

Not a Glum Lot

Alcoholism Plus Time Equals Comedy

By Laura H

“A tattoo, no wait, two tattoos! Where? I think, on my forearms! Yes, perfect. Of what? Whatever, just make sure they have naked ladies in them! I want my 9-year-old cousin's first glimpse of a naked woman to be on my arm.”

Okay, this was not my goal when I got my tattoos. This is not how I asked for my tattoos, but it may as well have been, because that's what I ended up with.

It was the nineties, dude. Everyone was getting tattooed and I was no exception.

What does this have to do with alcoholism? Was I drunk when I got my tattoos?

Not most of them.

Maybe that was the problem.

I'm not even saying that tattoos, in and of themselves, are bad.

But they do pose their own special problems and that's where I draw the connection to alcoholism. The Big Book talks about the ripple effect of our actions on other people, that we alcoholics are like tornadoes roaring through other people's lives.

We hurt people in our disease.

Well, there I was, in full grunge mode, making my statement in indelible ink, up and down my body, not considering for a moment that my attitude, my life, might change.

My life changed, for sure, when I got sober in 1996. My attitude began to follow slowly behind.

My life, as my participation in the program, deepened, took on a more wholesome quality. My Sid 'n' Nancy, Kurt and Courtney domestic fantasies were growing dim in the light of reality and the grace of my Higher Power.

I made my way out of some very vice-ridden shadows. Being freed from my

self-destructive appetites by God and AA, I began to see my family again. I had cousins I'd only seen in photos because I was drinking when they were born but now I had a chance to know them. I had to show up to be with them, as I was, shady past, tattoos and all.

I have a 9-year-old cousin, a boy, and when I visit him, I try to wear long sleeves to hide my tattoos. There are naked ladies in them. They're not as much pornographic as artistic. Nevertheless, I believe it is my Aunt's decision when and how she will address the human body with her son. To even consider any of these ideas is as a result of what I've learned in AA. So sleeves it is! This part of my family I am referring to lives in Alabama. It's too hot to be wearing long sleeves. Here is where that little voice of recovery comes in. “It may be too hot for sleeves, but it's never too hot to carry the message!” I am often irritated by my own inner voice of recovery.

And while I may be a walking billboard for bad decisions, God gave me a sense of humor too. I get it. My family gets it too. We have come to a place where we can laugh about my past proclivities and life in general. I laugh with my family, tell jokes and appreciate them for who they are, and I am fortunate to have a family that does the same with me. With God, I find there is a balance. Sure, a situation may be tragic, but there is always a ray of hope and after that comes a really good joke. Otherwise, I'd just be the scary lady who smokes and has tattoos who comes for Thanksgiving. Instead I'm the scary, and funny lady who smokes and comes for Thanksgiving.

This is a very “site specific” situation, I realize. Not everyone will relate. When I was new to the program, I refused to get in the middle, as they say. I was dry, not getting the relief of alcohol or the steps, and suicidal. I wrote a college paper on legalizing suicide. I always felt weird about that until almost seven years

later I heard someone else talk about the exact same thing in their lead at meeting. Was it odd or was it God? It was God. Which doesn't mean it wasn't odd too. Let's face it, if anyone has a macabre sense of humor, it's the Boss Universal. The point is, I heard my story and kept coming back.

I am proud to be an AA member, grateful for my gift of recovery and for the help my experience, my past brings others. I have no real regrets. God has always helped me overcome my problems. But in showing up, being responsible, and making amends, I find the journey is the hardest part. As I make my way through some fear or to right some wrong, my brain races and tries every imaginable jab and conspiracy theory, trying to turn me away from the solution and toward a drink. My brain attacks me about my tattoos. My obsessive mind tries to make me feel so insecure that I will not go visit my family, instead stay home, isolate, feel bad, and drink. Alcoholism is quite adaptable and site specific.

For any AA out there with a tattoo, a brand, or scarification containing adult subject matter who has to go visit the kids in the family and will be doing it in a turtleneck, take comfort. There is another AA out there who can relate. We can help carry the message like no non-tattooed alcoholic can.

Besides, tattoos, they look pretty cool, don't they?

It's almost the New Year and with a new year come resolutions. What are your resolutions? Are you going to quit smoking? Finish those amends? What has changed and what do you hope to change? The January/February edition of *Here's How*, Chicagoland's AA newsletter, wants your stories about “Change.” Deadline for submissions is Dec 31, 2005.

Please send submissions via e-mail by clicking on the link for *Here's How* on the Chicago AA website at Chicagoaa.org

Or by mail to:

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CASO Corner

By Bruce P.

October 7, 2005

Gratitude & the Holidays

November is Gratitude Month. I feel like every November I'm asked to write a "GRATITUDE" article—with capital letters—and that every year I write the same thing, about how grateful I am to be in AA and how my life before AA bears no resemblance to my life today. So I asked Ernestine (a volunteer here at CASO) what I should do. I told her I thought I sounded "drippy." She told me that everyone needs to hear the truth, no matter how many times it gets repeated, that AA saved my life, allowed God to fill the God-sized hole I had inside, and overcame

those feelings of uselessness and self-pity that I used to dwell on.

So, I've decided to apply The Three R's of AA: Repetition, Repetition, Repetition. By going over and over the major points I need to keep in mind, I compensate for the fact that they seem to leak out of my head. When I came into AA, I was on the verge of dying, was an avowed atheist, was overwhelmingly depressed, and no longer had any idea what life was about or why one would want to continue it. These feelings were worse during the Thanksgiving and year-end holidays. The holidays were filled with dreaded OBLIGATIONS. I didn't want to see anyone and I sure didn't want to have to buy them anything. Or, if I did, I wanted my presents to be the very best presents everyone had ever received. Inherent in that was the fact that I had to top last year's effort.

Well, through the Steps God changes me and for that I am eternally grateful. Number one, I was taught early on that there were two things I needed to know about God: there is One and I'm not It. Second, that if I sought God, my life would immediately begin to improve immeasurably. Third, that if I prayed each day for knowledge of God's will for me and the power to carry that out, He had work for me.

Well, it worked. I always felt I've had three lives: one until I went to Vietnam, one since Vietnam, and one since I entered recovery. Only in the present have I been glad to be alive. That's a direct result of AA. So the holidays aren't an obligation any more. They are a chance to try to be a channel of God's peace and bring a little happiness and joy into others' lives. I don't have to outdo anyone about anything; I just have to do the next right thing.

And so, I continually apply the Three R's of AA. It helps me remember not only that I am grateful, but why. And during Gratitude Month, I try to express gratitude in my comments and in the basket.

Thanksgiving Appeal: Our annual appeal for individual donations is in November. Letters will be going out at the beginning of November asking for members to be as generous as they possibly can. Of course, we don't rest on formalized; you can just send your donation and

make a note that it's part of the Thanksgiving Appeal. As always, we promptly acknowledge every donation—Group or individual—with a receipt. Thanks in advance for your gratitude.

You are invited

The day after Thanksgiving (Friday, November 25th) from 9 to 5, we are having our CASO Open House, a way of thanking the entire fellowship for your support of the office. Meet the staff, snack on light refreshments, see Area committee displays, and attend an open meeting with your family. It's a festive day and we always have a lot of fun. Hope you'll join us!

VOLUNTEERS FOR JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2005

Addy B, Alan R, Andy V, Angie, Anna L, Audrey C, Beth H, Beth S, Between the Covers, Bill C, Billy Mc, Bob H, Bob K, Bob N, Bonita W, Brian C, Bruce A, Byron S, Buffy, Camille S, Caroline R, Catherine B, Cathy R, Cecelia J, Christopher T, Cindy S, Claude W, Crystal L, Dan D, Dan G, Daryl L, Dave L, David M, David S, Derek U, Dillan S, Dylan H, Elizabeth B, Eric T, Erik M, Ernestine W, Francis S, Frank M, Gayle F, Grant S, Ginny F, Gratitude Mtng, Gregory M, Greg S, Herb H, Holly B, ISCYPAA, Jacek H, Jack C, Jason L, Jeffrey B, Jenny P, Jenni T, Jim C, Jim H, Joanne Y, Joe A, Joe H, Joe O, John C, John R, Jonas S, Jonathan H, Joseph Mc, Joy D, Joyce T, Judy D, Kevin C, Larry T, Leo S, Lorie G, Lynnell L, Mardi O, Mari M, Marilyn C, Mark P, Matthew W, Maureen B, Melanie W, Men's Fireside, Meredith C, Meredith L, Meredith W, Michael G, Mike R, Noah P, Oliver R, Pat P, Pate, Patrick B, Patrick C, Paul K, Pete B, Peter L, Rachel P, Rick C, Rita B, Robert D, Robin W, Ryan M, Ruben G, Sam W, Sarah M, Steve C, Steve F, Steve J, Susan S, Tammy W, Ted W, Teresa S, Terry R, Tiffany C, Tim A, Tom Z, Van A, Young People's BB.

*The 12 Steps
to Complete
and Total Insanity*

We admitted we were powerless over nothing – we could manage our lives perfectly and we could manage those of anyone else who would allow it.

Came to believe that there was no greater power than ourselves, and that the rest of the world was insane.

Made a decision to have our loved ones and friends turn their wills and their lives over to our care.

Made a searching and fearless inventory of everyone we knew.

Admitted to the whole world at large the exact nature of their wrongs.

Were entirely ready to make others straighten up and do right.

Demanded others to “either shape up or ship out.”

Made a list of everyone who had ever harmed us and became willing to go to any lengths to get even with them all.

Got direct revenge on such people whenever possible, except when to do so would cost us our own lives or, at the very least, a jail sentence.

Continued to take moral inventory of others, and when they were wrong promptly and repeatedly told them about it.

Sought through nagging to improve our relations with others as we couldn't understand them at all, asking only that they knuckle under and do things our way.

Having had a complete physical, emotional, and spiritual breakdown as a result of these steps, we tried to blame it on others and to get sympathy and pity in all our affairs.

*AA – The Best Show in Town
for Two Bucks*

Sean S

The things I've seen, heard, and experienced in Alcoholics Anonymous are more psychotic, unbelievable, absurd, stupid, and funnier than anything I've seen and heard in the madness of alcoholism. AA has its own brand of madness and it's completely real, though a person would never guess that if they weren't one of us. I've never laughed harder than in my time spent with my fellow recovering alcoholics.

It might be my own absurd behavior, such as the time when, at six months of sobriety, my sponsor caught me bathing in the public fountain at the International Convention in Minneapolis. Perhaps it's someone else's, like a friend of mine who made an amend to an AA group for relapsing in the bathroom at the meeting break. The amends affected a new man so much he asked that friend to sponsor him. Years later, in an even rarer moment of honesty, my friend confessed to the group he'd made the whole thing up. The relapse never happened. He had, in fact, made amends for something that never occurred.

The AA Fellowship also contains countless stories of recovering alcoholics looking for a solution and relief anywhere and everywhere but the steps. Watching others and myself search in vain for relief can be quite amusing, especially considering some of the sources: yoga; shopping or “retail therapy;” porno; CDs; e-Bay; Match.Com; marathons; Ho-Ho's; ice-cream; gambling; sex; skydiving; movies; TV; niacin; and workaholism (which I've never tried) – just to name a few.

Selective hearing can also be a problem among us AA members. Another friend of mine had a crush on a co-worker and he asked me what he should do about it. I suggested he tell her how he felt about her *ONLY* and I stressed this emphatically, after he did the following things:

Check with his sponsor first.

Consider the possible ramifications of dating a person he worked with.

Make sure she was single.

What my friend heard was “Tell her how you feel! Tell her how you feel!” Ignoring my first three suggestions, he rushed up to her at work and spilled his feelings to her. The woman's eyes grew wide and her face turned distorted and bright red. Her reaction was not what he expected. Needless to say she did not share his feelings. The result for my friend was a feeling of extreme stupidity, a very uncomfortable workplace, and her boyfriend wanting to kill him.

If I were to tell these stories to most nonalcoholics, they would not believe me, or at least they'd become very uncomfortable. However, these stories and situations, and many, many more, are everyday occurrences in AA. These are the things that keep me coming back. I relate to the absurdity and insanity. The laughter is healing. We have to laugh or we'll go insane.

To watch people grow and change in AA, and to see them start to behave like somewhat normal adults is what I'm attracted to, what I want for my life. Slowly, in AA, this is happening. My past, though tragic, is hilarious at the same time. And while it hopefully will not be repeated, my past is my greatest asset in the program. I can help the newcomer know that he is not alone, not the only one.

And to think, all it costs is two dollars – for the best show on earth. We are indeed not a glum lot. We are the farthest thing from it that I can imagine.

*We Are
Not A Glum Lot*
Doug D

I've been coming around AA for 14 months and I'm 10 months sober. I had what I believe and what I call “God placement.”

I am a suburbanite. While I was still using, I started dating a “downtown” girl. I was pretty much at my bottom, scared, panicked, anxiety ridden – I'm sure you can relate – when my girlfriend wanted me to move into her downtown apartment.

“No way”, I said. “Way too many people. I'm a loner, a rebel.”

I couldn't walk outside my apartment,

let alone the big city.

After some heated arguments and eviction notices, I agreed to move in. I was excited for a while, for a few hours maybe, but reality set in. What was I thinking? I was in the middle of the city and the middle of my bottom. Things were all right at first, but you know, we alcoholics can only hold it together for so long. Soon the all-nighters started, becoming more and more frequent.

After about 3 months, I had still not met my landlords, one of whom was a recovering alcoholic, or anyone else in the building. I knew if I did not meet the landlords I would not feel as bad when I burned them on the rent. I listened through the door for the landlord's footsteps. I would stay inside for days if I heard someone in the hall. I had more "conversations" with my girlfriend about my drinking and a four-day hospital stay. Finally I agreed to meet my landlord who was in AA. A double whammy.

She suggested I go to an AA meeting. That sounded like a good idea. I went to a meeting called Big Book Roulette, very fitting since I like to gamble. I went to more meetings and at one Saturday morning meeting, there was a girl who looked familiar. We talked.

"Do you have a yellow dog?" I said.

"Yeah" she said. "Do you live in my building?"

"I don't know. Which building do you live in?"

It turns out we lived in the same building. A few more meetings and I met another girl who looked familiar. She said, "Don't you live in my building?" Well, you know the rest. I was surrounded by recovering alcoholics, great.

It turns out it is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me in my life. Out of the six people in our building, four of us are sober. I have gone from avoiding these people like horse poop on the street to having a smile on my face when I come home. Not the "I'm hiding my pain" kind of smile, but a genuine smile. The laughter in this building is nonstop. We have Sunday dinners and a game night and it's stomach-aching fun. We are definitely not a glum lot.

The Concept of Small Bottles

Lilian J

Someone said at a recent meeting, "I just never understood the concept of small bottles!" This comment was in response to a speaker's tale of buying small bottles of wine that would fit in the waistband of her running shorts.

I understand the concept. And it is called Denial.

I've been a "chronic relapser" in the course of my drinking and nondrinking "career." Practically every one of those relapses began with the purchase of the smallest packaged amount available of the potion of the moment.

Maybe you recognize this chatter, brought to you by the denial committee upstairs: This one-buck, airline-sized swig of Smirnoff in my glass of tomato juice surely doesn't amount to anything. Only one of those \$1.29 bottles of Chardonnay before dinner (never with — no diluting with food for me) is certainly just the civilized thing to do. That little old martini after 6 months of hard work and a terrible day at the office is just the reward I deserve, and all I need to set things right. So there.

The next vodka purchase is a half-pint and the following day it's a pint; by Thursday I'm economizing by buying a fifth — because when we do the math on those small bottles of wine — for heaven's sake, for the price of three I can go home with several times that amount! Dim lights and that warm tingle make me want to hang out just a little longer... anyway it's Friday... Yes, bartender, one more, thanks.

It is certainly puzzling how I find myself face-down on a hard mattress in one more detox center on one more unidentifiable day.

And THAT is the concept of small bottles.

The Meaning of Friendship

Francisco G

Who, me? An alcoholic? Yes, my name is Francisco, and I am an alcoholic. Born in Pharr, Texas, I was raised in Chicago as the eldest of five children. Although my mother has always been nurturing and kind, my father was extremely abusive. He consistently returned home drunk and violent. (I still have scars all over my legs from the abuse.) Due to his alcoholism, the bills were often unpaid, forcing us to bathe in cold water or live without lights. After years of seeing him passed out in the living, porch, dinner table, or even on the toilet, I vowed to myself that I would never, ever follow his footsteps.

Well, you guessed it. I turned out just like him, a wet stinking drunk

I still remember my first drink. It was in high school; a peer gave me a fifth of Jack Daniels. I drank it to show everyone how a big man can handle his liquor — well, Mr. Daniels had other plans for me. He kicked this "big man's" butt. Although I felt alcohol had transported me to a wonderful, new place, I was extremely sick the next day.

Still, I was instantly addicted. Whatever vows I had made about my father were thrown out the window; I was down hook, line, and sinker.

I continued drinking with the neighborhood boys, drinking lots of beer and a bit of whiskey. Although I was turning into my dad (albeit not as violent), I moved out of the house with my brother, Joe, to get away from him. We drank up a storm. Over the next four years as roommates, we would both fall deeper and deeper into a mind-numbing alcoholic abyss.

I started to drink all day, every day — before, during, and after my shifts at the hospital food service (work begins at 5:30 AM). To quell my insatiable thirst for alcohol, I would frequently run to the liquor store jacketless, in snowy subzero weather. I was getting drunk with my co-workers at every turn, then with the neighborhood boys after work behind a local school. In spite of my mother's

that friendship is about learning, being “present,” having a sense of humor, and unconditional acceptance. This can only be achieved through complete honesty and trust. Accordingly, I accept alcohol as my friend, but one that I may not touch, smell, or taste. Alcohol has taught me the value of humility, patience, and gratitude – important lessons for which I am forever thankful. The lows I’ve experienced due to alcohol have made possible my appreciation of the great life I have now. Alcohol, to my surprise, has turned into a remarkable blessing.

My life of loneliness has blossomed into a life of friendships. Thank God for AA. I’m now sober from alcohol...and drunk on life.

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Are you tired of being told like it is?
Still looking for that easier, softer way?
Had enough of that same old time-tested direction?

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- * Co-signing your excuses and rationalizations!
- * Work only the steps you want, in the order you choose!
- * Learn the secret of giving it away before you even have it!
- * Why “walk the walk” when you can just “talk the talk?”
- * Remember, it’s better to look good than to feel good!
- * Why save your ass at the cost of losing your face?

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“*Staying Sober on War Stories Alone!*”

America Dry

by lady georg

(Based on “American Pie” by Don McLean)

A long, long time ago
I can still remember how...
an intervention gathered round
And I knew if I had my chance
That I’d no longer pee my pants –
And I’d be sober longer than awhile
Blackout consequences made me shiver –
with every excuse that I’d deliver
Bad news on the homefront – Couldn’t
pull one more stunt
I can’t remember if I cried – I know the
steps were not applied
And something stabbed me deep inside –
the day I learned I was Dry.
So bye bye egotistical pride
Did my fourth step but there’s more
steps and I’m breaking a stride
Them good ol’ boys from 1939
Singin’ you can be more than a barfly
Just gotta be willing and try.
Do you read that Book of Blue –
And are you friends with Bill W.?
Are you telling the whole truth?
Now do you believe in too much pain?
So much pain you cannot explain –
and do you feel like you are going
insane?
Well, here’s what my sponsor had to say –
call me at least one time a day
I looked her in the mouth, man... and
then I started to shout
I was a legend in my High School Days –
the rest of my life is just a haze.
But this is just a really bad phase –
she said ‘Yeah, you are DRY’.

She started singin’
Bye bye egotistical pride
Did my fourth step but there’s more
steps and I’m breaking a stride
Them good ol’ boys from 1939
Singin’ this work is not pie in the sky
But ya’ gotta be willing and try

I was a girl who sang the blues – and I
kept searching for some happy clues
But they were never to be found
And I went down to that liquor store –
which I had robbed some years before
But the store had turned into the
Mustard Seed (a Mickey D’s)

And in the streets the junkies screamed,
the lushes staggered and the drunks
were mean
But not a word was spoken – my spirit
had been broken
Three persons I admire with girth...
William Wilson, Robert Smith and
Dr. Silkworth
Give me hope from their very own Hells
on Earth
That today... I don’t have to be dry
And they were singin’...

Bye bye egotistical pride
Did my fourth step but there’s more
steps and I’m breaking a stride
Them good ol’ boys from 1939
Singin’ Do not undermine the design...
Do not undermine the design
And they were singin’...

Bye bye egotistical pride
Did my fourth step but there’s more
steps and I’m breaking a stride
Them good ol’ boys from 1939
Singin’... This could be the day
I’m not dry.

How It Works

by Everett D.

When i move into my head
then of course god moves out
and my life seems all out of joint
“I’ll do it myself,” “I’ll figure it out”
I’m back at that turning point,
that two-letter word
is too much to take
and it throws me into a fit,
then i ponder and fret
and get all worked up
trying to figure out it
it takes me in circles
to heaven and hell
to a place i just want to shout
so I’d have a few drinks
then I’d have a few more
i really must figure it out
I’d come home to the wife
who’d raise all kinds of hell
screaming, “when are you going to
quit?”
the stock answer, she knew
was leave me alone, get off my back
you don’t have to worry about it.

thanks to A.A. i know how to get out without even seeing a shrink, by turning to god and asking for help just screw it, i don't have to drink.

*As read at the 66th All Chicago Open
UIC Pavilion, September 17, 2005*

Alkathon Listings

Need help this holiday season?
How about hitting an Alkathon?
An Alkathon is an around-the-clock series of meetings.

Try one of these

15th Annual "Blazing Trails" Mega Alkathon

Nov 23, 2005 through Jan 1, 2006
with 5 locations!

All meetings are nonsmoking

Harvey 100 Club

Wednesday Nov 23—Sunday Nov 27,
around the clock!
240 W. 109th Place, Chicago, IL 60628
114 E. 155th St., Harvey, IL 60426
708-331-9880

New Wanderers Club

Thursday Nov 24th—Sunday Nov 27th
around the clock!
8936 S. Ashland Ave., Chicago,
IL 60620 No listed number

Lee's House

Sunday Dec 4th
629 E 88th Place, Chicago, IL 60619
8 a.m.—9:45 p.m.

Vision of Hope

Sunday Dec 11th
240 W 109th Place, Chicago IL 60628
8 a.m.- 9:45 p.m.

Rogers Park Alano Club

Friday Dec 9—Sunday Jan 1, 2006,
around the clock!
7033 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60626
773-743-9146

Mercy Hospital Alkathon

Mercy Hospital
2525 S. Michigan Ave., 2nd floor
7 p.m., Dec. 31, 2005 (New Year's Eve)
—7 p.m., Jan 1, 2006 (New Year's Day)
Refreshments and party favors will be
supplied.

For more info call Dave H.
at 773-523-1955.
"Do not be discouraged!"

Tips for a Sober and Joyous Holiday

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new AAs. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober — an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-around ball without a drop of alcohol.

Line up extra AA activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phone at a clubhouse or central office, volunteer to give a lead, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at the hospital.

Be host to AA friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.

Keep your AA telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes, postpone every thing else until you've called an AA member.

Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are with you.

Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.

If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A. member with you, keep some candy handy.

Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.

Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.

Don't get worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember: "one day at a time."

Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts, but this year you can give love.

"Having had a..." No need to spell out the twelfth step here — you already know it!

Adapted with gratitude from the
Maico GAAzette,
November/December 1999

THE FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

In every AA meeting room, facility or club I see the fellowship in action. One alcoholic trying to help another in one way or another. United by a common cause, staying sober one day at a time and improving their way of life. What a contrast to our drinking days, where it was me, myself and I. Speaking for myself, the AA program deflated my sick ego back to reality where I see I wasn't the only person on earth with problems. The AA program was slowly changing my outlook on life. The mental and emotional barriers I had built around me began to melt away with each meeting I went to. I could see where there was actual concern for our fellow alcoholic. I heard stories from members that were worse than mine. I starting to have compassion for them and thinking maybe there was some way I could help. By sharing our hopes, strengths and experiences we are helping each other.

One of the strongest bonds in the fellowship is sponsorship. A more seasoned person on the program gives advice and encouragement to someone with less time on the program. This is on a more one on one personal basis. The sponsor gives advice on how to stay on the AA beam and work the principles of the program. This almost always involves doing the 5th step together. In most cases the newer person becomes a sponsor his or her self one day. It's all about sharing and caring. We're not alone in the world anymore. The rapid expansion of the AA Program has spread to all corners of the earth. Today anywhere you go you can usually find an AA meeting or facility within reasonable distance. The language may be different but 'How it Works' is the same.

In my travels to other areas I felt completely welcome and comfortable at any meeting I've been to. We all share a common cause. In perspective, however, most of us find a meeting, facility or club which we consider our home group. There we feel a camaraderie with people we see share meetings with regularly. Also, we form closer friendships with members who have similar interests. All kinds of personalities are among us. Some we may even have a negative feeling for and don't seem to like. Like the program says, however, its principles over personalities. We must wish the best for everyone and exercise tolerance when called for. We're all in this together trying to get better one day at a time. I feel the unity particularly at the close of many meetings when we join hands and say the Lords Prayer followed by in unison 'It works if you work it.'

Then there others of us who go that extra mile doing service work for the program. They serve in some way helping area's central service office. Some are delegates representing their group or area. There are those of us on special committees organizing conventions, retreats, alcahthons and other AA related events. Some serve in the distribution of AA literature. Serving coffee, soft drinks or help clean a meeting area also contributes. Then there are the front line workers who go on 12 Step calls to carry the AA message and program to newcomers. This keeps the fellowship growing. Many lives were spared and put on a new sober course with these calls and visits. Reflecting on all of the above I see the AA Triangle Symbol 'Recovery-Unity-Service' in place. Enhanced in the light and spirit of a Higher Power and a loving God of our understanding.

By a Grateful Recovering Member
of the AA Program
Jerry W.

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