HERICALD ALC Includes Service News

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BEHIND BARS

Editorial

The chosen theme for this edition "BEHIND BARS" is something that most alcoholics can identify with whether they have been to prison or not. But firstly let's look at the person whose freedom has been removed due to circumstances brought about by their alcoholism, the gavel falls, and the judge's decision is implemented and the bewildered one heads off to the grey room with bars on the window, what hope can they have in this situation? I would like to think that people in this situation are advised on committal that the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous hold meetings in prisons, and that for whatever reason they make the decision to attend, the first seeds of hope will be sown in their lives.

Then there is the personal prison brought about by the individual that has freedom to look out through their window at the wonders of God's creation, but are imprisoned by the necessity to feed the insane obsession of the first drink which kicks off the physical craving, this person is trapped in similar fashion to the one the judge passed sentence on.

The responsibility of our fellowship is to ensure that both these types are catered for, the first are those that give their time to go to our prisons to carry the message of hope, the second lies with our public information at all levels to ensure the message is constantly shared and that the person, glass in hand behind the imaginary bars will also gets the opportunity to hear what Alcoholics Anonymous has to offer.

Can you serve the fellowship in either of these two fields? Maybe at our next personal inventory we can examine our conscience on this question.

The theme for the next issue will be "STEP 3" so again you are invited to contribute your experience, strength and hope because it may be **YOUR** story that convinces someone that maybe they are alcoholic too.

We are really looking forward to hearing from you,

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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At a meeting I attended on holiday last year I had a chat with a man who shared he had found AA in prison. Finding himself back behind bars again for a considerable time, alone in his cell he told himself "Maybe I will try what those AA guys offered when I was last in jail"

That was over twenty years ago, he now lives as a useful member of his community, recovering one day at a time. Hearing that gave me a lift, I have been privileged to participate in carrying the message into our Jails, and over the years I had moments of doubt.

Sometimes I questioned the effectiveness of our meetings, were the inmates coming for the biscuits? Yes, before COVID we used to have tea, and we brought the biscuits, I wondered, were they coming to meet their friends or were they coming to get out of their cells?

Then I knew that was none of my business. My powerlessness over alcohol extends beyond me, I am simply a grateful member of AA, just as it was none of my business why they were in Prison.

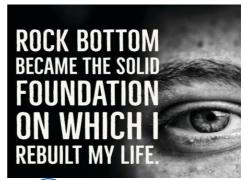
AA is there to carry this message of hope; it is not easy for a prisoner to put his head above the parapet and attend an AA meeting in jail. Again, I was filled with gratitude on hearing my holiday friend share. When I think of the time I heard about AA's recovery program as an inmate in a mental asylum, it took me a further two years before I was finally convinced, I couldn't help myself.

So, if you have the required sobriety as suggested in our Service Handbook, Service in prisons may be for you.

I finish with the words of a good servant to the prisoner; he always closed his share at prison meetings with the words "WHERE YOU ARE AT PRESENT DOES NOT DEFINE YOU"

A beautiful message of hope.

Anon







My name is Cathal, and I am an alcoholic.

I began drinking at 12 years old and over the years I experienced many ups and downs. Alcohol came before everything in my life and although it caused me many problems, I needed it in order to live with myself. Over the next eight years I gradually began to get involved in crime to fund my addiction, alcohol was always involved when I got into trouble with the police, and this led to me going on the run for almost a vear before eventually being caught and sent to prison for 6 months. When I was told that I was heading to prison, fear struck me. I had never stopped drinking for a long period of time before and I didn't know how I was going to be able to live without it, but unknown to me, this was to be the happiest and most peaceful time in my life so far.

I was one week into my sentence when the physical craving for drink left me, the fog began to lift, and my mind felt the clearest it had in years. One of the best parts of prison life was the structure and routine, it offered me the chance to do things I had never been fit to do in the outside world because my drinking made my life so unmanageable. I couldn't look after myself properly, but in prison I had a bedtime and three meals a day. I also attended educational courses and had a job in the

garden. The fact I was only in jail for a short period of time but had accomplished so much brought on the realisation that alcohol was the cause of all my problems and held me back in all areas of my life, but I had absolutely no understanding of the disease of alcoholism or the danger of the first drink.

I was happy when my sentence came to an end, but I was worried how I would manage to live left to my own devices. Although this thought had no time to linger as my granda passed away the day before I was released. I had always had a good relationship with him, and I was gutted that I wasn't there with him, alcoholism had taken that away from me. I managed to stay sober for his wake and funeral out of respect for him and for my Mum but as soon as he was buried, I was gone. Mum had given me a new phone and a few of guid, then no one saw me for the next two weeks. I was right back where I had left of six months before. The following six years was much the same, I continued to drink and occasionally get into trouble with the law, until I walked through the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous in 2017. I still wasn't ready at that stage, leaving after a few months. Another two years of hell, and the worst years of my drinking career before I was beaten completely. I thought back with irony, I had been more free sitting in a prison cell than I could ever be with a bottle in my hand.

Thanks to my Higher Power, I got back to the rooms of AA and this time I stayed. I was ready to listen and learn, I eventually got a sponsor and started the steps, and to this day I have not needed to pick up a drink.

and that life could be better without it, but AA and the program has given me the courage and the strength to live without alcohol one day at a time, and shown me that I can be free without being behind bars.

Cathal C, Dungannon

Prison showed me that alcohol was my problem,



My first experience of prison service was in the Curragh prison in 2001. I had been very hesitant to get involved with this service as I didn't know what sort of characters I would be dealing with. But after some 'strong encouragement" from my sponsor, I submitted my documents to be vetted by the prison authorities.

When clearance came through a few weeks later, I was very nervous at the prospect of entering a prison for the first time. Myself and another member, auld Bill, were met at the door by a prison officer. I can still hear the clunk of the prison doors closing behind us. While bringing us down to the meeting room, he said that the meeting facilitator, a prison employee, wanted to have a quick chat to see how the meetings had been going. This meeting facilitator turned out to be my next door neighbour. I was still in relatively early

sobriety and was fearful of people knowing I was in AA. But in fairness to this woman, she was completely professional and never hinted that she knew me, or ever mentioned it again.

There were usually three members at the meeting, all of whom were in prison because of crimes they had committed while drunk. They seemed to be three really nice guys. I know that at least one of them is still sober and is an active members of Alcoholics Anonymous today.

In 2003, the Curragh prison closed. I was keen to stay involved with prison service so I started going into a remand prison just outside Dublin. On my first visit there, the other AA speaker and I were met just inside the prison doors by the meeting facilitator. He was a really nice guy. Probably in his early thirties, well spoken and well dressed. He spoke passionately about



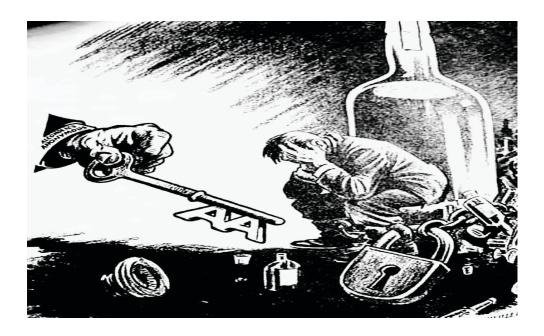
AA while we walked down to the meeting room, passing through numerous locked doors on the way. As the meeting started, it dawned on me that this guy wasn't a prison employee, he was a prisoner.

I got to know him over the next few months. A couple of years earlier, he had what most people would describe as a perfect life - a really good career, a beautiful fiancé, plenty of money. After a night out with his bride to be, where he had drank far more than enough, they had had a mild disagreement about a minor detail of their upcoming wedding. The next thing he remembers is when he 'came to', the following morning, with his fiancé dead beside him. He had killed her but he had no recollection of it. Prior to this tragic event, he knew that he probably had a drink problem. He had tried, unsuccessfully, to give up drink on a few occasions. He had also been to a couple of AA meetings. But the people at those meetings seemed to be far worse cases than him so he figured that he could probably drink for a few more years. If it became a serious problem, he could always go back to meetings. But like for so many members who stop going to meetings, tragedy struck before he got back.

The reason that I am sharing this story is because this could so easily have been me. I have never been in prison, not even overnight. I have never been arrested. I have never been physically violent. But I know from experience that once I pick up the first drink, I don't have any say in what happens next. "What happens next" could, and probably eventually would, have tragic consequences. I was a blackout drinker – not every time I drank, but often.

Thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous, I don't ever have to experience that again. I love the freedom that comes with living a sober life, and I don't just mean the physical freedom. There is a different level of freedom that comes from trying to help somebody else.

Brian, Kildare.





My name is Kevin and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is August 16th 2012. I was born and raised in the south of Ireland and grew up in an alcoholic home.

My Dad got sober in 1986 and has been sober to this day. When he drank, he would become extremely mean and verbally abusive.

As a result I vowed never to drink, afraid that alcohol would cause the same reaction in me. When I emigrated to the States in 1986 at 23 years old, I left sober. In my late teens and early 20's, I had been to bars and social events with my friends but never touched alcohol.

Even though I was now living in another country, I still vowed never to drink.

The fear was still strong.

For the first few years I stayed sober. I was determined.

But as much as I tried to avoid it, I took my first drink at age 25. And for all the fear I had about alcohol, it seemingly gave me great courage. I was suddenly more outgoing when I drank. I was funnier. I found it easier to approach and talk to girls. I was the life of the party. Or so I thought.

And then the day came that I feared the most. I was at a party one night and had drank a lot of shots. I blacked out and was told by my friends the next day that I had been really arrogant and verbally abusive. All those years of determination were gone in just a few hours.

Alcohol had taken its hold.

I spent the next 25 years of my life in a constant battle. I would go for weeks without drinking only to get drunk again for days at a time and cause more problems than the last time.

I moved from one relationship to another. I failed in business. I got a number of DUI's. My health suffered. I lost great friendships.

But it was everybody else's fault. I never blamed anything on my drinking.

Deep down I knew it, but would not admit it for fear I would have to stop.

I knew for a long time now that alcohol was running and ruining my life.

Then in August of 2012 while living in Las Vegas, I got into serious trouble with the law. I was arrested while drunk and charged with a felony.

The lie was over.

On August 16th of 2012 I drove myself to my first AA meeting.

Today at 61 years of age, I regard that day as the greatest day of my life.

I walked into a room and had friends I'd never known. I felt kindness and acceptance. I knew I was somewhere I truly belonged. I went to meetings everyday. I got a sponsor and started working the 12 steps. I was given the courage



by my higher power to face the fears, the anger and the resentments of the past.

Today I have an amazing relationship with my Dad.

I have absolutely no desire to drink. It's been taken away.

I begin most days on my knees asking my God for guidance to do the right thing. To keep me sober just for today.

After 6 years of sobriety on Christmas Day of 2018 I lost my beautiful wife to alcohol. She died in hospital in Miami of liver failure.

It was by far the worst experience of my life. But through AA and the support of my amazing friends and family, I stayed sober.

Today I have a life that I could never have imagined. I live in the beautiful Florida Keys. I play music for a living and after 12 plus years

of sobriety I still go to meetings an average of 5 days a week.

I now have a healthy fear.

If I don't go to meetings on a consistent basis I might drink again, and I cannot let that happen.

I get to sponsor other guys and we get to keep each other sober. I carry the message wherever and whenever I can.

AA and my higher power have given me a beautiful and peaceful life.

It's right here for anyone who needs it.

Just give it a chance and watch the miracle happen.

Kevin, USA







Sa Ghaeilge deir muid go mbíonn trí rud is gá a dhéanamh leis an deoch; í a ól, í a íoc agus í a iompar. Ar feadh 20 bliain bhí mé féin ábalta na trí rud sin a dhéanamh. Cibé trioblóid a bhíodh agam mheas mé go mbíodh an stró céanna ag achan duine - tinneas maidine, gan a bheith in ann tiontú suas do chúramaí, dearmad ar chodanna den oíche roimh ré.

Is mise Raymond as Contae Ard Mhacha agus lá ar lá tá mé stuama anois le 15 bliain a bheag nó a mhór. Bím in éad le daoine a bhfuil dáta a stuamachta ar eolas acu de ghlanmheabhair. Ní féidir liom a bheith chomh beacht sin mar bhí seachtainí agam, sna laethanta dorcha sin ag an deireadh nuair a bhí mé as mo chiall. Ní dorcha a bhí siad i ndáiríre ach dubh dorcha. Is dóigh liom gur am éigin i Mí na Samhna 2010 a bhí i gceist nuair a fuair mé dóchas go leor le dul ar aghaidh gan alcól; an cara ab fhearr a bhí agam a thiontaigh ina namhaid ba mheasa.

Ba léir go raibh greim ag an deoch orm. Stad sí ag obair i bhfad roimhe sin. Bhí deireadh tagtha leis an tsamhlaíocht ildaite. Ní raibh aon spraoi le cairde thar roinnt deochanna. Ní raibh aon fhaoiseamh. Ní raibh ann ach pian; pian fhisiciúil agus pian mheabhrach. Bhí mé tinn an t-am ar fad agus bhí mo mhuintir agus mo chairde dubh dóite liom.

Dá mhéad iarracht a rinne mé éirí stuama ba mheasa a d'éirigh mo chás. Bhí mo shaol as smacht. Bhí le fada ach d'admhaigh mé é don chéad uair.

Ar deireadh b'éigean dom dul isteach chuig ionad athshlánúcháin. Istigh ansin a ghlac mé an chéad chéim cheart ar bhealach mo leasa.

Ní raibh an dara rogha agam. Bhí mé réidh do shaol nua, réidh don teagasc ceart. Istigh sa tearmann sin bhí andúiligh eile, go leor acu. Go dtí sin, shíl mé go raibh mé liom féin agus go raibh an locht orm féin. Go scioptha, áfach, d'fhoghlaim mé nach drochdhuine a bhí ionam ach duine a bhí tinn; tinn le haicíd mharfach, aicíd díthe - bhíodh rud éigin de dhíth orm ó mhaidin go hoíche. Deoch eile a shásaíodh an díth sin go dtí gur stop sé á sásamh. D'fhoghlaim fosta go raibh leigheas ann, go raibh freagra ann. AA an freagra sin. Ach bíonn orainn na rudaí a mholtar dúinn a dhéanamh. Ní mise a bheadh ann feasta ach muidne. Alcólach amháin ag tacú le hAlcólach eile i gcumann d'Alcólaigh. Bhí saol le bheith ann i ndiaidh na dí.



Go bunúsach na moltaí a bhíonn le comhlíonadh agam, mo leithscéal, againn, is iad: na céimeanna - 12 acu - a dhéanamh oiread is féidir, freastal ar chruinnithe den chumann, iarracht a dhéanamh eolas a chur ar chumhacht níos airde agus gan an chéad deoch a ól is cuma cad a tharlóidh. Déanann muid é seo lá in aghaidh an lae.

Ní thig liom go leor buíochais a ghabháil le hAA agus mothaím go bhfuil na gealltanais a léitear amach go minic ag cruinnithe ag teacht chun tosaigh i mo shaol. Tagann siad chun cinn i gcónaí má oibríonn muid ar a son, go gasta in amanna, go mall in amanna ach tiocfaidh siad chun tosaigh má dhéanann muid ár ndícheall.

I mo chás féin, tá an caidreamh le mo theaghlach míle uair níos fearr. Ní raibh mo shaol oibre riamh ní ba fhearr agus tá mé ábalta aire mhaith a thabhairt don mhadadh atá agam inniu nuair nach raibh mé ábalta aire a thabhairt dom féin go fiú.

Cluintear paradacsaí ag cruinnithe AA agus is breá liom iad: géilleadh leis an bhua a bheith agat m.sh. an chéad deoch a chuireann ólta thú, barraíocht atá i ndeoch amháin agus ní leor 1,000, nuair nár mhaith leat dul chuig cruinniú is cóir duit dul agus is féidir leis an éadóchas a bheith ina bhronntanas.

Cuidíonn na cruinnithe go mór. Gan chaidreamh le comhthaistealaithe ar bhóthar an athshlánaithe bheadh sé ródheacair fanacht stuama. Idir na cruinnithe má thagann éadóchas nó beaguchtach orainn bíonn i gcónaí Paidir an tSuaimhnis againn le rá;

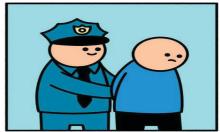
A Dhia, deonaigh dúinn an suaimhneas glacadh le rudaí nach féidir linn a athrú, misneach na rudaí a athrú nuair is féidir, agus an ghaois an difear a aithint, Áiméan.

Raymond, Ard Mhacha











What's the point? Oftentimes I asked myself that question as an empty, lonely, and exhausted alcoholic. That was before A.A, the Fellowship that gave me a taste of what I had been searching for in active addiction. Six months into recovery and I found myself asking the same question, what's the point? I was existing without alcohol but far from living. It was then I finally heard a suggestion that had been said many times before but this time it hit home – get a sponsor and get started on the steps. Things started to change from then on, in large part to a patient sponsor, who I am humbled to call a great friend today.

Recognising how much had been given to me in A.A, and somehow reaching two years of continuous sobriety, one day at a time, I finally understood the importance of giving away what had been freely given to me. In time, a prison service position was on the horizon and life and recovery have been immeasurably better ever since. The honesty and courage was palpable as we shared our experience, strength, and hope within a room in Mountjoy. Despite the seriousness of what was being shared, there was always laughter, there was always hope no matter how faint. I would leave each meeting

torn – buoyed by the power of the meeting but saddened that we couldn't go together for a coffee afterwards - that rite of passage we all get to enjoy in A.A and something I realised I often took for granted. Suddenly, I saw my life for what it was - a life based on the freedom of movement, something that my fellows are temporarily without.

Each week, the prison meeting is a highlight. To see recovery with all its ups and downs, happen in prison, is joyous. It instils hope faith, and gratitude in this recovering alcoholic. I am embarrassed when I am thanked for taking the time to host a meeting in prison, as I get so much from it, so it is me who needs to be thanking my fellows. To meet a member after their release is a gift, further strengthening my sobriety. Life today feels fuller, more meaningful, which is a direct result of the privilege of being trusted to undertake prison service. I can honestly say that prison service is what I have spent a large part of my life searching for.

Ken L

PARALLEL LINES

My names Bill and I'm an alcoholic.

My journey into active alcoholism was swift, unapologetic, and instant. I picked up a drink, and then another, until I was drunk. I danced all night, and enjoyed that elusive feeling of being completely free. And when it was all over, all I wanted to do, was do it all over again.

Recovery from alcoholism is about reversing.

Recovery from alcoholism is about reversing And within these patterns, was a life I'd settled

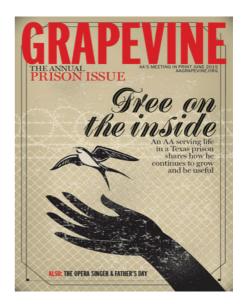
the thrusts of my drinking. That starts by leading a life, that doesn't involve alcohol. It's then about finding a way of living that avoids anger, bitterness, resentments and self pity. For my drinking followed a well defined pattern. Where these patterns of behaviour became a part of my being, almost familiar.



and enjoy the good times, I'd always know, fighting something or someone...? And in a that when I was having a run of good luck, strange kind of way, our addictions, eventually somehow my drinking would bring this all becomes part of our personality. Where we to an end. Where as night follows day, good somehow learn to live with them, side by side, always followed bad, which was then followed in harmony. But eventually we must deal with by more good. And so on. It was a cycle of them, as we did our drinking. For our path into boom and bust, but a cycle nonetheless. And this, our new sober life, doesn't stop when we a cycle I had to break. Where, as bad things put down the drink. Because stopping drinking kept happening, I had to stop doing them. But is but a beginning. And dealing with these new the cycle, this merry go round of my drinking, foes, is like turning another page in our story, the constant resentments and of upsetting on our path to a new life. Where using the 12 those around me, would only stop, once I step recovery program, can be just as effective got off.And so, as I sorted one part of my life as it was with our alcoholism. We all have out, my drinking, so other patterns emerged. parallel experiences in our lives, and ongoing Patterns, that had been reoccurring, often for struggles with pattens of behaviour. But are years, even decades. But were hidden neatly we not the lucky ones, because we have the behind the veil of my alcoholism. For are twelve steps, and a higher power to help us. we not all creatures of habit. Where we end Where, just for today, we can heal the scars up thriving off the ups and the downs. The in our lives, and move on. And move on with highs and the lows. For as they become more dignity, with respect and with some humility, familiar, they become somewhat comfortable into the future, and into the sunlight of the to live with. Where nothing stays good for ever, spirit. and nothing stays bad for ever. For we get use to even the most destructive and painful One day at a time. of behaviours. For they weave themselves into our lives, so neatly, and so deeply, that they become normalised. Repetitive, hurtful and dehumanising patterns, become just like taking a drink. Where we accept them as we did our drinking, as inevitably. We can forget sometimes, that they even exist. We end up learning to live with them, day to day, month in month out. And so we endure them. We have to, because there seems no easy way out. But by putting up with them, we do at our peril. Because once our drinking has stopped, these new patterns become our next addiction. For like any addiction, they will only bring us hurt and discomfort, upset and frustration. Where each new addiction, eventually becomes our new fix. As if we'd subconsciously feel lost, without yet another addiction, bringing more disharmony into our lives. Where having some form of resentment and low self worth, is a place we can place our energies, by fighting the

into very neatly. I would justify the bad times, foe from within. For have we not always been

Bill the shirt, Bristol





Heard at Meetings

AA is like comedy club, but with better stories

If you don't want to slip - stay away from where it is slippy!

The elevator to sobriety is broken!
Take "The Steps"!

If you sit in a barbers chair long enough - you'll end up getting a haircut

We have to give it away to keep it

It's an AA
Meeting!
Of course we
are going to
have tea and
humour!



Service News

APR - JUN 2025

All-Ireland Convention 2025

This year's All-Ireland Convention was held in the Clayton Hotel in Sligo from the 11th to 13th May. The Convention was a huge success with a tremendous atmosphere all around the hotel for the whole weekend. Well done to Sean and all of the organising committee members for putting together such a tremendous event.

Next year's All-Ireland Convention

It's always the case that as soon as one All-Ireland Convention is over that we are already talking about the next one. Next year's event will be held in the Gleneagle hotel in Killarney from the 17th to 19th April 2026. You will find further information about this event in this publication. You will also find this information, as well as information about other events across the country on our website, alcoholicsanonymous. ie.

The Roadback

As you may have noticed over the last year, the Roadback editorial team have made a number of subtle changes to the publication. There are now far more homegrown stories included. We are asking members to keep sending in your stories to roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie.

AA website

In recent months, we have made a few changes to the website. In particular, we have made a few alterations to the members section so that various documents are easier to find. The draft minutes for Conference 2025 are also available at the bottom of the homepage for anyone who might be interested in reading them. It can be interesting to see how Conference operates in Ireland.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING MOTIONS TO CONFERENCE

At Conference this year, it was agreed that the General Service Office would distribute guidelines for sending motions to Conference. These guidelines have been drafted by a Subcommittee of Conference. It includes a few minor changes to the motions to Conference process, which were agreed at this year's meeting.

Preparing a Motion for Conference

These are considerations to help when submitting a motion for Conference through the structure:

- Motions are submitted by a Group through the structure via its Group Conscience to Area to Intergroup to Conference.
- Examples of motions:
- A change or update to the General Service Handbook
- A request that a piece of literature from another country's structure be introduced to Ireland
- Evaluate if there is sufficient information for Conference to discuss the motion.
- Is the motion clear? Motions are sometimes returned through the structure because they are not clear on what is being proposed.
- Is the motion a Group or Area issue? Motions are sometimes returned because they are concerned with Group or Area matters. For example, recently there was a motion about insurance which is an Area issue.
- Has the motion already been successfully brought to Conference in recent years.



Sometimes motions are submitted to implement something that is already in place.

Deadline for submission of Motions to Conference

Motions for discussion at the upcoming General Service Conference should be submitted by 1st November each year to the Board secretary in the normal manner, through the structure: The fellowship is informed of this deadline in The Road Back and through the normal AA Ireland group email boxes and AA Ireland website.

Keeping the fellowship informed

Motions are anonymised and published in advance of the annual Conference meeting in The Road Back. This ensures the widest transparency across the fellowship and allows motions to be discussed without prejudice at Conference. Similar motions are grouped together.

Discussion of Motions at Conference Breakout tables are used to discuss motions at Conference. Similar motions are grouped together and anonymised. Each table is balanced with at least one representative from each province and one trustee. World Service Delegates, Non-Alcoholic Trustees and Observers will be evenly distributed as possible. This allows Conference members the opportunity to discuss motions fully and provide an opportunity for the minority voice to be heard, should it arise.

It is hoped that the suggestions in Preparing a Motion for Conference encourages motions that are suitable for discussion to come through the structure. The breakout tables will nonetheless evaluate if there is sufficient information for Conference to discuss a motion. If necessary, additional information will be requested to assist in the resubmittal of a motion.

Once each breakout table has fully discussed their assigned Motions, a summary is presented to all members of Conference for voting.

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 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 will be updated to reflect the agreed changes.

Services in Hospitals and Other Institutions

For the purposes of this important AA service, 'hospital' is taken to mean a hospital or treatment facility/rehabilitation centre where people are treated for alcoholism. In such institutions the purpose of the AA meeting is to carry the AA message to the patients receiving treatment.

The Hospital and Institutions Committee (H&I)

The AA Hospital and Institutions Committee has one objective – to carry the AA message to the alcoholic who still suffers. It tries to reach the alcoholic who is in treatment or hospitalised. It does this by members sharing their own experience as individuals and as part of AA in learning to live without alcohol. All efforts in this field should reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside AA are equally concerned about the problem of alcoholism. We must recognise that our competence to speak about alcoholism is

our competence to speak about alcoholism is limited in subject matter to Alcoholics



Anonymous and its recovery programme.

Who forms a Hospital and Institutions (H&I) Committee?

The responsibility for forming a Hospital and Institutions Committee rests with the Area Committee and the H&I Committee is answerable to the Area Committee.

The advantages of the H&I Committee

• The experience, strength and hope of AA

- Groups in the locality are available to the H&I Committee, and through it, to the suffering alcoholic.
- The message carried is solely the 12th recovery programme.
- Any issues that arise can be dealt with promptly by the Area Committee, which has at its disposal the collective experience of Groups in the area.

Qualifications for H&I Volunteers

- It is recommended that H&I committee members have a minimum of two years continuous, current sobriety.
- He/she should be familiar with the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of AA and have an interest in 12th Step work.

Exceptions

Members should not volunteer if:

- He/she is an employee of the hospital/institution.
- He/she is involved in any way as a facilitator or therapist in the hospital/institution.

Important points to remember

- The Committee serves at the invitation of the administration of the hospital or institution, always remembering cooperation not affiliation.
- Visiting hospitals and institutions is a privilege extended to AA, therefore acceptance of such an invitation requires compliance with the hospital or institution's rules and regulations.
- Since we deal only with alcoholism, we are not qualified to give opinions on

medical or other issues.

- AA has no opinion on outside issues and members must avoid comment on internal administrative issues. We carry only AA's message of recovery from alcoholism.
- The AA H&I Committee should not take or invite patients/residents out of institutions to outside meetings.
- There are no Tradition 7 collections at hospital meetings (Conference 1982).
- Area may purchase literature for free distribution at hospital meetings (Conference 1984).
- The most appropriate meeting for H&I is an Open AA meeting (Conference 1989).
- Where the hospital or institution does not accept AA guidelines for meetings,

then AA ought not to be in that hospital or institution (Conference 1989).

 The anonymity of staff members who are also members of AA should be respected.

Hospital and Institutions Convenor

The H&I Convenor is appointed by his/her Area Committee in the manner agreed by

the Area. Where an Area has one or more institutions, members of the H&I Committee may be given individual responsibility for specific meetings.

The usual term of office is two years.

The Convenor will keep the sub-committee well informed of hospital and institution

rules and privileges. The Convenor is responsible for locating a suitable meeting venue.

The Convenor must report to Area at Area's regular meetings.

Format for Hospital and Institution Meetings

The Hospital Committee Secretary/Convenor is responsible for organising the H&I meeting as an Open AA Meeting.



He/she should arrange to have a suitable Chairperson and two or three responsible AA speakers present. Speakers should allow enough time before the meeting to prepare, at least 10 to 15 minutes.

On opening the meeting the Chairperson:

- Should state that the meeting is an Open AA Meeting and explain what this means.
- Give a brief outline of what AA and its programme are about.
- Read the Preamble.
- Read How It Works from chapter 5 of the Big Book
- Introduces the speakers, who should share for approximately 15 minutes each. Patients should not be asked to share but should be encouraged to ask questions.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairperson should stress the following:

- AA Pamphlets are available.
- How people can contact AA on leaving the hospital through local Groups and General Service Office. The AA business cards, should be available for attendees (available free, through the Structure, from GSO).

The meeting should last approximately one hour.

What AA Does Not Do

- 1. Solicit membership or try to persuade anyone to join AA who does not want to.
- 2. Keep membership records or case histories.
- 3. Engage in or sponsor research.
- 4. Join counselling or social agencies, although AA members frequently cooperate with them.
- 5. Make medical or psychological diagnoses.
- Provide drying out or nursing services, hospitalisation, drugs or any medical or psychiatric treatment.
- 7. Engage in education or propaganda about alcohol.
- 8. Provide housing, clothes, food, jobs, money or other welfare or social services.
- 9. Provide counselling services.
- 10. Accept payment for its services or any funding from non-AA sources.

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.





"Statement of Evidence of Maura Browne Garda 99999A, of Anytown Garda Station, made on 17.4.2025".

That is how my story of a sequence of events used to begin. Today, it starts with "Hi, my name is Maura and I'm an alcoholic".

The old me didn't identify as an alcoholic because I considered myself as normal & functional. This was mainly down to my belief that I couldn't be, because of my ability to have a high-pressure job, be a mother of two, running a busy home & having a social life, involved with family, friends & my community.

Today I am happy to identify as an alcoholic. Because THAT IS WHAT I AM. But I am an alcoholic in recovery, who has not picked up a drink in over 6 years. I have taken an ill health retirement from An Garda Siochana now, and now work in a different field, however, I still meet and deal with the public and my community daily.

In our modern society now in 2025, we are all aware of the problems and challenges of drug addiction, gambling addictions, food addictions, disorders and gaming addictions to name but a few. There is great empathy, support and understanding for people suffering from same. However, people and society still think of alcoholism AS A CHOICE. Society is far less tolerant of a person with the DISEASE OF ALCOHOLISM rather than a person with the disease of Crohns/Diabetes/Parkinsons or Cancer.

But that is what I suffer from, A DISEASE. The disease of Alcoholism, where it affects both my mind and body. I become powerless to alcohol once I pick up and consume my first drink.

Whilst as a serving member of An Garda Siochana, I dealt with many incidents – traumatic, instantaneous, life-changing and life ending. It was an ever adapting/evolving role. One case haunts me to this day – a fatal fire. I was first on scene and will never

forget the image of the fatality sliding down a window, arms spread, with flames all around. Back then, there was no counselling, no peer supporters, no help.

I drank to cope. I drank to numb. I drank to block out.

Today, that is not the case. Today I deal. I deal with life, and my life, with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I attend AA meetings and work a 12-step programme. AA is my coping mechanism today. I believe AA has changed my life and me and because of this, AA is a driving force in my life today.

AA is a place where I feel welcome, accepted and understood. My life problems and challenges can be dealt with. I believe I have become a better mother, daughter, employee, friend, sister and just an overall better, more understanding and compassionate person. The rooms of AA have become for me the backbone of Maura Browne version 2.

I have new confidence, happiness, and serenity along with personal development. I have received a massive education regarding the disease of alcoholism, and I no longer numb myself or block out my life through drinking. My personality has changed, my thought process is clearer, my behaviours and way of life have gone down a far nicer road because of sobriety. Recovery is always at the core of my life today.

In my time being sober and well, I have also had times of struggle. Life has gotten very real! I had an accident with lifelong consequences, one of my parents passed away and as a result, problems have come along regarding family/wills/property etc. I have coped. I have stayed well and sober with the help of AA.

So, I would urge any garda or struggling professional to get help. It's there, it's available to all. AA can and will change your life, if you try. It's changed mine for the better, and I'm not the only one. AA is all inclusive, I've met guards, solicitors, nurses, and consultants in the rooms of AA. I've also met a few people I've escorted into Paddywagons along the way.

NO ONE is immune to the disease of alcoholism.

Today I am proud to be in recovery, and living a wonderful, sober life. I'm proud to have a second chance at a better life and to say and mean those words, :

"Hi, my name is Maura and I'm an alcoholic"

For further information please contact AA on via - email: gso@ alcoholicsanonymous.ie or visit our website www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie Tel; (ROI) 01 8420700 (NI) 028 90 351 222







This year, one day at a time, I will reach 10 years since my last drink and I am so very grateful to the rooms of AA for my sobriety and the changes in my thinking and life over that period. For my part, when I came into the rooms initially back in 2013, I was ready and willing to do what I was told and was as they say, as willing to listen as the dying. My own efforts at managing my life had failed and the joy of living had almost disappeared altogether, and I was bringing misery into my family.

I conceded I was powerless over alcohol and needed help to find a new way of living. This bottom end, devastation, despair and hopelessness that I felt and experienced created a new opportunity through the rooms of AA at what I was to learn was a second chance at living, so doing service, in particular prison service made complete sense as I could relate, at least psychologically to being alone, perhaps rejected in some sense, not knowing a way out and being captive to my disease. I also relished the opportunity to give back, share my experience and relate to my fellow alcoholics in the prison system.

I have often heard the definition of humility being 'right size to others', not better or worse than, and of course 'right size' to God, there is no measurement between me and my Higher Power, but fundamentally I am the 'same' as other alcoholics, not better or worse as I learned, which of course includes my fellow alcoholics in prison.

I was very fortunate to have been offered the opportunity to start prison service in 2019 just before Covid and I began in Arbour Hill where I remained for several years before moving onto the medical wing in Mountjoy. Arbour Hill's meeting was a very enjoyable experience where I met a lot of fellows AAs trudging the road, many of whom had long term sobriety and many of these long-term sober men were lifers but lifers who described themselves as being free and who looked content, relaxed and happy, and I was intrigued by their recovery.

Over that period I was to learn so much about recovery and how to live one day at a time and about the AA program from these men. For me it never felt like an effort to do this prison service, as to my mind I needed a meeting anyway and this prison service was to turn out to me a real learning experience, listening to the men's ESH, daily challenges and seeing first-hand what the 12 step program of AA had done in their lives and reflecting on what it had also done for me through identification and sharing. In Arbour Hill, the men set up the meeting, kept the records for the minutes, minded to literature and generally ran the meeting. My job was simply to show up on time

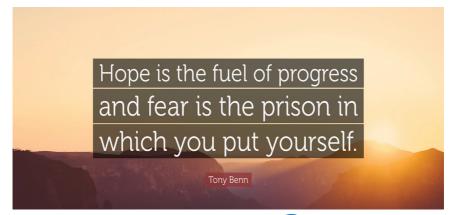
and facilitate the meeting and to participate as just another alcoholic. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience in Arbour Hill, and I made some good friends in the rooms and was delighted to have had the opportunity to do service there.

In 2022, John, the prison convenor, asked me to move to the medical wing in Mountiov and this was certainly another experience I was very grateful to have had. The Mountjoy medical meeting of AA had a much different dynamic. The members were younger, and the turnover of members was somewhat greater given the fact that the medical wing was effectively a temporary prison area for prisoners over from the main prison for health / addiction reasons and prisoners were often being released directly from the medical wing, moved to other lower security facilities such as St. Pats or onto treatment programs. I have to say this was the part of service I enjoyed most. We could have anywhere between 1 and 14 members ioining us in the room for the weekly meeting and my experience was that any prisoner who walked through the door really was looking for something. It took strength and resolve for these young men to leave the common areas and walk into an AA room and I could see how daunting and brave these young men were in coming in and while in the first two or three meetings, one could see how unsure they were, once they kept coming, the transformation was nothing short of miraculous, and I don't say that for effect. Their eyes brightened, they looked relaxed, with fellow members sharing honestly where they were at, encouraging others to do the same. Friendship and bonds were formed and the connection between us as secretaries with the prison members was so humbling. These were fantastic young men, often from harrowing childhood environments. seeking something different, earnestly wanting to change in their lives and hard fastened on making the lives of their loved ones on the outside different. Many of them shared how they wanted a God in their lives, and by truly connecting and sharing with us and each other it proved beyond all doubt to me that a Spirit exists in and is working through the rooms for all to see. Mountjoy was my most coveted and enjoyable prison service experience, and I am so grateful for the experience.

I have now been moved to Cloverhill and again in an environment with young people on remand and I am again really enjoying the experience. I am in Cloverhill alongside Ciaran H who has been fantastic in welcoming me into participate in the meeting and in showing me the ropes.

I highly recommend prison service to members and am grateful to John our prison convenor for the opportunity.

Gary





LIAM'S STORY

My name is Liam, I have been sober since the 20th of June 2006, approaching 19 years.

I was born on the 4th of July 1977. The area I came from, at that time, was a place of violence; army, hijackings, bombing and shooting, but the worst of my troubles was in the family home. Daily violent beatings and a lot of shouting, which created a lot of fear. I loved to play sport – soccer, Gaelic and boxing. It got me out of myself, escapism I suppose. When I played for the under 14's, we won the All-Ireland Féile an nÓg, and on the bus home all I was worried about was, what would the atmosphere be like when I got home. I continued playing Gaelic Football and played for the Armagh minors.

My mother never took a drink in her life, my father, very few. My first teenage drinks, I thought, "there's something in this stuff that excites me". I couldn't get enough of it, because on a night out, after coming home, our breath would be smelt, and a savage beating would have occurred. I served my time as a plasterer from the age of 15, it was hostile every day, leaving me with thoughts of suicide and low self-worth.

One troublesome day at the age of 18, after coming home from work with my father, he stood up, after his dinner and said to me, "you know what to do when you finish your dinner, pack your bags and get out". I packed my football bag with a few bits of clothes and walked down the drive and across the cattle grid, and it was there and then I crossed my line, as awe call it. I clearly remember saying to myself, "I'll show you". There were no mobile phones back then, I walked to a friend's house and asked could he put me up for the night, and I went and got drunk and staved drunk for the next ten years. I became violent. I did door work and plastering, drinking every evening after work. I lost all interest in my sports because it came in the way of my drinking. It was regular to go to work and open the van door and throw up the lining of my stomach. Then I wouldn't work Mondays, and some Tuesdays. I became unreliable, dangerous. Then I started to suffer from the DTs, and who could I tell I started wetting the bed? Lost all interest in hygiene. My weight ballooned to 24 stone. Then I developed type 1 diabetes and was losing my mind. I went to my doctor and asked was there a tablet I could take Mondays to Thursdays so I could only drink at the weekends. He said no and recommended I went to the addictions team. I just agreed so I could get out of there and get more drink.

The addictions team sent for me on Monday, 14th June 2024 at 9.30am, and naturally, I was dying from the weekends drinking. It was recommended that I was admitted straight away to St. Luke's in Armagh, I was 26. I went to my first Open AA meeting that night. The room was full and as they were talking about the first drink, my throat became drier. Making a long story short, I was in and out of AA meetings, in and out of rehabs. I had committed numerous violent attacks on security services; it was a pitiful and incomprehensible demoralisation. My AA mentor and friend was there for me. He was fair and when needed to be, he would correct me with my behaviour, He had great words of wisdom.

20th of June 2006, early in the morning, I had 3-4 drinks and knew the game was up. I rang rehab and begged forgiveness for earlier misgivings, and pleaded with them to take me in. I was ready and willing to do anything that was asked of me. They agreed to give me one more chance. The only way I can describe it was, when I came off the phone, something inside me had snapped, I had now fully accepted that I was a real alcoholic. The psychic change had taken place. I spent until the 9th of August in rehab, then was taken

to Newry courthouse, where I was sentenced to 19 months in prison. I was handcuffed, taken down and put into a cell, I will always remember the clanging of the door. A feeling came over me as I was about to sit down, that I was going to be ok.

While in prison, I knew this wasn't the place for me, and yet I never felt as free in all my life, the power of booze no longer controlled me. Released on 24th May 2007, I had managed to make use of the rehabilitation schemes, the prison was running, one was the renewal of my driving licence. So, when I was released, I had my licence back, freedom, freedom! I shouted. Then my real condition became clear, I had no clue how to live, handle money, relationships, jobs, people or my anger and defects.

No alcohol, no program, no sponsor, no power. It wasn't long until I ended up, once again, in prison. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. Prison

with a cell door and prison in my mind. It came clear to embark on our recovery programme, which I done. I unearthed the causes and conditions behind my illness. I was mentally and bodily different to my fellow people. A total of four and a half years with no booze and back in a prison cell was attraction enough for me to become an AA member. Change I must.

I left prison 10th August with a newfound freedom, became willing to live in the solution. The rewards of doing these simple things led to my marriage and three beautiful girls, who all, have never had to see me drink. The literature of Alcoholics Anonymous has comforted me in many days, and my wee friend Eric, who has always been there for me. A design for living was reborn within me and I will never again have to pick up a drink. One day at a time.

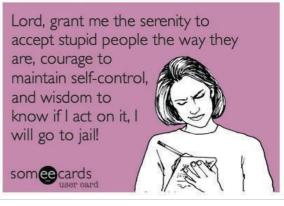
Liam F.

IF YOU HAVE DECIDED
YOU WANT WHAT WE
HAVE AND ARE WILLING
TO GO TO ANY LENGTH
TO GET IT—THEN YOU
ARE READY TO TAKE
CERTAIN STEPS.
HOW IT WORKS PG-58



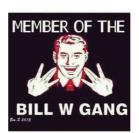
HUMOUR



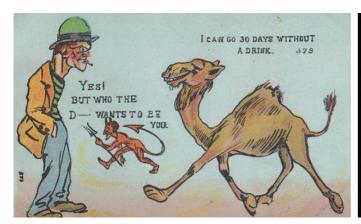


How did the picture end up in prison?

It was framed







Me: it's not about how many times you fall, it's about how many times you get back up

Cop: that's not how field sobriety tests work

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH TOMAS H

QUESTION

How long have you been sober?

ANSWER

I was four years sober on the first of March 2025

QUESTION

What brought you to the fellowship?

ANSWER

I first came to AA after I was hospitalised when I had lost consciousness after an overdose I had taken while drinking. I initially came just to get a lot of people off my back and to seem as if I was doing something about my situation.

QUESTION

Had you any knowledge about AA prior to this?

ANSWER

Many of my immediate and extended family are in AA and AL ANON so I was aware of AA from very early on in my life, there was literature scattered all over the house and I regularly heard family members talking of going to meetings.

QUESTION

How did you feel about the fellowship at your first meeting?

ANSWER

At my very first meeting I couldn't tell you

much about what was said apart from many people telling me I was the most important person in the room and to keep coming back which made me very apprehensive. I was 21 when I first came to a meeting and I looked around the room and I was genuinely at least half the age of all other attendees which I then thought meant I was too young, I later realised this wasn't true but at my first meeting I wasn't ready to surrender.

QUESTION

Had you ever any doubts about your chances of recovery?

ANSWER

I once truly believed that I would never be able to escape from the mental torment that I was in and that I used alcohol and other substances to nullify but there came a time when nothing worked anymore and that was the cross roads for me I was either going to die or be permanently institutionalised and I knew it or I was going to have to recover and in that moment it was the identification of one alcoholic speaking to another that gave me the hope I needed to alleviate my doubts. The only doubts that arise now are if I think I am doing this alone but that is where the program reminds me that I have a higher power and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous which works under all conditions.



QUESTION

What age were you when you got sober?

ANSWER

I was 22 years old when I got sober.

QUESTION

So what would you say to a young person coming into AA?

ANSWER

Although it is reiterated often "keep coming back" regardless of what happens because eventually the Penny will drop and you will get it, if you are willing. It took me three attempts to get it but each time I got a better grasp of the problem, initially I believed it was just a drinking problem, the next time I realised the necessity to keep working the program because I didn't keep working it and slowly drifted away but the third time has been a complete surrender to the program and in the long run that pays dividends.

QUESTION

Do you have a favorite slogan in AA?

ANSWER

Although there are many if I had to pick one I would say "one day at a time". For today I get a daily reprieve and no matter how bad or how good things may, be tomorrow is a new day and in my recovery now, my biggest enemy is the thinking which has a tendency to ruminate on the past or to speculate on the future. I have to constantly remind myself to keep everything in the day otherwise I could be in danger of becoming lost again and losing my connection with my higher power and the fellowship.

RY CONTROL OF THE PROPERTY OF

QUESTION

Have you played any role in the fellowship in your recovery?

ANSWER

Throughout my recovery I have done many roles including PI work in schools, hospitals and prisons. At group level I have been treasurer, secretary, GSR, greeter and worker on the telephone service. At Intergroup level I have been a YPLO. I have also sponsored several people through the program as well as sponsoring people into roles I have previously held

QUESTION

Do you feel giving back is important?

ANSWER

A pivotal moment in my recovery was the first time that I saw that light come back into somebody else eyes and in that moment I realised that this whole thing was not about me the entire fellowship is founded upon one alcoholic giving back to another alcoholic without expecting anything in return so I would say that not only do I believe that giving back is important but that it is the heart beat of the fellowship.

QUESTION

The family afterwards is important, has that aspect of life improved in recovery?

ANSWER

I believe today that alcohol and other forms of escapism are but a symptom of a greater illness called alcoholism which I experienced long before I picked up a drink and throughout my childhood and life. Before the fellowship I was not present with my family, I often isolated myself away from them and they were with me through my addiction but today I make sure to cherish every moment I spend with them and the relationship I have with my family today

is unrecogniseably better than it was before because I am present with them.

QUESTION

Is there anything you would like to add to your Q & A?

ANSWER

I was initially apprehensive about AA because of my use of other substances but I believe that times have changed and nowadays the two go hand and hand and from my own experience I believe that the use of other substances sped up the rate at which alcoholism took over my life and I am grateful that AA has such a rich heritage and that its doors were open for me.

FRIENDSHIP IN FELLOWSHIP

They come from all walks of life
They help me to grow
They show me a way of life
That today I am willing to know
They are gentle and kind with me
Everyone of them
I thank you God, as I understand you
For these wonderful women and men

They share their experience with me
They tell me about themselves
They said to me that it would be helpful
For me whan all about one self tells
I have now got myself a sponsor
Who is bringing me through the Steps
Ans in no time at all I don't have any regrets

So easy does it, one day at a time
The Days that were dull will one day come fine
and if you are ever felling lonely
Remember that you are at home
With Friends in Fellowship
You are never Alone

Tom K







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

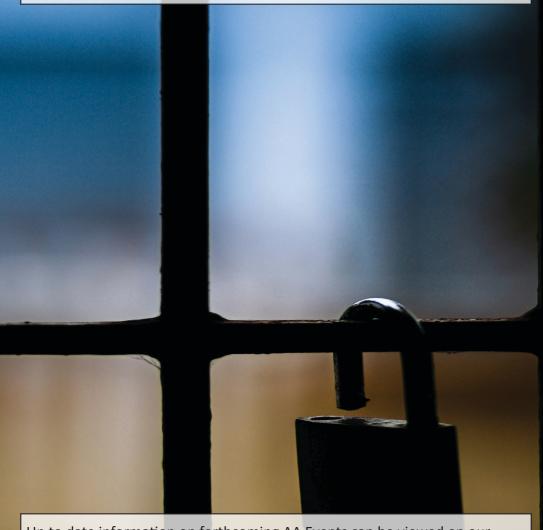
The Twelve Steps

- 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.
- 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**