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Here's How

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Stepping Into the New Year

The Robins Nest

BY RICK H.

A while back a very unusual event happened at our house involving a bird—a robin, more specifically. I have played back the events several times and each time I see a spiritual message that I'd like to pass along.

The event unfolded like this. I went into our garage, which had been open for a while, and noticed that a robin had flown in and was "circling." Although a bit surprising, when it flew out, I thought, "Oh well, a misguided bird!" However, when the bird returned to the same antics, I knew something was up. What I eventually learned was that the bird was starting to build a nest in the garage—and where did it choose? On top of the garage opener, exactly at the point where the metal belts circulate to open the door. A recipe for sure disaster and destruction.

I honestly laughed a little, thinking this bird was not very bright. However, I just shooed it out and closed the garage door, thinking a little adversity and the robin would go find a more suitable spot, a better direction for her life.

I went into the kitchen which is nearby the garage. I looked out the window and a robin was on a branch close to the window and was absolutely staring right at me, totally unafraid, chirping incessantly, clearly angry with me. Now I can't say this for certain but I am pretty confident this was my "garage robin."

So I had a little talk with her. Went like this. "Robin, I know what you are doing, the path you are taking, but it's not a good one. The nest won't work in the place you have chosen. It's going to lead to disaster. Go find a different

path, a different destination, for your life and family. I promise you will be better off."

Been thinking about how God had that same talk with me in my years of drinking and bad living. "Rick, this is not the path you want to be taking. Not the place you want to go. It's not good for you and those who love you. Find a different path, one that was meant for you, one that I created just for you. Not artificial and short term. One that has safety and good all around it." However, as with my robin friend, I didn't listen. More like, could not hear or understand what I was being told.

So back to the nest situation. I left for the day and forget to close the garage door. The robin returned and built a significant new nest in a matter of hours. Again, same place—on top of the garage door opener. No problem. I will insert my caring oversight and break

her will. I take a broom, knock down the nest and tell the bird again, "This is a very bad idea."

And guess what? Just like in my own self-willed drinking obsession—while friends, family and doctors were telling me that I really need to stop drinking—I continued down my path of destruction, totally unaffected by what my loved ones were trying to help me see. And, likewise, the robin just came back once again and started doing the same thing over once again, insanely.

Now I'm frustrated, feeling bad for the robin and wanting so much for her to just see that this was not good for her. Reminds me of how God must have felt when He was watching me do the same addiction thing repeatedly. Even when He sent messengers, signs, troubles to correct me, the only response He got was me shaking my fist and continuing to build my life nest on a road that would certainly end in destruction.

(continued on page 2)



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I sometimes have this thought that at some point God just put His head down and cried over this mess. He never wanted this to happen. It was not meant to be this way. It was only my misguided self-will and hard-headedness that was at the core of my problem—always seems to be at the core of my problems.

So the end has it that I once again knock the nest down and this time make sure I keep the garage door closed for a long period of time. The robin doesn't return. She has no alternative but to find another path. A power greater than herself has put an end to her self-will.

Same thing happened to me. God ended my self-destructive path. Got me to treatment through my wife, Susan. Sent me to AA to get sober and to build an understanding of His will for me and what that means in my life.

Today my "nest" is built on a strong foundation of God, AA, the 12 Steps, spirituality, fellowship and family. I am so grateful God kept knocking me down until I finally could see all of this.

A final thought on the subject of self-will. While the robin was trying to do her will, she was probably thinking, "I know this will work. I know my way is the right way. Why does this power keep blocking me, trying to send me in another direction? Why am I having so much trouble trying to do this my way? Maybe if I do it a little different, try a little harder, things will be different."

Sound familiar?

The Steps

BY JIM Z.

In the Sep-Oct 2011 issue of Here's How you asked for comments on the Steps, specifically which step made the greatest impact on me. Here goes.

Like many newcomers into AA, I did not grasp the program the first time around. In fact, I am sad to say, I had many relapses and spent four tours in treatment centers. The last time, I ended up in the hospital and was so sick the chaplain administered the last rites. When to everyone's surprise I did not die, I knew that I had to do something about my drinking.

Fortunately I still had friends in the AA fellowship and I was welcomed back. The first thing I did was get a sponsor, which I had never done before. He pointed out that I had not only two-stepped (gone from Step One to Step Twelve) but that I'd never worked the middle six steps. Sure I knew them by heart but I had not really worked them, at least not with heartfelt sincerity.

So this time I really took the program seriously and made a commitment to work each and every step with "all the earnestness at my command." And when I got to Step Four I made a thorough, moral inventory of myself in writing. With the help of my sponsor, I sought out a clergyman and did a very exhausting Fifth Step. Because of my near death experience, I knew I was entirely ready to have God remove my defects of character and on my knees I humbly asked Him to do so.

I had a hard time with Steps Eight and Nine because I still had the mistaken belief that, as long as I was not drinking, I could merely say I was sorry to the people I had offended. It took some time, and that is why these two steps should not be rushed into, for me to realize that making an amend required proving to those I had offended that I had really changed my life and the way I conducted myself. Amazingly, people saw the change in me and when I started to make amends, they were, with no notable exceptions, accepted by those I had harmed.

I also realized at this stage of my journey through the steps why I had not experienced the fulfillment of any of the promises. My earlier journeys did not include the middle six steps. It is only after Step Nine that we can have the audacity to think we may be worthy of the promises.

That was many twenty-four hours ago and since then I have attended innumerable meetings and sponsored many individuals. And the one thing that has become apparent to me is that those who go back to drinking have not worked the middle six steps. They, like me, were looking for the easier, softer way. When I attend meetings today and I hear a person talk about his relapse, I cringe when I hear fellow alcoholics say such things as: Oh, that's alright, many of us have done that, or Forget it, you're back now, and so forth. Understanding is fine but the person who relapses must be cautioned and reminded in no

"Step One: The Foundation of Recovery"

"Step Two: Coming to Believe"

"Step Three: Making a Decision"

"Step Four: Getting Honest"

"Step Five: Telling My Story"

"Step Six and Seven: Ready, Willing and Able"

"Step Eight: Preparing for Change"

"Step Nine: Repairing the Past"

"Step Ten: Maintaining My New Life"

"Step Eleven: Partnership with a Higher Power"

"Step Twelve: Carrying the Message"

The Steps We Took, published by August House. This is a book written by program member Joe McQ. of the "Joe and Charlie" tapes who shares his experience and methods of taking the Steps. The price is \$14.95.

Twelve Step Sponsorship—How It Works, published by Hazelden. Author and program member, Hamilton B. includes "Finding a Sponsor," "Being a Sponsor" and "Guiding the Sponsee through Each of the Twelve Steps." The price is \$14.95.

As a reminder to our members who may not be familiar, the fellowship of Area 19 has decided that we want our Bookstore to carry non-conference approved literature in addition to conference-approved literature. All non-conference approved literature sold in the CASO Bookstore is suggested by Area 19 members and reviewed by other program members voluntarily through the Area 19 Literature Committee. They use a set of review guidelines that ensure that all non-conference approved materials sold in the CASO Bookstore support Area 19's primary purpose—to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. If you are interested in volunteering to work on the Literature Committee, they hold their meetings at the Chicago Area Service Office on the first Wednesday every month from 7pm to 8pm. They would welcome your participation.



If you would like to know more about these materials, please visit the Bookstore located in the Chicago Area Service Office at 180 N Wabash, Suite 305, in downtown Chicago. Our hours of operation are 8am to 5:30pm, Monday–Friday. If you would like to order books and have them delivered, please call the Bookstore directly at (312) 346-8451 or send an e-mail to Bookstore@chicagoaa.org. Currently we do not have on-line ordering and e-books. We are working to make these available in the near future. If you have questions or concerns about this, please contact the Chicago Area Service Office at (312) 346-1475 for more information.

NEW BEGINNINGS

WE NEED TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS!

This is the time of year for new beginnings when people resolve to improve themselves and do better than they did in the preceding year. What are you going to do this year to live a more sober life? How will you be a better member of AA? Will you attend more meetings? Will you finally get a sponsor? Will you sponsor a newcomer? Will you take on a regular meeting as the secretary? Will you rework the Steps? Will you set aside a certain time each day for prayer and/or meditation?

Tell us what you have in mind and explain why you think this is a good (or important or necessary) idea. Share your message with the fellowship so we can all continue to grow together in sobriety and serenity.

Email: hereshow@chicagoaa.org with submissions. Or send us stories on any sobriety-related topic!

A Great Sponsor

BY MARK H.

I have a great sponsor. That's why I have sixteen years. My sponsor has guided me through the Program and, as busy as he sometimes gets, he makes time for me. He's helped me work and understand the Program.

He's also done additional things. On the coldest night of winter, he had tickets to the Evans Avenue banquet on the south side and I saw the oldest living AA member speak before he died. He helped me get a great guinea pig as a pet which I had for two years before he recently died because of the heat. He was there for me again and I was able to bury my dead pet next to one of his in his backyard. His 11-year old daughter made a sign for the deceased pet.

When he was at a motorcycle convention in Arizona, he saw a crazy t-shirt and thought of me. He got me the shirt. It's quite a conversation piece! He helped me move and store my art in another person's house. When that person could no longer keep my art, he helped me move the art to a storage bin.

I wish I could mention his name but I know this is an anonymous program. I sponsor two people now and he has taught me good ways to be a sponsor.

Sponsorship works!

Twelve Steps Materials in the CASO Bookstore

BY LAURA H., CASO BOOKSTORE CLERK AND AA MEMBER



My name is Laura H. I am the clerk of the Chicago Area Service Office (CASO) Bookstore. I come into contact with AA members from Area 19, the United States and many foreign countries. Some of these AAs have very precise practices in taking the Twelve Steps and some have very loose, conceptual ideas about them. Either way, a lot of recovering alcoholics come into our bookstore looking for materials on the Steps. The CASO Bookstore carries the following materials that deal specifically with one or more of the Twelve Steps.

Conference Approved: (materials published by AA World Services and the AA Grapevine)

Alcoholics Anonymous, published by AA World Services. This is the book that launched the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. It was written by co-founder Bill W and edited by the first 100 men and women of AA. Specific directions for working steps are found in the pages containing the "Doctor's Opinion" through "A Vision for You" and are peppered throughout the entire book. The price is \$8.00 for a hard cover, \$7.60 for a soft cover, \$4.00 for the pocket size and \$8.30 for a large print.

The Twelve Steps Illustrated, published by AA World Services. This pamphlet uses illustrations and very simple text to summarize each of the Twelve Steps. The price is thirty cents.

Step by Step—Real AAs, Real Recovery, published by AA Grapevine. This book shows how members of different ages, backgrounds and religious persuasions have recovered and found a new way of life by working the Twelve Steps. Here is a variety of AA experiences in dealing with the Steps and sent to the Grapevine over the course of its sixty-seven year existence. This book is \$10.95.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, published by AA World Services. Author and AA Co-founder, Bill W. expands his thoughts and shares his experiences on each of Twelve Steps. The price is \$7.40 for a hardcover, \$7.00 for a soft cover, \$5.50 for the pocket size and \$7.75 for a large print.

Non-Conference Approved: (any materials regarding recovery from alcoholism, NOT published by AA WorldServices and the AA Grapevine)

A Guide to the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, published by the Akron Intergroup Office. This pamphlet provides an explanation, in everyday language, of the underlying principals of AA. A simple, concise interpretation of the rules for sober living as compiled by the earliest members of AA. The price is seventy-five cents.

A Program for You—A Guide to the Big Book's Design for Living, published by Hazelden. This book "is a celebration of the basic text of Twelve Step recovery and breathes new life into the Big Book's timeless wisdom." Thoroughly annotated line and page, written to provide a contemporary context for understanding the Big Book. The price is \$14.95.

(This book also has three optional companion workbooks featuring information to reinforce important points in the AA Program. They are: **Living with your Higher Power, Steps 1-3; Living with Yourself, Steps 4-7; Living with Others, Steps 8-12.** These workbooks include

exercises for self-examination and disclosure, discussions and questions for each Step. Each workbook is sold individually at \$5.95 apiece.

A Woman's Way through the Twelve Steps, published by Hazelden, author, Stephanie S. Covington, Ph.D., is geared specifically to women. This book is an open exploration and a flexible interpretation of the Twelve Steps, taking into account the psychological development of women as it relates to addiction and recovery, as well as the social and cultural factors that affect women in particular, acknowledging issues for women--from questions about sexuality, relationships, and everyday life to anxieties about speaking up at mixed-gender meetings. This book is \$14.95. There is a workbook of the same title for \$13.95 and we have the set available for \$23.95.

Carry This Message—a Guide for Big Book Sponsorship, published by August House. Also written by Joe McQ. of the "Joe and Charlie" tapes, this emphasizes using the Big Book in working with others and introducing them to the Steps. The price is \$12.95.

Drop the Rock—Removing Character Defects—Steps Six and Seven, published by Hazelden, Authors Bill P., Todd W., Sara S. This book combines personal stories, practical advice and powerful insights to help readers move forward in their experience with Steps Six and Seven. The second edition features additional stories and a reference section. The price is \$13.95.

Hazelden Classic Step Pamphlets, published by Hazelden, various authors. Originally used by patients in recovery centers throughout the nation, these easy-to-read booklets are a way to gain a basic, and yet thorough, understanding of the significance of each Step. There are eleven pamphlets, each one priced at \$3.50.

uncertain terms that if he or she wishes to stay sober, those middle six steps are there for a reason.

So I guess you can say that I was a two stepper in my early attempts at sobriety. Sure I got sober, but the way I was working the program proved that I did not want to stay sober. Thank God for the many hard liners in the program who gave me no sympathy but taught and encouraged me to work each and every step.

Making Amends

BY P.M.

The Twelve Steps give us a way to repair and rebuild the past.

Do any of the following remarks sound familiar? "The one I hurt the most when I drank was myself." "When I wrote the list of people I had harmed, I put my name at the top of the list."

Those remarks turn up often in AA meetings when Steps Eight and Nine come up for discussion. However, like much of the conventional wisdom in our Fellowship, they have no connection at all with the AA Program.

Significantly, the Steps say nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. They say nothing about "making amends to myself." Nowhere is there talk about "forgiving myself." Far more to the point, the Twelve Steps provide me with specific instructions on a way to repair and rebuild the past so that I feel forgiven.

And that works!

Forgiveness is a commodity I heard about frequently in the religion of my youth—divine forgiveness, that is. To my growing despair, however, no one showed me how to experience forgiveness. I never learned how to feel forgiven. There was no method that would remove the growing load of guilt and acute discomfort I carried.

Believing in nothing by the time I arrived in AA, I heard, for the first time in my life, about "God as we

understood Him." With a nearly audible sigh of relief, I saw that nobody in AA argued about whose Higher Power was higher. My new friends said, "Just approach God on the basis of your understanding."

Moved by their interest and love, I began to live with a newfound hope and direction and slowly started to work with the Twelve Steps. A written inventory after a year of sobriety, then a Fifth Step, and I experienced an awareness of God that was new and strengthening. Halting efforts with Steps Six and Seven seemed to make some improvements in me. My relationships with God and with other people were on different ground, and my life was demonstrably better.

Waiting as long as I possibly could, I finally went from there into the amends Steps: Eight and Nine. Apologizing has never been my favorite activity. Rather, I've been influenced by the person who exclaimed, "I may have my faults, but being wrong is not one of them"

Pain, my most effective motivator, finally moved in and made the decision for me. I made a list of those I had harmed. In my opinion, that list should be written and should include everyone ever harmed, whether they are alive or dead, whether or not it is possible to find them, whether or not amends "would injure them or others." I think we should write the complete list first, and then begin deciding what to do in each case.

On the question of someone who deserves amends but can't be found, an AA friend of mine in Chicago has a precise answer. He asks, "If he owed you money, do you think you could find him?"

Early in my sobriety, I made a substantial production of looking up some people in other parts of the country to whom I owed money from my drinking years. I paid them and basked in their complimentary responses to the repayment. As with many things in my life, I created a mild tumult about this and managed to

mention it to most AA friends of mine, regardless of what we were discussing.

In making my amends list, however, I assiduously overlooked those who were close to me, those who had put up with me when no one else would, those who had bought me out of trouble, who had been shriveled by sarcasm, frightened by my anger and appalled at my complete lack of concern for anyone else. I was so busy "making amends to myself" and "being good to myself" that I ignored the most important amends of all.

Eventually, after two years of not drinking, I was unable to continue lying about my failure to work the program in this critical part of my life. Inner pain overpowered my talent for self-deception. I gave up, once again, and began to follow directions. With immense reluctance but with no other options, I made those amends and wonderful things began to happen. I started to experience the promises on pages 83 and 84 in the *Big Book*.

Another important change appeared. Where before I could pray but never quiet my thoughts for meditation, I could now sit still and meditate for twenty minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes at night. In a few months, this grew to half an hour in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening. Healing those relationships had dissolved a block that had prevented meditation.

While I might talk endlessly about my contact with God and my spiritual growth—and I frequently do—the best measurement for my relationships with God is the condition of my relationships with other human beings. If they're in bad shape, then my lofty spiritual talk is just empty conversation. At that point, what I need to do is repair my part in the damaged relationships. Without that my chances of growing closer to God are nil. It's all connected.

A *Big Book* discussion of amends (page 82) spells it out: "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way

through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough." (The emphasis is mine.) "He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, 'Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

Precise and specific, the message is clear. I don't make amends by staying sober. I hurt many other people badly and far worse than myself when I drank. Unfortunately, I've done this sober, too. Steps Eight and Nine are not limited to what I did while drinking. They are concerned with bad behavior, drunk or sober.

Nowhere In the AA program do we read that we're supposed to make amends to ourselves or put our names on the Eighth Step list. The program says nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. It simply guides us in the direction that enables us to feel forgiven. We experience forgiveness by using the Steps to make amends for the past. We are healed by our effort to repair the damage we caused others, and this, in turn, repairs the damage within us, damage created by our heedless, totally selfish actions.

We can change the past. The Twelve Steps give us a highly effective technique for rebuilding the past as we repair damage caused by our dishonest, self-centered living. It works. In my experience, the spiritual life has little to do with talk about God and everything to do with working the Steps. Each Step of the Twelve is equally spiritual.

Again and again, AA members sober for years and suffering from such symptoms as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom, and apathy lose those crippling conditions when they clean up the past. Time after time, AAs who have been unable to stay sober find the strength to refuse the

first drink as a result of rebuilding the past.

Through the wisdom of the program, we have a simple, powerful prescription for freeing ourselves from the consequences of dishonest, selfish living. It's simple and basic. Without this kind of cleaning job with the Steps, the past still controls us. On the other hand, when we face and admit our wrongs and make direct restitution wherever possible, we're suddenly free. With today no longer a hostage of yesterday, we begin to live with the freedom and joy God intended for us.

My Take On Sponsorship

ANONYMOUS

Early on in AA, I had developed my own idea of sponsorship. I don't know whether it was because I was in the fog that I was from day one of being dry and attending AA meetings, or whether the extremely helpful AA's that I had been introduced to were not talking sponsorship with me in those early days, or I simply was not listening to what was being said about sponsorship. So I made up my own definition. At first a sponsor was someone who could come up with the amount of money listed in the regional directory next to the meetings I wanted to attend. After I was made aware of how ridiculous that was (the dollar amounts shown in the directory were obviously the amount that that meeting had sent to GSO), I began to listen at AA meetings to determine what a sponsor was actually supposed to be. I then went on a search for several months for the perfect sponsor. After settling in on a few meetings where I started to get to know some AA's better from what they discussed at those meetings, I mentally made my selection. It still took a while before I actually approached the guy that I thought I would be compatible with. This guy was tall in stature, was well liked by many AA's and appeared to be sought after by several guys wanting him to be their sponsor. Finally the day came where I was going to approach him with my request. As

I approached the group he was in I overheard him say that he "...has way too many pigeons and didn't want any more". Darn! So not wanting to continue on without a sponsor I asked the guy standing next to my first choice and he agreed to be my first sponsor. Although after a while I didn't feel comfortable with this pick, I went and asked my first choice anyway. Even though I had been informally using him as my sponsor, it now became official with his saying he would be my sponsor. These two early sponsors have become like brothers over the last 32+ years. Even though they both had left town causing me to use up a few new sponsors, some of whom also left town, I continue to stay in touch with them. And now the guy who became my first sponsor by default is back in town. So we have more face to face time.

In the beginning, my early sponsors helped me to learn the steps. They listened to my whining about my failing marriage. They supported me when my marriage ended about 8 years into being an AA. And they have also provided direct advice when requested, so I could sort things out and hopefully make a better decision on how to proceed. But when I was clearly continuing to exercise my defects, they put in the barrel until I could eventually see the error of my ways. All of my sponsors have taught me something. They have all been good friends. Some are still around. Others have passed on and are missed.

None of my sponsors have demanded that I do a step their way. They have shared their experiences with the steps and as a result provided guidance but no demands. I hear of these sponsor demands more and more nowadays. Sponsors are taking their sponsees through the steps in a whirlwind weekend. Sponsors are now instructing their sponsees not to speak at meetings. It bothers me to no end when an AA meeting attendee says "my sponsor told me that I should pass". Ugh!!! Many of these sponsor driven passers don't seem to listen as a result. And I see many of them

When we embrace Tradition Seven and decline outside contributions, we take on the responsibility of paying our bills from your generous contributions and those of your group. This is a responsibility that every member of the Fellowship shares. Your generous contributions make up our budget. We need your support to ensure the telephones are answered, the doors stay open, and we carry on our mission to facilitate Twelfth Step work.

If you have \$9 in your pocket, you can help to supply a Big Book and a meeting directory for your group. If we have \$9, we can supply a Big Book and a meeting directory to those who have yet to hear this great message of hope.

To cut expenses we are doing away with our answering service. We therefore need your help to answer the telephones. Service work has saved my life, initially as a recipient and today as a trusted servant. We have telephone shifts that are unfilled due to a lack of volunteers. Can you imagine that? We don't have enough AA members to fill our telephone shifts. We need your precious time to ensure there is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous speaking the language of the heart, just like someone did for you.

I am forever grateful for your support to office and area. Without your support we could not exist. We depend on you and members of your group. With just \$50.00 you can make a difference in the lives of many. But any amount is a tremendous blessing. Help us make this annual Thanksgiving Appeal successful. Help us carry on the work of our founders who opened this office in May 1941.

"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

I want to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to the hundreds of volunteers who do this important work. I salute you, the staff of volunteers, for the many tireless hours spent on the "front lines" of Alcoholics Anonymous—one alcoholic talking to another. This simple concept of one-to-one sharing is the spiritual heart of every service we provide. I am forever grateful to you for giving us your valuable time.

I would like to remind us all that it's not about money. Yes, it takes money to pay the bills, keep the coffee flowing and literature distributed; but most importantly, it is about all of us together embracing a common solution, a "way of life," that ensures alcoholics like you and me a place at the table in this wonderful Fellowship, Alcoholics Anonymous.

But this God-given freedom from bondage is not free. It requires each member to actively participate in AA by tirelessly giving of oneself to others in the hope that one day they too will enjoy freedom. By actively participating in our recovery, we help those we are blessed to sponsor discover our spiritual way of life. By actively participating in our Home Group, being in service, not sitting on the sidelines letting others do the work, we strengthen our sobriety. By actively participating in our local services, the Chicago Area Service Office and the Area, we participate in the worldwide responsibility to ultimately ensure that when "anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, the hand of AA will always be there." Yes, it starts and finishes with me. I am an AA member and I must assume the responsibility that has been entrusted to me by our founders. And so it is for you.

Clearly, if we do our part and encourage others to actively participate in the AA Fellowship, we need not worry about where our resources will come from. It will materialize. We can rely upon it. Celebrating the Seventh Tradition is simply expressing the need for a given service and, once the need is clear, the necessary support is received. Through simple, straight-forward and consistent communications, we lovingly remind the groups that their office and services belong to them. You are the members and the rightful owners of Alcoholic Anonymous.

I hope we can count on your help. I am deeply grateful for your support of the Chicago Area Service Office. Please send the most generous gift you can as soon as possible. Because people like you have always supported the work of the Central Service Office, I heard the message of AA and have been able to experience the promises as outlined in the text *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Your donation can help the next person in need. It will only take a minute and it will help forever!

WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE,
LAURA N.G., OFFICE MANAGER

**The names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the living members of the fellowship.*





Dear Friends of Bill,

I am deeply touched by the number of people I have recently encountered who made their first call for help to your AA office. A few weeks ago I met Joan* in Arizona. She heard I was from Chicago and introduced herself. She told me how hopeless she was when she called the office on January 4, 1965. She spoke with an AA member who found someone to Twelve Step her and has been sober since. This chance encounter filled me with gratitude and a quiet sense of honor, commitment and love for what I do here at your Chicago Area Service Office.

The idea that this is a family disease is backed up with this story. On February 14, 1975 Kirk* was sent to the AA office, at that time located on the 19th floor of the Engineering Building on Wacker Drive, to pick up material for his father's AA meeting (spiritual trickery). Little did he know what was about to happen. He did what his father did and many others do when approaching the office for the first time. He looked around to see if anyone was watching, then looked at the building directory. He went up to the 19th floor, again looked around before checking the floor directory to find the office. As he approached the door, he heard typewriters, laughing and people on the phone. The office had green desks and linoleum flooring; then he saw her... Sylvia K our first female AA member in Chicago.

"Young man can I help you?"

Kirk replied, "I have a problem."

Sylvia said, "We're in the problem business. Have a seat. We'll talk about it."

She called Bob H. to Twelve Step him. She had done the same for Kirk's dad, Edward*, when he'd called FINancial-1475 on July 14, 1959 and asked for help. Bob asked Kirk to find him at a meeting. Kirk nervously walked into the meeting and a woman greeted him, "You look new here. Don't be afraid, we're all alcoholics." She spoke the language of the heart as she extended her hand to the newcomer. Thus started his journey in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Kirk's kids, Mason* and Erica*, are sober too. Mason found AA in 1996 and Erica came in a few years later in 2008. Among them they have 110 years of sobriety. That is a living example of a power greater than ourselves.

We cannot do this alone. Up to now we have been able to carry on this legacy which was entrusted to us because of people like you who care enough to support our important work. Will we be here if the next generation needs us?

That's why I'm writing to you today. I am continuing the tradition of requesting a gratitude contribution at Thanksgiving, which began in 1952, and reaching out to you, the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, to help us carry the message.

This appeal is part of our annual budget. Our goal is to raise \$58,000. Due to your generous support, in years past we have been able to meet this goal. This year might be different. We realize that everyone has been affected by the economic times. Unfortunately, we are not exempt. Currently we are reporting a loss of \$97,853. Of that amount \$52,445 is a decrease in bookstore sales.

As a result we are working on serving you better by creating an on-line bookstore and a new website. We expect this to be live by the end of the year. A way to support your Area and CASO is to buy your AA literature and meeting materials here. Who knows? You may need materials for your meeting or have a family member who happens to work in the area and may need to come see us. Just like Frank's son Kirk did thirty-six years ago.

continue to have problems that lead them back to alcohol. I have voiced this on a number of occasions at AA meetings. Most of the time to no avail it seems. I can understand a sponsor having a sponsee take the cotton from their ears and putting it in their mouths. But not having cotton in both. And, I strongly believe that no matter what the topic is at a given AA meeting, and no matter which step is being discussed, that if a sponsee is having problems of a nature that could lead them back to a drink they should be given the green light to share the problem with the group, therefore splitting that problem up with the other AAs which should steer that sponsee further away from the thoughts of taking that first drink. I have seen those continuing to have trouble staying alcohol free also say that that they have been coming to AA for 10, 15, ... years but now are back. Welcome back, I say. But I can't stomach their words of many years of AA wisdom being expounded on the group when they are still struggling. Okay, share your experiences, strength and hope but don't lecture the group as though you are an AA expert.

I am sure none of the above is original. It's been heard and shared I am sure at many an AA meeting. But that's my take as I continue to learn a better way of living without alcohol as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The All Chicago Open (ACO)

The All Chicago Open (ACO) is an annual event, sponsored by CASO, celebrating the first AA meeting in Chicago, September 20, 1939. This year's gathering was the 72nd annual celebration, attended by over 10,000 AAs at the UIC Pavilion. Always a powerful experience, Bev B. and Chris E. report on last year's Open.

All Chicago Open: A Personal View

BY BEVERLY B.

When I enter a venue where thousands of people are gathered, I often feel a little lonely and lost. Entering the ACO last Saturday night felt like coming

home to a very, very large family. The familiar look of real happiness and contentment on the faces was very comfortable and exciting. I wondered how many of us would still be alive today if we had not found the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

There were elder statesmen and women with decades of recovery whose presence showed that gatherings of this kind never get old. The excitement renewed our spirits and seeing the faces of the newcomers reminded us of the importance of remaining faithful in our attendance and service to this program so it will be available for the generations to come.

For a newcomer it gave the assurance that we are indeed not "a glum lot" but exchange plenty of laughter and love. There was a warm welcome for each new member and at least four people to shake his or her hand as they entered the auditorium.

My only disappointment was the difficulty in hearing due to the PA system echoing. Thanks to everyone who gave of themselves to make the ACO a success. God bless you!

All Chicago Open: A Personal View

BY CHRIS E.

Though I've been in the program for many years, this was my first time attending the All Chicago Open. The scale of the meeting was truly impressive. I've been to numerous concerts and programs at the UIC Pavilion in the past so I'm familiar with the crowd volume, but I had to keep reminding myself that all these people were fellowship members and friends. There was a sense of unity that I've not felt in any other large group gathering. I kept running into friends I know from completely unrelated meeting circles and that was really wonderful.

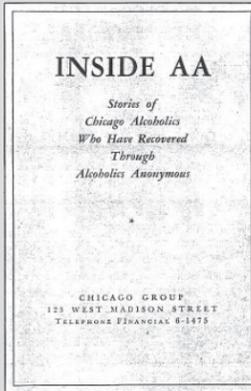
We found seats near the main floor and I went to check out the vendors and displays. I was particularly impressed with the Archives area, including a panel display showing a letter "discussion" between Ann

Landers and various AA office holders that went on for a couple of years in the early 80's. There was also an excellent Chicago AA History slide-show presentation that ran continuously on the big screen behind the stage with lots of locally-related points of interest I had been unaware of.

When the actual meeting began, I felt a combination of familiarity and surrealism; the format was the same as any average meeting with five members, but this was in an arena attended by thousands and it was a bit breath taking! My only complaint about the whole evening was the sound system which was battling the obvious challenges of stadium acoustics. It was very difficult to hear everything said from the stage in our seats. About halfway through, we went to the balcony where the sound was markedly clearer and my appreciation for the event improved proportionately.

I found both of the featured speakers, Brian and Beth, to be excellent. Well-spoken stories and inspirational personal thoughts; they both had great things to say and had very smooth deliveries. For those newly sober, this meeting provided a huge amount of support and the reassurance that there are many folks in the same boat. Seeing the obvious pleasure of many who were meeting fellowship friends and acquaintances, some after a long separation, also instilled a sense of long-term bonding and common spirit. Long-timers were there in abundance, of course, and being there with so many of them was very inspirational. (Fifty-plus years? Wow!) Those in the program for longer periods found a renewed sense of purpose in seeing so many other like-minded people coming together to share their common goals of sobriety, spirituality, and unity.

The first planning session for the 2012 ACO will meet at the CASO office, January 19th at 7pm. Volunteers to help out are welcome to attend. Come join us!



The More Things Change...

The stories presented here were first told to a reporter, himself a member of AA, as part of a series of articles published in the Chicago Daily News in February, 1950. They were then republished as the AA pamphlet *Inside AA*. Though some of the facts, figures and language in the articles may seem a bit dated, the stories themselves ring eerily true to what many of us hear in the Rooms today.

Here's How will be republishing these stories over the coming months. We thank the Chicago AA Archives Committee for their collaboration. We hope you enjoy *Inside AA*.

By the way, if you dial the phone number on the cover of the pamphlet, your call will still be answered by the Chicago Area Service Office.

The Alcoholic Salesman

"We're one drink from being drunkards."

That's a favorite saying among the 4,000 Chicago men and women who are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. It seems obvious that if a person doesn't take the first drink, he'll never get drunk. But, there's an obsession – and AAs will say that word is not too strong – among alcoholics that someday, somewhere, somehow they'll be able to drink in a controlled manner.

There's the story of Walter, a Chicago executive.

"I got into selling in my early 20's. Older salesmen in my firm, checking out at the end of the day or after a sales meeting, liked to stop for a few drinks. I thought it was the thing to do.

"I went along pretty well for some years. I married.

"We weren't lucky enough to have any kids and sometimes, in the later days, my wife used to wonder if things might have been different if we had had a family. I don't think so.

"Better accounts began to come my way. I was making more money. I was drinking more, but I was doing a good business and the firm didn't seem to mind.

"When my wife objected I gave her the old routine – it's standard among alcoholic salesmen, I've since discovered – about the valuable contacts made, the friendships cemented, the orders closed over a drink.

"Then a few more years and my drinking increased and my accounts began to slip. I was beginning to miss appointments. I was showing up at my customers' offices pretty well charged up. Word got back to my firm.

"The salesmanager called me in and talked to me in a fatherly fashion. He was a kid I had broken into the business 10 years before.

"The resentment I got when he was chosen salesmanager and I was passed up hadn't cut my drinking either.

"I made the usual promises and for a couple of months I watched my step. Then, little by little, I drifted back.

"Again he called me. Again I promised. He called me for the third time less than a month later.

"This, he told me, was the last chance. I had in years past done a good job for the firm.

"He personally, he said, owed a lot to me for the help I had given him in his early days, but the management was aware of what was going on and he couldn't carry me unless I straightened out.

"The new promises lasted just three months. I was called into the president's office. I was given the courtesy of being fired by the president instead of by the salesmanager.

"Well, I was a big-shot salesman. I couldn't take the first job that came along. I was in an upper bracket.

"What little money a fellow salvages from being fired soon went, too much of it for whisky.

"One day my wife got a job. That hurt my pride, but it didn't hurt it enough for me to quit drinking.

"I began drifting along the streets in which our business was centered. For a while I was good for a five or a ten dollar bill when I ran into old friends in the business. That didn't last too long.

"It's funny how fast a man on the make for money for whisky can descend the ladder, can resort to cadging half dollars and quarters.

"The little money my wife made just got us by for rent and food.

"One day I thought I had struck it lucky. I ran into a fellow who used to be in our line of business in Chicago. He had gone West, made a lot of money and was back in town for a little business and a celebration.

"He wanted a drinking companion and I volunteered for the job. We bounced around town, flitting from hotel to hotel for a week.

"He woke up one morning, decided he had had enough, and he told me the party was over.

"I went home. It had certainly been luck running into him. Yes. Oh, yes. When my wife came in that evening, I expected fireworks.

"Instead she just looked at me – it must have been for two or three minutes and then she said, almost in a whisper:

"Your mother died the day you disappeared. We held the funeral while everybody in the family hunted you. Then we gave up. She was buried yesterday.'

"You'd think that a thing like that would shock a man into sobriety. Well, it did. After I'd been dry four months, I even got back with my old firm – not a good job but still a fair selling job. I stayed sober for two years.

"Then one day I got thinking that maybe I could handle the stuff. After all, dry two years, that showed will power, that showed that I could take it or leave it alone.

"I did pretty well for three weeks. Then one night I got really drunk, couldn't make it to the office next day. That scared me and I went back on the wagon.

"For three months I didn't touch a drop. Meanwhile, I'd done a lot of thinking. The thing to do I decided was to drink only in spots where I wouldn't run into anybody I knew, then I could run along after a drink or two.

"It took me 10 days this time to discover that wasn't the answer either – I could get drunk alone or with strangers just as easily as with friends.

"I was moping to the office one morning when I ran into an old drinking companion. But he was changed.

"He was swinging along like a kid and when he stopped to talk, he looked better than I'd ever seen him.

"I remarked about it. 'The answer,' he said, 'is Alcoholics Anonymous. They tell me you're nibbling again.'

"A fellow may think his drinking is secret. It's about as secret, I've since found out, as a Grant Park band concert.

"But I put up a front. 'I can handle the stuff,' I said. 'I was on the wagon two years.'

"Until you took that first drink,' he said.

"We made a date for lunch that day. He hammered away about that first drink – the one drink from being a drunkard; that it's not the 20th drink that gets you into trouble, but the first.

"When I finally accepted the idea about the first drink, I was ready for the full course of sprouts in AA.

"That was more than nine years ago. The job I have is the best job I ever had in my life. I laugh when I think that I was once disappointed over the sales manager's job with my old firm.

"The thing that sold me, and I've stayed sold, is: 'We alkie's are all one drink from being drunkards.'" •

Liquor Song

BY LAURA H.

(sung to the tune of "If I Had a Hammer")

*When I had some liquor
I drank it in the morning
I drank it in the evening
Even on the can
I drank away danger
I drank away warning
I drank away the love from my
brothers and my sisters
And got hassled by the MAN*

*Then I found a Big Book
I read it in the morning
I read it in the evening
In my minivan (where I was living)
It talked of danger
It called out warning
It spoke of amending to my brothers
and my sisters
All over this land!*

*I got a sponsor
She met me in the morning
She met me in the evening
We prayed in the can
I got out of danger
I heeded warning
I gained back the love from my
brothers and my sisters
All over this land!*

*So you're a sponsor
You see I'm in hell
Can I get that book from you?
I don't feel so well
I need those 12-Steps
I need some freedom
I need back the love between my
brothers and my sisters
And even the Man!*