

Here's How

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Not A Glum Lot!

San Francisco Treat

BY MATT S.

As a family, we always tried to take one "out of state" vacation a year.

The best sober vacation I ever spent was a few years back when my family and I went to Fishermen's Wharf in San Francisco. Prior to my getting sober, any vacation meant freedom from home, freedom from work, and most importantly, freedom from my wife and three kids, even though they always came along. I was free to do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted, because I brought along on all these trips, the one companion that always agreed with all my selfish decisions—my disease of alcoholism!

Back in the day, I remember driving from the airport to the hotel with my head on a swivel, looking back and forth at the passing intersections.

"What are you looking at?", my wife would always ask.

What I couldn't tell her was I was scanning for liquor stores, so that I knew where to go when I would eventually ditch them (with some lame excuse) to unite with the only vacation company I *really* wanted — booze!

I would always get my stash, but then would come the real dilemma, where to hide the bottle in the hotel room. One time on a vacation, I used duct tape to tape the bottle underneath the sink in the bathroom. I would then practice sitting down on the toilet, leaning over to make sure you couldn't see it.

Looking back at the insanity, it is truly remarkable the amount of work that went into planning and hiding my drinking. Our San Francisco trip however, was the best ever for a lot of reasons. Yes, I was a few years sober, but more than that, because of the AA program, I was given back a number of things my active alcoholism had stolen from



me. Namely, the person I always *drank*, and *pretended* to be; a good husband, father, brother, employee, and friend, On this trip could be with my family; take part in the days itinerary (even though it might not always be my first choice) while showing genuine enthusiasm for all we did, simply because I know it matters to them, and I no longer have to think only of myself.

To cap off this most wonderful vacation, I went to a local Friday night AA meeting, before we were scheduled to leave in the morning. What happened was truly a miracle and a spiritual awakening I shall never forget. With the week's itinerary complete, the family content to watch a movie in the room, I began to walk the thirteen blocks up and down the streets of this beautiful foreign (to me) land. I walked in complete contentment and amazement at the wonders of my new life, excited to see what this meeting was all about. When I arrived at the quaint little store front building, I was informed it was a speaker meeting, and the speaker wouldn't make it. Before I knew it, I was standing in front of fifty or so strangers, microphone in hand, this guy on vacation from Chicago, and preparing to tell my story.

At first, panic was beginning to set in, my anxiety level rising, then like a gentle touch on my shoulder, I looked

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up and said to myself “You’re on God” From that point on, I couldn’t tell you one word that I said. That’s when I realized I had had the most profound spiritual moment of my life! When the meeting ended, I was mobbed for my phone number like some rock star, I walked out of that little store front, made it down the sidewalk a dozen steps or so, looked back, and said to myself “Who was that guy?”

I knew who it was. And that’s the reason I don’t recall one word I said! My “Higher Power” God, had spoken through me! The trip back to the hotel was magical. I was this “giddy” kid, happier than I can ever remember, floating down the sidewalk, trying over the phone to describe to my sponsor what had just happened. All I could ever tell anyone about that night is that I was given a very “special” gift! — the gift of knowing in my heart and soul, so long as I work this AA program, one day at a time, to the best of my ability, life has the potential of being a VACATION all in itself!

My First Christmas Season

BY BOB S.

The 1975 Christmas season was in the air and I was several months sober; my phone was ringing off the hook; a host of new AA friends were keeping my spirits alive and happy. I was going to meetings all around Los Angeles as often as possible. My spare time was spent hanging around the clubhouse at 26th & Broadway, in Santa Monica. There I felt safe because the subject was generally focused on one subject: sobriety. Although my family was back in Indiana, I was seldom lonely and I seemed to be winning the battle against that first drink. The goose seemed to be hanging high! (A Bill Wilson saying)

However, I hadn’t experienced a sober holiday season for over twenty-five years and there existed that hidden terror of the next drink, but I seemed to be successful at pushing it away, like the boy in the Big Book who was whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits. The closer Christmas came, the harder I pushed away those terrifying thoughts. But, like a muscle, the harder I shoved it, the stronger it got. The terror grew! Maybe I could get past Christmas, but what about New Year’s Eve! I remembered the time I was so drunk in preparation that I passed out and missed the entire celebration. *Don’t think about it! Don’t think about it! If I think it—I’ll drink it!* The fear grew paramount. Was I headed for deep chicken fat trouble?

I had a sponsor who told me to just work the Steps off-the-wall the way I felt best and the obsession would finally subside (not a very good idea)! I now realize that I was staying sober by surviving on the fellowship; I have since learned a cliché: “*Survival on the fellowship is untreated alcoholism!*” Although numerous meetings and the AA fellowship did, albeit barely, keep me dry throughout that terrifying season, the time soon came when I marched into a Hollywood bar, after a parade, and almost ordered a gin & tonic. Thank God I didn’t! The next week, a new sponsor led me through the Twelve Step process and within a few months the obsession to drink was lifted and has never returned.

If I were asked to offer personal-experience-advice for someone’s first sober Christmas holiday season, it would be to find a sponsor who can help them through the 12-Step process, el pronto. The fellowship is good, but a vital spiritual experience is the ultimate solution.

It’s Time to Change

BY MICHELLE D.

How did you feel when you woke? Were you frightened or lonely, or was your heart broke?

Do you feel alone or sometimes afraid? Is it clear that your life’s not meeting the grade?

Do you feel uncomfortable in your own skin? Do you feel that you’re losing, but just want to win?

Are you having remorse about what could have been? If so, then it’s time to grab paper and pen.

Jot some things down you’d like to achieve. Then read them each day and start to believe.

We cannot go back and change the past! Standing still today, just won’t last.

So get ready, prepare, and take care of your needs. It’s time to firmly plant His seeds.

Start with yourself and the rest will follow. I know right now it’s hard to swallow.

Be gentle and patient, for there is no doubt, you’ve been hurting so long, both inside and out.

HEARD IN THE ROOMS

Maybe there was a time or two or a hundred when you were really down or on edge and a certain meeting put you back right. Or maybe you heard a comment in the rooms that made a big impact on you. And, of course, our Home Groups are very special places. Tell Here’s How about what you have heard in the rooms that has helped you through!

Send submissions to: hhcommittee@live.com or Here’s How, 180 N. Wabash Ave., Suite 305, Chicago 60601 or hereshow@chicagoaa.org.

If you know in your heart that something's askew, you must be willing and ready to start anew!

There's help for you along the way. You'll receive it for sure, so start to pray.

Dear God, Please show me where to start. To You, I know I must open my heart.

So say each day, "Thy Will Be Done," and you'll see it, I'm sure, but just don't run.

Be open and willing to hear and see, all that He is calling you to be.

Follow His signs and stay on the road, and when you ask He'll help bear the load.

Don't bring excess baggage for this trip. Keep it simple, you see or you just might slip.

You need to remember to stay on track. Once you start, hold nothing back.

For the new road you find is the only way. You'll get there soon, if you just don't stray.

Now is the time for discipline and prayer. You'll start to believe you're in His care.

As you practice and try to do the right things, you'll be eager to see what the next day brings.

Your life will be flooded with joy and gladness, and you'll know he's there in times of sadness.

Life is still life, but just stop and think. Nothing is solved by taking a drink!

So put all your worries in God's hands today! There's no reason to keep them, let go and just pray.

I know that miracles do come true. Have faith and His promises will be given to you.



My name is Tiger, and I'm an Alcoholic

I've always known that I was wired differently, but I was too ashamed of being labeled.

I called it a gift & a curse that I could drink most of my friends up under the table.

I was a social drinker & recreational drug abuser.

I abandoned my responsibilities & obligations, & unintentionally... became a loser.

I lost consciousness of my conscience & started doing and accepting what wasn't morally right

I used to be able to see my destiny, until alcohol stole my sight.

I was cared about, loved, appreciated, my stock was on the rise.

Now when they see me coming, they can't believe their eyes.

I've become unreliable, uninspired, half the man I used to be...I've become a disgrace.

I knew this when I looked in the mirror & couldn't stand the sight of my own face.

The man in the mirror confessed to being an alcoholic, addicted to wanting more.

I've admitted I have a problem, I'm powerless and can't stop going to the liquor store.

I've gotta find another way of dealing with my problems, my losses, my pain...

I had to go thru all I went thru to better appreciate my change!

I had to become sick and tired of myself & want to become the man that I knew I had the potential to be.

The Higher Power I needed to make this transformation was already instilled & buried deep inside of me.

The path & road to recovery is a journey of desire & faith.

The desire to change & the faith in God....to show you the way.

So, if you have an alcohol problem, don't put off to tomorrow what can be started today

Because procrastination is NOT OKAY!

You're just 12 steps away....Don't try & con yourself..because the program really works.

Just live it one day at a time without gimmick or trick.

You've come to the right place for help.

If you really want help....Now welcome to AA

My name is Tiger... and I'm an Alcoholic.

Make sure to get a sponsor!

BY JOSEPH B.

I hear well-meaning people saying to newcomers, “Make sure you get a sponsor,” and if I’m new, I think to myself, “Thanks for the advice and I have no idea of what a sponsor is or does.” “How do I pick one?” Then in some cases, what gets added is, “...and be sure it’s a good one!” So here I am, full of confusion, anxiety, shaking, sweating, uneasy about eating anything, not sleeping very well, and **now I’m supposed to be the one to pick who should be a “good sponsor.” Right!**

I haven’t discovered anything in the Big Book that speaks to asking someone to be a sponsor, however, there is a great deal of emphasis on offering to help if someone wants help. We are told that working with others is vital to our recovery. When someone shows up at a meeting for the first time, why don’t we offer to call or connect him or her with someone before they leave? Take away a piece of the “sponsor dilemma”.

At my very first AA meeting in 1970, a man named Marsh offered to exchange phone numbers. I was surprised when he called the next day and asked if I wanted to go to a meeting. We went and then started going to a number of meetings. He never asked if I wanted him to be my sponsor. He simply said, “Why don’t we work together?” That relationship continued until his death ten months later. Marsh was an absolute Godsend.

I have found this offer to exchange telephone numbers will only be as effective as our willingness to follow-up the next day, and work out a way to attend another meeting. Following this second meeting, we can determine how to proceed, whether it will be us or someone else to work with this person. Would you agree that this approach is more likely to assist a new person starting off in a meaningful way than, “Make sure to get a sponsor!”

After Marsh died, I wandered for some time on my own, thinking it was pretty cool to use different people as a sponsor. Within the year, I was a mess. I was going to meetings, not drinking, and white knuckling it on most days. Here I was, two years in the program, with anxiety, confusion, and perplexed with living. Thoughts of ending my life came at times. My wife and I separated. One night, I was in more emotional and physical pain than I ever experienced. I had knelt down to pray at times in the program, but always edgy that I was going through motions. Something was different now, and on my knees, prayed with something close to “To whom it may concern” and the rest of the prayer was essentially “Help!” I climbed into the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning, I woke, astounded to realize none of the problems or issues from the previous night had changed, but the pain was gone. Something had my attention. Never before had anything like this happened.

I realized I had to get connected with a sponsor. There was a fellow named Roy, who I had seen at meetings. His comments were brief and convincing. I asked his help as a sponsor. He said if he were to work with me, there were four things I had to agree to do, or he would work with someone else.

The four things were:

1. To ask God for help in the morning (help for the entire day-not drinking was implied in that) and thank Him at night.
2. To have a home group that I built the entire week around. Certainly attend other meetings but the only reason for missing the home group meeting was because I was dead. (Not much squirming room.)
3. Stick with the winners. (Time was not a factor, being serious about living the program was.)
4. Contact him on a regular basis (He would tell me what regular was) — and he was not responsible for calling — it was up to me to call him.

I agreed to these four things. While I said yes to the four items, I discovered quickly that following through and doing these four was much tougher. Roy did not let me off the hook. When I missed calling him, on the next phone call, his immediate response to me identifying myself was “What’s this sponsor in name only, s**t”. In the past, accountability was never a strong characteristic of mine. I was the chameleon who could slither out of many situations. Slowly the discipline of doing what I said I would do, grew. This new accountability aspect became a very welcomed trait. Roy also said that there may come a time in the future when I would need more spiritually than he could give me, and when that happened, it would be time for me to work with someone else. After several years, increasing tension grew in our conversations. In a phone conversation one day, we agreed the time had come to move on. Roy’s help was irreplaceable and we became really good friends afterwards.

Driving home that day it occurred to me that I was without a sponsor. I said a prayer that God would connect me with a person that would be just what I needed at that time. Within a few weeks I connected with Hal.

We began a review of the steps and started to find new pieces from the past that added to various steps. Hal led and

... And be sure it's a good one!



encouraged me to a level of honesty that was extremely important. When I would call him, with my shorts all wrapped around the axle, he typically had one of two responses: "Well, did you or did you not make a decision in Step Three?" – I'd say, "Yes" at times with some heat, but always while knowing I really needed to be reminded. His other response was, "Why don't you take a nap?" This initially was the craziest thing I heard. It gradually became welcomed, and to this day I work at naps as though they are a new art form. More importantly, Hal boosted me with a strong belief in "being available".

When we moved to Houston in 1980, I met Larry and soon after that I asked him to work together. He was very concise and direct. "Why'd you do that?" "How come?" We had many really great conversations, went through extremely difficult business situations, and could laugh together in spite of painful health and business challenges.

In 1986, we moved back to the Chicago area. While in Houston, I had stayed in touch with my friend, John, from early in the program. I asked him to work with me, and he continues to be my sponsor. John has been a voice of sanity and consistency in learning how to live. He will ask me "How are you doing," I'll say, "Fine" and then he'll add, "So, how's your interpersonal relationships?" Our conversations will go in a different direction at that point, and cover a various situations, both positive and negative. Step 10 is the focal point in many of our talks.

We all know there is no perfect program. We each move forward, based on doing the best we can with what we have to work with. What we have to work with is good. I have had five sponsors, one at a time. I believe it was God's leading that prompted these connections. Each of them provided something unique, practical and exactly what I needed at the time. To me, sponsorship is spiritual, and a two way street. The Big Book tells us, "Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress". Growth in the program for me has come

through the grace of God working through others. In addition to sponsors, countless others have made an impact in meetings and conversations. We stand on the shoulders of many who have gone before us.

Consider this, where has this term "sponsee" come from? It seems to imply that a sponsor is doing something to and for the "sponsee". What happens to the fact that working with others is a two-way street, give and take for both people, a spiritual relationship that the Higher Power works through?

The outcome of being sponsored allows me to sponsor others. It is a blessing and joy. I don't know how someone can sponsor others if they don't have a sponsor themselves. A number of people I sponsor have been in the program for some time. On an ongoing basis, I believe I receive more than I give. This has allowed a level of honesty that I know I could not achieve on my own. To be part of others lives creates an environment of trust and well-being. I become increasingly convicted that the need for a sponsorship relationship in many ways is more critical as time in the program moves on. The ability to have very frank, open discussions, and a willingness to implement recommendations, leads to better judgment, decisions and comfortability.

I believe our primary role, as a sponsor, is to work through the steps together, address our past and continue building our lives in Steps 10, 11, & 12.

It works if we work the steps. In doing this, we put into practice the reality of:

"What we have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition."

Prescription for Alcoholics

Just a few words that cannot express the gratitude I feel for Alcoholics Anonymous. By the Grace of God I am "just" an alcoholic. I used to think the medical profession, priests, ministers, self help books and all sorts of human things and beings could help me with my alcoholism.

This past year we celebrated my 30th anniversary and more than ever I see how important it is to carry the message that is in our conference approved literature. The instructions are laid out in our Big Book. "To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."

I thought I was a moral degenerate, an absolute failure. I had guilt and shame that seemed impossible to get rid of. Sadly, this was not just when I was new. By the Grace bestowed upon me after I repeatedly asked for God's help, the miracles began to happen.

I had been going to meetings drunk not only in my early AA membership but also for many, many years after I stopped drinking. Some call this untreated alcoholism, depression, etc., some get treatment from professionals as I did. Bill W. called it emotional hangovers. However, in our Big Book we read how the earliest members worked the steps and reached out to others to carry the message. We read amazing answers to our problems. In one of the stories it says, Certainly, now, anyone would have agreed that only a miracle could prevent my final breakdown.

But how does one get a prescription for a miracle?

Dr. Bob wrote a prescription for alcoholics in 1937. It says:

1. Trust God.
2. Clean house.
3. Help others.

I came to believe I could be restored to sanity.

Color me grateful,
EKG

Katherine, My Story

It was 2006, I had just gone through a few months of job interviews and unemployment checks. How could I have limited myself to just one city and go through a summer of restaurant jobs and temp jobs as fast as I did I don't care to say. Chicago is exciting and adventurous to anybody coming out of the small south suburbs of Indiana where corn roast festivals are the jackpot of fun and passing time. That's why I moved in with the first man who I met and we hopped for three years from apartment to apartment some with roommates and someone bedrooms. Chicago winters are unbearably cold and fearsome. I found myself barefoot and cold in the early morning hours after bars closed.

I usually spent my weekly paychecks up before I needed to pay for a cab or get something to eat. The money went to sparkling Junebugs, Tequila Rose, amaretto stone sours, and frothy cherry margaritas. On my parents tab or strangers tab there was no stopping the paradise in a glass for me every weekend and some week days. A swollen face and dark circles from alcohol and no sleep was my lifestyle. I'm not sure if there would ever have to be a reason to end these brutal times of drinking since I was persuaded I had to celebrate everything with a drink such as graduation, weddings, and being single. It was something I wasn't proud of and begin to notice that birds of a feather flock together, and I was a monkey see monkey do kind of gal. If you had a shot I wanted a shot. Dehydrated and exhausted I carried myself as a young and functional drinker who can handle her drinking while behind closed doors I was very ill from depression and overwhelming stress from hellish hangovers and excruciating stomach cramps from constipation and malnutrition from drinking too much hard liquor and sugary concoctions, the kind you see in Glamour or Cosmopolitan magazines.

I'm thankful today to be sober, to be rested, and properly well fed. I exercise everyday still and have regained a new relationship with my parents as they help me with my credit debts and support in my recovery of year and eight months. Service work and more work, prayer, and religious people advise me as much as I need or want. I have a therapist and last but not least my higher power. The walls of AA are constant and always here to stay when I've unmanageably lost hope and a lot of life from fear, anxiety, and depression from feelings of worthlessness from not having responsibilities.

The AA Program-of-Action Is So Simple That Even a Caveman Can Do It!

BY BOB S.

Just this afternoon I was thinking of how the earliest members were using the spirit of our AA-program-of-action long before they were first printed in the manuscript. I mean even before the six-step program (Big Book p. 263) or the Twelve Steps that we see on the walls of our clubhouses today. For example, let's consider Bill's Story (Big Book); where Ebby related the wonders of his newfound sobriety to gin & pineapple juice guzzling Bill W. He told of a simple religious idea (spiritual experience) and a practical program of action while Bill was pondering how his gin would outlast Ebby's preaching . . . But It didn't!

A short time after this 'kitchen table' talk, Bill marched to Town's Hospital for his fourth and final recovery. With beer in hand and willingness in heart, he sobered up for good. Later, Ebby stopped by the hospital and reiterated, once again, his neat little formula for sobriety. Obviously, Bill was impressed because he did much of Ebby's practical program of action right then and there! Of course, it worked. If you look closely you will find that Bill actually worked the essential elements of our Twelve Step program of today . . . He did them four years before they were written!

So what does this story prove? I think it illustrates that the spirit of the Twelve Steps runs much deeper than the Steps-on-the wall or even the clear-cut-directions in the Big Book. Ebby and Bill used this powerful and mysterious spirit to find their sobriety; the same spirit that drunks used far back through the ages: those tipsy survivors of the Roman Empire, Hellenistic Greece and far-ancient Egypt . . . and eons before: even the caveman! Oops! Well, maybe not that far back.

But the AA Program is so simple that even a caveman can do it!

Twelve Steps Before the Program

SUBMITTED ANONYMOUSLY

1. We admitted we were powerless over nothing; that we could manage our own lives and the lives of everybody else.
2. Came to believe that we could restore ourselves to sanity if everybody else would just leave us alone.
3. Made a decision to take ourselves very seriously so we could manage the will and lives of our loved ones.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of everybody we knew, especially those we were convinced were out to get us.
5. Admitted to our nearest and dearest the exact nature of wrongs and if they didn't understand, that was their problem.
6. Became entirely ready to have others remove the defects in their character that offended us.
7. Demanded that others admit their shortcomings and shape up or ship out.
8. Made a list of all persons we were sure opposed us and became willing to make them do it our way no matter how long it took.
9. Became entirely ready to make those people miserable, especially by staying angry, resentful and afraid.
10. Continued to take the inventory of those around us and when they were wrong promptly told them about it.
11. Sought through bitching, nagging, and self-righteousness to improve others relationship with us, demanding only that they understand us and do it our way.
12. Having had a complete physical, emotional, and spiritual breakdown as a result of these steps, we tried to carry our message to those who would agree with us, blaming our troubles on others and getting sympathy and pity in all our affairs.



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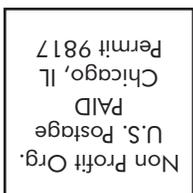
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