

# HERE'S HOW

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## Spirituality

### *Holding Hands*

Anonymous

A lot of the meetings that I attend here in Chicago have a little tradition that I really love. As the meeting ends, everyone joins hands, and says a prayer together. Sometimes the Lord's Prayer, sometimes the Serenity Prayer. Not having a ton of experience, I'm unsure how prevalent this practise is in other cities.

On numerous occasions, I've been struck by this simple act, and it's come to hold special meaning to me. times that it's moved me, it's as if the Fellowship of AA is forming a protective barrier around itself, a statement of unity, and community. With our backs to the rest of the world, and our faces towards each other, speaking in unison, I become a part of the whole, just one of many, interdependent on my fellows.

It strikes me that this is a statement that has currency in the spiritual realm, consolidating and reinforcing the events of that particular meeting. Later, walking out of the meeting, I'm left with the feeling that progress has somehow been marked, a milestone passed. This feeling gives me the ability to head out into the world at large with renewed confidence, faith, hope, and peace.

Thank you AA for walking with me into the uncharted future of sobriety.

### *More Than We Can Handle*

Anonymous

There's an axiom: "God won't give you more than you can handle."

It's often used to quiet the nerves of overburdened people, a religious opiate essentially saying that you are in good hands.

Underneath that placation, however, is a more aggressive message, a call to action, basically demanding that we stop complaining about our burden. Buck up, God won't give you more than you can handle.

When you think about it, most of what we can or cannot handle are people. The other big categories, places and things, are fairly finite. For example, a thing you must handle: cancer. A place you must handle: prison. But mostly we are talking about people; a boss, a neighbor, a child, a parent, a roommate, and so on. These are the burdens that threaten to break our backs.

Certain people assert power over us, often cruelly. Everyone has a story about an evil boss or client. In those cases we must submit to abuse in order to preserve our livelihood. Maybe. But why do we give so many many other people the power to disturb us? A neighbor parks his car on your lawn, over and over again. It's wrong. It's obvious. Yet you agonize over telling him for fear he'll take it poorly. After all, he wouldn't be parking that way if he knew it was wrong. Therefore, the neighbor must perceive his actions to be acceptable. Under these circumstances, your telling him otherwise would be interpreted as aggressive and petty.

Nonsense! There are no "circumstances". You have built a story in your head based on fear (he'll get mad), and insecurity (I'm being petty). In other words, you have given him power over you!

*To AA and Bill Wilson*

Author unknown

We died of pneumonia in

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furnished rooms where they found us three days after when somebody complained about the smell.

We died against bridge abutments and nobody knew if it was suicide and we probably didn't know either except in the sense that it was always suicide.

We died in hospitals, our stomachs huge, distended and there was nothing they could do.

We died in cells, never knowing whether we were guilty or not. We went to priests, they gave us pledges, they told us to pray, they told us to go and sin no more, but go. We tried and we died.

We died of overdoses, we died in bed (but usually not the Big Bed). We died in straitjackets, in the DT's seeing God knows what, creeping, skittering, slithering, and shuffling things. And you know what the worst thing was? The worst thing was that nobody ever believed how hard we tried.

We went to doctors and they gave us stuff to take that would make us sick when we drank on the principle of "so crazy, it just might work," I guess, or maybe they just shook their heads and sent us to places like Drop kick Murphy's. And when we got out we were hooked on paraldehyde or maybe we lied too. And the doctors and they told us not to drink so much, just drink like me. And we tried, and we died.

When we were desperate enough or hopeful or deluded or embattled enough to go for help, we went to people with letters after their names and prayed that they might have read the right books, that had the right words in them, never suspecting the terrifying truth, that the right words, as simple as they were, had not been written yet.

We died in convulsions, or of "insult to the brain," we died incontinent, and in disgrace, abandoned. If we were women, we died degraded, because women have so much more to live up to. We tried and we died and nobody cried.

And the very worst thing was that for every one of us that died, there were another hundred of us, or another thousand, who wished that we could die, who went to sleep praying we would not have to wake up because what we were enduring was intolerable and we knew in our hearts it wasn't ever going to change.

One day in a hospital room in New York City, one of us had what the books call a transforming spiritual experience, and he said to himself "I've got it" (no, you haven't, you've only got part of it) "and I have to share it." (Now you've ALMOST got it) and he kept trying to give it away, but we couldn't hear it. We tried and we died.

We died of one last cigarette, the comfort of its glowing in the dark. We passed out and the bed caught fire. They said

we suffocated before our body burned, they said we never felt a thing, that was the best way maybe that we died, except sometimes we took our family with us.

And the man in New York was so sure he had it, he tried to love us into sobriety, but that didn't work either, love confuses drunks and he tried and we still died.

One after another we got his hopes up and we broke his heart, because that's what we do. And the worst thing was that every time we thought we knew what the worst thing was something happened that was worse.

Until a day came in a hotel lobby and it wasn't in Rome, or Jerusalem, or Mecca or even Dublin, or South Boston, it was in Akron, Ohio, for Christ's sake.

A day came when the man said I have to find a drunk because I need him as much as he needs me (NOW you've got it). And the transmission line, after all those years, was open. And now we don't go to priests, and we don't go to doctors and people with letters after their names.

We come to people who have been there, we come to each other. And we try. And we don't have to die.

Stay connected, I need you!

### *The Mistress Alcohol*

by Matt S.

With a little over twenty-five years of marriage, I've always considered myself a loyal and faithful husband to my wife as well as a father to my children. But was I really? When it came to alcohol, the answer was absolutely, inequitably NOT!

Like a mistress who began as just an acquaintance, alcohol seduced me. Before I knew it, I was completely hooked on "one night stands" of drinking, which soon turned into every night stands, depleting me of any "moral" ability to restrain myself. I was all too soon willing to lie and excuse my behavior, as this once "acquaintance" began stealing away my love for my wife and family.

Just like with real infidelity in a marriage, the secrecy was at first "exhilaratingly" fun and adventurous, as I snuck into my garage to be with my new companion, who "really understood" me. I became obsessed with it's company, and soon, before I knew it, I would do anything to be near it. It took over my thoughts daily, as I neglected anything and everything in preparation to be with it.

As the years passed, nothing else mattered except to meet

my mistress's daily wishes with reckless abandon. The distance from all that used to matter to me, continued to grow as consequently did the excuses for continuing the charade. I was caught up in a destructive "fatal attraction" relationship without a clue how to end it.

As it continued, I felt the real guilt, and the real remorse that real infidelity should cause. I tried desperately, to cover my tracks and remain undetected. Soon, the guilt and remorse were replaced with fear. I feared, like a jealous mistress, alcohol would take all that I had. It would expose our relationship to the world, and ruin me. I felt dirty, right down to my very soul. I hated what I had become, and as far as I felt, nothing stood lower on this earth than me. At this point, the "fun" was long gone, and with each reluctant rendezvous with the bottle, I held in contempt, the reflection I now saw in the mirror, as the image I held for myself was vanishing quickly. It was surely going to destroy me, if I didn't take action...and soon!

Finally, on a night of absolute drunken despair, I hit my knees, and begged God for forgiveness, and a way out. I awoke the next day, and was hit immediately with the way out, a total "leap of faith" that would lead me through the doors of AA. I realized that leap would have to include a complete moral inventory of truth and honesty in order to be set free of this relationship's power over me. I had to take the chance, the "leap of faith" my loved ones would understand; I was an alcoholic!

Today the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, along with my Higher Power (God), have restored me to the husband and father I originally set out to be. Though not perfect, and at times extremely far from it, I continue to be "spiritual progress" in slow motion. But it's millennia from where I was, just a few short years ago. I have the Program today, that enables me to live life, not to be condemned to it, as if it were a sentence. It has taught me life can be lived to it's intended fullness, so long as you accept it on it's intended time line..."One Day At A Time".

### *The Winds of Change*

From Akron Intergroup News

The winds of alcoholism blew steadily through my life for 31 years. They propelled me through many tough times brought on by alcoholism. When the wind that lifted this alkie wings blew it swatted me straight to the ground. Time after time the winds blew and my life steadily became one disaster after another. Never did I once ask myself if I should stop drinking; it was a given that I would

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

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drink. The winds made sure of it. Now did I ever wonder why life was so difficult for me, or so it seemed. I was clueless about the winds of alcoholism and how they will blow away every dream you ever had. In my drinking years they blew away opportunities, people who loved me, jobs, schooling, everything that could have made my life a little easier.

When I got sick of being sick, I was granted peace. That is, the wind quit blowing and I was able to recognize a little hope. Was there really some hope that I could live a better life? I was assured by some ex-drunks that there was hope if my winds had indeed quit blowing drinking into my every waking hour. What a relief I felt when the wind finally did quit blowing.

“Ain’t it grand”, they would ask me. I didn’t know what they were talking about. Only when I put down the drink once and for all did that horrible wind stop blowing. And, then all hell broke loose!

Sure, I was greatly relieved that the obsession and craving had been lifted from me. But after a few months of recovering physically, I had to ask why there were so many people crammed into my head - you know, the committee.

The committee would start as soon as my eyes opened in the morning and wouldn’t let up until I drifted off to a restless sleep every night in my early sobriety. I became desperate to stop it and, thank God, I did not become desperate enough to take another drink. The only reason for my not returning to the drink was that I was surrounded by good AA members. I felt safe around them. After all, they assured me that they had been just like I was and that they had become whole for the first time in their lives once their winds stopped blowing. But they cautioned me that just because the wind quit blowing, I was not going to live a perfect life. First I had to address the committee. The only way, they said, to get rid of all those troublesome thoughts was to pray them away; use my prayers as a shield against unwanted thoughts, they told me.

So I began a life of prayer, for the winds blew hard at this point. They wanted me back. I can honestly say that prayer, plus surrounding myself with good AA’s, vanquished the winds once and for all. Prayer was my weapon against the wind of alcoholism. Then, and only then, was I able to begin the journey to wholeness.

In the beginning, it seemed like I was an endless mess. I shook all the time, my job was in jeopardy, I drove the typical alcoholic car (not sure if it would start or continue to run long enough to get me home from a meeting), all my family relationships were in the dumpster, and so on and so on. The winds had quit blowing, and I saw the work ahead.

I was told by the people I surrounded myself with that they would help me with all my problems and that all I had to do was to build my prayer life and stay close to them. And I did cling to them like my very life depended on it. It did. First came the association with a group of good AA’s, then came a solid prayer life, then came the Steps.

It was a simple formula for recovery and they walked me through each phase of this journey, holding my hand lest I become too afraid. I have not found it necessary to seek out the wind of alcoholism for a long time now.

The winds of change gently blow through my life on a daily basis now and I welcome them with prayers of thanks.

### *Carry the Message*

This is a great topic, and one I hope a lot of people have experience with. When I was new an old-timer said he wasn’t sure about the line some people crossed from normal into alcoholic drinking, that wasn’t his experience. He then said but there is a line I can tell you about I know exists in AA, and that is the line from a taker to a giver, and if we don’t cross that line in AA, we lessen our chances of sobriety.

That line stuck with me and scared me, scared me enough to walk over to newcomers, and have enough faith that I actually had something to carry. Leaving AA and going back to where I came from was much scarier than going up to some stranger and sticking my hand out, and welcoming them into AA. After doing this enough, I began to feel like a useful member of AA. Then as I began to watch some of them get better, and their lives changed. I began to actually see how much I had changed in my own life, and began to fall in love with AA.

I have continued to make sure I say hello and welcome every newcomer that comes into my home group, I don’t wait or assume someone else will do it, I do it myself. I don’t hang out and talk with my friends and say “I’ll get to him later or at the break”. I already have my friends number I can call them at any time. I may never get a chance to say hello to this particular person again. This again reminds me of a story another old-timer use to tell. She talked about walking down the beach and there were thousands of starfish washed up on the beach, and she noticed a man picking them up one at a time and throwing them back into the ocean. She went to him and said



“Why are you doing this, there are thousands of starfish out here, and what possible difference could it make?” He leaned over and picked a starfish up, and said “All the difference in the world to this one.” I never know which person I may help, so I better try to help as many as I see. Just look at the history of AA. I doubt Ebby ever realized what him going to visit Bill would create in this world.

I was still young in AA and had a lot to still learn about carrying the message, what I learned was that AA asked me to share my experience with that newcomer. Don't get me wrong I am a Southside Irish kid, so I have opinions galore, usually etched in concrete, but I can scare away many a newcomer by sharing my opinion. We all have opinions which are shaped out of our experiences, but I have made many an enemy by not being open to the fact that someone else's experience is different from mine, along with their opinion. Just think about in the heat of a pennant or playoff race you're talking to a newcomer, and you express your hatred of either the White Sox, or the Cubs, and he happens to be a fan of the team you are not, he will hear nothing else you say, he will just be waiting to escape your presence, or you criticize or say mean spirited things about a politician they happen to agree with. Or talk about a medication he or someone in his family is taking. I have ruined many chances to help someone over sharing my opinions. My opinions about, God, religion, medication, sexuality, political identification, relationships, legal matters, are all things that make me different from you. The more differences I can find between us to more I can discount something you say, that I really need to do.

My mother was the person who introduced me to AA, she got sober when I was very young. Years later when I got sober, I fell into a group of AA people I felt comfortable with, but they were very different from the people my mother got sober around-- in fact my mother's friends would often complain and make fun of my acquaintances in AA. My mom remained silent, and this silence saved my life. Had she spoke out tome about my friends in AA, I would have done one of two things, either hated her for it, and ruined our relationship, or left AA over it, again ruining our relationship. I don't have the only way to sobriety within AA, every ones experience in life is exactly what God has for them. Even though my mother's approach, and my uncles approach, and mine were all very different to AA, we all got the same result, sobriety. We all became useful members of society, helped a lot of people, and became examples of Alcoholics Anonymous, but we all did it a little different, but all got the same result. Just think of the arrogance it must

take to declare your sobriety better than someone else's, after hearing that we would all know your humility isn't superior to anyone else's. I never know what God has in store for that brand new person, or which way his life will take him, I just have to remember to be helpful is our only goal.

When carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous, which for me is simply my story, and the hope someone may get from it, that they may say to themselves “Maybe this can work for me”. I often try to remember part of Dr. Bob's last talk in which he said: “Let us also try to guard that erring member, the tongue; and if we must use it, let's use it with kindness and consideration, and tolerance. And one more thing, none of us would be here today if somebody hadn't taken the time to explain things to us; to give us a little pat on the back; to take us to a meeting or two; to have done numerous little kind and thoughtful acts on our behalf. So, let us never get that degree of smug complacency so that we're not willing to extend, or attempt to, that help which has been so beneficial to us, to our less fortunate brothers. Thank You.

### *Accepting It The Way It Is*

I'm a member of AA who got introduced to AA by the mercy of God. I came around the rooms of AA in 1985 sick and tired of the life I was living. I was drinking one day and watching TV. I heard on the TV “This is your brain on drugs.” I said to the TV man “I don't believe that, ain't nothing wrong with me.” I found myself walking down sixty-first street trying to get drunk. I didn't think I had a problem. Period.

Started making meetings. My mind was so messed up from that mental beat down and delusional mind seeing monsters and crying all the time at meetings. Later on in time things started changing. I soon created five years of sobriety. Just making meetings wasn't enough. I had to get involved with the program. Getting a sponsor, making a beginning on the steps. Most of all applying them in your life every day on a regular basis. To anyone who's new or old: Don't stop doing what works. Practice working the program and the program will grow on you. Staying focused on the principles behind the steps never gives that lurking notion a chance in your thought life.

AA works! It truly does. Thank my God from above for saving me again. Now I'm doing what God intended me to do.



## CASO Corner

By Geoff C.

Hey there Chicago AAs. I hope your spring is full of sunshine and hope for the future. Your Chicago Area Service Office is humming along early in the year and things are busier than ever. Our volunteers are taking 12-Step Calls from the still suffering alcoholic and the staff is making sure the Office is here to serve the Chicago Fellowship.

If you don't know me, my name is Geoff and I am an alcoholic. I am also currently your Group and Fellowship Services Coordinator at CASO. That is a long title that includes a long list of responsibilities. Some of my work includes acting as the Chicago Area 19's Registrar which means I register new groups and GSRs in our database and update our information with the General Service Office in New York. I am in constant communication with the committees and districts in our Area to make sure their needs are met. One of the more visible aspects of my job is publishing the three directories we distribute every year. Not only do I want you to know about my role at the Office, but I also want to bring a few things to your attention.

Every year we hold an annual "Spring Thing" to show our appreciation for the volunteers who give up their valuable free-time to do a little service work at CASO. This year's party was May 15th and was a raging success. Our usual mass quantities of delectable AA coffee and soda flowed, and we ordered pizzas for attendees. We had a great time. If you were not there, you were missed and we want you to be there next year. Just come down to CASO and volunteer on the phones or help out in the Bookstore.

As a result of our Group Contact Mailing last year, we had many groups removed from the directory because their contacts did not respond. Please check the new May 2010 directories and make sure your group is included. If it is not, call me at the Office and we can look into it. So you can beat the rush, the deadline for the September directories will be August 16. Submit your group changes to me before that date.

There is so much to look forward to this year. After the International Conference in Toronto in 2005, I am unbelievably excited for this year's in San Antonio. Of course the All Chicago Open is in September 11, so stay tuned for service opportunities in the next few months. September is also the month for our Area Trusted Servant elections at the Area Assembly. If you want to get in touch with me for these or any other reasons, you may call me at CASO at (312) 346-1475 or e-mail me [groupservices@chicagoaa.org](mailto:groupservices@chicagoaa.org). There is quite a bit to get excited about and I hope to see you at all of these events. Until then, enjoy the season of beach meetings and sober bar-b-ques.

## Questions Corner

**Q: What is the story behind the Circle and Triangle logo?**

**A:** The Circle and Triangle symbol has long been connected to the A.A. Fellowship. It was adopted as an official A.A. symbol at the International Convention in St. Louis in 1955, and from that point on was widely used in the Fellowship. For the Fellowship, the three legs of the triangle represented the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, and the circle symbolized the world of A.A. In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, Bill W.'s 1955 speech, in which he describes the adoption of the symbol, is printed:

"Above us floats a banner on which is inscribed the new symbol for A.A., a circle enclosing a triangle. The circle stands for the whole world of A.A., and the triangle stands for A.A.'s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service. Within our wonderful new world, we have found freedom from our fatal obsession. That we have chose this particular symbol is perhaps no accident. The priests and seers of antiquity regarded the circle enclosing the triangle as a means of warding off the spirits of evil, and A.A.'s circle and triangle of Recovery, Unity, and Service has certainly meant all of that to us and much more." (p. 139)

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, A.A.W.S. decided to phase out the use of the Circle and Triangle symbol on its literature, letter-head and other material. It was decided to phase out the "official" or "legal" use of the Circle and Triangle symbol, and in 1994 the General Service Conference resolved that the logo be discontinued on all Conference-approved literature. However, the symbol is still associated with Alcoholics Anonymous (and other kinds of 12-Step recovery fellowships) and has a special meaning for AA members all over the world.

**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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