

Here's How

Published in Fellowship by the Chicago Area Service Assembly
Volume XLI | Issue No. 13 | November-December 2012

We Are Not Saints

No Saint, but Committed in AA

BY ERIC B.

How many times I have typed those very words. I have had the great pleasure of serving as Chairman of a conference with exactly that title. It started because one day, after the original committee



disbanded, I mentioned to my sponsor how I would miss that convention held every year shortly after the Christmas Holidays. His response was typical, for a sponsor, he simply said then you need to start it up again, so I did.

I had no idea how much that simple decision would effect the next ten years of my life. The first thing I learned was exactly what the title of the convention says. There were guest speakers, who ordered extravagant meals, inappropriate movies, travel reimbursements without receipts, and poor conduct. I became very disillusioned in AA due to this experience, to find out that someone's talk behind the podium didn't match their actions. I became very cynical. This was only overcome by my own failures. I sat for years and harshly judged several speakers and others in AA due to their actions. I thought my own brand of AA to be superior, and vastly more spiritual.

Through the years I stayed active, but went through some of the "vicissitudes of life" and during this time I became the type of AA member I had come to judge, and despise. I had inappropriate conduct, bought things I couldn't afford, had many failings in conducting business honestly, and had

inappropriate contact with newcomers. I was as close to leaving AA, as I have ever been. My own harsh judgments I had cast upon others, were now cast upon me. I began to really believe the simple saying, 'You reap what you sow'. I watched as people I sponsored left, as my home group failed. We in AA really almost seem to shove people out of AA because of some failings we all have, rather than to comfort those, who have exposed their shortcomings, we shove them away almost afraid, that we may catch what they have, as we point our finger at others look at your own hand, there are three fingers pointing back at you. When we see someone failing in AA, would we be better off inviting them out for coffee, and being honest with them, about what we see. We often hear people in AA talking about "take your own inventory" I still disagree with this, because we all judge, it's in our nature, it's unavoidable. In a book I read it quotes someone as saying, "As I see, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek the will of him who sent me". Therefore when I see or judge something, I should look to where I can be helpful to those I am judging, because if I use that judgment to neglect, or criticize, I am only doing so to satisfy my own selfish needs, but if I use my judgments to be of service, or of help, I believe I am doing what God expects of me. Because after all, we all fit under the title, "We Are Not Saints".

While going through this, the one thing that saved my bacon was the simple act of being committed in AA. By chairing this convention, I was on the hook for the contracts signed with the hotel, so when that thought of leaving AA due to my own actions came, always in the back of my mind was the thought, I'm signed on that convention, I'll have to tough it out and leave after the convention. By the time the convention came and went, I didn't feel like leaving AA anymore, and I would sign a contract for another year. My commitments in AA are extremely important, they not only give me the opportunity to fight my self-centeredness, by helping someone, or something out, but they keep me tied down here in AA. There is no "fight or flight", it is a simple

(continued on page 2)

In This Issue

No Saint, but Committed in AA – 1
Experience, Strength and Hope – 2
Inconvenient Guilt – 2

Dream – 3
A Proud Big Book Thumper – 3
Rent-A-Sponsor – 4

CASA Elections – 5
Tips for a Sober and Joyous Holiday – 6
CASO Corner – 7

(continued from page 1)

structure that started years ago, when my sponsor told me to get a job at my home group. So many Fridays I wanted to go drink in my early days, but I had the keys, and had to make the coffee. So maybe I'd drink after the meeting, and by the time the meeting was over, I didn't feel like drinking anymore.

Sobriety is a process, not an event, and I need to stay in AA, for that process to continue. So grab a job in AA either in your home group, or in the service structure, or better yet both. Keep yourself in AA, through that process, you too will learn you ain't no saint.

Experience, Strength and Hope

BY MARK Z.

When I entered Alcoholics Anonymous, I walked in twenty-five years old and completely broken. I spent my final using months wandering around Wicker Park bumming cigarettes and stealing food. Every morning I awoke to feelings of unbearable hopelessness and overwhelming depression. My life was clearly unmanageable but yet I somehow failed to make the correlation between alcoholism and my problems. I just figured that if I miraculously came upon a large sum of money everything would be okay. It was obvious I had a million problems but I was oblivious to the possibility of alcoholism being one of them. And so I entered Alcoholics Anonymous not so much because of booze but mainly because my life was terrible. I had completely run out of options and had no other alternatives.

I entered a recovery house and they required me to get a sponsor and do ninety meetings in ninety days. At the time I didn't have any specific thoughts about long term sobriety. To me, it was just something I had to do at that moment to stay fed with a roof over my head. After obtaining a sponsor and making meetings everyday, I quickly began to realize that alcohol did, indeed, negatively affect my life. Due to my excessive drinking I had been unable to hold down a job, pay bills, or do anything that even remotely resembled responsibility. Furthermore, I had resorted to stealing to support my drinking habit. The more I heard people comment at meetings, the more I began to identify with them. Gradually I began to believe that I was alcoholic and could not drink like normal people.

Accepting my alcoholism was a turning point for me. When I bought into the problem, I then proceeded to buy into the solution. The solution, I was told, was in the 12 Steps. As I dived into the 4th and 5th Step, my life began to get better quickly. Socially I began to interact with people from meetings, family members, and people in the work place. The loneliness and isolation began to disappear and usefulness began to emerge. At nine months of sobriety I moved out of my halfway house to live on my own. It was a beautiful moment in my life. No longer did I have house

requirements limiting what meetings I could attend and how long I could hang out. On January 29, 2007, I reached one year of sobriety. In a year I had gone from being a degenerate loser to a happy and productive member of society.



My second year of sobriety saw more growth but required even greater resolve to work the steps consistently. Years of selfish and dishonest behavior did not go away in one year of sobriety. Old behaviors still crept in and occasionally caused me to struggle both emotionally and financially. Learning how to cope without drinking was a mandatory learning experience. The more I persevered, the more I realized how much happier I was living sober. Even when times got tough, I always found things to be grateful for.

On January 29, 2008, I reached two years of sobriety. As part of Step 12, my old sponsor wanted me to start talking to newcomers. As a result, I started working with a sponsee. Without a doubt, watching his growth has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my entire life. When we did his 5th Step, I was overcome with amazement and awe. At that moment, I began to realize just how powerful Alcoholics Anonymous truly is. This program saves not just individual lives but also entire families. It's such a beautiful thing. On December 5, 2008, my sponsee reached eleven months of sobriety. His transformation has been unbelievable. He has helped me in more ways than I could ever have imagined. I owe everything I currently have in my life to this program. Sobriety is a gift and I am so grateful I don't have to pick up a drink today.

Inconvenient Guilt

BY BOB S., RICHMOND, IN

While boozing it up out there, in and out of the clinker, I developed a nagging and most inconvenient sense of guilt and remorse. Someone told me that I felt guilty because I was guilty, but of course I didn't like that answer at all. But one day, my good-keen-super-intelligent-alcoholic-mind came up with a seemingly simple solution — why yes, I'll just forgive myself and that will be the end of it. Fresh out of the jug I would march into my favorite 'oasis' and explain to the bartender how the cops have always had it in for me; that I was no different from my friends who were drinking just as much as I. It was not my fault! Problem solved!

Oops! Maybe not, because every time I sobered up, that unpleasant guilty hole radiated ever more brightly

throughout my conscience; this coaxed me back to the bar room for predictable and instant relief.

Then, one fine day, I staggered into AA and succumbed to their program of action. The first tool for relief began in Step Five. My sponsor, Carl, (he just celebrated fifty years) burned up most all my guilt-stained and tortured paperwork . . . and as it flamed announced, "Bob, this is your past burning up in smoke. You don't have to feel guilty about all those awful things you did because you are now on God's train and you are no longer doing those things. You are becoming a brand new person every morning you wake up! But if you take just one shot of whisky you get all your guilt back!" Thank God I haven't.

Another guilt removing tool was found in Step Eleven (p. 86), where we are to ask for "God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken." That's the real answer! God's forgiveness!

After all, how foolish it is to ask self to forgive itself. This is almost like someone who has invented his own imaginary god and then asks it for directions. He will *always* get the answer he wants: "Not guilty!" However, only God can truly forgive me. I now possess the miracle of *emotional forgetfulness*; I may remember the most horrid of past experiences intellectually and even relate them to others but that old inconvenient dismal sinking feeling of guilt no longer returns!

Dream

BY THOMAS B.



In my dream, I am walking along the River Vodka as I have for several years when, suddenly, I lose my balance, slip and fall into the fast-moving water. I am quickly swept downstream in the chilly currents.

An atheist sitting on the riverbank yells, "Don't worry, your struggles and misery will be soon be over and there is nothing to worry about for there is no afterlife."

A moment later a preacher on the other bank tells me to pray to God for deliverance from the dangers of the river.

He throws me a Bible and says the answers to my problems were in this book.

A policeman sees me and says, "Get out of the water because it is against the law to swim in this river, and by the way, suicide is also illegal."

An AA member then happens by and tosses me the Big Book. "All your answers are in this blue book," he says as he walks away. He also cautions me not to drink the water.

My family and friends say, "You are a strong swimmer. You should be strong enough to pull yourself out of the water".

The Devil runs over and says to simply drink the water and I will feel better instantly. There will be no consequences.

Finally, an AA sponsor runs over, jumps in and we struggle for a long time but we make it back to shore and safety-good thing, because a giant waterfall was just up the river and we would have surely died. He administers first aid and stays until I able to walk again on my own. He later calls to check in to see how I am doing.

You can re-arrange the paragraphs for a different outcome. It is only a dream.

A Proud Big Book Thumper

BY BILL H.

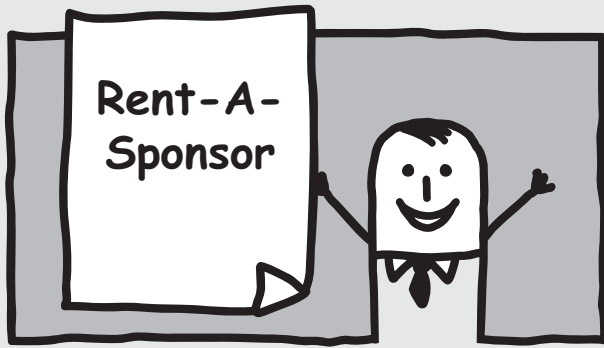
My name is Bill and I'm an alcoholic, I haven't found it necessary to take a drink since February 29, 1980, because of God's grace, the fellowship I find in Alcoholics Anonymous, and because somebody showed me how to work the 12 Steps.

I introduce myself this way at every meeting where I'm privileged to comment. God's grace, or at least the realization of God's grace, and the fellowship I enjoy in the program, are two of the bonuses I've received over and above recovering from the hopeless state of mind and body which necessitated that I drink alcoholically.

I am privileged to attend two meetings per week that are based on Big Book centered recovery. I have the ability to attend one or two others if my family responsibilities permit. I was taken through the Big Book page by page by my original sponsor who died sober of natural causes after nineteen years as my sponsor.

I still have contact with about ten of my original friends and brothers in the program who are all still sober today because they were sponsored in a similar manner. I played softball at a retreat in 1983 and have a picture from that game where I am one of thirteen people. All thirteen are either still sober or in my sponsor's case attending meetings with their Higher Power providing the coffee.

(continued on page 4)



**Are you tired of being told like it is?
Still looking for that easier, softer way?
Had enough of that same old
time-tested direction?
No Reading! No Writing! No Deadlines!**

Standard Features include:

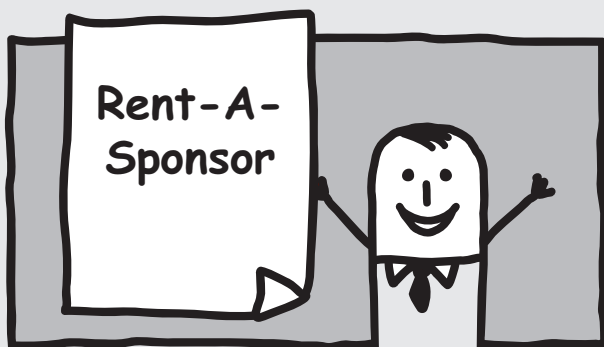
- *Listening to your sniveling without constant reference to the Big Book or the steps!*
- *Co-signing your excuses and rationalizations!*
- *Work only the steps you want, in the order you choose!*
- *Learn the secret of giving it away before you even have it!*
- *Why "walk the walk" when you can just "talk the talk?"*
- *Remember, it is better to look good than to feel good!*
- *Why save your ass at the cost of losing your face?*

**Fourth Step Writing Service Now
Available — Yes, We Will Write Your
Inventory For You!**

Yes, at Rent-A-Sponsor we know how unique you are, and we do understand!

**Half Measures Are Our Specialty!
Call 1-900-0-POOR-ME or
1-900-POUR-ME-1**

Call now and receive a free copy of "Staying Sober on War Stories Alone"!



(continued from page 3)

I attend meetings in New York City on occasion when business takes me there and have attended meetings in many other cities in the United States. As I near retirement I'll start to attend meetings in a wider sphere here in the Chicago area and around the country. I also try to go to one Bill W retreat per year.

On numerous occasions I've heard — both at retreats and at a few meetings — people referred to in a derogatory manner as Big Book Thumpers. You know what I mean. They're referring to those of us who like to quote from the Book with those annoying tips which bring us to actual recovery. We point out the statistics from the Forward to the Second Edition in 1955 when seventy-five percent of those who gave our program an honest attempt got and remained sober. We show how Bill W worked the steps of the program while still in the hospital on page 13. And we point out that if Bill had waited until he was "comfortable" to make 12 Step calls he would have never met Dr. Bob. Dr. Bob, of course, was that thumper who was making his amends less than thirty days into the program. Then Bill W. and Dr. Bob went to see Bill D. They made a 12th Step call on him when the two of them combined didn't have eight months sobriety.

Someday you may see me (or another person like me) at a meeting. You may hear me say I'd be happy to help anybody go through the Big Book. I'm willing to show them how to work the Steps, in order, quickly, with momentum, as our founders' did.

If you take me up on the offer and you want to call me a Big Book thumper at that point I'll be proud to fit into that label. In thirty-two years in the program I've come to know that it's the steps we take not the meetings we make that take insure long term sobriety.

WE ARE NOT A GLUM LOT

As we come to the end of 2012, we contemplate the past year and look forward to the holidays and a new year. Certainly, We Are Not Saints; but Are We A Glum Lot? **Here's How thinks not;** but what do **you** think?

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

{Note to Readers: Lest we give the wrong impression, it is mere coincidence that CASA Election news is appearing in the "We Are Not Saints" issue. This is NOT editorial comment.
– Here's How staff}

Casa Elections

The election of the six Area 19 officers was held at the September 29 Chicago Area Service Assembly hosted by Districts 10 (Southern Spanish district) and 11 (Northern Spanish district). Newly elected to two-year terms beginning January 1, 2013, were:

CASA Chair – Tom F.

Alternate Chair – Dan A.

CASA Recording Secretary – Mo B.

Alternate Recording Secretary – Mark Me.

General Service Conference Delegate – Mark Ma.

Alternate Delegate – Tommy B.

Tom F. has most recently served as Alternate CASA Chair. Prior to that he has chaired the Area Finance Committee and served as DCM for Districts 6 & 21. "I am grateful for the opportunity to lend my twenty years of recovery and thirty years of business experience to serve the Chicago area Fellowship and repay the debt of gratitude I owe for my sobriety."

Dan A. is currently serving as Finance Committee Chair. He has served District 14 in a number of capacities and also as a Group Service Representative. His sobriety date is July 11, 2002.

Mo B. is currently the Alternate Recording Secretary and is the 2014 Illinois State Conference Outreach Chair. She has previously worked on the Committee on Conferences, the Second City Round-Up and the Windy City Round-UP. Her sobriety date is April 26, 2006.

Mark Me. has served extensively as a GSR and volunteer in New York, Brooklyn and San Francisco as well as Chicago. His sobriety date is November 1, 2003.

Mark Ma. is the current Alternate Delegate to the GSC. He also served in that capacity from January 2007 to December 2008. Mark was the CASA Chair from January 2009 to December 2010. His sobriety date is November 2, 1998.

Tommy B. is the current Chair of the Correctional Facilities Committee and has worked extensively for that committee for over five years. He has also worked many years with the International Conference of Young People in AA. He was the first Chairman of the Board of ICYPAA. His sobriety date is March 28, 1981.

Also, **Ruben G.** was elected as the Area's candidate for East Central Regional Trustee. Ruben is currently on the Here's How Committee and is the Treasurer of the East Central Region. He has served as Alternate GSC Delegate and Alternate CASA Chair. His sobriety date is March 27, 2000.

"I was fortunate to fall in with a group that kept involved in all sorts of recovery-focused activities. It was only later that I came to identify these activities as SERVICE, but by then I was hooked. My new friends knew that action was a much better alternative to my thinking and through this fellowship I found that sobriety was a much better life style." – Tommy B.



Tips for a Sober and Joyous Holiday

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new AAs. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-around ball without a drop of alcohol.

- Line up extra AA activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phone at a clubhouse or central office, volunteer to give a lead, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at the hospital.
- Be host to AA friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.
- Keep your AA telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes, postpone everything else until you've called an AA member.
- Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are with you.
- Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.
- If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an AA member with you, keep some candy handy.
- Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.
- Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.
- Don't get worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember: "one day at a time."
- Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts, but this year you can give love.
- "Having had a ... " No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here—you already know it!

Adapted with gratitude from the Maico GAAzette, November/December 1999



Caso Corner

BY LAURA N.G., CHICAGO AREA SERVICE OFFICE MANAGER

Happy Fall! We are preparing for that lovely time of the year yet again. For some, that might mean preparing for the upcoming Holidays. For us here at the Office it is our year end season which will mean that we will conduct an inventory and our annual audit (it's not as bad as it sounds). **Please take note that your Chicago Area Service Office will be closed on November 22-23 for Thanksgiving & December 25 & January 1 for the Holidays. During inventory the bookstore will be closed from December 24 through December 31.**

We just finished with our biggest event of the year, the All Chicago Open, which commemorates the first meeting in Chicago on September 21st 1939. Because of your continued support to your Service Office we are able to continue this celebratory tradition. I hope those who attended The Open this year enjoyed the event. I would love to see the rest of you next year and join me and the 6,574 attendees on September 21st 2013. The CD's of this year's event and the prior years are now available.

I had the honor and privilege to go to the 27th annual Central Office / Intergroup AAWS Seminar. This year it was held in Washington, DC. I was able to meet the Chairmen of the AAWS, GSO and Grapevine Boards, & staff from GSO & AA Grapevine were present. The purpose of this seminar is to foster greater unity among AA members, groups, areas, regions and service boards through the exchange of ideas and experiences and to provide an opportunity for representatives attending the Seminar to discuss the relevant AA and office issues. Every year I go I realize a few things. Mainly we have the same problems as offices all over the US and Canada and, I am sad to say, it is lack of participation from the AA members in our respective Areas. As an example we have 625 registered GSR's but only about 80 shows up to participate at your Area Assembly. Our Area committees are always looking for help to do service work – reach the new person. We still have telephone shifts that are empty particularly during the day. All in all, we as an Office are doing quite well and because I get to represent CASO, I come back with ideas on how we can improve what we are currently doing to foster 12th step work.

We just had our Area elections. I want to first thank the outgoing Area Officers. Delegate to the General Service Conference Michael H., Alternate Delegate to the General Service Conference Mark M., Chicago Area Service Assembly Chair Kim H., Alternate Chicago Area Service Assembly Chair Tom F., Recording Secretary Nora W., & Alternate Recording Secretary Mo B. It has been such a pleasant joy to work with them these past two years I have learned so much from their service experience.

I hope that you will soon get to meet the newly elected Area Officers. Delegate to the General Service Conference Mark M., Alternate Delegate to the General Service Conference Thomas B., Chicago Area Service Assembly Chair Tom F., Alternate Chicago Area Service Assembly Chair Dan A., Recording Secretary Mo B., & Alternate Recording Secretary Mark M. They are all trusted servants that are here for us, the AA member. I want to congratulate them all.

I also want to thank all of the Committee Chairs, Committee Members, DCM's and any GSR's that might be rotating out of their positions this year. Without your love for AA and all the precious time you have given up, AA couldn't survive. You are the links between the AA groups and AA as a whole.

I invite you to visit your Chicago Area Service Office!! The Archives Committee has been working hard on displaying Chicago AA's history. I want to thank them for their time and efforts on creating an atmosphere of historic beauty here in the Office.

With Love & Gratitude I thank you,

Subscription to Here's How

Name

Address

City/State/Zip/Country

If address changes, please indicate your old address:

Name

Address

City/State/Zip/Country

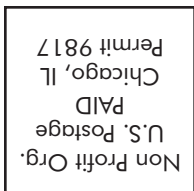
- I am a new reader.
- \$5.00 annual subscription enclosed.
- Here's an extra contribution of \$_____ to help keep *Here's How* self-supporting.
- Please remove my name from your mailing list.
- I can't contribute now, but please keep me on the mailing list.

Please mail to:

Here's How

180 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 305

Chicago, IL 60601



Chicago Area Service Office, NFPC
180 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 305
Chicago, IL 60601
Dated Material, Do Not Delay