



# HERE'S HOW

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## FEAR and Gratitude



### *Fear of Being Alone*

Ralph T.

On Jan 1, 2007, I travelled to Panama City, PA to embark on my second freighter ship adventure. I thoroughly enjoyed my first freighter cruise just a year earlier and had no problem maintaining my sobriety.

This time, However, I was travelling with a "heavy heart", having been informed by my long-time partner that he was moving out - I just didn't know when.

I arrived in Panama City on Jan 2, and was advised that the vessel was running behind schedule and would not depart until Jan 5.

I had just celebrated 4 years of sobriety a week earlier, and in spite of my sadness, I had not thought of picking up a drink. Regrettably that all changed upon entering my hotel room. There, 3 feet in front of me stood a stocked mini-bar! The thought of drinking immediately entered my mind. I was telling myself I deserve it because of my problems back home. I did not dismiss the temptation by kneeling and asking God for help (something I knew well to do). I did not call the Front Desk and request the alcohol be removed. I decided to visit the casino next door just to get out of the room. When I returned, I again allowed myself to romance temptation to "pick up". Anyways, who would know about it, I'm all by myself in a foreign city. Again, I did not pray or call another alcoholic even though I had come prepared with the phone numbers of English speaking aa members. My relapse had begun!

The next morning came. I went through the motions of my prayers, and then made eye contact with the mini-bar. This time I had a stronger urge to drink, and I gave the thought much too much time before going to breakfast, near miss! When I returned, I had made up my mind to call one of the local AA members I mentioned earlier, which I did. His name was Martin, and he answered the phone. I did not share with him my vulnerability, but we did arrange for him

to pick me up at 6pm to take me to a meeting he was chairing. I felt a little better, and decided to take a walk to get my mind off of the alcohol, and it did help.

Martin was right on time and very cordial. He introduced me to all of the regulars, and called on me to share. Again, I made no mention of my struggles. Martin drove me to my hotel, and offered to bring me to another meeting the next day, "just call", he said.

Encouraged, somewhat, by the AA contact, I got through the night. But the next morning I found myself languishing in a self-pity funk and seriously entertaining a drink. This time I made no attempt to change the subject, and went directly to the alcohol, and drank a vodka miniature. The next thing I remember, I woke up with my head severely bleeding. I called reception, and they managed transportation to the ER. My next recollection was riding back to the hotel, and this person asking to see my bracelet (a treasured gift). The next morning I woke up in my hotel room minus my bracelet with my head bandaged. It could have been much worse as Panama City can be very dangerous, especially as vulnerable as I was.

I got drunk on the ship, but the amazing thing was that I awoke with half a bottle of gin left. I got up and poured it into the sink, I have never done that in my entire history of alcoholic drinking!

I returned home, and decided because I had only drunk twice that it was not necessary to acknowledge my sli to anyone. So, for 6 months I kept this gut-wrenching secret to myself. I lied by omission at every meeting, to my sponsor and my sponsees. I walked around with a terrible knot in my stomach, knowing I was deceiving the fellowship, and myself!

In June, my partner informed me the move-out date was scheduled for 7/2/2007, news I dreaded and was very fearful

of hearing. On the evening of 6/29, I sat alone deep in my self pity, obsessing that in 2 days I would be alone, and there was nothing I could do about it.

At about midnight, I succumbed to the temptation to swallow a couple of anxiety pills, and washed them down with a quarter bottle of mouthwash. I talked myself into "deserving to take the edge off" because of my despair. Again, no thought of praying or asking for help from another AA member.

I woke up at 3pm that day in Lincoln Park Hospital, I had fallen and hit my head again!

I learned from the nurse that my roommate had found me unconscious, bleeding profusely, and called 911. She also related, had I not been found in time, I would have bled to death. Upon hearing this disturbing news along with the realization that my relationship was over, I resumed my fear-based despair and anxiety.

The following quotes from the Big Book described my emotions exactly: "The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable," and "no words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. (Bill's Story, pg 6-8)

I called my sponsor to confess that I had relapsed 6 months earlier, that I had been living a lie, and the details of why I had been hospitalized. He was concerned, but very supportive, as I should have known.

I was discharged the following day, but the relief of returning home was tempered by the fear, despair and reality my partner of 27 years was moving out the following morning. I prayed all night for strength not to pick-up and got through the next day better than I thought, prayer is powerful!

That evening I attended my home group and finally raised my hand and related the whole story surrounding the relapse and the dishonesty. I should not have been surprised, they were all supportive! I felt so relieved. Living that lie for the half-year had been eating away at me, and was absolutely instrumental in the near fatal incident 3 nights earlier.

The next day, I came clean with my sponsees, and to my surprise they both wanted me to continue as their sponsor. With the blessing and grace of God, and the loving support of my AA fellowship, I continue to get stronger, both emotionally and spiritually.

Before ending my story, I would like to share with you the elements that contributed to my relapse.

1) Given my emotional state regarding the impending break-up, I should have been spiritually and emotionally

better prepared to cope.

2) Should have had the alcohol removed from my room immediately.

3) When the thought of drinking first occurred, I should have erased the temptation right away by praying to God asking for His help.

4) Next, I should have called my local AA contact and related my vulnerability.

5) When I did meet with Martin, I should have told him and the fellowship about my ongoing temptations to drink.

6) Most important, instead of picking up a drink the morning I relapsed, I should have called Martin as he suggested when he dropped me off the evening before.

Taking the right action (action I had been counseled by my sponsor to take), regarding any one of the above elements likely would have averted the slip.

I am now on the 37th day of my current freighter cruise in the North Atlantic, and while there has been a fair amount of drinking, I have not been tempted. I am now safely home and can honestly report that my sobriety date is still July 1, 2007. I remain active in AA with frequent attendance at meetings (including 2 on this trip in Montreal and Halifax), sponsoring men, service work at meetings and Caso, and daily prayers.

I was very fearful of living alone, but as it turns out, with God and my AA family "close at hand", I never feel alone because I am not.

## SPOOKY THINKING

*"The key to change... is to let go of fear."*

*"Each time we face our fear, we gain strength, courage, and confidence in the doing."*

*"FEAR is an acronym in the English language for "False Evidence Appearing Real""*

*"Fear can keep us up all night long, but faith makes one fine pillow."*

*"Fear makes strangers of people who would be friends."*

*"Fear is a habit; so is self-pity, defeat, anxiety, despair, hopelessness and resignation. You can eliminate all of these negative habits with two simple resolves: I can!! and I will!!"*

*"Fear is a darkroom where negatives develop."*

*"Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy."*

*"Fear has a large shadow, but he himself is small."*

*"Fear cannot take what you do not give it."*

*"He who fears something gives it power over him."*

*"Feed your faith and your fears will starve to death."*

*"Faith activates God - Fear activates the Enemy."*

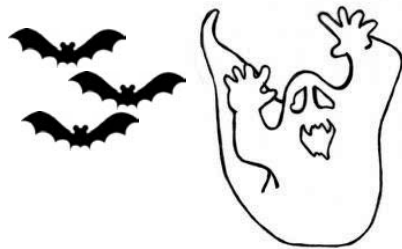
*"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."*

*"The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time."*

*"If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles."*

*"Do the thing we fear, and death of fear is certain."*

*"Fear doesn't exist anywhere except in the mind."*



*Desert Pete*

Hal M

Here's a little story I came across a while back in a church group, and as I was reading it struck me how all the elements in the story were an analogy of how our program works!

The story centers around a person who has been alone in the desert for enough time for his lips to be cracked, his throat is parched and his skin is burnt and peeling from endless days of creeping under a boiling sun. He believes he is at the end, his hope has left him. He's lost, alone, and filled with fear!

As he stumbles and rolls down the face of one more endless dune in the valley, between two sand dunes he sees, of all things, an old water pump! He drags his debilitated body to the base of the pump where he finds this sign hanging from the spout: "I was here in 1936. At that time I put a new suck-

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**Address all communications to:**

**Here's How**

**180 N. Wabash Ave, Suite 305  
Chicago, IL 60601**

**or**

**e-mail: [hereshow@chicagoAA.org](mailto:hereshow@chicagoAA.org)**

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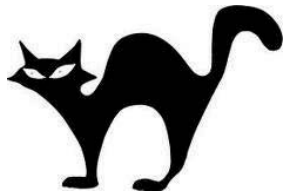
er washer in the pump so it'll be working good. Next to the pump, 12 inches to the right, i buried a bottle of water, cork down. Dig up the bottle of water but, DON'T DRINK ANY or you won't have enough to make the pump work! Pour half the water into the pump to wet the sucker washer, then pour in the other half, pump the handle like crazy and you'll get all the fresh water you want! When you've had your fill, fill up the bottle, and bury it cork down for the next fellow."The note was signed simply, "Desert Pete".

What a dilemma! Maybe Desert Pete doesn't even exist. Maybe some old joker wrote the note. I need help for myself now, why follow some stupid instructions? I'll drink the water and forget about the pumpin' and the next guy! That might be how he was thinking. What do you suppose he did?

What do we do? Believe in someone unseen, no matter what we call him. Follow the instructions, to get the promise. Pump the handle like crazy, do the work, take the steps! In gratitude, fill up the bottle for the next guy, pass it on.

What do you suppose he did? Drink the water in the bottle for immediate relief and take his chances with the dessert? If he did, could he ever find his way back to the pump?

I guess we'll never know about him, but as for me, I'll keep following the instructions and keep pumping at the endless well of sobriety in AA.



## My Fears

There is a lot of talk in the rooms of AA about Fear. Much of it, I don't understand, but the longer I'm around, the more it starts to make sense. One of the first things that someone told me about AA, was that I can take a "buffet" approach. In other words, just take what I want and leave the rest.

And so, I just kind of tuned out for a long time when people started talking about fear. You see, somehow my mind equates fear with weakness. But, I know that I'm not weak. Perhaps it is some kind of social programming, or some kind of macho-thing, I don't know. But I know that it took me a long time before my concept of "manhood" could accept the idea that I was fearful or afraid.

I'm just glad that I was desparate enough to stop drinking long enough to get to the point where I could look past all the "fear-talk", that I equated with weakness. That's the kind of talk that I normally would have no part of. A couple of years ago, if someone told me that I was afraid, I would have challenged you to fight. That was the way that my mind worked.

Even now, I would probably prefer a fight to exploring the feelings inside me that can expose so much pain.

There's lots of people out there who make fun of these urges in us guys, but it's very real. No one ever taught me what fear is, or the many forms that it can take. But, the more I work the steps, and utilize my sponsor, the more aware I become, and the easiesr it is to face these things.

I'm starting to see that all my problems and difficulties in life are built on foundations of fear. Fear of being vulnerable to others, fear of not being loved, fear of being loved, fear of being rejected, fear of success, fear of failure, are just a few of the undercurrents of fear that run through my being.

Through the program of AA, surrender to my Higher Power, honesty with my sponsor, and embracing a life of service, I have hope that one day I will learn how to live free of fear and truly be the man that I know I am.

## Gratitude

Since it is Thanksgiving time it seems only appropriate to talk about one of the most important tools in the recovery process - gratitude. Being grateful for what we have, and keeping things in perspective, is vital in the struggle to stay in the now and enjoy today as much as possible. There are two aspects of empowerment that come into play here. One is; that empowerment involves seeing life as it is and making the best of it (instead of being the victim of it not being what it "should" be); the other is realizing that we have a choice about where to focus our mind.

To have a healthy, balanced relationship with life we need to see life as it really is - which includes owning and feeling the pain, fear, and anger that is a natural part of living - and then have a Spiritual belief system that helps us to know that everything happens for a reason, that allows us to choose to focus on the silver linings rather than buy into the belief that we are victims.

Society teaches us to view life from a perspective of fear, lack, and scarcity. Rather we view life from that place of fear or go to the other extreme and deny that we feel any fear - either way we are giving power to the fear, we are living life in reaction to the fear.

Growing up I learned from my male role model that a man never admits he is afraid - at the same time that my role model lived in constant fear the future. To this day



my father can't relax and enjoy himself because impending doom is always on the horizon. The disease voice, the critical parent voice, in my head always wants to focus on the negative and expect the worst just like my father did. This programming to focus on the negative was compounded by the fact that I learned conditional love (that I would be rewarded or punished according to what I deserved - which, since I felt unworthy, meant I had good reason to expect doom), and that I had to learn to disassociate from myself in childhood. I had to learn to go unconscious and not be present in my own skin in the moment because emotional honesty was not allowed in my family. Everyone learns to find things outside of self - drugs, alcohol, food, relationships, career, religion, etc. - to help us stay unconscious to our own emotional reality, but the primary and earliest way almost all of us found to disconnect from our feelings - which exist in our bodies - is to live in our heads.

Since I could not be comfortable in my own skin in the now without feeling the feelings, I spent most of my life living in either the past or the future. My mind was almost always focused on regret for past or fear of (or fantasy about) the future. When I did focus on the now it was with self-pity as a victim - of myself (I am stupid, a failure, etc.), of others (who victimized me), or of life (which was not fair or just).

It was wonderfully liberating in recovery to start learning that I could start to see life in a growth context. That I had a choice to focus on the half of the glass that was full instead of giving power to the disease which always wants to focus on the half that is empty. When I focus on what I have, and have been given, that I am grateful for - instead of just focusing on what I want that I don't have - it helps me to let go of the victim place my disease wants to promote.

What works for me is to remind myself of the difference between my wants and my needs. My Truth is that every day that I have been in recovery all my needs have been filled - and there has not been a single day that all my wants have been met. If I focus on what I want that I don't have then I feel like a victim and make myself miserable. If I choose to remind myself of what I have and how far I have come then I can let go of some of the victim perspective.

Ninety-eight per cent of the time when I am in fear it means that I am in the future. Pulling myself back into the now, turning the future over to my Higher Power, and focusing on gratitude, frees me to have some happy mo-

ments today.

When I was about two years in recovery there was a time when I was talking to my sponsor on the phone. I had just lost my job, the car had broken down, and I had to move out of my apartment in two weeks. Talk about tragedy and impending doom! I was laying in bed feeling very sorry for myself and very terrified about how painful it was going to be when I became homeless. After listening to me for a while my sponsor asked me, "What's up above you?" It was a stupid question and I told him so. I was pissed that he wasn't giving me the sympathy I deserved - but he insisted that I answer. So I finally said, "Well, the ceiling." And he said, "Oh, so your not homeless tonight are you?" And of course, everything worked out fine in the next two weeks. My Higher Power always has a plan in place even when I can't see any way out.

We all have much to be grateful for, to give thanksgiving for, if we just choose to look at the half of the glass that is full. So, have a grateful Thanksgiving.

### *Love of Self* Ricardo



Self Love is the starting point for giving love to others. It opens the door to abundant living. Without, it we limp through life, we become a part of the walking wounded, the living dead. We can not grow or glow without it. Self love determines how solid and fulfilling our lives are. The love of self is the foundation on which we build all the rest.

The God within, the Higher Power within, the Good Orderly Direction within, the Spirit within, forces us to retreat inside of self. Falling back in order with order. Let's begin to listen to ourselves loving and honoring our needs, so that our healing can begin. Why can't I stop crying? Why do I feel so disconnected? Why am I so angry and resentful at myself? Why am I so unhappy? The forgiveness of self, ask honestly and you shall be forgiven. The love of self, begin to start loving yourself, celebrating yourself.

Congratulate yourself for getting to this meeting, for getting through each day, for attending to your many responsibilities. Make honoring your God, your Higher Power, the spirit within you an important ritual in your life. Make honoring yourself, an important ritual in your life.

No one but you has the time to tell you regularly, how naturally beautiful and capable you are. Make a commitment to care for and nurture yourself. Self love gives you discipline to delight in your individual beauty and to be accepting of

the spiritual, mental, and physical changes that occur as we mature.

Caring for ourselves must be our conscious lifetime commitment, that we don't need anyone's permission to be good to ourselves. In order to maintain balance in our lives and achieve our goals while supporting others. In order to think honestly, move wisely and give love to others, we must begin with a full cup, a full cup of love that only we ourselves can fill.

Love Yourself  
Keep coming back!

### *Simple Pleasures*



Hello, My name is Jerry and I'm an alcoholic. I wanted to write on this subject because that's what I've been trying to do since I got my own apartment in Chicago. It's also the first time I've lived by myself in sobriety. To start, I like to cook. It's not anything fancy, just basic food that is filling and usually healthy. My sponsor told me I had to start eating three meals a day. I was kind of shocked. I said "every day?" He said "Yes, every day". This is something "normal" people do, I guess. Next, I wash the dishes, every day. I know that seems boring, but it doesn't have to be. It doesn't take long either. I pay my bills, do laundry, call program people, and pray. I try not to get bored. I read all the time and play music. This gets me out of my head. I don't know if this helped anyone, but I hope it does. Also, I never let my phone get heavy. If someone calls me, they might need my help just listening. I never give advice. I try to be caring, loving, and tolerant. This is sometimes hard for me because it's still new for me. All I know is that I don't think about drinking when I'm thinking about other AAs.

## *Poetry and Prose*

### *One Man, Ten Years, One Day at a Time*

I'm here and don't know what to do. They say I've got to pray to You.

I'm not sure exactly where to start. There are so many feelings in my heart.

I've prayed a lot in the past you know, but they tell me I really never let go.

I'd pray, but then I'd scheme and plan. I guess I never really held Your hand.

I prayed and thought of what life could be, but how could I trust what I could not see?

They told me to sit back, relax and listen. They also ex-

plained what I'd been missing.

I thought they were way too happy and free, and I doubted it would happen to me.

I was different, so miserable and still in pain. I felt a cloud above me and I felt its rain.

As I sat back and really tried to hear, I slowly felt you coming near.

In their stories I felt their pain. Some of them too, had felt the rain.

In some of these people I started to see, my past, my failures, but how great life could be.

They explained exactly what to do. Don't drink, go to meetings, and to Pray to You.

Somehow these people had softened my heart. From that small, safe room, I feared to part.

I left the meeting and went back to life, to work, then home to my kids and my wife.

It wasn't easy getting through that first day. I think it's because I forgot to pray.

On the way home, as I got in my car, my first instincts told me to stop at the bar.

I knew it would take the edge off the day, then I thought twice, then I cried and I prayed.

I remember those feelings I had that morning, as my tears kept flowing without a warning.

I pulled my car over and looked at my phone. I remembered they told me I'm never alone!

I dug in my pocket and grabbed the list. I dried my tears and clenched my fists.

I dialed the first number on the page, and as I listened I was full of rage.

No one answered, and I became very sad, but tried one more number on the list I had.

I was shocked to actually hear his voice. I was sure that I had made the right choice.

I thanked him for answering and explained my day.

He listened and asked "Did you remember to Pray?"

I wanted to lie, but had to say no. He said "maybe that's why you're feeling so low."

He gave me a few more suggestions, then said

"With all that you've been through, you're lucky you're not dead.

As we ended the call, I pulled in my drive. I felt grateful that I was home and alive.

I met my children and wife at the door. I felt love and warmth and wanted more.

One more thing I remember him saying. He made it clear it's not a game we're playing!

I went to sleep that night and knew, all these people were working through You!

I kept going to meetings and prayed a lot. Some things just stuck and I never forgot.

To be grateful, honest and willing to grow,  
and when good things happened, he'd say "I told you  
so."

It's been ten years, but I still keep in mind, I could only  
do it One Day at a Time.

### *Life Or Death*

It just got so bad, so quick this time.  
I was so sick, and had lost all life lines.  
But there was still one, who knew before I.  
My road before me...IT WAS NOT TIME TO DIE!  
I never thought I'd be lying in the hospital again.  
Not really knowing how long it had been.  
On day three, I finally came to,  
with tubes in my arms and my veins a bright blue.  
Hopeless and empty, I lay there in bed.  
Visions and places stuck in my head.  
Doctors and nurses and my husband by my side,  
I tried to escaping reality, but the facts did not lie.  
In and out of consciousness I cried and I dreamed,  
There was a 'calm', though, inside me, and serene it  
just seemed.

No more struggles, and no more pain.  
Surrender I did and came out of the rain.  
When the fifth day came, I was detoxed they said.  
A lady came in and stood by my bed.  
She was quiet and calm and asked me that day,  
"Do you remember me? I'm from A.A."  
I vaguely remembered and said "It doesn't work!"  
No sooner came those words, that I felt like a jerk.  
She gave me a list and said "NOW, get to one!"  
We're here for you honey, so please don't run.

She left and then the Doctor came by.  
He told me right then that I almost died.  
He said very firmly, I had to abstain.  
If I drank he doubted, I'd make it back again.  
With his unimaginable news that I had received,  
My pancreas almost burst, It's a serious disease.  
This statement came true, right then in my mind.  
This illness really is the KILLING KIND!  
A long time ago, I heard them say,  
Death, Insanity or Jails, will be there some day!  
Quicker than most people would normally think.  
But it's true, could have happened, if I continued to drink.  
It's been almost a year now, and sobriety's stuck.  
I can tell you right now it's not about luck.  
Today I know that God has great plans.  
He told me to reach out, and take your hands.  
Now you are the ones I owe it all to!  
I would not be sober, if it weren't for you.  
With all of this gratitude I feel in my heart,  
Thank You, my friends for a blessed new start.  
The rest is a 'daily' thing that I'll live.  
My blood, sweat and tears, now I must give.  
It was hard coming back, to be the new girl again.  
But today life is good because of you God, my family and friends.

Thank You!!!!!!



## Questions Corner

**Q:** The 12th step says we need to practice "these principles" in all our affairs. Can you please tell me where to find the official list of principles this step refers to?

**A:** Although there is no "official list" of principles, the Big Book does mention several principles throughout its chapters. Patience, tolerance, kindness and love from the chapter Into Action, and Honesty, Openmindedness and Willingness, from Spiritual Exp.

What is being referred to in How It Works are the steps themselves, and the principles of 'turning it over on a daily basis', 'righting our wrongs as we go along', honesty, and the general spirit and principles that are practised through working each individual step.

**Do you have a question you'd like answered? Send it to us and we will post the answer in an upcoming addition of Here's How.**

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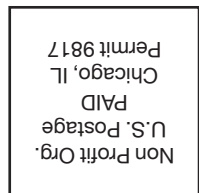
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