask for?

*ADELE, Sandhurst Saturday
Newcomers*

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.

SHARE INTERVIEW

WITH KIRK T,
WHITLEY BAY



12 YEARS SOBER

Conducted via telephone by Ian

Q How did you first get to the Fellowship Kirk?

A I had attempted to stop drinking by myself again. I had a seizure and ended up in hospital in London – one of the neighbours had found me in the street. I was being wheeled along on a stretcher in the hospital and saw a man walking along the corridor and I later found out he was in AA. The second time I saw him was at an AA meeting in the same hospital on a Friday, he was sober and making the tea. The thing is three years later I bumped into him in the North East. We had both (unknown to each other) moved up to the area. He recognised me at the meeting we were at up here.

Q So, you came back to the North East, how did that come about?

A I'd been in hospital on a few

more occasions. My brother brought me home because he'd been told that I was going to die, the thinking was that if I was going to die, I may as well die at home. When I arrived here, I did a spell in a psychiatric hospital and eventually stopped drinking, maybe 18 months later. Six months into sobriety I'd already had various admissions to hospital, then I was referred to a hepatologist at a local hospital. He basically told me I had less than two years to live unless they could get me a liver transplant; eight months later I got a phone call saying one had become available and the rest is history. Physically I've been very, very well ever since.

Q Thanks for that. What did you think of your first meetings?

A Frightening. Didn't think they were for me; I thought these people weren't my kind of

people. I'd done seven months in rehab but even then, and this sounds shallow, if I didn't identify with the speaker in AA because of the way they looked I thought that was it, that was game over. But I can remember the moment that it changed for me. A big, fearsome-looking man was sharing at a meeting and he had my attention because of the way he looked, he looked like a baddy from a film. You know what – I'd never heard anything spoken so eloquently about fear in my whole life. I thought he looked like that but he talks like that? The reason I drank without a shadow of a doubt, was to kill the fear.

Q Bringing us up to date would you like to talk about service?

A Here's where my God comes into it, coincidence, luck, it doesn't really matter. I was sponsored into service by the same man who saw me at my first meeting in London! This was years later when we had both, coincidentally moved up to the North East. So, I started doing prison service. I enjoyed it because I felt I was doing something worthwhile, I got hooked. Service is recognition and gratitude for what was given to me for free. It keeps me sober.

Q There's that thread with that member running from your first meeting up to today isn't there?

A Absolutely. He was getting involved in AA and I wasn't. I started to recognise what happens when you lose that fear, talking with people you wouldn't normally talk to. He played a big part in helping me get over myself. Also, when I've heard others quote from the Big Book, that used to irritate me, until I started reading it myself and realised that they were not only quoting from it, but sharing how it applied in their own life experiences. I've been very uncomfortable with authority, don't tell me what to do. But if you ask me and say you'll do it with me, I'll do it at the drop of a hat.

Q So you work better when it's suggested?

A It's crucial. My sponsor has never told me what to do. He's listened to me, questioned what I said and he helps me to see things that sometimes I don't see by myself. A while back I was talking with a lad and telling him I was a bit overwhelmed with work, he said that if he had three things to do, he'd say to God, "Can you keep hold of those two, while I get on with this one?". I did it and it worked, I realised I'd been making a big deal out of minor things. That gave me the permission to concentrate on one thing and I started to enjoy the work.

Q Peace of mind?

A This is what I aim for. On my tenth AA birthday I was walking

along the promenade near the lighthouse and I realised that there was absolutely nothing going on in my mind. All I could hear was the sound of the waves lapping against the shore and this big blue sky in front of me, and it was just total peace of mind. It was a lovely moment.

Q How are you coping with the virus and the lockdown at the moment?


A It's taught me acceptance and peace of mind to a degree. I am very good at not letting things become a drama or at least for not very long. This is what it is. I feel very fortunate in that I realised something in AA a long time ago, that you're not in this by yourself. In the coronavirus I know I'm not by myself. I'm intergroup chair and we've gone through

this wonderful experience of mobilising our meetings from physical meetings to having 43 meetings online. There's been hiccups, but there have also been wonderful lessons in letting go and letting God. Speak with people if necessary, not as chair of intergroup but as a friend. I don't want to watch anybody fall over. I have no authority, the intergroup is not me and a couple of others – it's everyone in the area.

Q What would you say to a newcomer who may be reading this?

A This made a difference in my life when it was said to me, "Don't drink. Go to meetings and listen. Get a Big Book and go through it with a sponsor."

Kirk thank you.



Got something to say?
Don't let your homegroup
be the only ones to hear it
...Share it with SHARE!

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

IDENTIFICATION

SO much identification with others' stories pre-AA and in recovery – the lowering of standards, drinking to fix feelings and choosing unhealthy relationships. Changing reality and reaching the jumping off point.

It reminded me of all the ways I denied, justified and blamed others when things went wrong in life and my drinking never entered my mind until I came into AA. I began to see the truth of alcoholism and how it affected every area of my life. Today in recovery I can also at times delude myself about my other addictive behaviours – like eating too much, smoking and relationships – until it gets painful. As it says in the story – thinking and feelings don't change anything, action is the key. The joy in our story is how, when we give ourselves completely to the AA way of life, trust God's will for us, practice the principles in every part of our lives with a true willingness and commitment, we gain so much in return.

Helping others and doing service are very necessary for my own sobriety and continuing growth. I am learning to love, care and respect myself thanks to the unconditional love I have from AA and to put my sobriety first. This Programme has changed me and my life for the better and it's worked for quite a few days now so I think I will try it again tomorrow.

Thank you for your time and service. Love in Fellowship

SANDY

A QUICK TIP FOR CHRISTMAS

In the months leading up to Christmas I used to watch familiar Christmas films and listen to familiar Christmas songs, staying up drinking all night.

Since I have been sober I try to seek out new festive songs and films. This really helps as they have no nostalgic link to the past.

DAN, Horsham

PRINCIPLES BEFORE PERSONALITIES

IT took me an awful long time to get my manic head around Tradition Twelve. It was mainly that I didn't understand the word 'principle'. I thought I had principles. However, upon studying this Tradition, I found them wanting.

The definition is, roughly, a fundamental truth that serves as a foundation. Well, I couldn't tell you the truth when in active alcoholism. I always either exaggerated everything or under-exaggerated things. There was no balance. On coming into our wonderful Fellowship, I made so many mistakes that would've been covered by this Tradition. If someone upset me, I would not go to a meeting that I thought they may be at. I certainly had not had a spiritual experience at this time (Step Twelve). Mine was to come to me slowly but it did come.

This principle of Alcoholics Anonymous, I feel, is the final piece that holds all our Traditions together and I must try my best to practice it on a daily basis, much like the Twelve Steps. Personality equals a combination of characteristics. I have a

few of these, some not so good, but they are as always, 'Work in Progress'.

I wish everyone, everywhere a happy, peaceful and sober Christmas. Oh, forgot to say, I still exaggerate things, but in a funny way, it's good to be able to laugh at myself. Thanks SHARE Team, you're all stars.

JOJO, North Yorkshire Dales



"I dumped Dorothy and moved in with the Wicked Witch of the West, and I thought this was normal behavior."

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