

# HERE'S HOW

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## *Sowing Seeds of Recovery*

960 Words  
Ted

I grew up in a house where alcohol was used freely and anger was the most frequently displayed emotion. I felt that drinking, fighting, auto accidents, getting into trouble and coming home drunk were completely acceptable. I always had a vivid imagination, preferring to explore the magical world around me, pretending I was someone of importance, using my environment as a playground rather than playing with other kids. My life was directionless until I discovered how much I loved music. I then immersed myself in it and learned to play guitar so I could add music to the lyrics I had been composing.

Although I had tasted alcohol under adult supervision at family functions, my first drunk came one Thanksgiving when my brothers and cousin decided to use me as a guinea pig while they mixed exotic drinks at the bar. I remember acting out and feeling free to express myself with a new found sense of euphoria. The next day my brother asked me if I remembered any of it and seeing a scapegoat, I lied and said, "No," not realizing I was admitting to a blackout without the actual experience. I assumed that memory loss was a part of drinking and also socially acceptable so I figured, "Why not take advantage of the situation?" I was ashamed that I had felt so foot-loose and fancy-free in the presence of all of my relatives.

On my last day at Catholic School, I brought bourbon in an empty aspirin bottle to impress the girl who sat next to me. I regularly took swigs of booze in the liquor cabinet at home. I learned to really love the sensational warm feeling and the buzz that accompanied it. In high school I began to mix with the crowd that was sneaking smokes on school grounds and subsequently using beer and pot at night and on the weekends. Before I drank I was a mischievous child, pulling pranks, disobeying my parents, lying and stealing, as well as getting into trouble with neighbors and police. It was not much different when I got older but drinking and using drugs always accompanied the trouble I was involved with. Arrested at the age of sixteen for drunk and disorderly in the middle of a school day, I saw no abnormalities in my predicament. During

my teens I was arrested four times and always for an alcohol-related incident. I truly believed that was part of the game.

I drove my car into a house at the age of 19 and blew .32 on the Breathalyzer, although I hardly felt drunk at all. I spent 3 days in the Cook County jail because my parents refused to bail me out. In order to avoid the option of jail or rehab, I joined the Navy. Incidentally the Army had refused to allow me to take the Armed Forces Entrance Exam, due to my being involved in a drunken incident the night before at the hotel where they had put me up. After about two years and four Navy Alcohol Apprehension Programs, I was told that I was ready to go into a twenty-eight day program. However, I felt I was not ready and, instead of spending my rehab in Spain, I spent the next 6 months restricted to the ship as we visited all the European ports. I told the intake officer that I would prefer to wait until I was stateside, thinking I could get some more drunks on in the meantime. The result was a Mediterranean cruise from the rail of the ship.

As soon as I arrived in rehab, I became acquainted with other albies that had some marijuana. But in one of the AA meetings, I heard a young surfer-looking dude tell his story and the seed of recovery was planted. I went back to the barracks and told my fellow pot heads, "I think I really want to get something out of this venture." I knew that smoking pot while going to meetings was not going to cut it. One of the other guys agreed with me but two continued to smoke. One of the smokers came back to rehab drunk after his commencement to prove his arrogance. I continued not to drink throughout the rest of my stay in the Navy but started smoking pot a few months out of rehab when I stopped going to meetings.

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After I left the Navy, I drank and it took me only nine months until I was in County again. With my job jeopardized and a suggestion to go to AA from my boss, I called up CASO and got the address of a Friday night meeting in Rogers Park. I must admit I looked the part the night I walked into the meeting, I had fallen down the stairs and was emaciated from a week-long, all-alcohol diet. Everyone was receptive to me as a newcomer and there were many people my age at that meeting. I fell right into the fellowship and started to hang out with sober people all of the time. I had a new lease on life and I felt like a teenager again. Subsequently I became quite involved in service work for many years, until I became burned out. I drifted from AA and even though most of my friends were in the program, I began to slip and slide for several years.

I came back and after doing ninety-in-ninety, working on my fourth step and getting plugged in, I've enjoyed sobriety more than ever before. I now have a 5-year-old daughter and life is beautiful. In spite of losing almost everything, I believe anything is possible as long as I do it sober, one day at a time.



### A Word From The Committee... 'Archives'

Chicago Archives Committee Members Report on Their Experiences as Volunteers in the Archives Display Area at the International Convention, San Antonio, Texas

**JIM E.** I have attended five International Conventions. I have volunteered at the Archives Booth at three of these conventions. This by far was the most meaningful because I brought a new member of AA to help at this convention. I wanted him to see and to feel what it means to do service on such a grand scale. Thank the World Service Archives for letting me do this. It was indeed a pleasure to meet our New York Archivists.

**CAROL O.** This was my fourth time as an Archives Volunteer at the International. Each and every time I get such a sense of belonging to the fellowship when I am surrounded by AA's history in such a wonderful setting. I always bring a list of questions to ask the New York Archivists and they always graciously answer them. Our committee also decided to bring a packet that included a few items from our collection that were from places other than Chicago to donate to New York. One of the items was a newsletter from South Africa; it was really great seeing the look on Michelle's face as she told me that she was just helping South Africa set up their archives repository and how much this would mean to them. She was really happy that we shared something that another archives repository will cherish just as we cherish the items we have had donated to us over the years. I also enjoyed meeting the other archivists from all over the world, exchanging ideas and suggestions which always get me charged up. I also attended the archives meeting where three excellent speakers shared their experience, strength and hope as members of archives committees. I can't wait

for the next one!!!

**TOM C.** My experience as a volunteer for the GSO Archives was very positive. I was able to give some people helpful information on the years in which new editions of the Big Book were printed and answer other sorts of questions. One gentleman came by the booth with a first edition, first printing copy of the Big Book. It was signed by many people from the Louisville, KY group. I suggested that if he wasn't willing to donate the book to the group, that maybe he could make copies for them. I received a number of compliments on the setup of the booth and the people seemed to be having a good time. Most of them came by, shook hands and introduced themselves. I was able to give them handouts and whatever additional information they needed. Many people from all over the world passed by just to say hello. It was a great thrill to be of service at the International and still have plenty of time to enjoy myself!

**JIM A.** July 1-4th 2010, approximately fifty-seven thousand people descended on San Antonio, Texas after hurricane Alex hit the day before. The people were very friendly and helpful. Some of the sites to see were the Alamo and the River Walk with plenty of good restaurants to eat at.

In addition to the "civilians," Air Force and Army personnel from nearby bases were in attendance. The newcomers or first-time attendees at an International Convention were impressed that during the quiet time you could almost hear a pin drop despite the size of the huge crowd. Nineteen flags representing various countries where AA is present and editions of the Big Book in fifty-nine different languages were very impressive.

An example of the friendliness in AA was a conversation I had with a member from California who observed and admired my "Service is the secret." pin. I gave it to him and wished him well, knowing it would spread that message where ever he wore it!

The theme of the convention was A Vision for You. The highlight for me was being an Archives Volunteer and meeting people from all over the world while helping people sign the visitor book and purchase archival tapes and videos from the World Service Archives.

**BOB P.** I had just returned from the International Convention when I began to reflect back to 1985 in Montreal and my first convention. As I look back on it, this year's International has a whole different feeling for me. I met fellow archive committee members for breakfast on Friday morning. All were brimming with anticipation of what would be coming up next. Most of us would soon be volunteering for two hour periods at the official archives area set up by the General Service Office and would get to meet others who share our enthusiasm for the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. During my short stay as a volunteer I got to meet and answer quite a few questions and also learned some things about the archives in New York and other states. It truly amazed me how much more material and memorabilia is out there to be saved for future generations. One of the greatest pleasures of attending an International is discovering that your smiling face is just one of many. At Saturday night's big meet-

ing, it was the Long Timers moment to shine and they certainly did to the tune of over twenty-one thousand years of sobriety by less than six hundred members. That sight will be very hard to forget for a long time. The display case in the archives area presented the history of many different areas and states. Sadly there was no history of Area 19 included. I hope God willing I will be able to see an Area 19 history display at the next International and that I will have helped in some small way in getting it there. I would just like to say it is an honor and a privilege to serve on our area's archive committee and to thank Alcoholics Anonymous for allowing me to participate in it.

### *Came Back To Stay*

Rick S



I was at a meeting some time ago at which the speaker talked about her early experiences with AA. After her very first meeting, a person of passing acquaintance approached to welcome her to AA.

"We've been waiting and praying for you," was one thing he said to her. She recalled the indignation she felt, that these people would have the nerve to pray for her without her knowledge or consent. That strangers had sat in judgement of her and decided that this was what she needed. However, she swallowed her pride and returned to that meeting and continued to come back. She was here now, many years later, relating this story at another meeting. Her first impressions of AA, she was very glad to say, were not the lasting ones.

Her words struck a familiar chord in me. I remembered back to my first AA meeting I went to. It was at a halfway house in Northwest Indiana. My plan was to sidle in, sit in the back, and take in the proceedings. A fellow coming in at the same time, led me down some stairs into a smoke-filled basement. He asked if I was new to that meeting. I made the mistake of saying that I was new, period. As we hit the bottom of the stairs, he loudly announced, "We've got a first-timer here." As dozens of people turned to look, I thought, "First-timer, hell. More like dead meat." Any hopes I had of avoiding attention went up in, well, smoke.

That first bit was the worst part though. One person asked if I wanted to say anything. Another chimed in, "Nah, just let him relax and listen." Then, one by one, every person in that room told their "drinking stories", how they had come to AA, and what things were like for them now. I was amazed by their openness, honesty, and humility. A piece of paper was passed around the room, and then handed to me. It was a list of names and telephone numbers under the heading, "Before You Drink - Call". I remember leaving that meeting with great hope and resolve that my drinking days were over.

Sadly, that was not to be the case. I wanted to be sober. I wanted what the people at the meeting had, but I was still way too much

## **WE NEED YOUR STORIES!**

Tell us about "what it was like, what happened and what it is like now." In upcoming issues, Here's How will publish your 500-800 word stories about:

**We Are Not a Glum Lot**

**Balance in and out of AA**

**The Steps**

**Living Our Dreams In Sobriety**

**AA Humor/ Jokes**

**Or send us stories on any topic sobriety related!**

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

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into thinking I could do it on my own. Yeah, I went to meetings, but I would always pick up again. My dry times got shorter, and my drinking times got longer until there were no dry times at all. Just like before.

I came to resent those people. I envied their success where I had failed. I feared their honesty. I envied their freedom. The more I pushed them away, the more the memory of that first meeting persisted. As the Big Book says, a seed, a thought, had been planted and, try as I may, I could not shake it.

So, eventually, I came back to stay. Well, at least for almost six years now. I've been back to that meeting more than a few times now. Same place, many of the same folks, many of the stories the same, mine included. And I keep coming back, for myself most of all, but also because it's the least I can do to be a part of a seed maybe planted for someone else.



## *Came to Believe*

Tom T

First and foremost, I must sincerely express my gratitude and indebtedness to the program and people of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have an amazing and full life today. I have the ability to show up, to be an employee, a family member, a friend, a sponsor, a productive member of society and a servant to God and my fellows. All these things are truly blessings and gifts given to me through the ego-deflating, altruistic, self-sacrificing and life-giving actions and principles inherent in our wonderful recovery community.

My life was not always so good. I certainly did not walk into AA with my head held high or with much hope for the future. On July 22nd, 2002 I came to AA with a lot of problems. I was an emotional wreck, my career was hanging on by a thread, my relationships were destroyed. I was malnourished, underweight and broke. The condition of my car was a visual parallel to the condition of my life...there were dents, scratches, and broken lights on the outside. In addition, there were burn marks on the seats and a pervasive stench within the car.

On the outside you could tell there was something wrong with me – blood-shot eyes, skin and bones and a cold, taut, rarely-smiling face. Yet, the inner turmoil was even worse. When I was not drunk everything that made me uncomfortable bubbled to the surface: anger, resentment, self-loathing, social insecurity, awkwardness, fear and shame caused by broken relationships and ugly actions.

I knew for a long time that my life was unmanageable. I was a soldier in the United States Army, and served as a Military Police Officer. Louisiana State Troopers trained me in the procedures of Standardized Field Sobriety Testing, Traffic Accident Investigation, and DUI Enforcement. While on shift, I would pull people over for traffic violations, write tickets, tow vehicles, direct traffic, investigate traffic accidents and process people we had apprehended for DUI. Yet, when I was off of work I would do the exact same things that I was arresting people for. I sped, drove drunk, bought and sold drugs, and got

in fights.

My life was very hypocritical. Each and every time that I put my uniform on, holstered my 9mm Bereta pistol, put my handcuffs in their case and got my radio set up, I felt horrible. I would get into my undercover police vehicle with its high-tech radar speed enforcement equipment and low profile lights and feel like a con artist. Sometimes I would come to work still drunk, and I would turn on the Intoxilyzer 5000 breathalyzer machine. I would blow into it, figure out my BAC and then try to determine when I would be under Louisiana's legal alcohol concentration limit, so that I could justify driving the squad car around. (Note: At this time I wasn't even twenty-one years old yet, so it was really hard to justify being drunk in the first place.)

When I got to AA, I looked at the second step and immediately focused on the words, "restore us to sanity." Being somewhat intelligent, I knew that this implied I had been insane. As this thought settled down into my consciousness, a sly little smile started to develop on my face. It did not take much effort for me to access some hilarious and/or tragic instances where an onlooker may have called my actions insane. I thought about the times I drove drunk with one eye open so that my double vision would be less exaggerated. I thought about being wasted while working as a military police officer and then arresting a person for DUI while knowing that I was probably just as much, if not more, intoxicated than he was. I thought about eating only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for a solid month, so that I would have enough money to drink every night. I thought these instances and others were manifestations of my insanity.

Thankfully, right from the start, I was given a copy of the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous," went to a ton of meetings and got a sponsor. Before long I identified with the "peculiar mental twist" that always preceded me picking up a drink. In short, my insanity was and IS the fact that my mind will try to convince me that drinking is a logical, acceptable, viable, justifiable and necessary option. No matter how much evidence I have to the contrary (jail time, stints in rehab, loss of jobs, broken family or the like), my head, my thought process, is faulty and would like me to drink, though in my heart I know it will only lead me to three bleak options - jails, institutions, or death.

The second step then becomes a step of hope, for it says that "We," the community of recovery, have "come to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Thus, to break this down to an elementary truth, each and every member of our community who will make progress and "stick" must begin to believe that AA has something to offer him or herself. AA must become a living, viable, bastion of hope for the newcomer. WE must all believe that our malady of alcoholism and the perverted thought processes which encourage us to keep drinking have a solution. One must be able to envision his or her life being restored, rebuilt, rehabbed and set on a firm foundation.

This change happened for me when I became a member of my first home group. These people loved me despite myself, were

truly caring people and were all sober for years. These loving people at the "Plant-A-Seed" group at Fort Polk, Louisiana became anchors for my soul and they shaped a vision upon my heart and mind that could see the possibility of being "restored to sanity". Now, five and a half years later, I am a student in Chicago and have a wonderful life. I love Chicago AA and continue to go to a home group "Common Solution" that keeps me, holds me and challenges me as I continue to stay in the process of being "restored to sanity."



## Odes To Sobriety

### 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

took 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."

Throughout all the years, I couldn't change IT,

no matter how hard I did try.

I finally learned that the only change wasn't the "t" - it was "I."

Thanks to AA, 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.



### Humility

Anonymous

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

### How It Was:

Ego-maniac with an inferiority complex.

Most of the time, I acted as though I was God's gift to the world. I was the center of the universe. However, I never really liked myself and often felt inferior to others. I felt false pride and at the same time, I usually felt guilt, shame and unworthiness.

### What Happened:

12-Step Program

I can't explain why the program works. For me it is enough that the Big Book tells me how it works. The program has been responsible for a transformation.

### What It Is Like Now:

God is the center of the universe. The false pride is gone. I feel good about my accomplishments but understand that these accomplishments are really gifts from God. It is God's grace that is responsible for these accomplishments. I am now able to listen to Good Orderly Direction.



### Perception

anonymous

One day, the father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the express purpose of showing him how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return from their trip, the father asked his son, "How was the trip?"

"It was great, Dad."

"Did you see how poor people live?" the father asked.

"Oh yeah," said the son.

"So tell me what you learned from the trip," said the father.

The son answered, "I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece

of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We buy our food but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us; they have friends to protect them.”

The boy's father was speechless.

Then his son added, “Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are.”

### *When You Travel* anonymous

Just as you found friends in meetings in the Chicago area, you will also find helpful members in almost every city and town in the United States and in most parts of the free world.

Whenever you travel internationally, take the AA World Directory with you. It contains group listings, meeting nights and the contact information for AA members who are willing to talk on the phone or help you get to a meeting. Copies of the World Directory are available at the Central Office.

When traveling here at home, look in the phone book in most cities under “Alcoholics Anonymous” and you will find either an answering service or an AA Central Office that will help you make an AA contact. You are never very far from an AA meeting.

So now you've made a start. And if you are like most of us, we think you will find these suggestions helpful on your journey to a comfortable, happy sobriety.

Remember that you never have to be alone, if you use the tools that AA has to offer you. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous wants to provide support and guidance to all alcoholics who reach out for help. Our very survival requires that we must carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. So we need you. Join us, participate, and become a part of our program of recovery.

## Caso Corner

I'd like you to take a moment to think about the first time you reached out for help with your drinking...what if no one was there to help you? Where would you be today?

There is no greater gift than gratitude. I was filled with gratitude at our annual open house. There were four speakers who had about 140 years of sobriety. Three speakers mentioned that they called your Central Service Office for the first time looking for help. In particular, one of the speakers mentioned that he was sure we could not help him. So, reluctantly he did pick up the phone and dialed our number: FINancial-1475. He went on to tell about how two people were sent to meet him and took him to his first meeting. He did not sober up right away but eventually it stuck. He now has 35 years of sobriety.

This was one of the few times I remember hearing and seeing the power of the call to A.A. and seeing that they were still sober. Words cannot express the deep gratitude I felt to know that I have the opportunity to work here. I am deeply humbled to work at a place that has helped many to their first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and commence on their journey of recovery.

As you may know, November is gratitude month. This is when I think about the year that just passed and I am filled with gratitude when I think about how my life has been bettered by someone like you. Someone who has shown me the path to freedom. You have helped me and countless others live the promises.

Because there are people like you and the panel of speakers, thousands of others will find the hope and recovery they cannot find anywhere else.

Today, I am asking that you take action once again and show your gratitude by giving a contribution of any amount to the Chicago



Area Service Office. As you know, in the spirit of the seventh tradition, we do not accept outside funding. Your service office is fully self-supporting thru our contributions. Send us your contribution today to 180 N Wabash Ave., Ste 305 Chicago IL 60601.

*“The Central Office belongs to all Groups everywhere; it is your good-will and financial support which makes it possible: it is one of your main contacts with the general public and it is one of your principal means of carrying the 12th step of the A.A. program to untold thousands of alcoholic sick people who don't yet know they can get well.” – Bill W. June 1944*

The Chicago Area Service Office continues to work to help make a difference in the lives of people afflicted with alcoholism. Each and every person affected by alcoholism has many reasons for hope. Because of generous people like you, we can efficiently carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous' great advances that are being made in our community. I hope we can count on you for your support. Please feel free to take the time and visit your office to see how your contributions are being utilized. While visiting with us we invite you to stay for the noon A.A. meeting, browse the bookstore and meet the friendly volunteers and staff.

Thanks for your generous gift; it will provide help to alcoholics who have come before us, but especially for those who have yet to reach out for help.

Your generous contribution means that an alcoholic is on this end of the phone 24/7. Every day, members of A.A. selflessly give of their time answering phones so that when any alcoholic, any time, reaches out for help, the hand of A.A. will be there. They need an office to go to, telephones to answer, desks and directories to refer to and coordinated lists of both meetings and 12-steppers to do their job. And when those volunteers go home, more volunteers freely take up the task from home, answering calls throughout the night, until the office opens again.

Your generous contribution means that kids in schools and programs around Chicago can learn about Alcoholics Anonymous, that there is a solution to a drinking problem. Our Public Information Committee and the Cooperation with the Professional Community committees go to hundreds of schools, events, fairs, conventions and other gatherings. They let people know A.A. is here and that alcoholics are not alone.

Your generous contribution means that for those who cannot hear, the AA message can see it spoken to them through sign language, or can read it through Braille. Our Special Needs committee responds to those who need a little extra service, so that interpreted meetings and special equipment are available to help make A.A. accessible to everyone who has a drinking problem.

Your generous contribution means that thousands of A.A. members can come together to share their experience, strength, and hope. Each year, Chicago A.A. holds special events that help bring together A.A.s from all over the area to celebrate and share their recovery.

Your generous contribution helps preserve our heritage. A.A. has a rich history and Chicago has been an integral part almost from the beginning. Volunteers share our space to gather the historical materials from past and present to preserve our fellowship and its program for those yet to come. Their displays make our story available to carry the message, and show that we are each a small part of a great whole.

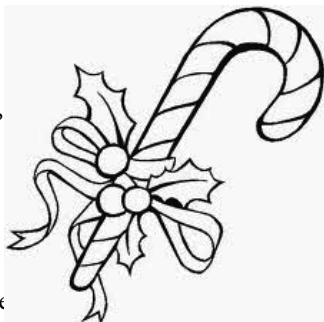
Our Co-Founder Bill W said it best, “I try hard to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits. When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion that we can never know.” Because of people like you who have come before me and the Central Service Office I heard the message of AA and have been able to experience the promises as outlined in Alcoholics Anonymous. Thank you for my sobriety.

With grateful appreciation,

Laura N Gonzalez

Office Manager

Chicago Area Service Office



*Happy Holidays*

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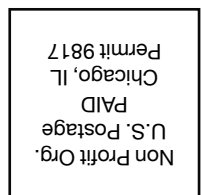
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