

THE ROAD BACK



includes Service News

MAY - JUL 2024
ISSUE NO. 445



SERVICE

Editorial

The chosen theme for this issue is “service” this theme covers many aspects of the work that is required from our members.

Recently we have seen the excellent work done by our National Public Information (PI) Committee which has produced posters, business cards and are currently going round the provinces with a PI presentation which will be available to all in AA.

Prison work is another very important service, “carrying the message to the prisoner”. Again all over Ireland men and women of AA deliver this service, Hospitals is another service which is constantly being taken care of by our members ensuring anyone hospitalised because of alcoholism will have an opportunity to hear our message of recovery.

I often ask myself how these people get into this type of service??

It becomes very clear they start off at the top and work their way down, the top being the group where it all starts. We make the tea, we open our meeting rooms, ask guest speakers, provide biscuits, we attend group conscience, gain a knowledge of the Service Handbook and after two years continuous sobriety we become General Service Representatives (G.S.R).

In Bill W words “the most important service in Alcoholics Anonymous, we attend area and relate important information to area and return important information to our groups, area is one of the first places where we are introduced to Hospital Committees and we are now on our journey through many service positions in our fellowship”.

So, for those that get the opportunity to read this challenge yourself with the question am I on a journey to service or will I just leave it to THEM, a term used many times for those that travel the path to the bottom of the service structure.

The next issue of The Road Back will have the theme **Step 1**, so let’s hear your experience of acceptance of your alcoholism and in turn those few words may be just what some newcomer needs to hear.

The future of our fellowship depends on our gratitude put into action, so let’s get pen to paper and send our experiences to:

roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie

Road Back 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, organisation 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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The General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous of Ireland,
Unit 2, Block C, Santry Business Park,
Swords Road, Dublin 9, D09 H584 Ireland.
Telephone (01) 842 0700 | Website www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

RECOVERY UNITY SERVICE

Recovery Unity Service, are in that order for a very good reason. I can't give very much in Service unless I have made some reasonable steps in Recovery through the 12 Steps. I can also contribute more in Service if I have some knowledge of the 12 Traditions. Making tea and emptying the Ashtrays was my first contribution in Service (They had ashtrays when I first arrived).

Having been taken through the Steps by two different Sponsors I began to see a new area I could contribute to to help others. I heard another member share at a meeting one night that his Sponsor had taken him through the Traditions. I hadn't had this experience so I approached a member who spoke in his sharing about the Traditions and their importance and he agreed to take me through the Traditions.

In my early days in AA I did very little in terms of Service and avoided Group Conscience meetings as that was where you were expected to get involved as a Meeting Secretary. This meant going to other meetings to get Speakers. Eventually I did get involved and many older members gave me sound advice such as "Don't ask someone to do a Chair if you haven't heard them share at a meeting". Other advice was to follow including meeting guidelines drawn up by the Group.

Then came Service of a different kind. The Group needed a GSR to go to Area This required a good knowledge of the Steps and Traditions and at least two years Sobriety. Area meetings showed me a different level of Service when members from the Area met and discussed a wider range of AA issues. My job was to bring anything from my Group to Area and then bring back to the Group what had been discussed at Area. I became a "Trusted

Servant". Everyone at Area knew more than me so I experienced a different type of Service and a bigger challenge. I had then to seek more advice from my Sponsor. On the application of Traditions and a whole new area of the 12 Concepts.

Then after some years at Area I was proposed as Area Secretary. I had to seek advice again from my Sponsor who directed me to the Service Handbook - Listen to what is being said and get to the kernel of the debate. Not an easy task at this time as we didn't have the advantage of the use of recordings which came later.

My next experience as Intergroup Secretary raised the bar yet again. Advice from my Sponsor again proved valuable. This came at a very difficult and a crucial period in my recovery. My wife died very suddenly and Service at this time provided me with a focus which deflected my attention away from my personal tragedy. This also carried over to my subsequent election as a General Service Conference Delegate (GSCD). This meant more understanding and knowledge. Many other members advice was valuable at this time along with my sponsor. At present I am coming to the end of my Service as a GSCD and I will have completed the Circle that surrounds Recovery Unity Service and will go back to Service at Group level.

I have found being in Service a great blessing. It has enabled me to grow spiritually and to make a contribution to the Fellowship which saved my life and gave me a life where I am at peace with myself and those around me.

Billy I. GSCD Ulster





When I was a year sober a member said to me "Get a home group and start doing Service, that's what's suggested". So, I did just that and began to do secretary. At the first few meetings I was anxious and nervous but after a while I became more relaxed and confident.

I began to feel its benefits and felt part of AA. I then went on to other levels of Service - Area, IG, Conference and served on Convention committees and All Ireland Convention committees. I saw that the members involved in Service were staying sober. At times I thought "will I be able to do this?" and self-doubt crept in. This didn't last long though as members were always on hand to give me encouragement and support.

I got to know of the Service Handbook and its importance, the structure of AA and much more. Importantly I got to know about myself, that I could be closed-minded, not a great

listener and hadn't much patience. So, I had to work on these things and change. I had to listen to other members' views and make decisions for the good of the fellowship.

So, what am I doing today, you ask. Though I have rotated out of Service on some levels I am still involved on a smaller scale and continue to do Service in my home group. Service has been such an important part of my recovery and always refer to it if I'm doing a top table share. To anyone reading this story and hasn't got involved in Service yet...go for it! Remember what I have heard numerous times during my 30 years of sobriety...When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help I want the hand of AA to always be there.

And for that I AM RESPONSIBLE.

Marilyn K, Mayo

THE VOICE IN MY HEAD

There was a voice in my head that would ask my husband, you will never leave me, he would answer with a smile, never!

It was a Tuesday night, I am reading a good book he is watching a film I have seen before. I got up and smiled, I am going to bed with my book, he winked back at me. I woke at 2:30am, he was having a heart attack, and he was gone, dead; seven years of happy marriage over in a flash.

My heart broke in two and this cold dark hole came to live inside me, this hole had friend's "anger" "envy" and hate of God.

Drink became my only friend; it understood the

pain and it took me to pubs, parties, places I could play the fool. I didn't drink at home I had to get out into the madness. My drink was beer and wine, it got me into lots of trouble, lost car, friends and most of all I lost myself.

My doctor got me to go to my first AA meeting, I was eight stone I could not sit and my legs shook all the time, it's not alcohol, it's grief I told myself for years.

AA got me over the years. I stayed and today I have a car, friends and most of all I have a love for God that will hopefully stay with me for the rest of my life.

Maeve, Ireland



WHAT DOES RECOVERY THROUGH THE FELLOWSHIP OF AA MEAN TO ME?

Age 43, sober one year and three days.

In Kildare, at 42 I was the mother of two boys, separated and consumed by intrusive thoughts of alcohol every morning I would say "please I don't want to drink today". Every day I would go to Lidl and buy enough beer to last for two days (just in case something happened tomorrow that I couldn't get to the shop).

My days were spent clock watching until the clock got to an "acceptable" time to drink. The acceptable time started creeping up earlier and earlier. If my young boys wanted to play out the front after beer o'clock, they weren't allowed, sure how could they!

I was drinking and that was a continuous thing until I passed out. Life was like that for two years straight. My alcoholism was slowly progressing and I was no longer recognisable, especially physically. I was so bloated I looked like a dead body having been recovered from the sea.

When my oldest boy was little I would tell myself I would stop when he noticed beer cans in the house that was when he was three or four years old. When he was seven, he came home from school and handed me a Mother's Day printout, questions he had answered, my mums name is, my mum loves etc., my mum's

favorite drink is beer.

There it was in black and white, the days of him not noticing had long since passed, it quite literally broke me. The next morning I logged onto an AA meeting. The secretary, now a friend, reassured me that the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking. I had never felt more part of something in my entire life.

I drank for a further two weeks before I came back, I have not felt the need to take a drink since.

Early sobriety was a rollercoaster of emotions, but I had an abundance of support in the fellowship. I credit them with my life and the life I have been able to give to my boys. I got my marriage back, I could start to see the part I played in its demise.

My son saved my life that day and the fellowship helps keep me on track every day.

Lisa B
All Ireland convention
20/04/2024

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!
SEND YOUR STORIES, POEMS OR FAVOURITE IMAGES RELATING TO YOUR SOBRIETY TO:
ROADBACK@ALCOHOLICSANONYMOUS.IE



Confidence

IS BEAUTIFUL...

Long before I ever drank Alcohol, I had the "ism's", the loneliness, people pleasing nature, I also developed OCD and paranoia about being in crowds after I entered my teens. This type of obsession I see now can be extremely draining, it seemed I was trying to internalise control that I felt I did not have in my external life. A pattern, intense anxiety if surrounded by people, especially if I was in the spotlight, and relief once on my own again. But even before this I experienced a lot of fear, during my primary school years. I remember settling down to sleep one night, I must have been about eight, and feeling this panic come over me, I had suddenly realised I had not completed my homework. That overwhelming feeling was one I got used to, especially in situations where I felt threatened, I remember another time a teacher asked us to compose a poem and read it out in front of the class, I was panicked at the thought of this. Luckily for me I managed to escape, I wasn't picked.

My sobriety date is October 15, 1999, my primary addiction was to alcohol, but I had been trying to get sober since entering recovery in early 1990. Even before that I had been looking for a solution, to what I wasn't quite sure. I tried a geographical, travelling to Germany on my own, I stayed away from alcohol for the first six weeks, secured a job and a small apartment. The drinking started again, the loneliness intensified, I had no friends there, I ended up in the apartment of a work colleague one-night drinking, that was my first time ending up in a police cell, I was let out in the morning, I went drinking again to blot this out, the neighbours complained about

someone sleeping outside my door, it was me, I was so drunk I couldn't open my own door. I left that city shortly afterwards and went to another without any real purpose except to escape again. A week later I was drinking in the train station with some homeless people, someone slipped me ecstasy tablet and I blacked out and got my wallet and passport stolen. Miraculously I got my passport back but had to summon money from home. It was the first time I made contact since I left, and it was because I was stuck. I came home to Ireland and at some stage gave up and went on a drinking binge for several months.

The physical effects of alcohol began to worsen, my body was in constant withdrawals, combined with loneliness, desperation set in. I found myself at the back of a garden with a knife in my hand, I am not sure how to describe what actually happened, whether an hallucination or otherwise, but a positive image appeared in the foliage, giving me a shock, I remember throwing the knife away and returned inside. Very soon afterwards a chance meeting with a person recognised my situation and suggested a hospital visit. The first person I met after an initial drying out period was a female counsellor. A meeting I will never forget, it was the first time I ever heard about alcoholism and it was also the first time I felt understood. The chart I was shown described my decent into hell but also mapped a recovery process. I came away with hope from that moment.

I went on to have regular meetings with the same person, it was the start of my making

connections with people without alcohol.

I found a sponsor who opened his heart to Me, which made it easy for me to open, he brought me through the steps, I felt great, I met someone who understood. Sadly, this sponsor died a few years after my knowing him. After his death I kept going to meetings, but the isolation came back, I felt it more so at recovery meetings than in normal everyday interactions, but I kept going anyway, I felt I was obliged, I owed my life to the recovery meetings but the interior feelings of not fitting in like I did at school returned.

I was always researching about different aspects of recovery, and early on I came across books by Carl Jung, I read with interest about the different archetypes, but I was not able to apply it to my recovery. I tried a Jungian analyst once, it took me nearly two months to get an appointment, but this analyst was stone face and abrupt, I never went back. It felt like my first day at school. I drank again soon afterwards, despite this I always went back again to recovery meetings, my drinking bouts were periodic, I always suffered torture afterwards, and it took me days and days to recover, but the loneliness and lack of connection was always there. I was afraid to reach out.

I was introduced again to the archetypes through my work with Write to Freedom. The lover archetype was the first one I encountered. I could relate to it immediately and could see where in many ways I let it dictate to many areas of my life. It helped me greatly, but at a cost to the other archetypes, in particular the warrior. I fell in love with ideas, for example I bought the book "Into the wild" about a man who escaped onto the Alaskan wilderness, After gaining knowledge of this archetype, I could see where it had in many ways given me dreams and hopes, for example the longing for travel and distant lands was a theme that helped me bounce back after my many "slips".

I could put on some music, and I was off again, leaving reality behind me, I could dream, dream of escape. My favourite book in recovery was a Hazelden volume titled "each day a new beginning", it had a daily reflection together with inspirational quotes by famous scientists, philosophers, my lover archetype fell in love with all the ideas and people in the book.

The lover also allowed me at times to break out of isolation and create relationships with people who shared similar ideas and interest with me, but once anyone displayed displeasure or lack of interest, fear gripped me again. I had not developed or was aware of my warrior to take over, instead my feelings were hurt, and I withdrew once again into myself. This pattern kept repeating itself and I never know why or how to break the cycle.

To break this cycle, I needed to become comfortable with my own lover archetype before I opened or shared with other people. A new type of confidence emerged when I done this.

So, by consciously giving time and space to the lover within I became more confident in what it had to say, and how it could help me connect meaningfully with others. I treat the archetypes like rooms in a house, my work is to open the windows and let the light in, allow fresh air to circulate.

Anon



UNITY | SERVICE | RECOVERY

GETTING SOBER IN THE 90'S

I got sober in 1990 doing the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and have stayed sober through the Principles of those same Steps.

My Sponsor introduced me to Service within the very first year by going on 12th Step calls and trying to carry the message as best I could. I was very enthusiastic about this experience as it was a whole new perspective of carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic. Little did I know at that time this was only the beginning of my journey in Service which has helped me remain sober for 31 years a day at a time.

The first decade of Service was opening up the rooms, lighting fires, making tea, washing cups and emptying ashtrays and doing my first stint as Group Secretary. All these various experiences of Service has helped me maintain and grow in Service. From the start I have been able to pick up newcomers and take them to meetings several times a week.

I have lived in various areas and so have experienced Service in Down, Antrim and presently in Belfast Area.

Currently I am GSR for the East End Group and attend both Area and Ulster Intergroup. In the East End Group I also do Service as Meeting Secretary Co-ordinator and have held this post for the last decade. I have also held the post of Chairperson in my Group.

Service is the backbone of my recovery and I am well rewarded for my efforts. I continue to collect members from homeless centres about five nights a week and take them to a variety of meetings in and around Belfast.

I find that service helps keep me in fit Spiritual Condition and enhances my Sobriety.

Norman, Belfast

I FOUND MY TRIBE!

Born and bred in a very affluent area. I grew up in an environment where the abnormal was normal. Also my experiences out of that same environment made sure that I would grow up insecure and very lonely.

With alcohol becoming my companion from 13 years of age, I soon discovered a way of life that was ill suited. However even after many attempts to stop, trips to hospitals, police stations, even a short stay in prison, I could not stop drinking. Even though, I desperately wanted to stop, my thoughts always came up with an excuse why not to stop, even giving me more excuses to keep going. However finally after many years of wanting to stop, a miracle happened.

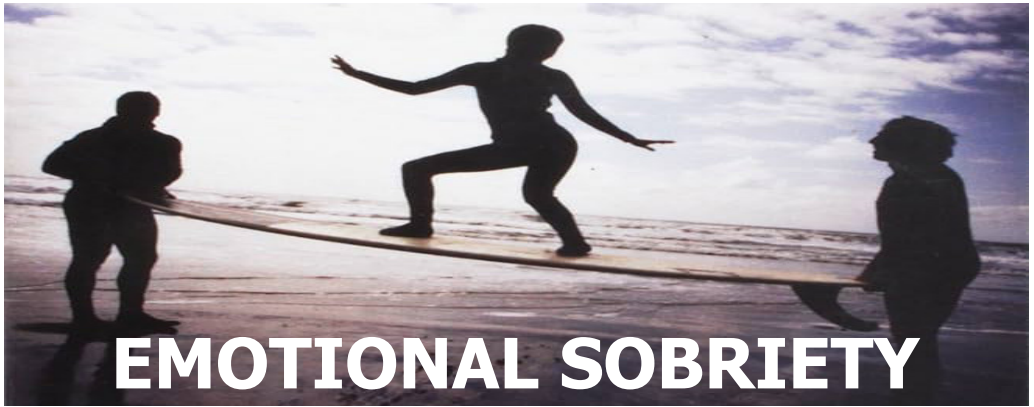
A woman whom I borrowed money from regularly said "Dave I do not know who owns this €20 note because it is going back and forward so much". That night I went to the pub to play darts (with a pub team). While playing my match, something happened – I said out loud, I am done. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I am now 22 years in AA where I have found so much hope and Gratitude, and a will to live free from the prison of alcoholism.

I found my tribe and the magic of living a day at a time, instead of my wreckage of the future.

Dave H





EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

This is the substance of a revealing letter which Bill W wrote several years ago to a close friend who also had troubles with depression. The letter appeared in the "Grapevine" January, 1953.

EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

"I think that many oldsters who have put our AA "booze cure" to severe but successful tests still find they often lack emotional sobriety. Perhaps they will be the spearhead for the next major development in AA, the development of much more real maturity and balance (which is to say, humility) in our relations with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God.

Those adolescent urges that so many of us have for top approval, perfect security, and perfect romance, urges quite appropriate to age seventeen, prove to be an impossible way of life when we are at age forty-seven and fifty-seven.

Since AA began, I've taken immense wallops in all these areas because of my failure to grow up emotionally and spiritually. My God, how painful it is to keep demanding the impossible, and how very painful to discover, finally, that all along we have had the cart before the horse. Then comes the final agony of seeing how awfully wrong we have been, but still finding

ourselves unable to get of the emotional merry-go-round.

How to translate a right mental conviction into a right emotional result, and so into easy, happy and good living. Well, that's not only the neurotic's problem, it's the problem of life itself for all of us who have got to the point of real willingness to hew to right principles in all our affairs.

Even then, as we hew away, peace and joy may still elude us. That's the place so many of us AA oldsters have come to. And it's a hell of a spot, literally. How shall our unconscious, from which so many of our fears, compulsions and phony aspirations still stream, be brought into line with what we actually believe, know and want! How to convince our dumb, raging and hidden Mr. Hyde' becomes our main task.

I've recently come to believe that this can be achieved. I believe so because I begin to see many benighted ones, folks like you and me, commencing to get results. Last autumn, depression, having no really rational cause at all, almost took me to the cleaners. I began to be scared that I was in for another long chronic spell. Considering the grief I've had with depressions; it wasn't a bright prospect.

I kept asking myself "Why can't the twelve



steps work to release depression?" By the hour, I stared at the St. Francis Prayer... "it's better to comfort than to be comforted." Here was the formula, all right, but why didn't it work?

Suddenly, I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence, almost absolute dependence, on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security, and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression.

There wasn't a chance of making the outgoing love of St. Francis a workable and joyous way of life until these fatal and almost absolute dependencies were cut away.

Because I had over the years undergone a little spiritual development, the absolute quality of these frightful dependencies had never before been so starkly revealed. Reinforced by what grace I could secure in prayer, I found I had to exert every ounce of will and action to cut off these faulty emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed upon any act of circumstance whatsoever.

Then only could I be free to love as Francis did. Emotional and instinctual satisfactions, I saw, were really the extra dividends of having love, offering love, and expressing love appropriate to each relation of life.

Plainly, I could not avail myself to God's love until I was able to offer it back to Him by loving others as He would have me. And I couldn't possibly do that so long as I was victimized by false dependencies.

For my dependence meant demand, a demand

for the possession and control of the people and the conditions surrounding me.

While those words "absolute dependence" may look like a gimmick, they were the ones that helped trigger my release into my present degree of stability and quietness of mind, qualities which I am now trying to consolidate by offering love to others regardless of the return to me.

This seems to be the primary healing circuit; an outgoing love of God's creation and His people, by means of which we avail ourselves of His love for us. It is almost clear that the real current can't flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken, and broken at depth. Only then can we possibly have a glimmer of what adult love really is.

If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependence and its consequent demand. Let us, with God's help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love: we may then be able to gain emotional sobriety.

Of course, I haven't offered you a really new idea --- only a gimmick that has started to unhook several of my own hexes at depth. Nowadays, my brain no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity or depression. I have been given a quiet place in the bright sunshine."

Bill W, Attitude is Everything

**For further information on forthcoming AA Events please
visit the events section of our website on:
www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie/events**



MY STORY

316 days ago – what on earth, ambulance, firemen, blood. Husband shouting my name, woke up in ambulance. Shouting I am ok, bring me home.

Panic, Panic, I won't be able to drink. Holy God almighty, I have messed up. Raging. How will I get out of this one?

Day two – children at end of bed, staples in my head, blood stained. Here's their tears, tears, tears. Please Mammy you have to stop, please. Husband crying I love you, please do something.

I tried on and off for years, but the devil always made the feelings so attractive. Lies, lies,

plotting, planning, hiding drink, drink, drink, drink, Yet performing, work, driving, family, make up, codding the world, or so I thought. Home from hospital, on Librium, etc. reluctantly I will check out AA.

Day four went online, found home group... wow, my new family today. Welcoming, understanding, knew how I felt. I got my fabulous Sponsor two weeks into AA. I wanted what they had in AA. I was such a mess, drinking for over 35 years.

How grateful I am today. 10 months & 11 days sober, at an All-Ireland Convention. Doing service & going to meetings daily.

Anon

STEP 9

When I got sober initially, I thought I hadn't hurt anyone else in my drinking days. I heard members at meetings sharing about wives, husbands and children and I had none of these. I was single. I drank alcoholically in London and felt that my drinking hadn't affected anyone.

As I went on in sobriety, the fog lifted, and I could see the past more clearly. I didn't write a list when doing the 8th step, I got a conscience in sobriety and when I thought of people I may have harmed, I did the right thing and made amends to them. When I was 17 years old, I got pregnant and I had to give my baby girl up for adoption. I was very traumatised by this and forgot a lot of the situations around the process. I drank and cried about this for a lot of years.

I started the journey on trying to locate her when I was about 25 years sober. I was unable to deal with it and go back there until then. Eventually and with help, I was able to meet my daughter and we are in touch regularly since then. Meeting her for the first time did

not happen in my time. It was a slow process. I was not in control, even though of course I wanted to be. I am grateful for that as I know I would have messed It up. I had my Higher Power and social workers to help me.

Step 9 has done a great service to me. I am now free of all the guilt and shame associated with this time and many others. I was called lots of bad names when I became pregnant and I believed them to be true. Through practising the 9th step, I have been able to understand my behaviour & move on from the fact That I had always seen myself as a bad person getting good, to a sick person getting well.

I have 3 adult children now and I am so blessed to be 37 years sober..

A day at a time.

Mary B



just for today...

Today, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride as I share a significant milestone in my life. It is now close to 26 years since my last drink. This journey has been one of profound transformation, growth, and self-discovery, and I wanted to take a moment to reflect on this accomplishment and express my heartfelt thanks to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, who have supported, guided and carried me along the way.

The decision to embrace sobriety was not an easy one, but it was undoubtedly the most important choice I have ever made. In the early days, the path ahead seemed daunting and uncertain, filled with challenges that tested my resolve and determination. However, with each passing day, I found strength in the support of my loved ones, the wisdom of the fellowship and the 12 step program.

Sobriety has gifted me with clarity of mind, a renewed sense of purpose, and the ability to fully engage with the world around me. It has allowed me to rebuild relationships that were once strained, to pursue passions that I had long abandoned, and to become a person who is present, reliable, and deeply appreciative of life's simple joys.

Throughout these last years, I have learned that sobriety is not just about abstaining from alcohol, but about embracing a holistic approach to well-being. It involves nurturing

my mental, emotional, and physical health, and continually striving for personal growth. I have come to understand the importance of self-compassion, forgiveness, and the power of resilience.

I am profoundly grateful to my family and friends who have stood by me through thick and thin. Your encouragement, understanding, and love have been the bedrock of my recovery. I am equally thankful to those I encounter in the rooms I visit and whose shared experiences and collective wisdom remain a source of inspiration, strength and learning.

I am reminded that sobriety is a lifelong journey, one that requires vigilance, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to self-improvement. I am proud of how far I have come, and I am excited about the future, knowing that each day presents an opportunity to build on this foundation of strength and resilience.

Thank you AA for sharing my journey and for believing in me. That support has made all the difference, and I am eternally grateful.

Philip McG ,Wicklow.



Heard at Meetings

Why settle for relief when what you really want is freedom

A sponsor is somebody who sees through you and still sees you through

Alcoholism is a brain disease.

Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you!

An AA meeting puts the brakes on my head.

When it comes to gratitude, my mind is like Teflon.
When it comes to resentments, my mind is like flypaper

Service News

MAY - JUL 2024

In this edition we have decided to tell you a little about Conference in Ireland. The Annual General Meeting of Conference in Ireland is normally held during the second weekend of March every year.

This year, a report was presented to Conference, by a subcommittee, which recommended that the Fellowship in Ireland change our current motions process to bring us more in line with how other countries deal with motions. Conference decided that this topic was too important for them to make this decision themselves – they felt that the report should be sent out to the Fellowship first in order that the membership could have their say on this very important matter. First we would like to tell you a little more about what Conference is and does.

Why do we need a Conference?

Bernard B. Smith, former non-alcoholic Chairperson of our New York Board of Trustees, and one of the architects of the Conference structure, answered the question superbly in his opening talk at the 1954 meeting:

‘We may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need it to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from his room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined to alcoholism. We need to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in AA that rebirth which brought us back to life. We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must insure can never invade AA. We need it to ensure AA against Government, while insulating it against anarchy; we need it to protect AA

against disintegration while preventing over-integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and all of its services.

We need it to ensure that changes within AA come only as a response to the needs and wants of all AA and not of any few. We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of AA never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome. We need it to ensure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is”.

Composition

The General Service Conference of Ireland comprises of 30 members as follows:

- Four General Service Conference Delegates (GSCDs) or their Alternate proxies from each of the four provinces of Ireland (16 in total);
- Four Provincial Intergroup Secretaries.
- Four Alcoholic Trustees (Members of AA) – one from each Province (Provincial AA Trustees) who are directors of the General Service Board of AA CLG (GSBAA);
- Three Trustees who are not AA Members who also are directors of GSBAA (NATS)
- The Secretary to Conference (who is also the Company Secretary of GSBAA)
- Two World Service Delegates (WSD)
- All members of Conference shall be entitled to participate and vote at meetings of Conference.
- Observers may speak at Conference at the discretion of the Chairperson of Conference



Conference Charter

In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference of Ireland shall observe the spirit of AA Traditions, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve be its prudent principles, that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive, or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its world services, it shall never enact laws and regulations binding on government, and that, like the Fellowship of AA which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action. Currently, Motions are dealt with as detailed in Article 8 of the Conference Charter

Article 8

Motions and Submissions to General Service Conference. Motions to Conference should be dealt with at the main sitting of Conference (usually held in March). All motions and submissions including reports from All Ireland Conventions, World Service Reports, Observers' Reports, Conference Delegate and Public Information Reports ought to reach the Board/ Company Secretary six weeks in advance of the Annual General Service Conference. Where a motion is put before a full meeting of Conference, no delegate other than the proposer of the motion shall be permitted to speak more than once on the same motion. The proposer, however, may exercise his/her right of reply in winding up the debate but shall confine his/her reply to answering points raised by previous speakers.

Decisions of Conference

The decision of Conference resulting from any vote or any motion or item before Conference shall have the following effects:

All items or motions passed unanimously become Conference policy immediately and are recommended in trust to all Groups, Area Committees, Intergroups, Conference and Board.

All items or motions passed by a two-thirds majority are recommended and unless rescinded by notice of motion, become Conference policy after the expiry of one year.

All items or motions receiving only a simple majority are recommendations and shall be further debated at the next General Meeting of Conference

Recommendations of the Subcommittee of Conference

This is a hugely important matter. It proposes to change Article 8 of our Conference Charter. This relates to how changes occur in the Fellowship in Ireland, which will affect every group and member across the country. It is important that you have your say. If your group has an opinion on this, please bring that view to your local Area meeting through your GSRs. Then the Areas can bring this to the Intergroup meeting and onward to Conference for decision next March. And please be mindful that it will take time for your group's views to work its way through the Structure, from Group to Area to Intergroup to Conference. Even though Conference doesn't take place until next March, now is the time to start this discussion. This is your decision to make. Some Groups will no doubt be aware of this proposal already. The Conference Delegates were tasked with bringing this report back to their Intergroups and Areas. But not everyone will yet be aware of this. Please take the time to read the report below. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to bring them to your next local Area meeting.

Details of the proposed changes are detailed below:

Review of the Motions to Conference Process Subcommittee Report and Recommendations

This subcommittee were tasked with evaluating what improvements could be made to the process for creating motions that can go through the structure for consideration at Conference. We met several times with the goal of evaluating and simplifying the Motions to Conference Process.

Several members of our subcommittee have attended AAGB Conferences and were very impressed and inspired by it. We looked extensively at their process but recognised that AA Ireland is smaller with our own unique structure, and accordingly needs a process reflecting this.

Areas that we identified for improvement are:

- Motions sometimes come to Conference that are unclear or more suitable for Group Conscience level discussion
- Groups would benefit from guidance on writing motions so that they can be clearly understood and considered
- Areas and Intergroups would benefit from guidance in how motions move through the structure
- Groups do not always receive sufficient feedback on why their motions were unsuccessful at Conference
- Circular discussions about motions at Conference were time consuming, repetitive and generally not conducive to reaching a consensus
- The fellowship could be better informed of upcoming motions or subsequent decisions made at conference.
- On occasion, members can be prejudiced for or against motions from particular groups/provinces.

- Sometimes there are many similar motions that could be grouped together and discussed as one motion.

The subcommittee acknowledged the process adopted for the 2023 Conference. The large numbers of motions submitted – some of which were similar – were broken down into manageable numbers for discussion within four sub groups to Conference. When each sub group concluded their discussions, they brought their recommendations back to Conference to be voted on. We recognised that this allowed Conference members the opportunity to discuss their sub groups’ motions fully and furthermore that they provided an opportunity for the minority voice to be heard, should it arise.

Based on both the areas identified for improvement and the 2023 Conference process detailed above, we recommend that:

A. Conference continue to use the 2023 format and formalise it as follows:

- Each subgroup to Conference is balanced with at least one representative from each province and one trustee.
- WSD’s, NAT’s and Observers will be evenly distributed between subgroups where reasonably possible.

B. The adoption of the following improvements for the Motions to Conference Process:

- Groups, Areas and Intergroups are given clear guidance on their role in the Motions to Conference Process
- All motions, once submitted to the Board Secretary in the normal way, are anonymised. In this way, the identity of the group is removed from the motion and this will allow the motion to be discussed without prejudice.
- Similar motions are grouped together and discussed as one motion.
- Motions that have been previously brought to Conference and been unsuccessful

have a cooling off period of three years before they or very similar motions are resubmitted.

- A Conference Motions Subcommittee is formed. Its primary role is to review and assess motions and their suitability for Conference. The subcommittee will consist of a Conference member from each province, a board member/trustee and the Board Secretary.

The role of this subcommittee is to:

- Group similar motions together.
- Evaluate if there is sufficient information for Conference to discuss a motion, and if not, be in a position to request additional information to assist in the resubmittal of the motion from the group.
- Consider if a motion is suitable for Conference, and if not, provide the group with a written explanation on the reasons why not.
- Publish all motions for Conference in the Winter edition of The Road Back. This will allow the fellowship to be aware of and discuss motions in advance of Conference.
- Allocate motions to Conference groups.

To facilitate these improvements we suggest the following changes:

- Motions for discussion at the General Service Conference be submitted by 31st August each year to the Board secretary in the normal manner, through the structure.
- The Board Secretary anonymise the motions and submit all motions to the Conference Motions Subcommittee before 21st September.
- The Conference Motions Subcommittee meet and review all motions.
- All suitable motions are published in advance of Conference in The Road Back Winter Edition to ensure the widest transparency across the fellowship. This will also have the benefit of encouraging

members to submit motions through their groups.

- If a motion is considered unsuitable for Conference, full details are provided to the group before the year end.
- The decision of Conference resulting from any vote or any motion or item before Conference shall have the following effects: All items or motions passed by a two-thirds majority become Conference policy immediately and are recommended in trust to all Groups, Area Committees, Intergroups, Conference and Board. All items or motions receiving only a simple majority are recommendations and shall be further debated at the next General Meeting of Conference. The General Service Board should take any necessary action.
- The Service Handbook be updated to reflect the agreed changes.



"MY NAME IS"



"My name is ***** and I'm an alcoholic!!"

These were words I never thought I would say in my life, and especially, in my early thirties. I didn't and couldn't say them out loud at a meeting for at least a month or two. That anxious feeling that came over me when I eventually got the courage to even say my name at a meeting, it was so nerve-racking. I will always remember the simple task of being asked to read out loud "how it works" or "the promises" at a meeting used to terrify me. I can reflect now on how things have changed for me since that time. I have grown in all areas of my life including self-confidence and self-awareness and this is directly due to being a member AA and getting involved in service in AA.

I remember my first meeting like it was yesterday. I walked in full of fear, not knowing what was ahead of me for my future. I must have had "it's my first meeting" written all over my face as I was immediately greeted by a friendly member who asked me would I like a cup of tea or coffee? I obviously declined as I couldn't even look the man in the eyes let alone enjoy a cup of tea! I sat down at the back of the room and just cried through the whole meeting. I didn't really know why I

was crying but when I look back now, I think they were tears of sheer relief. I eventually admitted, if only to myself at this stage, that I had a problem with alcohol and I needed help. I had my first drink when I was fourteen. I was going to a disco, and I remember this huge feeling of calmness and happiness that came over me, I had arrived. This was it, the feeling I had craved to make me feel more like myself, so I could be who I was supposed to be. I never felt good enough, for myself or for other people.

When I drank, I felt powerful, like I could be this confident outgoing chatty person, the complete opposite to who I believed I was when I didn't drink. I loved the feeling it gave me and from the very beginning it took control of me. I never had that "off" button that some people had. Very quickly it became a huge part of my coping mechanism throughout my teenage years. I suffered with blackouts from the very start and just presumed that this was part of a hangover. I thought my friends were lying when they said they remembered stuff about the night out, but it didn't really bother me that much. I had no sense of myself or who I was. I was their entertainment most nights and once I got a laugh and didn't get into too much trouble it wasn't harming anyone. Or



so I thought. I continued to drink throughout my teenage years and my twenties. Complete binge drinking with a few near misses along the way. I always identify with the story of the J-walker in the big book. Things would happen but I would always be able to make excuses as to why I got so drunk, I was spiked, I didn't have dinner, I drank gin.....etc. From the outside I looked like I had a great life and that I was happy, but I was lost as a person.

I had a brother who was destructively drinking every weekend and when he drank, he caused havoc in the family home. My drinking was completely different. It was more secretive, and I made sure I didn't get caught as I would stay with friends on nights out. I looked on my brother as your typical alcoholic and because I didn't get myself into the same situations as he did, I convinced myself that I couldn't be an alcoholic. I maybe drank a bit too much sometimes but that was okay as I was just enjoying myself and enjoying life. Except I wasn't. My rock bottom wasn't any huge disastrous event that happened. I certainly had a few of them alright. It was more the realisation that alcohol had simply stopped working for me. I wasn't getting the oblivion from alcohol that it had once given me, and I knew that I could either keep drinking and destroy my life or had to find another way to live.

I'm so grateful that I took the latter option and to say that AA has given me a completely different life would be an understatement. I really did think my life was over when I walked through the doors of my first AA meeting, but on the contrary, it was just the beginning of a whole new way of living. My journey in AA has been one of rediscovery. Learning about me and who I am as a person. At the start I came into AA to stop myself becoming like one of you! I didn't want to be part of AA and I certainly didn't want people to get to know the real me. I laugh at this now and how naive I was. I just thought that you could come to

meetings for a while and then you were done. You only went back if you wanted a drink and then "they" somehow convinced you at the meeting not to drink.

It wasn't long before I was approached to do my first chair within my homegroup. I thought that someone might come up to me afterwards and say, "what are you doing here, you don't belong here, you're not an alcoholic". Funny enough no one did! That was my first glimpse into what service was about. I was told that in telling my story that I might help someone else. My experience, strength and hope could be of benefit to another person. It was also a way for people to get to know me and my story and I felt a bit more connected to my group and to AA in general after doing it. A few months in I got a sponsor and was taken through the steps in a very loving and compassionate way. My sponsor suggested that I "give back" to AA by doing secretary at a meeting. I found this quite daunting at the start, as I would have to go to other meetings and speak to people and ask them to do the chair for me. I then had to sit up at the top table with everyone looking and listening to me while I opened the meeting. However, it helped me a lot in growing in self-confidence and I got to know people in the fellowship, and maybe more importantly they got to know me.

While taking on the role of secretary it was suggested by a member that I stay around for "the group conscience meeting" which took place once a month after the Wednesday evening meeting. I had no idea what this was, but I said I would go anyway just to see what it involved. At this meeting I learned how the group worked behind the scenes. As a newcomer you just see the doors opened, the chairs put out and the kettle put on for the meeting. You really don't think about the people behind all this and what it takes to make this happen. Someone comes early and gives up their time so that we can benefit from a meeting. Each month I continued to go to



the group conscience for the group. I learned about the traditions of AA and about things like public information for the group and where the money went from the contributions.

I first heard about the Area while attending the group conscience meeting. Each group can have two members attend as representatives for their group. Things like issues arising from different groups, correspondence from intergroup and the financial report of the area are discussed, along with the phone service, the prison service and public information. This area meeting happens once a month and at some point, maybe two years into recovery, I was asked if I would like to come along to observe what happens.

At this point I was eager to learn about the workings of AA. I had been attending meetings and doing secretary, and I was aware that there were benefits to doing service in AA, both in my recovery and my outside life. I could see my confidence was growing and the more I got involved with AA, the more connected and involved I felt. This "connected" feeling was something that I definitely lacked growing up. I was intrigued at how many people were involved in the service end of AA and at just how many different service positions were available to get involved in. I was asked would I like to become the GSR, (group service representative) for my group for area and I took that role on for two years. I attended area meetings each month and reported back to my group at our group conscience meetings every month. I enjoyed this different type of AA meeting and I got to know a lot of members from other groups who I may not have met otherwise.

There were service positions available within the area and it was "suggested" I take on the role of secretary for the area. Firstly, I knew nothing about this role at all and secondly, I didn't think I was qualified enough to do it. A few different members spoke to me and were

able to offer me support and advice and with their help I agreed to take on the role. The area secretary is responsible for taking minutes at each area meeting and keeping the area informed of all communications received from Intergroup, Conference, Board or the General Service Office. Each month I would make sure all the groups received the minutes from the area meeting either by post or email. I stayed in this role for two years, sometimes not knowing if I was doing it right but always having people to ask if I was unsure about anything. There was a sense of achievement I felt in taking something on I didn't know I could do and then doing the best job I could do with it. This was for me what getting involved in service was all about. Growing both personally in my recovery but also learning different interpersonal skills which benefited me in other areas of my life.

After about a year break from being area secretary, another service position for area treasurer came up. Like before it was "suggested" I put myself forward to take on this role, and again like before I knew nothing about being a treasurer. The previous area treasurer was very encouraging and with their help and the help of other members I became the area treasurer. I am currently in this position and am responsible for AA funds within the area. I look after the insurance for all participating groups and each month I give a written account of the financial report status for the area and forward any outstanding funds to intergroup. I have responsibility today and I can be responsible. I have a sense of value and worth for myself and I play an important role in the area committee. Getting involved in service whether it is by doing a chair for someone or by taking up a position at area plays a vital role in my recovery now and will continue to do so. I am so grateful that I can say today I am "part of" AA and feel proud to be a member of this fellowship.

Anon

AA World Service Overview

World Service like all functions within our fellowship begins with the group. Groups nominate members to Area Committees for ratification as a World Service Delegate (WSD). If Area agrees, the nomination is passed on to Intergroup then to Conference where a two-third minimum majority vote is needed for election. As with all votes for elections at Conference, if there is more than one candidate then the 3rd legacy voting procedure is followed as outlined in the Service Handbook.

World Service Delegates in Ireland are also European Service Delegates (ESDs) and serve for a four-year term, two years apart, to accommodate the transfer of experience when rotating from the role.

The 28th World Service Meeting (WSM) will be hosted by the General Service Office (GSO) and will be held in New York City from 26th October 2024 to 1st November 2024.

The first WSM was held in 1969 in New York City and 14 countries sent delegates to that meeting. The first WSM held outside the USA was held in London in 1974.

The primary purpose of both World Service Meeting and European Service Meeting is to carry the AA message to Alcoholics who still suffer and to do so requires the use of Tradition 7 contributions. The 2024 WSM delegates fees are US\$2000 per delegate, this covers the enrolment of our WSDs. Some countries that cannot afford to register delegates are sponsored into service by more affluent countries.

It was agreed this year that AA in Ireland would send a combined contribution of €10,000 per month to the International Literature Fund and the European Service Fund.

An initiative spearheaded by the General Manager, AA World Services in New York, sees literature licensing and publishing agreements being increasingly issued to AA in other Countries.

At the last WSM, hosted online by Japan, it was reported that India alone translated our book into 20 out of its 780 languages. This illustrates the scale and volume of work that is needed. Last year the big book was also translated into Kenyan.

An AA presence can be found in approximately 180 countries worldwide however this figure is misleading as only around 50 have structures capable of supporting WSDs. The New York office employs 87 people headed by a General Manager and includes AA Canada.

The role of WSDs is to share the experience of AA in Ireland and to ensure that the views of its members as expressed at Conference are shared at WSMs.

It is an honour to AA in Ireland that our outgoing World Service Delegate, Moira S., was elected to chair the European Service Meeting in York in 2025.

Thank you, Moira.

Tom D, WSD 1 Ireland



MY ALCOHOLISM & MY AD(H)D

All my life I have been a questioner. I have rarely been prepared to accept anything on the say so of someone else. Perhaps I should have been a scientist or an inventor – but I missed out on those – probably because I utterly lacked the patience and attention span to see something through.

As a primary school child, I had great retention. In Junior Infants (low babies as it was then) I was able to recite the alphabet and recognise all the letters instantly. Later, I recalled stories and poems verbatim. I only had to hear a song once or twice, and I knew the words and melody – actually my music brain also instantly goes to harmony – while most people sing along in the car with the song, I harmonise with it.

As a secondary school student I was good of average, however I had an enormous ability to “cram” for tests and exams. The result was that I did very well in exams, although the base was decidedly flimsy – I would pretty much forget everything I’d crammed within a couple of days. This set me up in a false state of being among the “elite” (honestly-brainy) students, with a rocky foundation.

It was probably around this time that I developed what I now know they call “imposter syndrome”. I was waiting for the day the Sword of Damocles would fall and I would be found out to be the fraudster I felt I was. Not knowing any other way to behave, I continued on my road to eventual self-destruction.

I didn’t drink when I was in school – the crowd I ran with didn’t drink, so having a desperate need to fit in, neither did I. I had an on-going eating disorder at this stage – but that’s for another missal.

This pattern of cramming and over-doing

everything followed me into my work-life. I trained as a secretary (very old-school now) but you can imagine, I kept finding ways to improve the filing, and every system, and could never leave anything as it was. I moved into Marketing and PR and found my niche as an event organiser in the industry where I worked. I was always onto the next, bigger, better, more extravagant, thing.

My drinking had taken off the first day of my working life. A trip to the pub at lunchtime appeared to fully dissipate my imposter syndrome and I felt bulletproof. My drinking career lasted for 20 years, from age 18 to 38.

On a positive note, during that time I got married, bought a house, had a baby girl – however, as I am talking here to alcoholics – you know the pain, fear and despair that goes along with this as an active, (barely) functioning alcoholic.

I crashed and burned at the age of 38 – in and out of a treatment centre a couple of times – lost my marriage, career and home, but I found AA, and the last 22 years as they say, is history.

So, after two solid years of trying to stop drinking, I had stopped. Staying stopped was going to be the issue. All of the old “demons” came back. The good/bad news being you get your feelings back – well lots of mine were those demons. Imposter syndrome – thinking AA will find me out and throw me out.

So I did what I had always done, and started questioning, and finding out about things. I did the steps (cramming of course) and then did them again, better. I ate the big book, got into service, and filled all the gaps in my life, of which there were many, with AA.



The 12 step programme helped me to regulate my behaviours, but not irradicate them. I learned, painfully, to slow down, to get out of my own way, and to pause (virtually impossible!!).

One fateful day approx. 12 years into my recovery, during the course of my work, I met a Psychiatrist, (by the way, the old job in PR etc had gone in the crash/burn, but that's another story). I was to spend two days with this Psychiatrist working along-side each other – just the two of us, and with loads of down-time with nothing to do but chat.

As an AA used to sharing with others, I eventually told him my life story. And as a professional Psychiatrist he asked loads of questions. He was genuinely fascinated to have such a period of time to talk to an alcoholic in long-term recovery. He was flabbergasted by the simplicity of working the 12 step programme, and how it effects our lives and our psyche. He was aware of all of this in principle, but had never discussed the nitty-gritty with a real, honest, recovering alcoholic. I have to admit to having been shocked by that.

Anyway, the upshot of it all was that by the middle of the second day, he told me that if I had come to his clinic with my story, he would have given me a clinical diagnosis of ADD - the "H" he was unsure of, as by now I have learned to curb my behaviours fairly radically. He said he reckoned there were probably a couple of other "initials" in there too, OCD, Imposter

Syndrome..... enough, already!!

Another thing he told me was that, in his opinion, 95% of people who have addiction issues and identify as Alcoholics like me, are somewhere on the Spectrum – usually low enough to go under the radar around diagnosis, but still enough to create that perfect storm that causes us to torture ourselves with and without a drink. He was fully on board that the 12 step programme was an effective way to allow us to be assimilated more comfortably into so-called, normal society.

So to conclude; does having a diagnosis of AD(H)D make any difference to my AA recovery? The answer is No, but it does answer some of the questions around how my behaviour developed as a child, and why my thinking can be so off-kilter today. Thankfully, the 12 steps have been the new and strong foundation on which I have build my way-of-being today. All the answers are there for me to live in harmony with all.

Would I have gone looking for a diagnosis? The answer also is No. But there is a part of me that is somewhat satisfied that during all those years when I was asking myself "what is wrong with me", there actually was something going on!!!!

Babs A, Dublin



GETTING SOBER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Hi, my name is Dani and I am an alcoholic.

When I first entered the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous in South Africa, I heard many sober alcoholics introduce themselves with these words. These so-called grateful, recovering alcoholics would share in meetings about how being an alcoholic was a good thing because it brought them to AA and, hence, a better way of life. I, on the other hand, as a newly sober woman, could hardly utter the words "I am an alcoholic."

These people are crazy, I thought. I will never be grateful that I am an alcoholic. For those first few years, I was angry. Angry and grieving. I had lost my best friend, lover, crutch and solution to everything. I drank a lot, both in terms of frequency and quantity. Without alcohol, life was way too heavy of a burden. I didn't know how to live. And to be honest, I wasn't too thrilled about the sober life, and I sure as hell wasn't grateful. Still, my sponsor encouraged me to make a gratitude list every morning. She promised me that it would counter the self-pity and depression.

I resisted. Gratitude list? I questioned. What in the world do I have to be grateful for? I told my sponsor that gratitude is not something you can just magically cultivate. "You are either grateful or you are not," I said. I could sense the frustration in her voice when she assured me that I was most definitely wrong. "Just give it a try," she said. And I did. I gave it a try because that is exactly what AA was telling me to do: to admit that I didn't know how to live sober; to allow someone else to show me how to live; and to accept that when I did things my way (not making a gratitude list, for example), I would turn to the bottle again.

While I was sceptical about all of the new suggestions I was receiving, I was desperate to not drink again. So, I reluctantly agreed and

made a gratitude list. Some days, it was short and included things like the health of myself and my daughter and the fact that I had a roof over my head. Other days, it was longer and more hopeful and included people like my sponsor, the program of AA, the birds chirping in the morning and the fact that I woke up without a hangover. Slowly, my gratitude habit did exactly what it was supposed to do: It killed the self-pity and countered the depression. I was feeling grateful.

With the help of AA and my sponsor I also learned the importance of living in the moment. "Forget yesterday," they said. "Tomorrow? Why are you wasting time thinking about tomorrow? It may not come." They told me, "Look at your feet. Wherever they are, be there and only there." AA and my sponsor taught me to let go of things and people I can't control and focus only on what I can control. They taught me to keep it simple and focus only on doing the next right thing. Sometimes that meant going to work when I didn't want to go. Other times it meant picking up a piece of garbage on the ground that didn't belong to me. One step at a time. I simply asked myself what is the next right thing to do.

AA also taught me to say yes when someone asks for help, to be honest and accountable, to say sorry, to forgive, and to never waste my time judging other people's actions. I felt gratitude for the present moment, for AA, for my sponsor, and for my lessons.

Alcohol was the cause of my ultimate demise in life. It took everything from me. It stole the relationship with my daughter, my relationship with my family, my will to live was taken. It left me financially and spiritually bankrupt without a shred of self-worth. It caused years and years of agony and pain and chaos and insanity for me and all who loved me. When I first put down the alcohol there was a large,



gaping void in my soul, and AA filled it with a new, improved, honest, clean and rewarding way to live. Eventually, my obsession to drink alcohol was removed.

I would make my gratitude list and vow to make the day a great one. I would wake up in the morning and thank God for another day alive and sober. I was embracing the sober life. I noticed myself becoming more honest and helpful. I was sharing the principles of my new life with my daughter and setting a good example for her. I had hit rock bottom, and AA helped me to climb back up and become a new and improved version of myself. And then, suddenly, I got it!

I, too, became grateful for being an alcoholic because I loved the new me more than I had loved any other version of myself. Today, I can handle the tough stuff like fear and anxiety and heartbreak, and I am smart enough to know that every pain serves a purpose. I can do things scared, and I can accept the things I cannot change. I laugh and I cry and I dance and I sing. I apologize and forgive, and I strive every single day to become better than yesterday. And I do it all sober. Today, I am the person God always intended for me to be. Today, I am Dani and I am a grateful, recovering alcoholic.

Dani, Dungannon

WHAT SERVICE HAS TAUGHT ME

Service is a huge part of my recovery. I was privileged to have a sponsor for 18 years who believed that service is a major part of recovery. Each service position has its own unique experience.

Doing secretary taught me discipline and responsibility bringing the reward of helping raise my low self-esteem. (Sitting in a meeting for an hour not allowed to talk and being responsible for opening the door).

Area taught me I was to bring the group concerns to Area and Areas information back to the group. Leaving my brilliant interpretation out.(taught me that the group is more important than me).

Then on to Intergroup same thing with the message but visiting the groups with another Intergroup delegate taught me that people respond a lot better to being asked to help rather than being told what to do. To ask groups to help Area rather than to tell them it is their responsibility to send G.S.Rs to Area.

Conference was different again it taught me more about the Traditions and Concepts and

living on principles. Doing research before making decisions. This sounds like something from the Big Book but service has taught me to live with other people and accept them for who they are. People who are trying to live their lives the best way they know how just like me.

Service as a whole has taught me that I matter and can be an agent of change for good or for bad. That I am a normal member of the human race and may by the grace of God be able to help someone else to find recovery and peace of mind.

It also helped to still the racing mind that in early recovery kept me awake all night, walking up and down the house a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other, going to kill someone who said something that had offended my righteous pride in knowing how everything works.

If anybody reads this may God as you understand him bless you with recovery and peace of mind.

John D



Q&A WITH BARNEY

Q How long have you been sober Barney?

57 years

Q Tell me a bit about your journey to AA?

I took my first drink when I was 14 years old and I was hooked from the start, money was very scarce so it restricted my drinking, the first few drinks I took were good, but the effect was devastating, that meant from there on in I had to strive to get money, serving an apprenticeship and earning 5 shillings a week wasn't going to do it.

So how did you go about earning the money required?

Myself and a friend were offered a job in England driving machines in an open cast coal site, our wages were much more than at home, most men on that site were to become alcoholic. I didn't realise that until 16 years later. I then got the opportunity to be a sub-contractor on the Preston bypass, I was able to hire in plant to the main contractor I earned a lot of money and drank on a continuous basis, my friend seemed to be ok, but I was not, my liver was in terrible shape and physically my legs were giving in.

Did you seek help in England?

No, my friend sent me home to see my own G.P.

What was the outcome of that?

I went to my own G.P for x-rays, but my wife had spoken to him before, the doctor said you don't need x-rays, you are a chronic alcoholic. And in 1965 the only way they could help me was by locking me up, or I could go private for treatment, On the advice of my doctor I was admitted to Saint Patrick's hospital in Dublin,

I was ill and spent my first two weeks in bed. When I was able to get up I was introduced to Doctor Norman Moore, he told me how ill I was and I had cirrhosis of the liver, that's where I was introduced to two members of Alcoholics Anonymous they shared their experience with me, however when I got out after six and a half weeks my wife asked me what they said, I told her they told me I could take a long drink but to stay of the shorts, needless to say I was Drunk before I got home, as predicted by my G.P I was locked up immediately and was to be locked up a further 36 times.

So your experience is a good example of the insanity of the first drink?

Correct. But on the 36th time I woke up feeling different. People were praying over me I was a hopeless case, the doctor didn't think I was going to make it, after four months, I realized what the AA members in Dublin said "that no human power could do anything for me" at that point a tears came, tears of joy, that was the first night I slept, the next morning I wanted breakfast I had had a spiritual awakening, there had been divine intervention in my life, I came to believe in God as I understand him. As a result, I was discharged from hospital.

How do you stay sober?

I go to Alcoholics Anonymous, I got a sponsor, a man from Sandy Row in Belfast, my sponsor told me whenever you surrendered your life to God, God removed the obsession for booze, there's a 12-step recovery program if you take it you will not return to alcohol, it's my job to make sure you take it, so let's get to work. I done the steps and have prayed for Gods help for the last 57yrs.

I know there's been Tragedy in your life, how did AA help you?

Yes, my first wife died in a car accident on her way to our holiday home in Downings, my son died in a forklift accident, and my second wife died recently, and I have to say even if I had wanted to drink I couldn't have because alcoholics were by my side during all my trials, with Gods help and their presence I knew I was not alone.

What would you say to a newcomer?

Identify with the stories you hear in meetings, keep coming back, when you identify yourself as alcoholic do the recovery program, you are guaranteed peace of mind without booze, then to maintain sobriety pass it on to others.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings started in your house in your hometown Dungannon in 1967?

That is correct we started late 1967 but the group wasn't registered to 1968 Or 1969

You said your sponsor was from Sandy Row in Belfast. 1969 saw a lot of troubles in Belfast, Sandy Row was a loyalist area, and you were coming from a nationalist area, did you find any issues getting to your sponsor?

Yes, the troubles were rife at that time when you came of the end of the motorway you may well have been stopped by paramilitaries, We had a code two names of AA members on Sandy Row, give those two names that was it, I want to tell you this, from that moment on the troubles played no part in Alcoholics Anonymous.

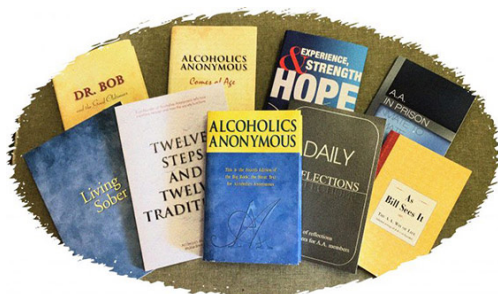
Thank you, Barney, for taking the time to answer these questions.

Homeless Alcoholic

He looks serene,
no slaver from his whitened lips
no sloven slouch on his shoulders slim
no sadness in his eyes, now sealed
no look of savage singularity
the thirty extra years or more
that seemed to crowd his swinewy,
frightened face, have disappeared in death
no fears of finding fifty notes a day
to stay alive - as they followed him
from prison ward to prison ward
his beard is black and neat
his hair now combed and clean
at last, the festers on his arm hid.

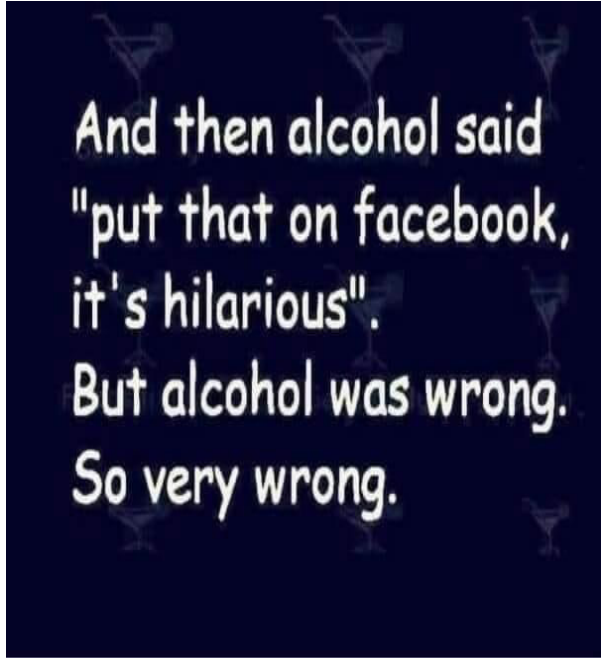
Outside the city morgue
the sleek black hearse awaits
on rate-payers time
as the men in dark slip in
and slug from pints o' stout, becasue
'tis early yet - not five - the appointed time
to slide the lid down over him
suffering - goodbye.

Submitted by Vincent, Raheny



UNITY | SERVICE | RECOVERY

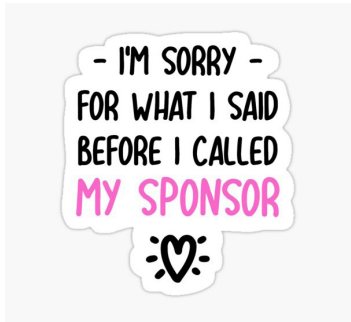
Humour



A normal drinker finds a fly in his beer and asks for a new beer.
A heavy drinker finds a fly in his beer, pulls it out by the wings and continues drinking.
An alcoholic finds a fly in his beer and shouts, Spit It Out!!!

You might be an alcoholic if:

1. The vodka you're drinking reminds you of the taste of a fine aftershave.
2. You're lying in your waterbed all warm and comfy when you remember you don't have a waterbed.



IRISH OVERSEAS

In AA we say that God never gives you more than you can handle. My sponsor disagrees; she taught me that we all get more than we can handle and this forces us to draw closer to a divine source and to each other.

The year that I left Dublin for Manchester was a tough one. Already thirteen years sober, 2010/11 felt like a year I couldn't handle, but I lived through every day of it, sustained by the rooms and the members around me. When I'd recovered myself and processed some painful events and circumstances, I was taken with an impulse to move. This was no geographical or escape plan - I was at peace with myself. I had done the work.

People told me I was brave moving to a place where I knew no one, but in AA you are connected to the people of any city before you even arrive. Mancunians have a warmth and welcome that would rival the reputation of the Irish any day and I threw myself into the fellowship.

Some of the meetings I attended in those early days, like Saturday afternoon at the Cathedral, have since closed. The clubhouse at Sidney Street, where I saw my wife for the first time one Friday night meeting, has been raised to the ground and rebuilt. I remember some of the old timers holding fort at Mount Street and Central Hall until the day they died, passing the

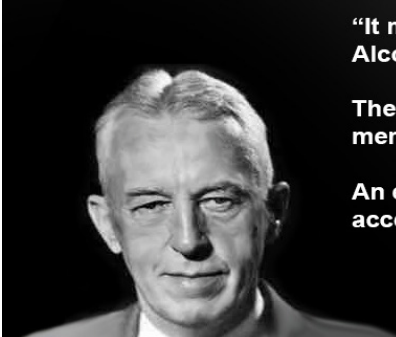
torch on to us.

Walking down Dublin's George's Street last year, I saw a 'Visit Manchester' advert on a bus stop and felt a chest burst of joy and recognition. The scene pictured was my favourite spot in the city: the back of the town hall extension by Peter's Square which wraps around the central library in her neo-gothic glory. This is the view from the steps of Mount Street Meeting Hall, where I have attended, served and thrived for many years. From the same vantage point, towards the Midland Hotel, is a sculpture made by an Irish artist called John Cassidy, honouring the many Irish lives uprooted to Manchester. Titled 'Adrift,' the inscription says that it embodies the 'dependence of human beings on each other' and the 'inevitable dependence on divine aid.' It has been my privilege to welcome newcomers and visitors drifting into these rooms: first timers, tourists or our Irish regulars over for the footie. I depend on these fellows and they can depend on me.

I learned in Ireland that the programme is about 'Service. Service. Service,' but I never lived it so fully until I re-framed myself here in Manchester.

She is a mother to me. 'Irish Kerri' is happy, joyous and free.

Kerri, Manchester



"It must never be forgotten that the purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous is to sober up alcoholics.

There is no religious or spiritual requirement for membership. No demands are made on anyone.

An experience is offered which members may accept or reject. That is up to them."

~ Bill W., Alcoholics Anonymous Co-Founder



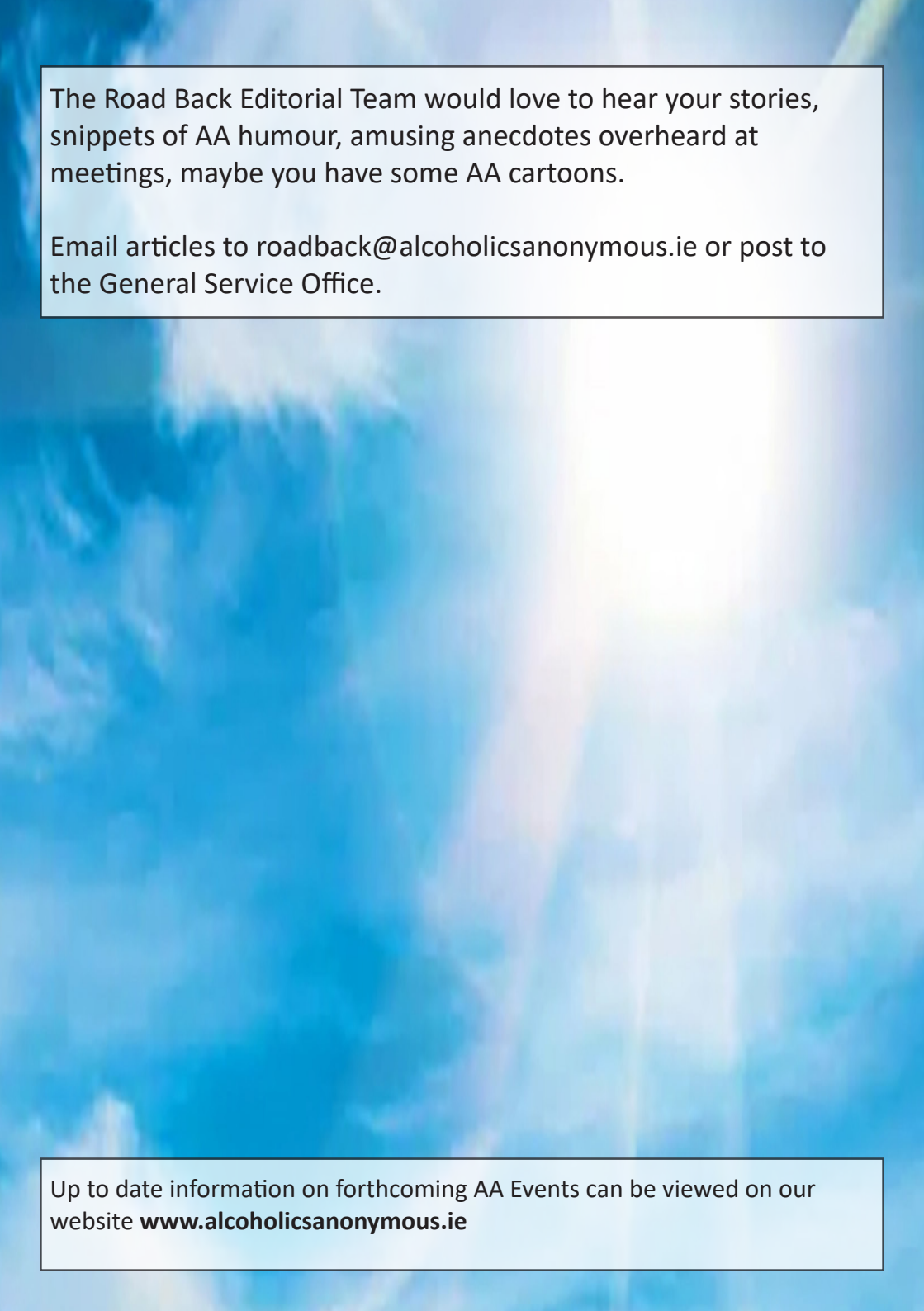
The Twelve Traditions

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 centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; 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

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 to practice these principles in all our affairs.





The Road Back Editorial Team would love to hear your stories, snippets of AA humour, amusing anecdotes overheard at meetings, maybe you have some AA cartoons.

Email articles to roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie or post to the General Service Office.

Up to date information on forthcoming AA Events can be viewed on our website [**www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie**](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)