

THE ROAD BACK



includes Service News

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HOPE

Editorial

Once again Christmas has slowly crept up on us, it's all hands on deck to make all the preparations for this annual event, for us in Alcoholics Anonymous it is always good to use our check list, firstly for the reasons we have to be grateful and secondly for the things we need to prepare for the occasion.

The theme for this issue is "HOPE" a word we hear regularly at meetings, the newcomer says "I left my first meeting with hope". The old timers remind us "if we don't stay in fit spiritual condition, we will never withstand the certain trials and low spots that lie ahead". The emphasis being on certain, as these things are going to happen. With this statement there is hope because it reminds us that we are not alone or unique, we are simply people that deal with every day events by using the principles laid out in our recovery program.

In this issue our members have written about their experiences of the hope they found in our fellowship, and in reading them we hope that you will find the hope that helps you through the festivities of Christmas and brings great joy to you and your family.

The theme for issue 448 will be Step 2, we associate Step 2 with hope because it is in finding a power greater than ourselves that carries us forward in the recovery program, so once again I appeal to you the membership, to put pen to paper and write your experience of Step 2 and forward it to, roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie

On behalf of everyone on the editorial team we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry, sober Christmas and prosperous 2025, and it is possible we may all meet as we trudge this road of happy destiny. To round things off for 2024 we would like to give you the gift of **10 Hints and Tips to enjoy your SOBER Christmas:**

1. If you are unsure if non-alcoholic beverages will be available, bring your own. Don't even think about trying the non-alcoholic beer and yes, the Egg Nog IS spiked!
2. Stay away from the bar area.
3. If offered a drink, just say, "no thank you". You don't have to explain.
4. If there is food available, be sure to eat so you are not hungry.
5. If you feel you are becoming tempted to drink, leave early.
6. Stay busy. Talk to others, dance, etc. Don't give yourself time to think about the fact that you are not drinking.
7. Don't drink no matter what.
8. If others at the event are drinking, chances are they will never know that you only have a non-alcoholic beverage in your glass.
9. If you are new to sobriety and are concerned about attending an event where alcohol will be served, arrive late and leave early. Take a sober friend, or at least their phone number.
10. You are probably not the only one at the party who is clean and sober. Find the winners and hang out with them.

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, 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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I could recognise that I had many problems in my life but I was not an alcoholic. I only used alcohol to deal with all of these problems and to get a break from life. My life had been one of pointing the finger at circumstances and others and saying 'look what life has done to me', 'if only that hadn't happened' or 'if only they had treated me differently'. While I pointed my angry finger at others and the world, the person I was most angry with, and in fact detested, was myself, and I kept on drinking.

Having first come into AA at 21, I just could not believe that my lonely, unhappy, dishonest and chaotic life could be caused by drink, when all along I thought drink was helping me cope. I drank after three months still believing I had problems but alcohol was not the major issue, and so continued to drink for another eight years. However, my problems did not go away, in fact they increased and were getting much worse. I could not be honest with anyone and certainly not to myself, I was a very lonely, dishonest and unhappy man. I was only using alcohol to deal with these problems that I could not speak about.

At 29 and thinking I was beaten by life, I was very surprised when a man, a recovering alcoholic informed me in a very loving manner, that perhaps my problem was alcohol, and because I was drinking, I was unable to deal with the reality of life and what I believed were my many hidden problems. Perhaps, that moment of kindness was also a moment of grace, although I did not understand, I was able to hear something in what he was saying.

Over weeks and months of attending AA meetings, sometimes grudgingly, I became exposed to the honesty and kindness of others. Gradually, something began to shift within me. I was given the gift of moving beyond my mantra that I drank because of my problems, to one of recognising drink was creating and worsening my problems, and ultimately to admitting the most freeing statement of my life 'My name is Barry and I am an alcoholic'. With this belief, I was given the doorway to freedom and choice. A belief I have held for over thirty three years, one day at a time.

Today, much of what I saw as 'problems' are now a beautiful and central part of my life. I discovered the beauty of my spirituality that honours me as a sober gay man. I have developed true and intimate friendships, soul friends, spanning many years. I have been able to enter into and engage in a loving relationship with a wonderful man. I was able to leave a career where I could not be the man my higher power created me to be and to choose a career, one based on caring where I can live a more honest and free life.

Today many of the burdens and fears I carried alone for years have fallen away, sure, life still brings me challenges but as a sober man, I have choice. I can reach out to another who understands and walks a similar road to me. Today, I live my life without alcohol and I can deal with the challenges and the opportunities life gifts me. For that I am grateful.

Barry Q



In 1952 I was having a drink with my brother in downtown Johannesburg in South Africa and we were talking about drinking. My brother said a friend of his had gone to AA and I said, "what's that?". He said, "you go there and they help you to stop drinking." My reply was, "hasn't he got the guts to stop himself? Why must he go there?".

So the time came when I had to stop. I stopped for six months. Then one night at a party my pals nagged me to have a drink. I made a bargain with myself that I would drink that night and the following week as well. But the week became very long. It lasted for about four years.

Then one Sunday night in August 1957, I was recovering from a drinking bout when my wife walked in to the bedroom, followed by two men, she said you have two visitors. They were well dressed in suits as though they were going to a party at Buckingham Palace. One was a Jew, the other was an Afrikaner and they said they were from AA, Alcoholics Anonymous. They sat either side of the bed and read out the 12 steps to me. I was very embarrassed that men had to come and talk to me about drink right in my bedroom. As I always say, "I never walked through the doors of AA myself. I was pushed through them by my wife!". These gents, Carl and Roy said they pass my house every Thursday evening at 7.30pm. They could give me a lift if I wanted one.

The meetings were held in the lounge of a house belonging to the Presbyterian Church in Orange Grove called 'The Orange Grove Group'. There was no Al Anon but the wives and friends attended the meetings and sat in the front row knitting. I remember specifically three of them who sat together named Ella, Bella and Stella.

The priest used to talk to us as well and mentioned that he saw members of his congregation in our group and he wanted to know from us why they came to this AA meeting and not his church and Sunday sermon for help. We told him that in his church he spoke of hell and heaven. Our talks at AA are for the recovery of people addicted to alcohol. He said that he thought he should become an alcoholic so that he would know how to treat alcoholics.

I was lucky attending AA. I sobered up from the first meeting. I took the talks very seriously. My recovery was immediate, and I've been sober ever since. I have helped many others to join the fellowship.

Something I recollect very clearly, that after four months in AA, I had a dream that I had a glass of brandy in my hand. I put the brandy in my mouth and immediately spat it out. I think that was the turning point in my life that in my dream I spat out the alcohol.

Article by Dan H.

Sobriety date 22/8/1957. He passed away in 2011 at a 101 years old.

MY NAME IS LOUIS

Hi. My name is Louis and I'm an alcoholic. I've been in the fellowship since the 9th of November 1989. If you do the maths, that's about 35 years. But! I've only been sober this time round for 21 years. 22 years coming up on the 21st May 2025. And why is this you may ask yourself? Well I'll tell you why!

Because I didn't follow the instructions set out in the book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn't know that the first 103 pages of the Big Book, including the Roman numeral pages and "The Doctor's Opinion" is actually a text book. This text book tells me what the problem is (Step1), it tells me what the solution is (Step 2) and then asks me to make a decision (Step 3) regarding the solution. It then goes on to give me a practical programme to implement the solution (Steps 4-9) to put into practice to carry out the decision I make in Step 3, which is to hand over my will and my life to a higher power. Why do I need to do this? Because with my own will and on my power, I was utterly hopeless. I failed dismally.

Why did I fail dismally? There are a few reasons. They are as follows. Firstly, when I came into the fellowship I had the notion, because I have tertiary education, that I was better and smarter than you guys. I was in fact far too righteous, and my ego wouldn't let me believe otherwise. So, this led to the second problem. You couldn't tell me anything. I attended weekly meetings once a week for four and a half years without missing a meeting. I did some service, coffee, treasurer etc. but I learned nothing of how to fix my problem. I got bored with the fellowship and the drunk along shares and stopped going to meetings. Within a few months I was drinking, and I was back to square one.

After a year I was given an ultimatum by a girlfriend (I'm currently in a fourth marriage) and I went back to AA. I did exactly the same thing again. I attended weekly meetings

diligently for four years, did more service. Unbeknown to myself at that stage, I resented not being able to take a drink like most "normal" people. Again, I got bored with the fellowship and the meetings and again stopped going to meetings. In a short space of time I was back to drinking. This time I was in pretty bad shape. I lost my dignity, my sense of self-worth, and wasn't very enthusiastic about life at all. It all suddenly seemed so pointless. So you see, my education didn't help me.

Eventually my work partners called me in and gave me an ultimatum. Either I went to a rehab and produced a certificate of proof of attendance, and then did 90 meetings 90 days, and supplied a list of telephone numbers from one person at each meeting and they also reserved the right to breathalyse me whenever they saw fit, or they would terminate my partnership and reserve the right to buy me out. Well! The game was up. I had to sober up, but how? At the rehab, during a religious share by an outside preacher, a thought came to me. I had tried everything I knew to beat the drinking problem! What harm would it do if I gave God a chance? After the meeting in a moment of weakness and fear, I went to this preacher and told him of my decision to ask for God's help. We prayed together, and without knowing it, I was doing my Step 3. This is now after being in the fellowship for 13 years remember. I had in instant feeling of freedom and a sense that somehow, I had crossed back over the "invisible" line.

After completing the rehab, I did the 90 days. One of the meetings I found was a Sunday afternoon Big Book meeting that Frank had started at Pied Piper. They were reading and discussing the first 103 pages of the book Alcoholics Anonymous. My copy had been read once and had been on the shelf for 13 years collecting dust. All of a sudden, the Big Book came alive. It got a life of its own



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in my life and, finally I understood why I was so hopeless. The fellowship and its fellows took on a new meaning in my life. I was free at last. I got myself a sponsor, I started doing daily readings. I regularly attended Big Book workshops. I started working with and sponsoring other alcoholics, and doing service at district level. It was no longer just about me. It was now about us.

Once I completed the programme of Steps, I had a personality change or spiritual awakening, and the message of AA took on an exciting new meaning and journey for me. I could now walk happy, joyous and free because I had done my house cleaning and discovered my character defects. The saying, keep your friends close and your enemies closer took on a new meaning for me. I had to master my defects. To do that, I had to acknowledge them. Happily, now I can monitor these defects daily (Step 10), stay in contact with my higher power (Step 11) and pass the message of the programme on to the still suffering alcoholic in the meetings (Step 12). My life changed dramatically, and the quality of my sobriety just gets better and better. I now have a set of tools that I can use to balance my life and deal

with my alcoholic problem, which is a physical, mental, emotional but mostly a spiritual one. I can and have now plugged the hole in my soul.

So, to summarise, this is what I now do to stay sober. I read certain paragraphs out of the Big Book daily together with the Daily Reflections and As Bill Sees It. I attend meetings regularly. I work with newcomers all the time. They are the lifeblood of the fellowship and a reminder to me that I am only one drink away from where they are. I sponsor newcomers and I do service. If I keep doing this, my life works for me. When I stop doing this, my life stops working for me. I need to practice the principles of AA in my life until the day I die. I am never cured. All I have is a daily reprieve. It's the journey that's important, not the end result. So, I try to live in the present and stay sober one day at a time

**Louis H. from the How It Works
Big Book Group, Wexford**

WHAT DO I HOPE FOR?

I used to hope for a lot of things. When I first started drinking with my friends on the weekends, I had so much fun. I didn't exactly enjoy the taste of the cheapest two litre bottles of cider or vodka straight from the naggin, but I most certainly enjoyed the way they made me feel – free. Of course I hoped that feeling would never end. Who wouldn't?

Well, I learned quickly enough that some people did not, in fact, love what alcohol did to them as much as I did. These people I did not understand, so I didn't spend time with them. What I hoped for was to be as close as possible to unconscious while still awake as often as

possible, and to be surrounded by people who could make this insane desire seem not only acceptable or normal, but actually cool.

To make a long story short, drinking suited me and I was good at it. So what was the problem? Well, what I didn't realise until I couldn't not, was that the freedom I felt had been coming at a cost. My health, safety, emotional stability, education, relationships, finances, ambitions, and the peace of mind of those around me were paying the price.

When I first heard of AA, I was sure it wasn't for me. I was young, cool, in control, not like these



poor bottom of the barrel creatures whose best hope it was to stay off the streets and mumble the Our Father, or so I thought. But I felt I had tried everything else, had nowhere else to go. And thank god, because how wrong I was.

Today I am a proud and active member of AA and I am so grateful that it ended up this way. I am beginning to see that age may have little to do with addiction, I care a great deal less about what I once thought of as being cool, and I

know and don't mind that I am not in control.

Today instead of hoping nobody will bother me while I get wasted, I hope that I can help someone who thinks living without alcohol is not possible for them, because that and many other seeming impossibilities have proven not to be true for me and for that I am very very grateful.

Anon

THE EARLY DAYS

When I think back to my early days in the fellowship, I'm still amazed I stuck with the program and waited long enough for the miracle to happen.

I had tried many new things in my 20 plus years of addiction. New hobbies, new friends, jumping from one job to another, new college courses etc. Nothing lasted long term, I was always unsettled and searching for something external to fix my general discontentment with life.

So why would AA be any different? I didn't come to the rooms of my own free will, it was part of an ultimatum after years of bad behaviour related to drinking. I thought the people in my life were over-reacting. Yes there had been many drink related incidents where I'd let my myself and my family down but wasn't I working full time in a stressful job, so I shouldn't I be allowed to blow off steam every now and then. I arrived into my first meeting with a 'poor me' attitude and very low expectations that AA would make any difference.

I remember the speaker clearly, he called himself 'Phil The Bike', I haven't seen him since and he only spoke for 15 mins but he had a profound impact on my life. He told a story that was very similar to my own and more

importantly he described how he managed to change his life for the better. Listening to him it began to dawn on me how selfish and self-centered my thinking had become in all aspects of my life. I wanted what he had, his contentment with life and his spirit of altruism.

I left the meeting with a small sense of hope that maybe there was a way out of this way of life of always thinking about myself. It hadn't proved a successful way of living but I didn't know any other way to be. That first meeting was a window into another way of living, constant thoughts of others instead of myself.

It has been eight years since my first meeting and I haven't had a drink since. Phil's message still rings true, when I think of others instead of myself, life is easy and carefree. When I drift back to selfishness life is hard and unmanageable. My character defects are still there so it hasn't all been plain sailing but for the large majority of that time life has been very good.

I owe Phil and all the speakers I heard in my early months of AA Meetings a huge thanks. They gave me hope where there was none before and provided me with the tools to meet life on life's terms one day at a time.

Mark



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HOPE BY EMMA

I'm Emma and I am an alcoholic. To you the reader, if you have a problem with alcohol then this message applies to you, so please for your sake take a few minutes and read on. The chances are you will probably glance over it throw it in a corner with the rest of the clutter, you know the place where we throw things and plan to come back to it tomorrow and tomorrow never comes because it's too much effort. If you are anything like me the concentration wouldn't be great so I'll keep it short and sweet in the hope that you identify with something from it. I spent most of my day just thinking and more thinking someone called me a daydreamer I wish that was the case, but the reality is I'm just thinking, I'm fully aware of everything going on around me and even take part and thinking of other things and discussions in my mind at the same time. Everybody was born with the gift to listen, hear and think. Being alcoholic my thinking is different from the so-called normal person, my thinking can take me to a place of mental despair also known as insanity. This can happen with or without alcohol in your system. I know this from my own personal experience. You're probably asking yourself what has this got to do with alcohol? Absolutely everything I lost the ability to control my drinking and my life became unmanageable. I hope you read on I'm now introduced to my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and am 27 years old. I'm a young woman with two beautiful healthy children, a loving husband and loving parents a very supportive family. How have I ended up in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous? I asked myself this question over and over and kept getting the same answer. I'm sitting in a

meeting because I can't drink successfully. But how dare anyone call me an alcoholic especially those I loved dearly.

My husband watched me drink myself to complete oblivion. I blacked out every time, I drank myself into a coma, sometimes near death from alcohol poisoning. My husband begged me to stop at least for the sake of our children. Everything we had achieved together was being destroyed, by me. Unfortunately, Sean could not help me as much as he tried, he never understood he went to many lengths trying to get me help. At my first meeting I was asked a simple question, Emma are you drinking against your will and the answer was yes. Normal drinkers do not have this problem so I quickly diagnosed myself at that meeting. Ask yourself the same question and if the answer is yes, then most likely you are an alcoholic. As a mother, the love from my children is unconditional. I think of them every second of every day, the reality is I could not stop drinking for them and that is the power alcohol had. Reading this small message may spur the discussions in your mind.

Finally I have surrendered to the fight of full-blown alcoholism. Help is on its way. The hand of hope lifted me out of living hell, hell on Earth. The hand of Hope showed me the way, the hand of Hope kept showing up, the hand of hope called at my home the hand of hope took me to meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and that hand was my neighbour, now in his 80s he continues to show me the way in recovery. He reminds me every day that I will only stay sober by showing up at meetings,

helping others, be of service to the life saving fellowship and if I'm stuck go to Chapter 5 How It Works this is our Big Book where we go through a 12 Step recovery program, one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic is like divine intervention that nobody can truly understand or explain, which means there has to be something greater than us. I'm now 40 and my two amazing adult kids are all grown up, they don't remember me drinking, my

husband Sean and I are still together, believe it or not, after all that I put him through. No matter how far down the scale, you have gone as long as you or any person draws breath there is hope. Never lose hope my fellow friend hope is a state of mind. Hope can make the present moment less difficult to bare. Peace and love.

Emma, Armagh



Hope is one of those paradoxical things of AA. It doesn't seem to work for me against drinking when I try it on my own.

When I first started drinking my hope was that I would be able to drink forever. I liked drinking from the get-go. The pubs where I grew up had retired men who had lived responsible lives. They took care of their families and enjoyed a few scoops in the evening. By the age of 20, I no longer drank with men like that. My drinking was different. Those men seemed satisfied and happy when they drank. I always had a thirst for more that made me feel different.

I did hope that I could drink like a normal person. I tried, and I have a fair amount of determination. I paced myself. I would go into a pub for a quiet evening but by the end of the night I was full and intoxicated. I would try to have a few and then go home. That rarely happened. If I did leave a pub I usually found myself in the next one. I blamed it on the amount of pubs where I lived. One time I lived in a room above a pub. That did not make it easier to get home either.

As my drinking got me into more trouble I began to entertain hopes that I could stop drinking. I knew that it was connected to the problems that I was having. It seemed like not

drinking should not be too problematic. Every time I stopped I felt better, for a while. I could get my act together. I moved a lot. England, Europe, America. I saved money, applied for jobs, and found new accommodation. I was more productive when I was sober. There was less drama, more opportunities. Yet I always went back drinking. It didn't make sense to me. My mid 20s were a constant cycle of stopping and starting with the periods of not drinking getting shorter and the periods of drinking getting more out of control.

I ended up in AA at 29. I did not have any hope that it would help. Stopping drinking had become just as awful as drinking. The constant trying and failing wasn't great for my mental health. Sometimes I hoped that I would just not wake up. But I went to a meeting after I met a few people who got sober and they suggested that I check it out. Surprisingly, I stopped drinking straight away. I did not intend to stop. I assumed that I would start again. I didn't find it hard as I wasn't really trying. I just found it weird. Everyone told me to enjoy it and if I drank again that I was more than welcome to come back. The days turned into weeks and then months.

Roy



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Before I came to my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, I was forever living in hope – the hope that one day I'd win the lottery, the hope that I'd get a new boss or a new job, the hope that my life would be different – anything other than the way it was. I was on that unending heartbreaking search for something else, that constantly changing intangible thing out there that would improve my life, make me happy, make me whole, and each time I failed to get 'that thing', I was consoled by alcohol and the oblivion of reality, and the inevitable journey into that dark place of no hope.

Little did I know that my search for all those external trappings had no hope at all. Not until I walked through the doors of that first meeting room did I encounter hope. I'd grown up with a drinking, alcoholic father and a not drinking, sober, alcoholic father and I knew life had changed for us when he joined AA, but there was a wee bit of me wasn't so sure that this too was my problem and yet another wee bit inside me hoped that this would be my answer. I was willing to give it try.

I heard that first night from others sharing openly and willingly about their experiences, the strength they now had and the hope they had for the future. Why were they doing this? Because they too knew what it was like to search for hope in the hopeless of places. I listened and I identified. I didn't know I was identifying; I was relating to what they shared with my own experiences. By the end of the meeting I knew inside me I was in the right place. I knew I was safe and I knew I was cared for. Up until then I had surrounded myself with lonely isolation, trying to keep the plates spinning while they crashed continually around. Relationships, finances, jobs, just

living had become unmanageable and I was at that jumping off point. Here I was told life didn't need to be like that anymore, that life was to be enjoyed, not endured. The end was in sight, yet the start had just appeared. That first meeting was the end of the lonely isolation, the start of a journey of hope. I trusted those who took me to meetings, members who were happy about their sobriety, whose lives and the lives of their families had improved. I listened and I took their advice. I wanted to rush right in there making major changes to my life (I still hoped those changes would be best for me) but was told 'no major changes for two years'. What? I'll sit it out for two years, then I'll make the change. How right those sober members were. They knew I was still hoping for the moon. They knew I'd be on a hiding to nowhere again with my 'hopes'. I was willing to trust them and took their direction by finding a sponsor and starting the steps. I had also begun to trust God and to hope that His way would be the right way – do the right thing and the right thing happens. Well it does. I didn't make that major change I had in my stubborn head and God set about with the changes He had in His head.

I could never have hoped for the way my life has changed since that first night. I could never have hoped for the peace and contentment my family have as a result of what was shared with me. I could never have hoped because all that has unfolded has been delivered to me through God's hands and I can never know his plans. I can however hope that, in trying to live the programme of recovery outlined in our Big Book, I may continue to share what has been shared with me, that one day another will open a meeting room door and therein they too, shall find that hope.

THE IRISH OVERSEAS

Let me cast the readers mind back to March 2020, the entire planet started to shut down as a pandemic forced the population into isolation. A bizarre time of uncertainty, stress, fear and loneliness and yet for me I welcomed this norm. You see, unbeknown to me I was in the grip of a deadly disease called alcoholism which had me in torture and isolation in the Northwest of England in a place called Blackpool long before the word Covid was on the national radar. If, at the time, you asked me why I drank I would have said people, places and things, if you had my life, you would drink too. Drink was my best friend; it took away the pain, until it didn't.

Do you remember those video calls on Teams and Zoom where we met friends, family and work colleagues, virtually? Those were the times where most people poured a wee cup of tea or brewed a coffee with a nice biscuit or bun and communicated, caught up on gossip, played virtual bingo, or had kitchen discos. Me.....I had the biggest mug filled with wine. Even virtually, I was hiding my alcohol consumption. I was aware I drank a lot but sure who was I hurting? I was living on my own again after a marriage break up, frightened the world was going to end and my family were all back in Ireland and booze was my comfort until it wasn't. You see I was a daily drinker often to blackout and couldn't stop. Nowadays, I often say, Chapter 11 A Vision for You is one of my favourite chapters in the Big Book because the four Hideous Horsemen were constant companions and the jumping off point was on the horizon.

Fast forward to May 2021, life was painful, very painful and I was drinking against my will. I distinctly recall one afternoon standing in my front room in Blackpool throwing my arms heavenwards and crying out with anger and meaning at a God who I rejected, "God, I can't do this (booze) any longer, I'm just going to drink now until I die." You see I had

tried stopping many things, changed drinks, changed environments and tried to change me but drink had me in its grip.

Today, I truly believe that was my moment of surrender. God had never left me and heard my cry of desperation. Nearly four months later and coming towards the end of the second lockdown, I was back in Tyrone on holiday with family; still drinking the head off myself and my God aligned all the right people and time together for me to reach the rooms of AA. On 8th August 2021, I was drink driving with my father, my hero, my inspiration in the car at 12.30pm on a Sunday afternoon. Today, I believe that was God's plan for me because it was the catalyst to get me to go to have a chat with a friend of his who was an alcoholic and 55 years sober. Standing in his house two days later, I got honest. He asked me do I have a problem with alcohol, I said, "Yes". A weight was lifted of my shoulders for the first time in 30 years of my drinking. I believe I had a spiritual awakening that night. He shared his story and then said we will go to a meeting and before you know it, I was in the rooms of a zoom AA meeting. That night, I got HOPE. A member mentioned HOW, Honesty, Open-Mindedness, Willingness and that along with the laughter and fellowship struck a chord with me; tweaked my curiosity. You good people said, 'Don't drink for one day and you can't get drunk' and I got that.

And so my journey in recovery began. For three weeks I sat beside my 12 stepper and listened and identified. I identified so much that after two weeks I questioned my 12 stepper, a bit sharply, "have you told everyone my back story beforehand" because I thought they were adjusting their experiences to fit round mine.... What an EGO! My 12 stepper just smiled and realised I was identifying. After three weeks he sent me back to Blackpool saying get to plenty of meetings, get telephone numbers and if



someone asks you to go for coffee say yes.

and traditions together.

So, in the second half of 2021 as the world slowly started to heal from Covid and return to its axis so did I. AA zoom was a game changer for me. I felt safe and accepted and was christened an AA zoom baby. I attended plenty of meetings, a mixture of zoom and face-to-face, I was trusted in a service position in my home group and for nine months I was living on the mantra of ODAAT (One Day At A Time).

Then FEAR hit me; fear I would drink again; all the anxieties and insecurities were creeping back in again. At nine months, I got down on my knees and prayed earnestly to that God who I didn't understand for a sponsor, and she was revealed. I truly believe God put both of us together and true healing, friendship and recovery began as we embarked on the steps

Today, I say AA loved me back to a new me; someone who I love. Today, I have a purpose. AA has taught me patience and tolerance, to say sorry quickly, to forgive easily and mostly not to take myself too seriously. Today, I am still an AA zoom baby. Today, I still sit beside my 12 stepper at meetings. Today, I say yes to service. Today, I am responsible. Today, I have faith and a reliance on a Higher Power who never left me and is in my heart. Today, my God has guided me on the road back as I return to Tyrone to continue a new sober life and for that I am truly grateful.

Bernie B, Blackpool



My sobriety date is 09/06/2015. I woke up that morning and thought 'this has to stop'. At 36, I was sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. I now see that thought as a Divine intervention - I had no plan or intention to stop drinking that day. After all, I had broken that promise to myself countless times! However, that evening, after making a call to my sister, I attended my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and I haven't needed or wanted to take a drink since. It was the first time that I ever had an honest conversation with someone about my drinking. What a relief it was!

The first signal of Hope was given to me by kind and sincere AA members who told me that I need never drink again. There was a solution! They then showed me what they did to get sober, and stay sober. In the beginning, I said the Serenity Prayer like a mantra and found that the AA slogans helped with almost any situation, alongside the good counsel of

members with long-term sobriety. I stuck with the women and my first sponsor was a woman called Anne. She was my rock and we laughed like teenagers together! She gave me such hope and told me 'we have a second chance at life'. What a gift!

Perhaps some of the most challenging of life circumstances occurred in early recovery, but I didn't need to drink. I have been able to show up for life and for those I love and I have faith in a Power greater than myself. I alone can do it, but I can't do it alone. I have a sponsor and I sponsor other women. This is a 'we' programme and I feel so grateful to have found my people as we trudge the 'Road of Happy Destiny'.

Through this programme for living - the Twelve Steps of AA, it really does get better - One Day At A Time.

Aoife, Dublin



Heard at Meetings

I knew I
was an
alcoholic
by the way
that I felt
sober.

Recovery
is not for
people who
need it - it's
for people
who want it

If you knew
me in my
drinking days,
I'm sorry.
Allow me to
reintroduce
myself

Them lads
up in the
GSO are
just the best
people ever!
So helpful!

Just do the
next right
thing!

Recovery
is about
progression
not
perfection!

Service News

NOV - DEC 2024

Strengthening Our National Public Information Efforts

Some history...

The Statement of PI adopted by the Fellowship in 1956:

'We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express interest. We further believe that all efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside of AA are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism.'

Furthermore, Bill W stated in an article written for the Grapevine Magazine during 1958 entitled Let's be Friendly with our Friends on the Alcoholism Front; 'Surely, we can be grateful for every agency and method that tries to solve the problem of alcoholism... We can and should work with those that promise success- even a little success.'

What does this mean for us today?

In the second part of our series on Public Information (PI) within Alcoholics Anonymous, we turn our attention to the national approach across Ireland. Building on the grassroots efforts discussed in the first part, we will explore how coordinated strategies can enhance our outreach and ensure that A.A.'s message of recovery reaches every corner of the country.

The role of the National PI Subcommittee
Established in late 2023, the National PI Subcommittee has been tasked with developing a comprehensive national public information strategy. The goal is to increase public awareness of A.A. and its program of recovery, ensuring that help is accessible to all who seek it.

Key Areas of Focus

The National PI Subcommittee's work encompasses several key areas:

Encouraging PI Service Throughout the Fellowship: Promoting PI activities at all levels of A.A., from local groups to intergroups and areas.

Linking with the Media: Developing relationships with national media outlets to share A.A.'s message through news stories, interviews, and public service announcements.

Refreshing PI Materials: Updating posters, business cards, and other resources to ensure they are engaging and effective.

Exploring Collaboration Opportunities: Identifying and pursuing partnerships with organisations that can help spread the word about A.A.

Connecting with Professionals

A significant aspect of the National PI strategy is building connections with community professionals. This includes first responders, health and social care professionals, training bodies, and community and voluntary organisations. By informing these key stakeholders about A.A., we can ensure that they are equipped to guide individuals struggling with alcoholism towards our program of recovery.

Practical Steps for National Outreach

To effectively implement this strategy, the National PI Subcommittee has been working on several practical initiatives:

Developing Relationships: Establishing connections with organisations that can help raise awareness about A.A. among professionals and community workers.

Distributing Information: Ensuring that A.A. materials are widely available to other





organisations for referral purposes.

information.

Engaging in Professional Training: Identifying opportunities to incorporate information about A.A. into the training of future professionals.

Creating Educational Tools: Developing a PowerPoint presentation specifically for professionals, providing an overview of A.A. and how it can help those struggling with alcoholism.

Media Engagement

Over the past months, the National PI Subcommittee has fostered good relations with the broadcast media to ensure A.A.'s message reaches the public. For instance, RTE Radio One requested information about A.A. in Ireland, which was subsequently featured on Morning Ireland and in news bulletins. In January 2024, media releases were provided to 21 radio stations nationwide, outlining who we are, the services A.A. provides, and meeting

New Resources and Initiatives

The General Service Conference recently approved new A.A. posters, now available on the A.A. website, in the online shop. Additionally, a dedicated email address nationalpi@alcoholicsanonymous.ie has been set up for members to provide feedback, ideas, and comments on public information.

The National PI Committee is also working on several exciting initiatives, including:

Developing Resources for Professionals: Creating presentations, business cards, and takeaway literature for groups to use when engaging with community members.

Gathering Personal Stories: Collecting and sharing members' stories across various channels to illustrate the impact of A.A.



Planning Themed Campaigns: Organising cohesive campaigns to raise awareness about A.A. and its benefits.

Exploring Social Media: Utilising social media platforms to reach a broader audience.

National Media Coverage: Pursuing in-depth TV/film projects to showcase A.A. across Ireland.

Billboard and Public Transport Campaigns: Considering nationwide advertising efforts to increase visibility.

Get Involved and Share Your Ideas

We encourage all members to get involved and share their ideas for enhancing our national PI efforts. Whether it's through participating

in Open Meetings or Open Public Information meetings, sharing resources such as posters in your local community, every contribution helps. By working together, we can ensure that A.A.'s message of recovery reaches everyone who needs it. Let's continue to support each other and carry the message of hope and healing to those still suffering from alcoholism.

Stay tuned for more updates and opportunities to get involved in our national PI initiatives. Together, we can make a difference and bring the lifesaving message of A.A. to every corner of Ireland.

In unity and service, let's keep carrying the message and changing lives, one person at a time.

Service News

NOV - DEC 2024

Conference 2025

A quick reminder that Conference 2025 will be held from 7th to 10th March 2025. This is the Annual General Meeting of the Fellowship in Ireland and is effectively the Group Conscience for the whole country. It is important that you have your say. Get your GSR to find out what motions are being discussed this year. Motions to Conference can only come forward from a group and must be received by the Board Secretary by 17th January 2025 and can only be received once they have been forwarded through the Structure.

A gentle reminder too that next year's All-Ireland Convention is being hosted by Connaught Intergroup and will be held in the Clayton Hotel in Sligo from 11th to 13th April.

Christmas

Christmas can be a time of great joy. But, for some, it can also be a time of sadness or loneliness. As members, it can be a good time to reach out to others who might find Christmas

to be a difficult time. The most basic principle of Service is to be of help to another alcoholic. Sometimes, something as simple as a phone call to say "Hi, how are you?" can make a huge difference to someone's life. As Bill W. once said, "AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action".

The Area Committee

What is an Area?

In AA, an Area is a subdivision of the relevant Provincial Intergroup, usually a specific geographical area containing a number of individual Groups. Generally, an Area will comprise not more than 20 Groups. Should there be more than 20 Groups the Area Committee may divide and form a new Area. The Area Committee is a Committee made up to two GSRs from each Group within that Area. Purpose

The Area Committee - perhaps more than any group in AA - is responsible for the welfare of



the AA Structure and for promoting growth and harmony throughout the Fellowship.

Each Group in an Area may send two elected representatives to its local Area. These representatives, called General Service Representatives (GSRs), bring the news and concerns from their Group to the Area and bring back to their Group any decisions or other information from the Area Committee. This is a vital link in AA's chain of communication.

Area Committees have been delegated responsibility for many of AA's local services. It has been found beneficial for Areas to co-ordinate the functioning of these important services. The following is a selection of services undertaken by Areas:

- a) Hospital Committee
- b) Prison Committee
- c) Public Information Committee
- d) Telephone Service
- e) Area Conventions
- f) Services for Hearing Impaired Members
- g) Maintaining a bank of AA Literature
- h) Organisation of Workshops
- i) Maintaining AA Archives, where appropriate

Guidelines on the operation of services (a)-(d) above and on the organisation of (e) Area Conventions are included later in the Handbook.

Area Committees may provide other services specific to their Areas.

Officers of Area Committees

Leadership must come from the officers. They must have the enthusiasm and know-how of the individual committee member plus the ability to get things done and give the committee direction and incentive. It is suggested that each Area puts considerable thought and care into the selection of its officers as the ability of the Area to function effectively is greatly influenced by the capability of its officers. It is vital that the best available and willing people are utilised.

Qualifications

All Area Officers should preferably have three years continuous sobriety in AA and have at least one year's experience as an active GSR.

An Officer's term of office is for two years from date of election. He/she must have the respect and trust of his/her Area and have a record of dedicated service in AA.

Importance of Rotation

Traditionally, rotation keeps AA volunteers from becoming fixed in their offices. Jobs, like almost everything else in AA, get passed around for all to share. After one term in any office, most members move on to other kinds of AA service. This way, problems based on personalities are prevented; no power or prestige gets built up; no individual gets taken advantage of or imposed upon; and the benefits of giving service are shared by more and more members.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

If you are leaving this publication in a public place such as a treatment centre, prison or doctors surgery - please be sure to remove the centre pages beforehand.

HOPE

As long as I can remember I never had any hope. I lived in fear all my life and was brought up surrounded by fear and inculcated by fear. I was afraid of everything and I felt like there was a battalion of demons storming my way. I felt like I was always wrong. I felt like I didn't deserve to live and I had no right to deserve anything good.

When I started drinking this magical elixir took all that away and I became the life and soul of the party and I discovered another world where there was magic, fireworks, smiling faces, women, men and endless horizons.

But that was an illusion. The reality was gutters, brawls, financial garbage and never-ending list of troubles. I resented everyone, from a musician I never met who played saxophone, to friends who were getting married and successful. I couldn't understand how they were doing so well and I had no luck at all. Life became a spiral of alcoholism, addiction, trouble and drama.

I spent four years in a relationship with a gorgeous Italian lady and at the end of those four years I couldn't tell you anything about her bar her name and she was Italian. In the meantime, I cheated on her with a number of people, and because I had a deep level of discontent over my own sexuality, I spent many nights in sordid and dark places. There was no point in having any hope. Life was brutish, nasty and short and everyone was out to get me.

I first came into AA at the age of 27 because I couldn't sleep anymore. Or rather, I couldn't knock myself out anymore. The booze stopped working. Other things didn't work either. My first meeting blew me away: I was astounded at the generosity and kindness of everyone. I discovered a new world and a new way, but unfortunately, I was still very overawed by fear and I refused to get honest and true and

after a year of not drinking I found myself back sucking down John Barleycorn with a vengeance. And that's when things got really bad. I spent another ten years "out there" as AA's say. I remember reading somewhere that the coward abandons himself first, and I think that's true of drunks. Hell. That's all I need to say on what happened over those years. Raw, vicious, unyielding Hell. I tried AA again and again but couldn't stay stopped. I couldn't live without alcohol. I figured I'd die this way and nobody would bat an eyelid.

Then, at a meeting on 2nd October 2015 a member said pray that God/Spirit/Universe remove the compulsion to drink alcohol, resentments, and fill me with grace. I'm not sure what happened but I haven't had a drink since then. It wasn't easy. I was full of fear, guilt, shame, paranoia, envy, resentments. But slowly my head started to clear the more meetings I went to and the message started to get through. I listened to everyone and got something out of each. I learned about myself through others and I began to see a better life and a better person. After six months of recovery I sat alone at home and felt for the first time in twenty years that I didn't want a drink and I felt OK in my own skin. For the first time! I knew I was on the right path. And there was Hope.

I'd love to say it has been plain sailing. It hasn't. But what was once a filthy, scruffy, miserable existence is now a bright, happy and peaceful life. I don't have enough time to do what I want to do. There aren't enough hours in the day.

And while I face all kinds of challenges, I try to contribute to the day instead of taking away from it. I try to bring peace where there is disquiet, light where there is dark, love where there is hate. It's a magical world out there now, full of hope.





I BECAME SOBER IN DECEMBER

I came into my first AA meeting in December 2008. I was in a detox program after being brought to my knees by alcohol abuse, combined with other substances.

I had used alcohol since aged 14 as an energy and self-confidence booster. It was an easily available solution for escaping from my paralyzing fear of other people, especially groups of other people.

I see now, however, that my using alcohol the way I did throughout my teens, 20s and 30s, inhibited any natural ability to mature into a person capable of managing my life's overload of chaotic circumstances. I actually just created more and more problems for myself by acting out of my rampant character defects, which were directing my decisions and life choices for all those years.

By 2012, I was basically back behaving as if I still had untreated alcoholism, despite having five years of sobriety. I had gone through the steps twice with two different sponsors and gone to regular meetings during my first three years.

In hindsight, I can see that during that period, I had been treating the AA program as a sort of 'hobby' or social club, and in reality I was actually still dangerously dishonest, with

arrogant ideas about 'my sobriety'. I had a fairytale idea about God, but I was still acting as my own boss. I was still blind, and worse, I thought I could see!

I relapsed and was so deluded I kept convincing myself that I wasn't 'that bad' anymore now-(after so long sober..!), that I could surely have the odd drink, after all life had thrown at me lately. I had been badly abused in a relationship and I felt more than justified to assume a victim role, which fitted in with my entitled defensive pride. I was different to other alcoholics and had enough reasons to tell myself I could now drink 'normally'..-unaware that I was in such denial (yet again) that I had never been able to drink 'normally' in my life!

So I slowly became reliant again on alcohol. It took another three years for me to reach a new deeper rock bottom, and resign to getting into a treatment center. This was a 16 month long program, but by then I was homeless, brainless, childless, and so physically damaged I could hardly walk or see. I only knew I had to do this, even just for a roof over my head, or I'd end up in jail, or dead. I wasn't capable of much thought at that point, but God was carrying me even as I was totally unaware of this truth. It was during my time at this facility that I came to develop my relationship with God. Who, for me, is the only God. I cannot

possibly attempt to understand His magnitude, but I came to truly believe in this Power, so much greater than myself.

I completed that program and came skipping out into the sunlight, saved and delivered. I thought, NOW I am recovered! I didn't need AA, I had the real God and I was going to church..I had forgotten that one of God's most amazing creations is the spiritual program of Alcoholic Anonymous, and that I am just a work in progress.

Life became the never ending struggle again with entanglement in abuse, the 'people pleasing' consequences, and resentments, all feeding into my awaiting 'victim persona' defect still within me. The death of a life-long loved one on top of my already overwhelmingly adverse circumstances, was all I needed to once again justify the selfish choice to numb myself with alcohol.

God in my life became outgrown in my personal priorities of focus by my self-centered drive to control my own life, according to my distorted perceptions.

I started going half heartedly to a few daytime meetings, but I was too sad and broken and obstinate to surrender my option to choose for myself, whether I took a naggin to bed, and deal with the shakes when, and if, I woke up. I was lonelier than I could imagine, in a self imposed prison of deception, forced to hide, from shame about what my reality was really like.

I was merely surviving in my 'mother' role, and my kids knew and felt it. To add to my shame, I knew I was robbing them of the mother they should have had, and deserved. But I was praying to God, every desperate tear filled night, I would be kneeling, sobbing out pleading prayers, assuming I might not be heard given the terrible grief I was causing in my self destruction. Somehow I didn't lose faith that God would save me from my

never ending mistakes, but WHEN? I needed a miracle right NOW!

Eventually, of course, my relapse got to and ending stage. My parents were convinced I would be found dead any day now, and getting me to try to hold a pen to sign guardianship papers and other documents that I was only aware of not being able to cognitively recognise the seriousness of. I remember my eldest daughter crying at my bedside, and I remember a dream I had of myself being in some hospital, experiencing the feeling of being actually brain dead. These were catalyst wake up warnings for me.

I was extremely blessed to have my strong healthy selfless father come to stay with me and barricade the door of my flat, while I went through my worst fear of that time-the absolute physical hell of withdrawal from alcohol which lasted two weeks, of hour after year-long-hour of torture in my mind and body. He read to me and talked and tried to get me to eat, I didn't deserve such a nurse, and dumbly took on board all the fatherly admonishments along with the love that touched my soul and sparked my desire to heal.

I stumbled purposefully into my local AA group in early April this year, bought a new Big Book and a 12+12. The warmth and gentleness of the other members was so encouraging. I finally felt the weight of all my reasons for lying and sneakiness lift, by a feeling of safety among these strangers, all of whom knew exactly the desolation I had just crawled out from.

I got some glasses from the opticians, as my eyesight had deteriorated so severely, although it wasn't just the glasses but a totally new way of seeing I had become ready for at last!

Total surrender this time. I had one choice left, as God says in Deuteronomy," I put before you Life , or Death - Choose Life!" And it certainly wasn't me who gifted me the rare shaft of light



I am currently seven months sober thanks to our God given AA program and our members help.

I now have a peace that is sustainable through adversities and trials and challenges, and many wells to draw from, for a vast array of forms of help, advice and support from the fellowship of AA and other resources I have since had the courage to access.

It is such a relief now, to know I can be confidently honest about uncertainties, that I can be OK with not knowing the exact reality of encounters and occurrences, but I can faithfully trust that God is in control, and knows every right time, for every happening.

AA was waiting for me to fully immerse myself in the program, and only when I was finally ready and willing to let go of myself could I enjoy starting to become transformed.

We would like to invite each group to order 10 of the **New PI Posters** from GSO (not the edible version) to put up in their locality in the suggested places:

- . Doctors Surgeries
- . Libraries
- . Garda / PSNI Stations
- . Supermarkets
- . Community Centres
- . Churches
- . Citizen Advice Centres
- . University/Schools



THE XMAS FIX

Walking through the festive season can be tricky if you're an alcoholic, in recovery. Walking through any season is tricky.

Where anniversaries, are known to be trigger times for picking up a drink.

Where surviving sober, contains an unlimited amount of advice and suggestions.

Where taking action, changing your behaviour, and altering our habits, certainly helps.

This Christmas will be no different to my first.

Where I'll spend time with my family, enjoying what is good and wholesome and just for today, I'll be sober.

Where the advice I was given, all those years ago, still holds true.

For nothing ensures a safe, sober holiday, than doing little safe, sober things.

Even at decades sober, I still don't find partying and drinking situations easy.

And that's the thing about staying sober.

I don't pretend that I do when I don't.

Recovery is not a prerequisite to suddenly becoming a party animal.

Sober Xmas fare is a time for reflection and self control. And is not a time to stop working a twelve step program.

Where a certain guilt and shame can come back.

Where my drinking and my behaviour, spoilt, what should have been some joyous, happy times.

Today, however, that's different.

And as I approach this my twenty eighth sober holiday, I'm no less cautious, and no less aware

of the dangers.

And I stay focused and aware, that I'm with my family, because I do as suggested.

I don't pretend all's well if it's not.

I don't assume that being sober, automatically waves some invisible wand.

Where I'll magically jump into all the festivities with not a care in the world.

I have to remember that alcohol nearly took all this away from me.

And I should also do well to remember, that a Xmas sober, is a gift and not a right.

And so these are the tips I follow.

They are straightforward, clear cut and sensible.

If I'm invited to a party, I arrive a little later than normal and leave early. If I'm offered a drink, I can say no thanks.

If I feel uncomfortable, I need to leave. Or go for a walk, or maybe call another alcoholic.

I pour my own drinks. I drink out of a cup and not a glass.

I don't put my drink down, but if I do, I'm cautious to smell it first.

Just in case.

Lemonade, and soft drinks, look exactly the same as an alcoholic drink. So be careful.

I don't eat chocolates unless I read the box first.

I ask if any of the food has alcohol in.

I don't drink apple juice or grape juice.

I go to a meeting on Xmas day, or maybe Xmas Eve or on Boxing Day.

That's important to me.

It gives me a little break. It gives my family a break.

It's also a time to say thanks to A.A. for a sober festive holiday.

It's better to be at home twenty two hours a day sober, and go to a meeting, than twenty four hours drinking.

Or I'll go and sit quietly and do a zoom meeting. I pay a certain respect to my disease, that very nearly removed everything from me.

Saying NO as a complete sentence this Xmas, is my go to phrase.

Where if I'm offered a 'special bottle' to drink, I politely say, thank you, but today I have a choice.

I take nothing for granted.

Where saying that I'm not feeling comfortable, is a strength and not a weakness. Where pretending all's OK, is not clever, and could lead me into a false sense of security.

I value what I've got today.

I've earned my freedom from drinking.

And I'm going to treasure it, as I would a beautiful present.

And treat the time with those close to me as a gift.

A gift, that's too easily lost to complacency, easing off my meetings, or taking for granted what I have.

Which is a recovery, that is only made a little stronger by helping another alcoholic.

So I'll still do my service, answer the phone, and try, one day at a time to share my experience, strength and hope.

And lastly, I'll treat Xmas day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve, as I would, any other day in the year.

As just another twenty four hours to get through, in this, my new world of recovery, where being safe, sane and sober, is more important than acting, and pretending and assuming.

So this year, let's stay safe out there, and stay sober.

Bill the Shirt

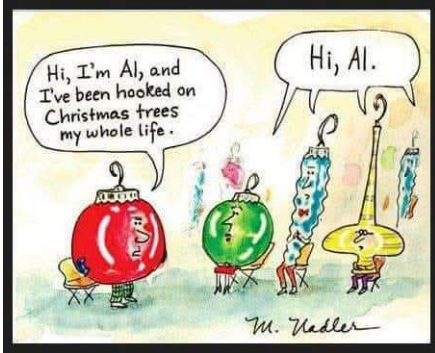
DRUNKEN WEEKENDS

Riddled with anxiety • Memory loss •
Headaches • Nausea • Over indulging • Hair
of the dog • Wine/beer breath • IBS •
Indigestion • Zero inhibitions • Disconnected
• Lethargy • Unproductive

ALCOHOL FREE WEEKENDS

Present • Mental clarity • Well rested •
Sparkly eyes • Productivity • Mindful •
Patient • Calm • Gratitude • Vibrant •
Limitless • Reliable • Freedom • Peaceful •
More time • Happiness

HUMOUR



REFLECTIONS FROM A NON ALCOHOLIC TRUSTEE

Serving a four-year term as a Non Alcoholic Trustee of Alcoholics Anonymous' Board of Trustees has been a unique, profound, and humbling experience that offers both a personal and professional journey of growth, understanding, and service. This role demanded an open heart, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to protecting the legacy and future of a fellowship that has transformed countless lives. Reflecting on my four years from 2020 to 2024, several key experiences stand out, from the responsibility of stewardship to the profound personal learning about courage, resilience, and community.

The Personal Journey

This four-year journey has been personally transformative. There is a profound sense of privilege in being welcomed into a community that shares its struggles and victories so openly. The trust placed in nonalcoholic trustees is a gift, and with it comes the responsibility to honor and protect the fellowship's mission. The role has reinforced the importance of listening without judgment, respecting boundaries, and recognising the healing power of connection and empathy.

I have met many inspiring people while on the Board and made, what I hope will be, lifelong friendships. My fellow board members' belief and commitment to nurturing and developing the mission and purpose of GSBAA, while trying to balance complex decisions and competing priorities has been extremely humbling and motivating. There was a constant feeling that preserving something valuable and ensuring sustainability for future generations was of key importance in the work.

Engaging with members has also been a powerful reminder of the potential for human change. Hearing stories of transformation—

of lives saved and families healed—has left an indelible mark on my own perspective on resilience, perseverance, and the power of community. It has been a gift to see that recovery, while often a deeply personal journey, is strengthened immeasurably through shared experiences and mutual support.

The Responsibility of Service

As a nonalcoholic trustee, one enters a deeply trusted position within a fellowship that values both its anonymity and its structure of self-governance. This role involves navigating the delicate balance between supporting AA's mission and upholding the boundaries that protect its principles. One quickly learns the importance of putting aside personal ideas and beliefs to serve the organisation's greater purpose. The primary responsibility is to contribute to the unity and welfare of the fellowship, guided by the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. These foundational principles shape not only the organisation's culture but also the approach to decision-making, fostering a deep respect for the democratic process that guides AA's operations.

Witnessing the Power of Transformation

One of the most awe-inspiring parts of this role is the opportunity to witness the profound impact of Alcoholics Anonymous on individuals' lives. Attending meetings, events, and conferences as a nonalcoholic trustee means hearing firsthand accounts of recovery, stories that are equal parts inspiring and heart-wrenching. These stories underscore the significance of AA's commitment to being accessible and free to anyone who desires sobriety. In listening to members, one sees the spectrum of human resilience and understands the necessity of AA's inclusive, nonjudgmental approach.



It is also humbling to witness how AA has created a sense of belonging and identity for those who might otherwise have felt isolated. Members often share about the community AA provides—a place where they are understood, not judged, and where they can share openly about their struggles and triumphs. This sense of connection is a powerful reminder of how fundamental human connection and empathy are to recovery. This, in turn, fuels a trustee's motivation to ensure that AA continues to provide a safe, supportive, and open environment.

Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

One of the most critical issues facing AA today is fostering diversity and inclusion. Throughout this term, there has been a growing understanding of how critical it is for AA to reach a broader range of people, including young people, marginalized and underrepresented communities. This is not without challenges; fellowship is built on traditions that were established in a vastly different social climate, and evolving while maintaining these traditions requires thoughtful, careful adaptation. As a trustee, supporting efforts to make AA more inclusive—whether through creating literature that speaks to diverse experiences, reaching out to underserved populations, or addressing structural and cultural barriers—has been both a challenging and rewarding aspect of the role. Learning from the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts

The Twelve Traditions and Concepts of AA offer a unique governance framework serving as a spiritual and operational guide. As a nonalcoholic trustee, understanding and applying these principles has been instrumental in approaching each decision and interaction with integrity and humility. These principles emphasise collective welfare, a focus on the group rather than the individual, and a commitment to transparency and honesty. They also underscore the importance of anonymity, which serves as a safeguard against ego and individualism, reinforcing the idea that AA

exists to serve rather than to promote.

In practice, applying the Twelve Traditions and Concepts challenges trustees to listen actively, put aside personal biases, and prioritise the welfare of the entire fellowship. This approach often runs counter to more traditional board roles, where individual expertise or opinion might weigh heavily. The beauty of this model, however, lies in the way it mirrors AA's own principles of recovery: humility, collective strength, and service to others.

Looking to the Future

As my term concluded, the future of AA appears as bright and hopeful as ever, though not without challenges. The need to remain adaptable, inclusive, and relevant in an ever-changing world is clear. In an age where mental health and addiction recovery are becoming more openly discussed, AA must find ways to reach a younger, more diverse audience while remaining true to its core principles. Ensuring that the fellowship remains welcoming, effective, and sustainable will require ongoing dedication from everyone involved—from trustees to individual members.

Leaving the role, I feel a deep sense of gratitude and respect for the fellowship and its members. The experience has been an education not only in governance but in empathy, resilience, and community. It is an experience that leaves one changed, not only with a better understanding of Alcoholics Anonymous but with a renewed commitment to service and support for those who, in finding recovery, change lives—starting with their own.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with you over the last four years and wish you all the absolute best of luck on your journeys.

***Cindy O'Shea (Former NAT)
November 2024***



Q&A WITH DEBBIE, DUBLIN

How long have you been sober?

I'm sober 10 years.

What brought you to the fellowship?

Well, it was a long journey. It took me a long time to get to the fellowship. When I was younger, I had said I would never drink because I had seen what alcoholism had done in my extended family, and I just never, never wanted to be like this. But, you know, I found it very difficult to deal with people, places and situations in life and alcohol, when I first tasted it, seemed to be the magic formula. It turned me from being a shy, introverted, insecure person into somebody who was full of confidence and could be great fun. And I felt like I fitted in because really that was my problem. I didn't fit in into life or I felt I didn't fit in into life. And so it seemed like the answer to all my problems, initially. But of course, as time went on, things changed and instead of it being my friend, it became my absolute enemy and I couldn't control it.

There were so many awful, humiliating experiences along the way. I got drunk so many times and made a complete show of myself. There were so many experiences that I'm so ashamed of. I lost my job. I was excellent at my job and I got fired in the end. I lost my marriage. My husband, who was a lovely man, just could not deal with my alcoholism and my behaviour. So I paid a huge price along the way. It was a torturous journey and it was a horrible life that I never want to go back to. In the end, I just couldn't stick it anymore. I was drinking all the time and I couldn't stop. I tried so many times to stop and I couldn't and I knew that I was drinking when I didn't want to drink. The hangovers, the depression, it was just horrible. In the end, my nervous system was completely shattered and I was suicidal. I went back to a hospital where I used to attend and a lovely counsellor there suggested that I should go to an AA meeting.

I was very nervous going to my first meeting. I went to Molesworth Street in the centre of Dublin and I stood outside and watched the people outside for a while and I was nearly going away when this woman saw me and she took me by the arm and brought me into the meeting, sat beside me and told me that I need never drink again and that everything would be alright.

Had you heard about AA prior to this?

Well, yes, I'd heard about AA, but I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know what they did. I didn't know where they held meetings. I didn't even know what the meetings did. I believed that the meetings were only for down-and-outs, for winos. You know, people that were begging in the streets, drinking out of bottles. I didn't think it was going to be for people like me. People who had a job etc. So I was very relieved when I eventually did go to a meeting to see that there were lots of normal people, all ages, male, female, all dressed well, looking healthy and smiling and laughing.

How did you feel at your first meeting?

Well, I was very nervous and a bit apprehensive going in, but as soon as I went in through the doors, everybody was so kind and they all made me feel welcome. I was absolutely blown away by listening to their stories because they were so honest. There was some sadness in the rooms listening to some of the stories, but there was also laughter.

I saw people who looked well and seemed to be very happy in their lives, and they spoke about how their lives had changed and how they had gone through hard times, but that by coming to AA and keeping it one day at a time, doing the 12-step program of AA, that they had transformed their lives, and now they had a second chance at life. At my first meeting, I got hope because I listened to their stories, and I thought, if they can do it, maybe I can

do it. When I was leaving, they said to me, just “keep coming back”. Keep it “one day at a time”. Don’t drink and go to a meeting, and you will be fine. You need never drink again.

Was there anything that you found off-putting when you first came into the meetings?

Well, I loved the meetings, I loved the people, I loved the feeling, I felt like I belonged there. But when I looked at the 12 steps on the wall and I saw that God was mentioned several times, my heart sank a little because I wondered, was it a religious organisation? And I didn’t want to be in a religious organisation. It wasn’t that I was anti-church or religion, but it just wasn’t my thing. But after a while, when I talked to other members and when I listened to other members, their sharing, I realised or I was told that I didn’t have to have a God. It certainly did not need to be a religious God or the God of my upbringing. I did need to have a higher power, something higher than me. And that perhaps the group could be my higher power initially, and that’s what I did.

What slogan is your favourite?

I love the slogans. They’re so simple and yet so powerful. I think my favourite slogan is, “This too shall pass”. Because in the first year of my sobriety, I found life so difficult. It was really tough. And on the worst days, I would just remember that slogan. It won’t be like this forever. “This too shall pass”. today, when I go through the hard times in life, and on those difficult days, I always remember, this too shall pass. And it makes me feel calm again. Also, what I need to remember is, during the happy times, the joyous times in life, this too shall pass. So I need to grab them and really enjoy them.

Does your family feel the ripple effect of your sobriety?

Absolutely yes. I let my family down so many times. They’re very, very happy to see me happy, joyous and free and without alcohol. I was an extremely selfish person, only thinking

about myself and not considering their feelings at all. So bridges have been mended. I’ve made my amends. And I can’t undo what’s been done. But I certainly how I live my life today. So I try to make amends on a daily basis by helping my family as much as possible, because I owe them a great debt and I’ve hurt them very badly in the past. So yes, I’m happy and my family are very happy as a result of AA.

Has your ability to do your job improved and how?

Yes, I’m very happy in my working life currently. I actually changed my career because the job and the profession that I worked in during my drinking life, was very stressful. And upon reflection I decided that it would be better for me to change to a less demanding, stressful job. A job where I was happier and also where I would have time to have work balance, time for my family, time to go to my meetings, time to enjoy myself as well as working. And it’s paid off greatly. So I’m in a much happier, better place and I really do like the job that I do.

Is just taking what is on offer enough or do you feel you need to give back?

Oh, I absolutely need to give back. What was freely given to me, I freely pass on. AA has changed my life. When I arrived into AA, the meetings were there and were on. AA in Ireland is there for me. AA has changed my life. I have to give back. It’s part of the programme. My sponsor who brought me through the steps told me that service was part of the programme. And so I got into service very early on and I have remained in service. Service is “gratitude in action”.

What is your message to the newcomer?

I would say, give it your best shot. Don’t just come for a week or a month and give up. You have to keep coming. When I first came, I really didn’t know what was going on, but they kept saying to me, keep coming back and it will get better. So give it time. You have to give it time for the magic to happen. Just take it one day at a time. In the beginning, the slogans up on the top table were what kept me going. And



I would say, keep it simple and take it one day at a time. And it will work for you.

Is there anything you would like to add or give a short summary?

When I came to AA first, I just desperately wanted to stop drinking. That was all I wanted. Over time, many, many days later, I have realised by coming to meetings and listening to other members sharing, and by actually going through the 12-step program and looking at myself on my fourth and fifth step, that there's a lot more to this alcoholism than just stopping drinking. It's all about my thinking and my feelings. And so I know that when I go to

meetings, it's like my medicine for life. When I go to meetings, I'm able to take part in life, hold a job down, be kind to the people that I love, and stay out of trouble. And that's what I do. I go to meetings which are only an hour long. I think it's a small price to pay for this wonderful new life that I have. I never ever want to go back to my old life of desperation and despair. And so what I've know is that people who stop going to meetings, a lot of them don't come back and they die. And I realise that I'm one of the lucky ones. But in order to keep this, I have to give it away to the newcomer and to other people who need my help.



I started doing Prison Service many years ago by first attending the Prison Sub Committee meeting in Aughrim Street. I had to go along and meet the Prison Convener, I did not know what to expect and I was quite daunted with the prospect of doing service in the Prisons. I think for me meeting the Prisoners when they come out of prison at a real meeting is powerful.

I went along, was vetted and started the process of doing Prison service. I always remember me first time going into the prison, how full of gratitude I was with the clang of the big gate in Mountjoy closing behind me.

I felt a deep sense of wonder I could have been there too. I had the Prison Convener on

speed dial and I had his head wrecked.

For anyone willing to be of service and wants to do service in prisons, I would highly recommend it. The requirement is two years sobriety and you will also need to be Garda vetted.

Prison Service has enriched my own personal recovery and helped me to stay grounded. I am proud to serve AA.

Mise le Meas

John O'L – Leinster Prison Convener



UNITY | SERVICE | RECOVERY

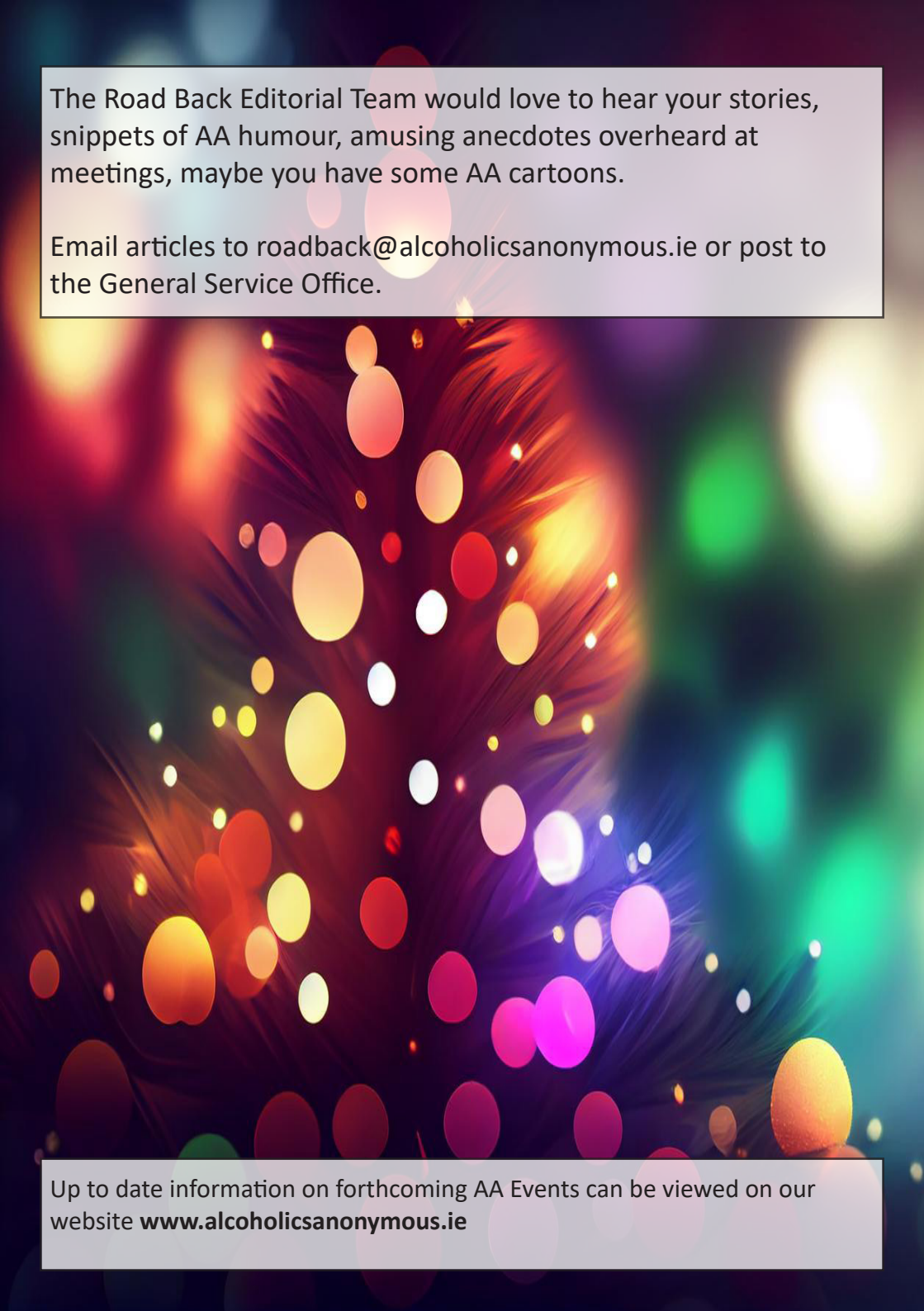
The Twelve Traditions

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)