



THE ROAD BACK



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Issue No. 430

One Step at a Time

Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn edition of your magazine, the Road Back. The Autumn weather reflects the period of change that we are all experiencing – rain today, sun tomorrow, storm then calm – and we sincerely hope that everyone is finding their path through these strange days. Who could possibly have thought that we would still be dealing with COVID-19 at this, the turning point of the year?

Fortunately, the Road Back magazine is a haven of peace in a stormy world, with stories and anecdotes reassuring us all that we can maintain our precious sobriety regardless of what storms are blowing. The lesson for us is, perhaps, that we can meet ‘life on life’s terms’ and still not lose our perspective, still maintain our balance. In keeping with the Autumn theme, this period can be an opportunity for us all to allow the winds of change to blow away the wreckage of the past, the resentments, the hurts and slights, and to make room for a brighter future for each of us individually, and for all of us together.

Readers, please send us your experiences of how you are coping during this time of upheaval. Tell us the difficulties you faced as individuals, as members of AA, as parents, sons, daughters, and friends. Tell us how you have dealt with these obstacles. Don’t worry that you might not be ‘great with the words’ or don’t have the technology. Take a pen and paper and write it down! Send it to GSO. We will look after the rest. Your experience, strength and hope will be invaluable in helping others to cope, giving hope to the hopeless and lending your strength to the less strong until they become more resilient themselves.

We all owe this to the still-suffering alcoholic. Contributing your story to the magazine is one more way to carry the message, one more way to help each other. Let us not now be found wanting. This is your magazine, your meeting online and in print. You are asked to share at every meeting. Why not share now?

Continue to keep safe, sober and well.

The Road Back Editorial Team

THE ROAD BACK

A meeting in print

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The Road Back is published every two months by General Service Conference, Alcoholics Anonymous of Ireland. Unit 2, Block C, Santry Business Park, Swords Road, Dublin 9, Ireland. Telephone: (01) 842 0700

Up to date information on forthcoming Conventions and One Day Events can be viewed on our website at www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

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At Home in a Home Group

Having a home group has been very important to me. It has also been a growing experience. I'm two years sober, and still feel very unique at times, but the members of my home group have helped me in my recovery. I only regret that I have not been very grateful for this at times.

In just two years, I've seen people in AA go through all sorts of adversity. Relationship problems, marital problems, anger, resentment, and suicide. But it seems like we always stick together no matter how tough it gets.

These people have saved my life, not by feeding my resentment or anger

but telling me that it was normal to feel the way I do at times

There have been several occasions where I've wanted to leave my home group. I've been very fortunate, though, and have always had an understanding member to talk it over with me. These people have saved my life, not by feeding my resentment or anger but telling me that it was normal to feel the way I do at times. This reassured me that I was not unique, and that everyone in the group goes through these things. Thank God for the home group and AA.

D.L.

Roanoke, Virginia

(Grapevine No Matter What Page 51)

Tradition Seven

Every AA Group ought to be fully self-supporting declining outside contributions.

Heard at Meetings

“ Begin from where you are now; Do what’s possible; leave the impossible to God. ”

“ This day (this moment) will never come again. ”

“ Sobriety: A sense of impending happiness. ”

“ Today is my life – stay sober. ”

“ Reach out for help – Reach out to help. ”

“ If I can cope with myself, I can cope with anything. ”

“ Some days, getting inside the door of an AA room can be a major achievement. ”

“ Everything goes to my head. ”

“ Right here, right now is where God is. ”

“ We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are. ”

Life as it Happens

In February, I celebrated thirty years of sobriety, and in March, I turned sixty years old.

I'm really happy that I was led into the Steps right away. As the result of doing the Fourth and Fifth Steps in my third month, I experienced the beginnings of the spiritual awakening that I believe has kept me sober all these years. For me, the greatest promise of the program is the one in the Twelfth Step. It tells me I will have a spiritual awakening as the result of the Steps. I know I need that awakening to have a chance to stay sober.

For me, the greatest promise of the program is the one in the Twelfth Step

I hear a lot of people say at meetings that it keeps getting better in sobriety. That hasn't been the case with me. Different, yes Sober, yes. But life has kept on happening. I had a terrific struggle with a social anxiety disorder that started in my third year and lasted for about nine years. Sometime after I recovered from that, I was hit with a chronic depressive disorder that I still struggle with. My wife of many

years returned to drinking after seventeen years, and I spent some time raising our boys as a single parent.

But sobriety continues. The measure of my sobriety isn't the distance between now and the next drink. And I know how to keep that distance: The Steps, trying to stay connected to a Higher Power, and working with others. Coincidentally, a few weeks ago I was listening to a tape of one of Dr. Bob's last talks. In that talk he said at one point, "Don't think that because I'm fifteen-and-a-half years sober I'm any further from the next drink than any of you."

A few months ago, I tapped into a survey on my computer. The survey said it would help to determine how long I would live. I'm not sure why it attracted my attention, but I went on to complete the questions about lifestyles, illness, family history, and so on. The result was that I could live to be ninety. That brought a chuckle to this one day at a time alcoholic.

I spent the first thirty years making a mess of the life I was given

There's a kind of symmetry to the whole thing: I spent the first thirty years making a mess of the life I was given, the next thirty trying to figure out this simple program, and now I can try in the last thirty to loosen up, let life happen, and try to have a little fun.

But if my experience is worth anything, it tells me that life will keep happening, as long as it lasts. There will be ups and

downs, and spiritual progress and setbacks. But at the end of each day as I extend my sobriety past age sixty, I hope that I can say a short prayer of gratitude for another day of sobriety. Anything else good that happens is a bonus.

Joe B.

*White Rock, British Columbia
(Grapevine No Matter What Page 33-35)*

AA Pioneers

That AA ever got off the ground is a miracle in itself. Our beginnings were so tenuous, so seemingly random. And yet, there were many AA pioneers, both alcoholics and nonalcoholics, who believed it could work, who saw the incredible possibilities and gave firelessly of themselves to shield, water, and provide light for the seeds out of which our Fellowship would grow.

With nothing more than a powerful faith and the novel idea of one alcoholic helping another, our AA pioneers reached out time and again, lovingly offering a way out to countless alcoholics who hitherto had known only suffering and pain. According to Bill W., as he expressed in the October 1947 Grapevine, "In actuality, AA has scores of 'founders,' men and women without whose special contributions AA might never have been." Together, they blazed a trail that millions have followed.

(Grapevine I am Responsible Page 89)



Angels on the Internet

When I started drinking at the age of sixteen, I drank to get drunk, even though I wasn't even sure what "drunk" was. Every time I did drink, trouble followed. After each night of drinking, I always ended up feeling guilty and ashamed, not to mention sick and hungover.

I was twenty-four years old and realised that the dreams I had as a child somehow had faded away

Those feelings of guilt and remorse eventually came to a head one night when I was staying with my extended family. There was no booze in the house, and I was trying to fall asleep. Nor was there a TV to drown out the thoughts that ran through my head. I started to wonder what had happened to myself – to my life. I was twenty-four years old and realised that the dreams I had as a child somehow had faded away. My ambition had vanished, and my future seemed dismal. That was the night, with my Higher Power's help, that I made the connection between the

emptiness I was feeling and my abuse of alcohol. From that point on, I thought it was all up to me. I thought it was about willpower, and I made a conscious decision not to drink.

I managed to dry out for a while - several months even. However, I knew there was something missing, something I couldn't quite put my finger on. I didn't know how much longer I could manage, even though I wanted so badly not to have to drink again. I was at a crossroads, but I had no idea where it would lead.

I didn't know how much longer I could manage, even though I wanted so badly not to have a drink

The turning point came about in a way I like to call "a sign of the times." My family had just bought a computer, and we were all having fun with it. One night, my uncle (who had seventeen years of sobriety at that time) went to a chat room where the topic was alcoholism. I was sitting right next to him intrigued with how they were talking about what they

did to stay sober. A couple of nights after that, when everyone in the house was asleep, I went back to the same chat room and confided to these people (strangers!) that I was trying not to drink, but didn't know how much longer I could hold out. They started asking me questions like "Do you have a sponsor?" and "How many meetings do you go to?" When I answered, "Oh, I'm not in AA or anything like that," they asked me, simply, "Why not?" they told me flat out that if I thought I had any kind of problem with alcohol, I owed it to myself to go to a meeting, Or two. Or three.

they told me flat out that if I thought I had any kind of problem with alcohol, I owed

it to myself to go to a meeting . . .

By the time I finished talking with these angels on the Internet (about ten hours later), they had convinced me to try a meeting. A trill went through me when I found the local hotline number in the phone book. An even bigger thrill went through me when I went to a meeting and heard the chairperson talk about the things I had been going through. And all this happened a mere twelve hours after, helpless and hopeless, I had logged on to the Internet and seen there was hope.

*Kathy C.S.
Ukiah, California
February 2001*

(Grapevine In your own Words pages 34-35)

Gratitude

Our chance to show our gratitude for the gift of sobriety. Gratitude is an active and forward movement and not a passive activity.

If you have been attending online meetings during the COVID-19 emergency, this is an ideal opportunity for us to show our collective gratitude for our personal sobriety.

Carrying the AA message is our Primary Purpose and AA cannot do this without our individual contributions.



AA Humour

Only a Dream for a Drunk

Brenda O'Malley is home making dinner, as usual, when Tim Finnegan arrives at her door.

'Brenda, may I come in?' he asks. 'I've somethin' to tell ya'.

'Of course you can come in, you're always welcome, Tim. But where's my husband?'

'That's what I'm here to be telling ya, Brenda. There was an accident down at the Guinness brewery'

'Oh, God no!' cries Brenda. 'Please don't tell me.'

'I must, Brenda. Your husband Shamus is dead and gone. I'm sorry.

Finally, she looked up at Tim. 'How did it happen, Tim?'

'It was terrible, Brenda. He fell into a vat of Guinness Stout, and drowned.'

'Oh my dear Jesus! But you must tell me true, Tim, did he at least go quickly?'

'Well, Brenda, no. In fact, he got out three times to pee.'

Watch what you confess to

Mary Kelly goes up to Father O'Grady after his Sunday morning service, and she's in tears.

He says, 'So what's bothering you, Mary my dear?'

She says, 'Oh, Father, I've got terrible news. My husband passed away last night.' The priest says, 'Oh, Mary, that's terrible. Tell me, Mary, did he have any last requests?'

She says, 'That he did, Father.'

The priest says, 'What did he ask, Mary?'

'She says, 'He said, 'Please Mary, put down that damn gun...''

Confession again

A drunk staggers into a Catholic Church, enters a confessional booth, sits down, but says nothing. The Priest coughs a few times to get his attention, but the drunk continues to sit there. Finally, the Priest pounds three times on the wall.

The drunk mumbles, 'Ain't no use knockin, there's no paper on this side either.'

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



64th All Ireland CONVENTION

“ A New Freedom ”

23rd - 25th April 2021
Friday, Saturday, Sunday

Venue: The Clayton Hotel, Sligo Tel: +353 71 911 9000

B&B - Sligo Tourist Board Tel: +353 71 9171905

For further information please contact:

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THE BRAVE NEW POST-COVID WORLD – ONE GROUP’S EXPERIENCE

A few weeks ago, my home group started thinking about how we might get back to physical meetings. We held a Group Conscience meeting online and made a list of things we needed to do. We tried to put these things in some sort of order – First Things First- and got to work.

We contacted our landlord to make sure our room was available. Thankfully, it was available. A delegation from the group visited the premises and measured the room to establish how many members could attend. One member made up and printed some notices for the door. On this notice was written the Group Conscience decisions for our Group. Maximum number of attendees, what we would do if more members turned up (we could not break the guidelines). What would we do if the room were full and a newcomer arrived? We couldn’t take them in, but we couldn’t turn them away. We decided that one long-term member would give up their seat to help the newcomer,

in the spirit of unselfish willingness to help. This would be a different member each time.

Next, on the notice on the door, we said that sanitising was required. Another group member bought sanitiser for this purpose. For COVID Contact Tracing we decided to have a table at the door with a notebook and also sanitiser for the pen being used. One group member was elected to stay at this table to ensure members left their first name and contact details. Anonymity was not broken; regulations are complied with. Masks are required to be worn when moving around inside the building, but not when people are sitting down with the proper social distance.

Anonymity was not broken; regulations are complied with

What if someone arrived without a mask? Another decision to be made! We bought a dozen or so masks to have available. These can be bought for cost price

from the Secretary, we cannot afford to supply masks for free, otherwise money for the structure would be wasted. The Group agreed that the Secretary would arrive ten or fifteen minutes earlier than normal, just to make sure the room was cleaned and sanitised and that nobody wandered in without first sanitising and wearing their mask. If visitors did not want to comply with these government regulations, then we could not allow them in.

We were not afraid. We made a few difficult decisions and we stuck to them. We are open a few weeks now and everything is settling down to the "new normal." If the room is full, we put up a second notice on the door. This explains the COVID-19 government requirements and regrets the necessity for the steps we took.

What about Tradition 7? How can we safely "Pass the Basket"? We decided to leave the basket for Tabletop Contributions at the sanitising/sign-in spot. For counting the contributions, we felt it was best if the Treasurer wore disposable gloves while counting contributions. More safety through best practise. Surplus contributions are passed

to GSO using the option on the AA Website.

Using our group email address, we informed GSO that we were up and running again and that they could include us in the directory and online. "We are open for business."

The new way of holding our meetings is working very well. There were one or two difficulties at the start. No tea or coffee. No biscuits! No literature on display. Literature is still available for sale though. We have a brilliant bunch of members and they all muck in when needed.

We were holding an online meeting every week during the lockdown, and we will have a Group Conscience meeting soon to see if we can keep this going on another night during the week. Some older members may feel vulnerable and afraid to travel just yet, others may have their own personal difficulties. We can reach out to them and keep them included by using the online option. All in all, our Group is up and running. We do not claim perfection, but we are making progress, one day at a time, one meeting at a time.

DB, Midlands

Up to date information about Online meetings available on our website at www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

To Life . . . My Greatest Guru

I love the ease and the honesty
That our program brings
That sense of being authentic
Instead of those counterfeit feelings.

It's not just the sense of returning home
And being happy to be you
But coming home to myself once more
One I was alien to

It is the heart and beat and pulse
Of life as it zests for life
Unburdened by the frozen thought
That 'it's the world and me in fight'

I've wrestled and writhed and woe betided
And futile I found it to be
Until that Light lit up my life
So I could clearly see

So the ballast is cut and my balloon takes off
And I can see where I was at sea
The more weights I let go, the higher I soar
With still greater vistas to see.

And those barns of wheat are full and deep
Ingredients for delightful confectionery
And like the pure essence of gold
When poured in a mold
Fashions ornaments ad infinitely.

The wondrous is here
So close and so near
But this fool was lost gadding about
I just had to be stopped
So lost in my tracks
From booze, I had to have out

I just had to stop that awful soul rot
My spirit impoverished and lost
The gift of surrender, subtle and tender
And like every solution it cost.
The process took time for
You pay for your crime

Notwithstanding forgiveness is swift
But contrition's a first
And then comes the musts
Though they're just suggestions they insist!

And though my variety of fruit is unique
I learned it needs time to nurture and peak
For so many factors to its growth disagree
Be it a bitter crab apple or fine pedigree.

For the growing of your own
Comes from the seeds that you've sown
For its futile to take fruit off other trees
For they'll never take hold
They'll just wither and interfold
Though impatient to ripen we be.

For today the solution
is In His absolution
From what I had taken myself to be
For my power and my will
Are plain useless to me still
Unless alert to His will I be.

So with my lesson now learned
I am blessed and give thanks
To the One who must timelessly be
Foremost in rank and
First in order to thank
If I'm to remain stayed in recovery.

From the core of my being
I sing with full heart
As His blessings and graces bestow
For I can see clearly now
The why wherefore and how
I was spared by His grace Further suffering escaped
That would have sunk me
To depths in its throes.

And I perish the thought
Where I might have been brought
Had not the light of relinquishment lit
To let go of defiance and that crippling reliance
So Pure Love could my emptiness fill.

LOB



Alcoholics Anonymous most effective path to alcohol abstinence

A Stanford researcher and two collaborators conducted an extensive review of Alcoholics Anonymous studies and found that the fellowship helps more people achieve sobriety than therapy does.

The Alcoholics Anonymous model — open to all and free — has spread around the globe, and AA now boasts over 2 million members in 180 nations and more than 118,000 groups.
Africa Studio

Alcoholics Anonymous, the worldwide fellowship of sobriety seekers, is the most effective path to abstinence, according to a comprehensive analysis conducted by a Stanford School of Medicine researcher and his collaborators.

After evaluating 35 studies — involving the work of 145 scientists and the outcomes of 10,080 participants — Keith Humphreys, PhD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, and his fellow investigators determined

that AA was nearly always found to be more effective than psychotherapy in achieving abstinence. In addition, most studies showed that AA participation lowered health care costs.

“If you want to change your behavior, find some other people who are trying to make the same change”

AA works because it’s based on social interaction, Humphreys said, noting that members give one another emotional support as well as practical tips to refrain from drinking. “If you want to change your behavior, find some other people who are trying to make the same change,” he said.

The review was published March 11 in Cochrane Database of Systematic Review. Cochrane requires its authors to undertake a rigorous process that ensures

the studies represented in its summaries are high-quality and the review of evidence is unbiased.

“*Cochrane Reviews* are the gold standard in medicine for integration of all the research about a particular intervention,” Humphreys said. “We wanted to do this work through Cochrane because of its rigor and reputation.”

The other co-authors are a researcher from Harvard Medical School and a researcher from the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

Though well-known, AA faces skepticism.

Although AA is well-known and used by millions around the world, mental health professionals are sometimes skeptical of its effectiveness, Humphreys said. Psychologists and psychiatrists, trained to provide cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational enhancement therapy to treat patients with alcohol-use disorder, can have a hard time admitting that the lay people who run AA groups do a better job of keeping people on the wagon.

Early in his career, Humphreys said, he dismissed AA, thinking, “How dare these people do things that I have all these degrees to do?”

Humphreys noted that counseling can be designed to facilitate engagement with AA — what he described as “an extended, warm handoff into the fellowship.” For the review article, Humphreys and his colleagues evaluated both AA and 12-step facilitation counseling.

AA began in 1935 when two men in Akron, Ohio, were searching for a way to stay sober; they found it by forming a support group. They later developed the 12 steps, the first being accepting one’s inability to control drinking; the last, helping others sustain sobriety by becoming a sponsor of a new member. The AA model — open to all and free — has spread around the globe, and AA now boasts over 2 million members in 180 nations and more than 118,000 groups.

Though the fellowship has been around for more than eight decades, researchers have only recently developed good methods to measure its effectiveness, Humphreys said.

For the Cochrane review, the researchers found 57 studies on AA; of those, 35 passed their rigorous criteria for quality. The studies used various methods to measure AA’s effectiveness on alcohol use disorder: the length of time participants abstained from alcohol; the amount they reduced their drinking, if

they continued drinking; the consequences of their drinking; and health care costs.

AA shines

Most of the studies that measured abstinence found AA was significantly better than other interventions or no intervention

Most of the studies that measured abstinence found AA was significantly better than other interventions or no intervention. In one study, it was found to be 60% more effective. None of the studies found AA to be less effective.

In the studies that measured outcomes other than complete abstinence, AA was found to be at least as effective. For the studies that considered costs, most showed significant savings associated with AA participation: One found that AA and 12-step facilitation counseling reduced mental health costs by \$10,000 per person.

The researchers looked only at studies of AA; they excluded Narcotics Anonymous and organizations focused on addiction to other substances. While it was beyond the scope of their study, Humphreys said the AA review is “certainly suggestive that these methods work for people who use heroin or cocaine.”

Humphreys noted that the findings were consistent whether the study participants were young, elderly, male, female, veterans or civilians; the studies in the review were also conducted in five different countries. “It absolutely does work,” he said of AA’s method.

He added that he feels validated in giving advice to so many patients to try AA: “That was really good advice, and that continues to be good advice,” he said.

Humphreys is a member of the Wu Tsai Neurosciences Institute at Stanford.

The research was not funded.

Stanford’s Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences supported the work.

Up to date information about Online meetings available on our website at www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie



The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our Group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants - they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. Group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



We, *The Road Back* Editorial Team, look forward to hearing from you with your stories, snippets of amusing things overheard at meetings, indeed anything that carries a message of sobriety to our readership.

Your contributions can be emailed to:
roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie

or posted to:
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Santry Business Park
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Up to date information on forthcoming Conventions and One Day Events can be viewed on our website at
www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie