

THE ROAD BACK

includes AA News Sheet

JULY - SEPT 2021
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Hello
Autumn



Editorial

Have you noticed the days have gotten shorter and there's a bit of a nip in the air. Nature is slowing down and getting ready for the winter. It seems so long ago that we had our few weeks of glorious sunshine.

Our fellowship has gone through some remarkable changes over the past year. We are a remarkably adaptable bunch. Again we are in transition. Covid restrictions gave us no option for many months but to have digital only meetings. Now that restrictions have relaxed, there are more physical meetings opening up. We remind you that as more people attend physical meetings, please remember to follow current health guidelines, not just for your safety but for the safety of your fellow members.

Our website lists many online and digital meetings, but I know that there are many meetings happening that aren't on the website. Why is that?, is it because groups don't want visitors to attend? If I was a visitor to your town would I be able to find a physical or digital meeting? Are we just looking after our own needs and that of our group? What about the still suffering alcoholic or newcomer? Often, it's the chats before or after a meeting that make all the difference to people.

Did you know that www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie is the only official Irish website where meetings are listed. Most people find your meeting details from this website. Don't forget to send in a group information sheet with updated information.

In the next edition we are hoping to celebrate AA being 75 years in Ireland. We are always looking for more stories. To try help our editors (they don't like cutting out any of your story) please keep submissions to an absolute maximum of 500 words. Pop it in an email, we can look after the rest. You can then e-mail to roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie

Do you put things on the long finger? Is there somebody that you keep meaning to ring or text but never get around to it? Now is the time for action. Almost always, my day changes for the better when I reach out.

Until next time, please continue to keep safe, sober and well.

The Road Back Editorial Team

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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.

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Balance in Recovery

Only after some years in AA did I fully realise that I had been one of the lucky ones - I got the program first time round (up to today) and was further blessed getting it when I was young. The image which best describes my story is that of a lilt on a decent from health to full blown alcoholism. Each floor represents another level of chaos on the slide towards insanity and death, many of which are 'not-yets' for me. I got off near the top of the building.

By being in AA at twenty while at college I felt hard done by. My whole life ahead of me with me not being able to drink, socialise or fit-in, seemed a discouraging order. In the three days between my last drunk, which was a blackout and violent, and my first meeting, what I did have was a clear and total acceptance that I could never drink safely again. I had the capacity to be honest. Up to today I hold that view, which is the first half of the first step. It has been my strongest card. On the plus side I did not apparently have that much wreckage built up, in terms of relationships destroyed, family responsibilities or financial ruin. I also realise, looking back, that

my early days in AA were far from balanced and it took a long time to get well again but eventually I was able to take my place in society. I was both sponsored and 'fostered' by two old timers whose good-natured competitiveness with each other always took second place to my welfare. Now, each time I accept or offer my time to AA service I think of how much help I needed and received in my difficult times, from my two sponsors and others, especially the early days.

I continue to have new experiences both in AA and outside and am aware that I am not running or don't have to run the entire show myself. Challenges and opportunities are sent my way all the time and when I am on the program I can see His will for me. Two of my favourite tools, which I use in AA are; If my motives are right then I'll be alright no matter what the outcome- (I apply this to all decisions) I can't think my way into good living. I must live my way into good thinking - (step 2 -action against insanity)

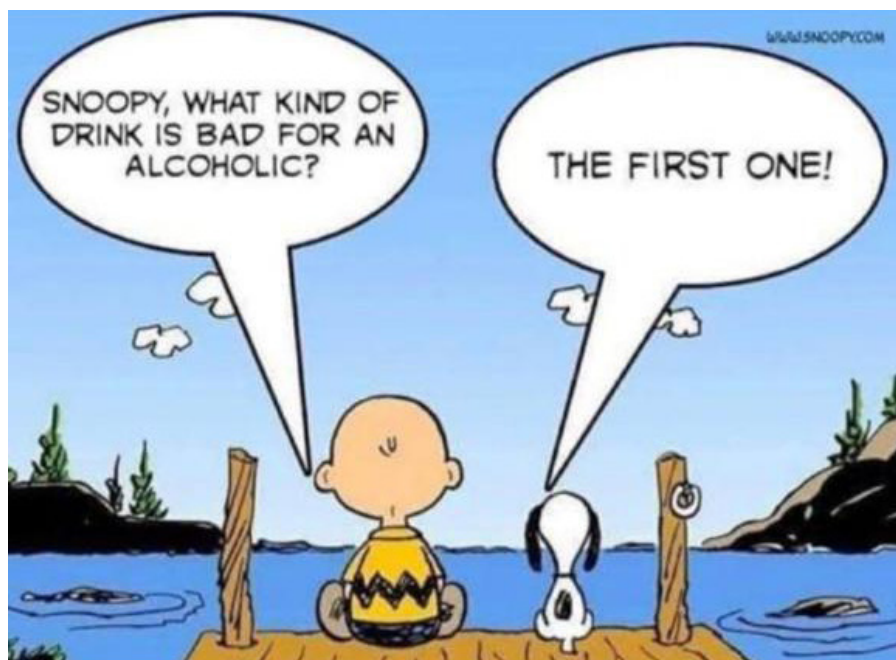
At age thirty-seven, I often say to my wife that I never had more to lose, which is a roundabout way

of stating one of my favourite AA quotes, "constant vigilance is the price of peace". I have at times suffered in my efforts to "practice these principles .in all my affairs" but my motives were sound and I have remained sober, grown and learnt from all my experiences, including the painful ones.

Life today is good and when it's not I know that everything passes and that I will find the

strength to hang in there. I have made AA my way of life. With AA I have some defence against my disease. Without AA all departments of my life would become unmanageable. The best line, which I heard at a meeting recently describes, for me, how I should apply myself to this simple program; I know what I am and I know what I must do."

PF



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

Summer of 1980

1980 was a beautiful summer. Liam Reilly was number one with "Summer in Dublin". I had a very responsible job. The elderly lady who washed the glassware in the lab told me one day that I was an alkie. What's that, I asked. an alcoholic she replied. she said her brother was alkie, had lost his job, his family and ended in a treatment centre in Kildare. Give me a break, I'm only 27, not married and don't have a house. But the seed was planted, the doubt set in.

That October I headed down south with three others for a camping holiday, my friend was driving the car and I would have a six pack at my feet. I would ask him to stop off at a bar as I needed to use the toilet. On my way in I would order a double Pernod. on my way out I would knock it back. Same at the next pub. this was early in the day. one o'clock the following morning, I ended up on the seafront pier, legless, my friend picking me up off the ground. When I came back home, I didn't realise my father had been seriously ill and my family had thought of putting an S.O.S. on the national airways for me to contact them. thank God my father lived.

My girlfriend work colleague of six months had got engaged to her long-term boyfriend. I was

devasted. phoned another lady I had been seeing who was on trial separation from her husband. I was knocking back the vodka. her husband had been trailing her. The trail ended in the bar we were drinking. He left, she stayed. Willie Nelson could write a song on that one. We ended in a guesthouse, and I ended up taking tablets to try and forget the lot.

I was in full flight. I couldn't face that girl in the job. So, one morning on my way to work, I was so bad I got off the bus, into a pub and started on the vodka. my plan had been. to go to my job in Dublin and go home to Kildare that evening with my dirty washing for my mother to do. Instead, I ended up in Hammersmith England outside my sister's house. she nearly dropped. I forgot to mention that earlier that Friday I phoned the job and told the boss to stick it. Wow. in the space of fourteen hours, I went from depressed to being high as a kite, to depressed and feeling suicidal. after throwing my job in on the Friday and going away forever, I returned home that Sunday and into my job on the Monday.

A relative told me of AA I went to a meeting in Aungier Street. no one was drunk, and there were no brawls. after five months and

no other meetings, I lifted that first drink. I was off again. For another fifteen months I was in and out of AA until finally I couldn't live with this horrific remorse and shame, I felt from the double life I was leading. In the early hours of Monday the fifteenth of June 1982, I hailed a taxi to take me to a nightclub. I was very low and couldn't get drunk. The taximan turned out to be an AA member, though I didn't know him. He guided me back to AA. the choice was either carry on or hand my life over to AA. and that's what I did. I must also say that thank God I was depressed that night. I was ready.

The taxi man was Paddy. thanks Paddy. and thanks to all the other people along my journey. everything I have is down to AA.

plain and simple. I have faced all the trials and tribulations of life so far without a drink. I am very close with my extended family. was a support to my parents in their senior years and their dying days. I don't wake up anymore with those four horsemen of the apocalypse coming at me. terror, bewilderment, frustration, and despair. instead, when I wake up, I thank God, and try and count my blessings.

In finishing I wish to thank you personally for taking the time to read this article. If you are not in a great space, lift the phone and tell someone. and remember, this too shall pass, everything does, the good and bad.

Pat A.

FREEDOM FROM... FREEDOM TO

We are going to know a new freedom

Alcoholics Anonymous p.83

Freedom for me is both freedom from and freedom to. The first freedom I enjoyed is freedom from the slavery of alcohol. What a relief! Then I began to experience freedom from fear – fear of people, of economic insecurity, of commitment, of failure, of rejection. Then I began to enjoy freedom to - freedom to choose sobriety for today, freedom to be myself, freedom to express my opinion, to experience peace of mind, to love and be loved, and freedom to grow spiritually. But how can I achieve these freedoms?

The Big Book clearly says that before I am halfway through making amends, I will begin to know a "new" freedom; not the old freedom of doing what I pleased, without regard to others, but the new freedom that allows fulfilment of the promises in my life.

"What a joy to be free!"



Back to Basics

Recently, through a series of miracles and incredible strokes of good luck, and with a pile of help from some beautiful people and my Higher Power, I broke all the odds and celebrated my fourth AA birthday.

My wife made a cake, and at our small meeting that night I was asked to chair. I did, and I'd no longer started talking than I realised what I was saying had nothing to do with AA.

Period.

Recently, I'd gotten into one of those self-help awareness books, and I was chairing straight out of the awareness book. Maybe that would have been all right, because perhaps we need to go a step beyond sometimes (although I've since changed my mind and live straight out of the Big Book) – except for one vital fact.

Sitting down the other end of the table was a guy named Dick. And Dick, bless him, had a plain, old fashioned, gut-level, puke-in-the-morning-and see-spiders-and snakes, bust-up -you-marriage-and lose-your-job, convulsion-and screaming-fit drinking problem.

Really, Dick was an alcoholic brand-new to the program, and he obviously couldn't care less whether or not I'd found peace and tranquillity through this new method that involved harnessing the cosmic forces inside my central being. As a matter of fact, Dick was trying to get a cup of coffee to his mouth, and most of it went down his front. But he got some in the right place and then he looked up and saw me staring at him.

He smiled

And I remembered just who the hell I was in the whole lash-up. I wasn't a guru, or some philosopher looking for the answer to Great Questions.

I was and I am a drunk.

Four years ago, I looked just like Dick. Worse, because I had puke on my sleeve when I came to the first meeting, and I didn't get any coffee in the right place.

I'm a drunk. And all the cosmic forces, all the awareness books or self-help gimmicks, all the super-duper-go-gettum-in-the-bushes new and whippy ideas brought out in shiny new packages and books each month can't change it.

I'm a drunk, and I'd like to thank Dick for bringing me back to basics. I'd like to thank him for jerking me away from the insanity of thinking I'll ever be anything but a drunk; thank him for pulling me back to a program that works and for me and keeps me alive and functioning. And sober.

But most of all I'd like to thank Dick for that smile. That's where it at.

Source unidentified

Starting Today

If resisting was an easy task,
who would be a slave?
Who would part with a piece of themselves
for the chance at an early grave?

Willpower alone is enough to put you in hell
but not enough to pull you out.
You'll never have a chance at getting well
until you accept living by a different route.

If change is what you want,
you'll have to change much about you.
You'll have to learn to become humble
and do what trusted advisers tell you to do.

The road is long and hard
but worth every step of the way
because you have the opportunity
to be free again starting today.

Poem Written by Justin Farley



So That's a Spiritual Experience

I can remember, early in my sobriety, feeling depressed because I had not had a spiritual experience. I was sure that I alone had not undergone a sudden change of heart.

This impression came from listening to some other members describe their spiritual awakenings. They described them simply and honestly. There had been, they said, no flashing lights, no burning bushes. But there had been a moment when they experienced a total surrender, a sudden change of attitude. It was, they said, an experience that immediately changed their lives.

I assumed (erroneously, I later found) that all AA members had undergone a similar experience. I was sure that those who did not speak of their moment of truth were too modest to describe it. And I was also sure that I was the only one, even among the new members, who had not experienced an instantaneous change.

I believed that my entry into AA had been different. I had come in reluctantly and had stayed reluctant for as long as possible. Only gradually, over a period of months, did I realise that I had no place else to go. There was never

any sudden, joyful acceptance of recovery. There was, instead, a gradual, sad admission that I could choose AA or die. Not what I would have called a "spiritual" experience.

Fortunately, there was a small group of us who were all new to the program and very close. It was among them that I made a series of discoveries.

First, I discovered that I was not alone. All of us agreed that whatever 'a spiritual experience might be, we certainly hadn't had one. We had all been waiting for it to happen, and by now, most of us were convinced that it probably never would. We were different. Unlike the older members, we had been too "sinful" in the past and were too secular in the present to be worthy of anything "spiritual."

Our second discovery was more exciting. We discovered that most of the other members had not undergone an instantaneous change, either. We learned, by listening at meetings and talking to our sponsors, that the majority of those we admired had undergone, like us, a gradual change. We still didn't know what a spiritual experience was, and we were still pretty sure that we hadn't undergone one. But

we had all experienced gradual change. So, we weren't inferior. We were with the majority.

The third discovery was a blockbuster. One of us read Bill W.'s discussion of the Twelfth Step in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. There, he explains that there are many kinds of spiritual experience. Some are like the conversions of the great religious leaders of the past; others seem purely psychological. Some are sudden or instantaneous; others are a gradual learning experience. But all of them, whatever form they take, have one effect: They make a person capable of doing something he could not do before.

As Bill puts it, "When a man or a woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone." For all of us, this was an important discovery. I was now capable of doing things that had been impossible for me before; I could not deny it. The obvious example was staying sober - by this time, I had been dry for several consecutive months. Before AA, several consecutive days had been impossible.

But there were other important changes, which were harder to describe. My feelings of fear and guilt were slowly being replaced by feelings of hope and self-respect. And most important, that which had been impossible before - a trust in something or someone other than myself - had now become possible.

In other words, I had been undergoing a spiritual experience without knowing it. My confused questioning about a Higher Power, my changed mental attitude, and even my physical recovery had all been part of a spiritual awakening. Without knowing it, I had been in contact with the source of life, whatever or whoever that might be.

Paradoxically, the realisation that even I had experienced something spiritual was in itself a spiritual experience, and I am only slowly understanding its implications. What happened in the past, without my knowledge, is probably continuing now. And in the future, when tomorrow becomes today, it can go on and on. All that is required is a desire to stop drinking, and to stay stopped.

E.O., York, Pa.

(Best of the Grapevine Vol 2, pg191)

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



EQUAL RIGHTS

At one time or another most AA groups go on rule making benders ... After a time fear and intolerance subside. (And we realise) We do not wish to deny anyone his chance to recover from alcoholism. We wish to be just as inclusive as we can, never exclusive.

"A A TRADITION: HOW IT DEVELOPED," P10,11,12

AA offered me complete freedom and accepted me into the Fellowship for myself. Membership did not depend upon conformity, financial success or education and I am so grateful for that. I often ask myself if I extended the same equality to others or if I deny them the freedom to be different. Today I try to replace my fear and intolerance with faith, patience, love and acceptance. I can bring these strengths to my AA group, my home and my office. **I make an effort to bring my positive attitude everywhere that I go.**

I have neither the right, nor the responsibility, to judge others. Depending on my attitude I can view newcomers to AA, family members and friends as menaces or as teachers. When I think of some of my past judgements, it is clear how my self-righteousness caused me spiritual harm.

The message of AA is likened to the sugar lump... it can be analysed, and dissertations written on its molecular form and the sugar cell being the origin of life inter res... only trusting others who have already tasted it and who attempt to inadequately describe its sweetness... a sweetness only your own taste buds can confirm. Don't take that first drink, find a sponsor, do the steps, enlarge your spiritual life and allow the miracle to happen.

Anon
Galway

Heard at Meetings

“ While we need not alter our truths, we can surely improve their application. ”

“ The only time you can't afford to fail is the last time you try. ”

“ Set a good example for others. Be decent, be fair. Face up rather than ignore problems. ”

“ Be honest. Live what you say. ”

“ When you talk you are only repeating what you already know but if you listen you may learn something. ”

“ To be capable of respect is almost as rare as being worth of it. ”

“ Surrender has nothing to do with giving up. It means to stop fighting. ”

“ In AA we discover 'self-help program'. Self-help kept me drunk for 20 years. To me, AA is the exact opposite. I'm sober now through the help ”

AA News Sheet

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021

**Virtual World Service Meeting 2020
held via Video Conference.
November 28th - 30th 2020**



Theme: The Purpose of our Service: Sobriety within Everyone's Reach

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, Delegates representing Alcoholics Anonymous from around the world gathered via Video Conference from November 28th - 30th for the 26th World Service Meeting, hosted by the Trustees of the General Service Board of AA in the U.S and Canada. This was the first time the event was held virtually, and it was attended by 69 Delegates from 44 Countries.

The meeting was chaired by Michele G., Chair of the U.S and Canada General Service Board and the Vice-Chairperson was Greg T., General Manager, GSO, U.S and Canada.

As is customary at the World Service Meeting, it opened on Saturday morning with a Red Ball AA Meeting where Delegates had an opportunity to introduce themselves and to meet the other First and Second term Delegates. Following this, the meeting proper was opened with Roll Call and Orientation.

LICENSING AND TRANSLATIONS | THE INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE FUND

The first of many presentations was by David R., Publishing Director on Licensing and Translations, who gave some highlights of recent activity in translation of literature as follows.

"How It Works" from the start of Chapter 5 in the Big Book has been translated for the first time in the Nicaraguan language of Miskito, in the Sub-Saharan language of Shona, which AA in Zimbabwe completed; as well as in the Quechua language (in its Peru dialect), and all have been approved for use in local AA meetings.

The new re-translation of the Ukrainian Big Book has been printed locally in Ukraine for the first time and the first-ever Tatar translation of the Big Book has just been approved and licensed to print and distribute. The Lesotho language Big Book translation has been approved and the first-ever Oriya language Big Book has been approved and licensed to be printed and distributed in India. India is also moving forward translations in several other of the many languages read and spoken there, Khasi, and Konkani, among them.

He also reported on some other innovations in the areas of formats and distribution with Audiobook formats of the most popular Pamphlets and Short Videos and Podcasts also in the process of being developed. In addition, there has been a make-over of several new and revised Conference-approved Pamphlets so that their cover images are inviting and attractive and the texts inside reflect the widest range of experience that is shared by a diversity of AA members.

PRESENTATIONS

Over the course of the weekend there were also Presentations on the following topics:

- Importance of the Group Conscious Process
- Encouraging Women into General Service
- Young People in AA
- Anonymity
- Safety in AA
- International Literature Fund

COMMITTEES

Members separated out into the various Committees and the final reports with their recommendations were presented. There follows a summary of these Committees.

Agenda Committee

The Agenda Committee recommended "Carrying the Message of AA in the Digital Age" as the Theme for the 27th World Service Meeting, this was accepted.

Literature and Publishing Committee

Many countries reported that the Pandemic Lockdowns adversely affected the availability of print literature. The need to provide downloadable literature was discussed as well as the need for digital literature to be available for purchase. The Committee suggested that AA World Service gather shared experience on creating eBooks and making literature available online with proper Copyright protections in place. It was suggested that it would be helpful to develop a Service Document that would make this shared experience available to members.

Many countries also reported a drop in literature sales, and this led to a wider discussion on the Tradition of self-support and the reliance on literature sales.

Policy/Admissions/Finance Committee

The Committee reviewed the current Composition, Scope and Procedure and made no changes. Requests from Bulgaria, El Salvador, Greece, and Guatemala

to participate at the 26th World Service Meeting were approved. It was agreed that China and Moldova did not currently meet the qualifications based on the information received. It was noted that greater participation at Zonal Meetings for emerging Structures would be beneficial.

Qualifications for Countries participating in the WSM were reviewed and it was recognised that there was a need to establish a deadline for countries applying for admission to the WSM. It was requested that the WSM Coordinator bring back a draft deadline policy for the Committee to consider at its meeting in 2022.

Policy/Admissions/Finance Committee (continued)

Qualifications for World Service Meeting Delegates were reviewed and after thoughtful discussion regarding the importance of rotation, no changes were made. World Service Meeting finances and Delegates' fees were also reviewed, and it was confirmed that the \$1,500/USD Delegate fee would be restored for the 27th World Service Meeting.

The Committee recommended that the 27th World Service Meeting be held October 1-6, 2022.

Working with Others Committee

The Committee was asked to report on how countries have been able to carry the message during the Pandemic. Nearly every country found itself, sometime in March 2020, moving abruptly from face-to-face meetings to online meetings. For several countries, the shift to online meetings was led by the Board or General Service Office, others observed that the local groups were ahead of the Structure when it came to adapting to the new reality and moving meetings online.

Some Delegates reported a digital divide in their countries. Countries addressed this in a variety of ways – some increased the availability of Hotlines and expanded their hours to 24/7 coverage, and several reported a large increase in phone calls. Some countries created guidelines to help members learn to navigate Video-Conferencing Platforms, address anonymity concerns and deal with “zoom bombers”. Newcomers were offered help by enlisting volunteers to accompany them to their first online meeting or offering break-out rooms for one-to-one contact. Some started more “hybrid” meetings and found that this encouraged unity. Unfortunately, there are still populations that are not able to access online AA.

Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community during the Pandemic was also discussed. Several Delegates shared about the cooperation between AA and their Country's Department of Health, especially in the area of information-sharing.

At the beginning of the Pandemic, many Service Committees reported less contact and cooperation with Hospitals and Treatment Centres. Also,

perhaps due to the Global Health Crisis, professionals seemed less focused on alcoholism as an issue. However, several countries reported increasing contact with Treatment Centres and their patients, including requests for online meetings. There have also been several articles published about AA recently as well as recordings shared on WhatsApp and other Platforms.

The one area where there was not much success to report was in reaching members in prison. Many prisons are now in lockdown and not allowing meetings or even visitors. One structure was able to send in issues of the Magazine they publish, while another reported success with a Prison Correspondence Program. However, how to keep in touch with AA Members and Groups inside prisons is still an outstanding question.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops were held on the topics of:

- Communication – A Key to Unity
- The Use and Value of our AA Literature in Sponsorship
- The Importance of our Non-Alcoholic Friends in Our Structure

Due to time constraints, the final Workshop Reports were not presented to the meeting but will be included in the Final Report which will be uploaded to the AA.org Website at the end of February.

GENERAL SHARING SESSIONS ON THE PANDEMIC

The general sharing sessions offered an opportunity for Delegates to discuss the current situation and the effect the Pandemic has had in terms of member's ability to meet face-to-face as well as the ability of newcomers to find and connect with AA. A key theme that ran through the sharing from all of the countries was on how communication is the key to unity. Further general sharing included:

Essential Service

As has been the case in Ireland, in many countries the General Service Boards encouraged their respective Governmental Departments to consider AA as an Essential Service for the purpose of physical meetings during the Pandemic. In some countries this was a given from the outset of the Pandemic.

Virtual meetings

There were many heartening stories about how countries keep AA going under the extreme conditions of a Global Pandemic. While most countries have embraced the online meetings, this hasn't been possible for some countries due to a lack of consistent internet connectivity.

In South America, members crossed borders to get internet service. Teleconferencing has been adopted for Prison Meetings and Zoom Meetings are used to maintain the Service *Cooperating with the Professional Community*. Maintaining a strong presence in media through this time has been vital.

An International Service Structure for Virtual Groups

One topic that received much discussion was the setting up of an International Service Structure for Virtual Groups, it was suggested that this would not be based on geography but on service. It was stated that how AA carries the message and how we are using technology to connect will be one of the most important issues discussed across AA Worldwide.

It was noted that online meetings have been a global reality in AA for many years. For instance, in China and Russia, due to their broad geographic spread, virtual platforms such as Skype, Zoom or indeed Teleconferencing are the norm. The Central European Region Intergroup (part of the UK Structure) has been providing English daily speaking online meetings for some years.

Decline in Contributions.

From initial confusion and pain came quick positive responses everywhere to ensure we continued to provide a lifeline of AA. There has been a widespread increase in newcomers globally with these online meetings. General Service Offices have maintained a constant service but sadly the universal experience is that contributions are significantly down. This is going to be one of the themes for discussion at the next WSM.

WORLD SERVICE MEETING CLOSING

The meeting ended on Sunday afternoon with all Delegates saying the Serenity Prayer in their own languages. Everyone expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the meeting Coordinator, Mary C., along with the technical support staff who dealt with the many logistical and technical challenges to ensure that the meeting ran smoothly. It was particularly appreciated that their diligent and thoughtful work created a genuine sense of fellowship across many Time Zones and Continents. Many thanks also to Barbara and all the staff at GSO for liaising with GSO New York to make our attendance at the World Service Meeting possible.

The 27th World Service Meeting "*Carrying the Message of AA in the Digital Age*" will be held October 1-6, 2022, in Japan.

In fellowship

Moira S, 1st Term Delegate
Helen H, 2nd Term Delegate

Truth

THE WORDS “YE SHALL KNOW the truth and the truth shall make you free” have echoed through time for two thousand years. Hands to ears, humanity has fled them ever since they were spoken.

If you don’t believe me, hold a discussion meeting on the subject of truth or honesty or communication, and see what happens. Unless your group is highly unusual - and you are highly deter-mined - within minutes the discussion will bog down in the comfortable rut of cash-register honesty.

“ ... Seven years later, I sent that bartender a check,” someone will proudly say in concluding an anecdote.

“Not me!” another will reply. “The liquor industry got enough out of me -I’m not repaying a cent!”

Unless the discussion is reined in sharply, it will canter lazily back to the barn without much benefit to anyone, you realize. So, you suggest more emphasis on truthfulness per se, rather than fiscal responsibility. Immediately, someone will point out that truth must be used discreetly; someone else will offer, as an illustration, his anger over a truthful but harsh remark; and - presto! - you are

not discussing truth anymore, but resentment.

**You try once again.
“But don’t you think
being honest in all our
dealings is important?”
you ask desperately.**

The clamorous response to this even awakens the drunk sleeping it off in the back row. Everyone is furious, the assumption being that you have demanded a mass orgy of public confession during which their darkest sins will be revealed for group vilification. If you are lucky, someone will bring up the Fifth Step or the anonymity Traditions before you are lynched.

I have only come to view truth as the most beautiful and accessible aspect of Harmony, or It, or God. This mass fear of it would surprise me more if I had not once felt the same way. Before AA, I had a go-around with psychiatry. I frequently complained that, although I arrived at the doctor’s office with green eyes and pink cheeks, after a tearful bout with truth I left with pink eyes and green cheeks. “And for this, I’m paying you!” I would conclude furiously.



I felt then, as many of us do, that the full revelation of “the real me” could result only in total rejection by those who saw it. I remembered a film version of Oscar Wilde’s “The Picture of Dorian Gray,” the story of a man who makes a pact with the devil, in return for which he lives on unchanged forever, while his shrouded portrait bears the visible ravages of time and depravity. At the conclusion of the black-and-white film, Dorian draws back the curtain and the picture of a monstrous, barely human creature is revealed in colour, unbelievably horrible.

Although Dorian presumably practiced every form of evil for a long period, and I was barely thirty, I was convinced that I, too, harboured within me a Dorian Gray who, once displayed publicly, would end forever my chance for acceptance. Gradually, however, in the course of therapy, the curtain began to slip aside, until finally the truth of “the real me” was revealed. When I mustered up the courage and it took a lot - to look fully at the self I had run from all my life, I saw, not Dorian Gray, not Ilse Koch, but an average American housewife! My relief was overwhelming. True, as I began to look more closely, I noticed serious flaws: I was an alcoholic; I was neurotic; I was brim-full of character defects. But these were things that, in time and with help, could be

dealt with. No longer did I have to run with nightmarish terror from an inner monster. I had seen the truth, and the truth had freed me to do less hiding and more seeking.

The effort to escape from truth is the father of anxiety. Consider the man who lies awake at night wondering whether his chest pains are the result of indigestion or heart trouble. If he fears going to a doctor to find out, he is carrying a burden he may not have to carry at all. Even if he finds that it is his heart, he is free to deal with reality and take precautions that may save his life. Truth has not hurt but healed.

**A world where truth
does not shine is a
world filled with fog
and cobwebs, a gray
miasma through which
we run blind and lost
and terrified, tripping
over roots we do not
see,**

dodging the threat of looming shapes, remaining separated from our fellows in the dripping, fear-filled darkness.

The world of truth is the world of what is, the world of the Spanish lime tree outside my window, wearing sunshine like a halo. It is the room I sit in, the sleeping

kitten, the job that must be done, the pleasure to be had or planned for. It is here. It is now. It is what is. It is my world, my truth, my reality, and in it I am no longer "a stranger and afraid/In a world I never made."

True, this world of mine contains ingredients I do not like -pain, grief, anger, fear, tragedy, but these are the things I must accept, because they are part of the totality, and I cannot change them. I wasted years escaping into the unreality of alcoholism. Until I faced the truth that I could not drink, I was alone in the fog and the silence.

Before I learned to love truth, I had to learn to recognize it. Truth is not an immutable absolute, a granite peak, eternal, un-moving, hiding its head in a nimbus of clouds.

Truth is a ballerina tracing arabesque in a pattern of colour and music, ever-changing, harmonious.

Truth is totality: question-and-answer, nail-and-hammer, inside-and-outside. It is never narrow or sectarian. It is not blind, because its own radiance banishes obscurity.

Truth is multifaceted because it is reality. Your truth and mine are different because we are different. Your beliefs are your truth, as mine are mine. When that is accepted, any cause for conflict between us is resolved. Neither of us is right or wrong. We simply hold different pieces of the incredible jigsaw puzzle of life, and each piece has its place.

Truth is immediate. What was true yesterday is no longer true today, and tomorrow is not born yet. Today - now - is truth. What is happening all over the world at this moment is truth, and no part is "truer" than any other part. We are all equal shareholders in reality. For an individual or group to believe he or it has captured the whole of truth is absurd.

When truth is so beautiful, why do we embrace the lie? As a practicing alcoholic, I escaped into nontruth because I felt ill-equipped to cope with reality. And yet the "reality" I perceived was a lie, too. I was escaping from one lie to another, seemingly more pleasant. Because I felt, sober, that I was unlovable, ugly, awkward, and flawed, surrounded by hostile strangers who were devoting their entire attention to spotting my inadequacies, I got drunk. Then, for a while, I felt confident and safe enough from others to enjoy them and myself. Is it any wonder that I fought



against returning to the ugly “reality” that sobriety seemed to offer?

When I finally accepted the fact that I couldn’t drink, that the solace and fun I had found in alcohol were no longer there for me, I turned to AA to show me how to live in that hostile, terrifying, sober world I had deserted many years before. Having found the first truth, I now had to find others: that

people were not hostile; that they were not looking for my flaws, but were much

more concerned with their own;

that, though reality presented many challenges, it had also provided me with the means to deal with them; and that the rewards of dealing with them were multifold -self-respect, a sense of accomplishment, ability to accept responsibility, tolerance, and, most of all, a feeling of being in step with my world. I had begun to grow up. I had found more truth.

*J. W., Key West, Fla.
Best of the Grapevine Vol 1, Pg 133
August 1973*



The Shrivelage Principle

Did the founders of AA give us the tools to cope with inflation, taxes, recession, unemployment, war, pollution, TV, energy shortage and the new morality?

Did the authors of the Twelve Steps foresee that some of the cherished assumptions everybody once seemed to take for granted would today be under serious and responsible question? That the traditional roles of the sexes would be successfully challenged? That we would begin to ask whether intelligent life is necessarily good for this planet? That economic and technological “progress” would no longer seem automatically beneficial? That America would be neither invincible nor always, right?

Did the founders foresee all this? Of course not. They never pretended to be oracular; they weren’t even trying. Sobriety is what it’s all about, remember? But did they, in spite of themselves give us the tools to cope with a wildly uncertain world? Before leaping to a ready, loyal, and resounding. “Yes,” let’s look at those tools as a means of coping with exterior, not interior, problems.

1. The Steps - especially the Third, Eleventh, and Twelfth. These are personal; they

bear on our relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves, and the suffering alcoholic. They gird us internally to meet outside assault. Spiritual.

2. The Big Book, the Serenity Prayer, the Grapevine AA literature, the slogans, and all the other AA sayings that are capsules of truth. They help direct the active mind and keep it muscular. Mental.
3. The group, the meetings, the work, the activities, and events outside the meeting room. They keep us busy. Physical.

Spiritual, mental, physical -it’s all there in the three-part AA way of life, a secure, solid, sober world to live in comfortably ... unless the outside world comes crashing in and demands new answers.

When I put those three elements together, I get an impression of order, of perspective. Among them, there is an interrelationship which seems to lend scope, purpose, direction. In one enormous word, faith. It works when reason fails.

And faith fails only when we try to be bigger than faith. When this

happens, as it does to me with annoying frequency, it is helpful to apply a new principle to meet this new situation. This principle, born of the contemporary scene, helps me to get back into the AA program where I, belong. It is a way of coping with modern problems called the Shrivelage Principle.

Here is the Shrivelage Principle: All things are either Big Stuff or Little Stuff; of the two, only Little Stuff counts. Coping is a matter of ignoring Big Stuff, shrivelling all medium or borderline stuff to Little Stuff, and letting the Little Stuff shrivel away to nothing by itself.

The only trick is recognising the difference between Big Stuff and Little Stuff. A good clue is that man invented Big Stuff; nature is concerned exclusively with immediate, Little Stuff.

All things are joined together by Little Stuff -molecules, atoms, electrons. Even the mountains are assembled from small rocks, the rocks, from tiny grains. Nature does nothing suddenly; it moves step by step, working ever so slowly with Little Stuff. It took 50, 000 years to stand us upright and another 10,000 to get us to the point of inventing the wheel.

People are separated by Big Stuff and united by Little Stuff. In the valleys of Appalachia, blood feuds raged for generations over long-forgotten principles; but

the music and the fiddling and the dancing drew the people together. ---not concepts bigger than themselves, but experience small enough for all to share.

Notice how children never cry over Big Stuff -only stubbing toes or losing dolls. And Wordsworth said, "The child is father to the man." Kids know.

Even our common expressions testify to the importance of Little Stuff: what it boils down to; the nub of the matter. And things that bug us are all Little Stuff.

I remember when I was Big Stuff. Big trouble! Only when I stopped fooling around with Big Stuff and started concentrating on Little Stuff did my life become manageable.

Big Stuff is war and inflation and politics and ecclesiastical superstructures and My Future and foreign policy. Little Stuff is eating and sleeping and loving and listening to music and going to the ball game. Only the Little Stuff is important.

Coping with coping is Big Stuff; it is a man-made concept designed to produce worry. Apply Shrivelage to coping, and we're not coping at all; we're just taking care of the Little Stuff that happens to lie right in front of us, as nature does, as the animals do, as AA co-founder Dr. Bob did. He was the first to admonish us to "keep it simple," and thus

summed up in three words the whole solution to coping.

Concentrating on the Little Stuff means that problems with which we cope are mere pebbles in the stream; they add interest, make the water bubble a little, but, impede nothing seriously or permanently.

To cope, don't try. This is what I absolutely believe for all time -this week. I can hardly wait for next week's unshakable conviction. (The foregoing is Shrivelage in action, applied to my burgeoning

"concepts" before they become Big Stuff.)

And as everyone knows, the real problem facing the universe is this: Why can't my wife put the car keys where they are supposed to be so I won't have to look all over the house for them? If I can get that problem solved, I shall be totally and infinitely happy for all eternity.

*C.H., Fairfield, Conn
(AA Grapevine Vol 2, pg 82)
January 1976*

AA Humour

Did you hear about the actor who fell through the floorboards?
He was just going through a stage.

A man tells his doctor, "Doc, help me. I'm addicted to Twitter!"
The doctor replies, "Sorry, I don't follow you ..."

What's the different between a cat and a comma?
A cat has claws at the end of paws; A comma is a pause at the end of a clause.

What did the Buddhist say to the hot dog vendor?
Make me one with everything.

I got my daughter a fridge for her birthday.
I can't wait to see her face light up when she opens it.



Why God Says No

The first real awareness of most of us, of the tremendous potential continuing assistance from a Higher Power came when we realised that something beyond ourselves was removing the baffling compulsion to drink. As practical results developed, we began to respect the practical side of spiritual life. Later we learned that God's help is not limited to our drinking problem alone but extends into all phases of our lives.

And right there a lot of us begin to get into a certain kind of trouble. Somehow, since we got an immediate answer for our drinking, we conclude that similar answers should come immediately for anything else that might be disturbing us at the moment. We learn that with God all things are possible, and therefore why should we have to be disturbed or disappointed at all?

So, we offer up prayers for assistance, and our requirements may be as lengthy as a Child's list to Santa Claus. But God doesn't meet our demands, so we become a little miffed. And our agitation is likely to increase when we see others getting many of the advantages we'd like to have. Worse yet, we see people who aren't on a "spiritual basis" at all enjoying an outpouring of

luck in all directions – a state of affairs that can lead us into blind alleys of self-pity and envy, feeling God has cheated us.

After All, we say to ourselves (and to the Higher Power who seems to be denying us), aren't we trying to lead good lives? We're doing our best to be moral, kind, courteous, helpful, and honest. Shouldn't good things come over our way, even material things? (We conveniently avoid the admission that we're are trying to lead good lives only because alcohol had us trapped, backed into a corner, with no alternative except to reach out desperately to AA.). We may also have been misled by some of the current books on positive thinking, many of which contain glowing accounts of how countless perplexing problems were solved simply through spending a few minutes each day in prayer and meditation.

But first, shouldn't we consider the real meaning of Step Three and Eleven in the AA program? In these Steps, we commit ourselves to God's will – whatever it is and regardless of the consequences. Our own plans may seem worthy, and our own immediate desires may be modest. But even these may somehow conflict with the plans God has for us.

It may be that in his strategy, the ultimate victory hinges on losing, not winning, some of the battles along the way.

Today's disappointment viewed six months, hence, may turn out to be one of the best breaks we ever got. And at the proper time, our own grateful hindsight will let us see the workings of God's unerring foresight.

AA's early history carries some good object lessons revealing how this principle works. At one time Bill W. and several other AA pioneers decided to solicit wealthy people for contributions to the struggling movement. When they weren't able to raise a single dime, they must have wondered if God hadn't forgotten the desperate needs of the embryo society. Yet, as it later turned out, this experience helped teach AA to be self-supporting. It certainly have been one of his mysterious ways of performing wonders.

Or take the example of Bill's business reverse in Akron, just before he met Dr. Bob. Why should God let a man sustain a defeat like that, especially a man who had known many successive defeats and was doing his level best to live a new kind of life?

No considerate person in his right mind would permit a man to get in a situation like that. But God permitted it, and in growing for a way out of the mess, Bill fell back on his spiritual resources and the soul restoring technique of helping others. Today we beneficiaries of AA's redemptive power can see that this supposed adversity was really God's heavy hand moulding a magnificent movement into being.

But let's suppose, just illustration, that God did give us immediate answers completely in accordance with our wishes, a blank check to do and have anything we want. How well would any of us come out on a deal like that? Since selfishness is a primary defect of alcoholics, amid most of us are experts in using people and circumstances to feather our own nests, wouldn't we do the same thing to God? We would bombard him with unlimited demands, ranging from material gains to dictatorial control over the lives of others.

Since we're an impatient breed, we'd use his help to run everyone else off the road. Although we'd smugly rationalise it by saying we were merely receiving what was due us. We would gloat over business success, romantic conquests, prestige, and other "breaks" – giving little thought to the unpleasant suggestion that our gains might be defeated from somebody else. Yes, we

would manipulate God as spoiled children make demands on foolish and indulgent parents. But God is neither foolish nor indulgent and has the wisdom to say NO. and his answers are always for our own highest good. None of this is to say that God's answers must always be "no", for all of us have known numerous times when the answer was an immediate "yes." But these requests were ratified because they were right and were undoubtedly made in a spirit of humility and unselfishness.

Some AAs seem to achieve beautiful harmony almost

immediately when they expose themselves to God's will. They develop such profound spiritual insight that they receive answers to almost all their prayers. The rest of us admire their serenity and wisdom but continue to inveigle God into doing things our way.

Then we start getting the true realisation, perhaps, when we, too, examine the course of our lives and discover God's unerring wisdom in times past, when he has had to listen and shake his head.

*Anonymous, Jackson, Mich
Best of the Grapevine Vol 1, Pg 188
February 1958*

Money – Before and After

In our drinking time, we acted as if the money were inexhaustible, though between binges we'd sometimes go to the other extreme and become miserly. Without realising it, we were just accumulating funds for the next spree. Money was the symbol of pleasure and self-importance. As our drinking became worse, money was the only and urgent requirement which could supply us with the next drink and the temporary comfort of oblivion it brought.

Twelve and twelve p120.

Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we find we cannot place money first.

For us, material well-being always follows spiritual progress; it never precedes

Alcoholics Anonymous p127


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:
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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