

THE ROAD BACK



includes Service News

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STEP 5



Editorial

Hello to all of our readers. Once again, we are in the middle of another year and we hope that our 'meeting in print' has helped you on this worthwhile journey of sobriety.

To all that submitted written contributions, a heartfelt thanks from all who continue to reap the benefit of your articles.

The theme for this edition is **Step Five**. The sharing of personal inventory, probably one of the most difficult and daunting steps to take, however a necessity for long term sobriety, or better still peace of mind. As described in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, "Step 5 was the beginning of true kinship with man and God". It also tells us, "The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly" and the Big Book adds "we can look the world in the eye".

The chosen theme for the next issue is **Emotional Sobriety**. There are a couple of lines from Step 10 that really give food for thought "for we know pain of drinking had to come before sobriety, and emotional turmoil before serenity". Can you identify with that? If so, why not share how that the emotional sobriety came into your life, what did you do to achieve it, and how do you maintain it?

Why not put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, and email your story to roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie.

"D'admhaíomar do Dhia, dúinn féin, agus do dhuine eile nádúr cruinn ár gcionta".

Iarrann an chéim seo orainn ár laigí a roinnt go hionraic agus go stuama. Nuair a dhéanaimid amhlaidh, is féidir linn tosú arís ag féachaint go díreach i súile ár gcomhchomhaltaí. Is fiú é!

The 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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MY LAST DRINK

By John

On the 23rd June 1997 was when I had my last drink. I had reached that hopeless state of mind and body that they mention in the Big Book ‘hopeless state of mind and body’ (*Chapter 2, page 20*).

I had also did, or tried to do, in the chapter ‘more about alcoholism’ (*Chapter 3*) I tried to control my drinking. I came to AA through a treatment centre not knowing what to expect and the sense of identification I got was overwhelming.

I heard my story being told over and over and was blown away. I came into AA a broken man, also as confused, but knew if I drank again I would die, I thought my life was over but it was only beginning.

I still go to AA on a daily basis, I don't want to take my eye off where I came from.

I am very much involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, I owe my life to AA.

John



When Alcohol Stopped Working

Who cares enough to admit defeat. Who cares enough to look inside the envelope that has never been opened and was never to be opened by anyone except whoever is in charge of my soul when I pass. I knew how I had lived, I thought it would never catch up with me as long as I kept drinking, ducking and diving. However, when alcohol stopped working for me, I knew I was in trouble.

My mind began to shake as I could no longer push the horrors back and all my previous misdeeds raced in front of my eyes even when I was asleep. I couldn't cope with my life. I'd nowhere to go and hide as I couldn't turn my mind off. Eventually the Rutland centre offered me a six-week stay of execution, I took it gratefully with trembling hands. There were others there whose hands and souls shook too.

Some tried to be brave; others like me, felt there was no point. The people there asked me to look at myself, I felt I couldn't and wouldn't, but they told me that if I wanted to get better and live without alcohol I would have to look at my soul. I felt so stupid, how had I ended up here? I had everything: a beautiful wife and friend, a lovely house waiting to become a lovely home. A really well-paid job a

beautiful baby girl and much more. However, my illness told me not two weeks previous to this all these things were baggage that was holding me back. I began my journey in recovery on my 32nd birthday. For my wife who stood by me and basically saved me because of her loyalty and belief in me it was a dreadfully tough time with terribly stressful days, weeks and months.

However, she showed me strength, courage, humility and tremendous character which I felt if I had I could survive. I knew from looking at my AA friends and listening to recovering alcoholics that I had to get honest and change to survive. That was thirty-six years ago and I haven't touched alcohol since. My wife is still beautiful, and we have three beautiful healthy daughters who are successful young women.

We have four grandchildren and the journey continues for me. I know today that my higher power showed me his love and compassion when saving me and pointing me towards AA. I thank him several times every day of my life for what he's given me. One day at a time I live my life and as long as I remain free from alcohol, I will be ok.

Brendan, Portmarnock



When Bad Things Keep Happening

My name is Bill, and I'm an alcoholic. It's only as an adult that I can now look back and see the indescribably degrading and dangerous situations I used to get myself into. At fourteen years old, I was drinking with men you absolutely should not be mixing with. And doing things that I could have gone to prison for.

But at the time, with all my life ahead of me, and my youthful thirst for adventure, I was living my perfect life. I was getting drunk every night and was proud to be friends with the baddest people I could find. And somehow, I congratulated myself on the crazy things I was getting away with. I loved the excitement, the danger, and thrill of living in the fast lane. And yes, I did compare myself to my friends at school who were playing cricket, on warm summer evenings, and studying for their exams. How boring and embarrassing.

At least I was living life. At least I was having some fun. I was driving around in a beautiful dark maroon Jaguar car I'd bought. No tax or insurance, obviously. And so drunk I could hardly stand. We would be out, in the early twilight hours playing chicken. Now 'playing chicken' was incredibly dangerous and stupid. But that was my alcoholism in full flow.

Because when I drank, any morals I might have had, evaporated. And any sense of right and wrong, would literally vanish. And at that tender young age, I was getting involved with and doing things that could have so easily have got me killed.

But alas did I learn? No, I didn't. But that was the insanity of my drinking. I never did stop. Why? Because I had to take everything to the limit. Never did I quietly sit down for two minutes, and think, how insane, crazy and life-threatening my drinking had become. Recovery from alcoholism is a simple process of healing, learning, and turning our lives around. Where sometimes it's the holding on that has kept me sober, but sometimes it's been the letting go.

Even before working the twelve steps, my journey began with one need. A need to change. A deep invisible yearning to end a life of deprivation and loneliness. Where change started with understanding one thing. When bad things kept happening, I had to stop doing them. And now, nearly three decades later, this has been the backbone to a long and sober life. Where character defects are simply a repetition of negative living, of hurtful actions.

Where my fears have been a reoccurring theme, since as long as I can remember. And resentments have plagued my entire life. Life as an alcoholic is just one long process of negativity, loss and pain.

Whereas the spiritual process of recovery, will offer me a way out. Because acceptance, surrender and humility, all ask me to walk away from that which brought me so much low self-worth and suffering.

And in so doing, I'm walking away from the truth of my drinking, and I'm entering the bright new world of staying sober. So, instead of wallowing in a pain that I became comfortable with, today I'm going to risk moving into a new sober life.

A new life that offers me a degree of hope, trust, self-care and peace, I once never deemed possible.

Where recovery has turned my life around by doing one simple thing. And probably just as important as 'when bad things keep happening, stop doing them'.

Today I'm adopting something just as new and life-changing. And it's this. 'When good things keep happening', guess what? I'm going to keep on doing these as well.

It's so simple really.

Bill the Shirt
Bristol UK

Keep Coming Back

When the road seems long,
And the burden hard to bear,
A voice from the fellowship whispers,
"Keep coming back—we'll be there."

~

Not judging, not demanding,
Just sharing what we know,
Together we find recovery,
Together we learn to grow.

Anon

Joe's Story



It was back in 1973, at the age of 28, that I was first introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous. The person who 12th-stepped me at a hotel bar counter, Jim was his name. I had known him for some time though our paths hadn't crossed in years. I have vague recollections of our conversation but obviously alcohol and its associated problems were a central part.

Jim offered to drive me home and as I began to sober up on the journey it became somewhat clearer as to what we had been talking about. Jim offered to take me to an AA meeting the following night and being a person that couldn't say "NO" to anything, I agreed. The next day came and as usual I had been drinking but every now and then the thought crossed my mind as to where Jim was actually taking me.

One minute I would say to myself that I'll not be there when he calls, then change my mind. It was like the toss of a coin. I kept the appointment and Jim brought me to my first Open Meeting of AA which was in the local Mental Hospital. Suddenly I became somewhat apprehensive as the building in question was often referred to locally as the Lunatic Asylum. When the speaker began telling his story, I became much more

relaxed, as I began identifying with his sharing. However, my mind was so mixed-up that I gradually became convinced the speaker had been carefully selected to tell my story. In other words, it was a set-up.

Feeling that I probably would never be back at another meeting, but once more I was unable to say "NO" when Jim offered to take me to my second meeting the following night. This was a Closed Meeting where everyone shared. In the weeks ahead Jim kept calling for me and bringing me to different meetings over a wide area. As a result, I was beginning to discover that the AA way of life just wasn't for me. A clear case of contempt prior to investigation! I did, however, examine the steps in some form of detail.

Step 1: I admitted that I had a problem with alcohol but couldn't accept that my life was unmanageable. After all I was the editor of a local newspaper which seemed to afford me a certain sense of power and control.

Step 2: I didn't feel I was in any way insane.

Step 3: Having been brought up in a religious home and taught by the Christian Brothers, God was not really an issue.

Steps 4 and 5 were ruled out instantly. Never was I ever going to share my life and its darkest secrets, of which there was a multitude, with another person. So, these two steps were completely non-runners.

Sept 6: Removing defects: My take on that was that most people had these, so why pick on me?

Step 7: Shortcomings and humility. I felt I was being humiliated enough by being around AA. So, leave it!

Step 8: Making an amends list. I was wholly convinced that I was more sinned against than sinned and actually felt it would make more sense to draw up a list of those who had harmed me.

Step 9: My take on Step 8 had already dealt with this one.

Step 10: Admitting blame and saying sorry never set easy with me so decided not to get entangled.

Step 11: I decided I would avoid meditation in case it would change my thinking, and change was something I just was prepared to buy into.

Step 12: I thought I may have something to offer, what that something may have entailed I couldn't honestly say. So that was my rushed assessment of the AA programme. In examination parlance, not too many marks out of 10, or 12 to be more precise. What I was doing was justifying not

having to do the programme but as it transpired the easier softer way would have been to take it on board. It would have saved me a lot of torment, physical and mental suffering.

At those early meetings I attended there were people who had discovered AA through hospitalisation. Thinking this may be part of the course and with my drinking becoming more problematic I was prepared to go down that route. My first admission was to the Mental Hospital where I had attended my first AA meeting.

I just couldn't believe that my life had come to this. Strangely enough after a short time there I began to feel at home, even reluctant to leave, such was my sense of a new-found security. This was followed by further admissions to what was then known as early treatment units and finally Shaftesbury Square Hospital in Belfast which specialised exclusively in alcoholism.

This was a six-week intensive searching finding course which I didn't complete, simply because I was told to go home, that I wasn't putting in the effort. And in truth, I wasn't. Yet I was somewhat taken aback by my early dismissal, being the only one in a group of 13 to be 'thrown out' so to speak.

Resentment, which I scarcely knew the meaning of, was running high. I was determined to prove them wrong, that I would not return to drink. I immediately teamed up with Jim again and hit the AA

trail. Both of us were single and had no real ties, so we travelled the length and breadth of Ireland attending AA meetings and conventions.

I was attracted to the social side of AA, but not the programme. At the time there was no AA group in Armagh, so Jim and I started one. As a founder member I felt important, right up there with Dr Bob and Bill W. What have I let myself in for, I thought, I can't be seen to drink now. I engrossed myself in service; started doing some of the things AA suggested but not the recovery programme as outlined. Almost overnight the obsession of alcohol had left me, I could pass pubs as if they weren't there. I was now convinced that I had made it without the aid of a sponsor or the 12 step recovery programme. I was unique, but then I had always thought along those lines. The honeymoon period lasted two years until one day I somewhat inexplicably found myself standing in a bar with a glass in my hand. That was in the summer of 1976, The slip as they were called back then was to last until 1982, in and out of AA, but in hindsight I had nothing to slip off.

During those two years of so-called sobriety, I met my wife to be, but marriage was not an option. The very mention of the word filled me with alarming fear and anxiety as I honestly didn't believe I would be capable of fulfilling such a role. As well as that words such as honesty, respect, fidelity, responsibility was just not part of my deranged form of mindset. On my

return to drinking, I was in a relationship with a very wealthy lady, a number of years my senior, but all that was happening was that my addiction was being spoon-fed. By this time, I had given up on hospitals, rather they had given up on me. So, my drying out horrid experiences were confined excruciatingly to home, being cared for by my elderly mother.

I got married in 1980, somewhat out of the blue, to the girl earlier referred to but continued drinking on and off for another two years yet kept attending AA meetings. By 1982 I felt it was time to be taking my recovery more seriously and began applying greater effort, but change was slow and eventually came to a halt. Somehow, I managed to stay dry over the course of the next 17 years, during which time I suffered a heart attack in 1990 followed by open heart surgery in 1999. Someone suggested that a little wine would be good for my arteries and I fell for it. Began drinking small amounts but soon the ball was over the wall again, back to square one and beyond.

Things began deteriorating rapidly at home and I was given the option to leave or my wife and children would go. So, I left. This was within months of my heart operation, and I ended up sleeping on the floor of my office. Now, if that's not insanity, tell me what is? Time to put the cork in the bottle yet again, so I was invited back into my home with the stern

realisation that things had to be different. I asked an AA member whom I had known a long time and whom I felt had a good knowledge of the AA to sponsor me and bring me through the programme. But what transpired was a half-baked attempt on my behalf. I did a 4th and 5th step of sorts, intentionally leaving chunks out and that's as far as it went. But I managed to remain bone dry.

Just before Covid I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and with meetings being shut down and not being a Zoomer, I became very much isolated and alone. It was a scary place to be. But it was to be the real turning point of my life.

I was now willing to go the full hog and dispense of the half-measured approach that had me like an empty vessel being tossed mercilessly about on the waves of self-will. For perhaps the first time I prayed honestly to God for the right person to come along so I could enjoy the full benefits of living sober. I hadn't to wait too long for that person and get the ball rolling. For all those years that I was around AA I finally signed up only to discover I could have been doing with this programme as far back as my school yard days.

I still find it puzzling how I came so close to missing this God-given wonderful way of life, but as the well-known AA phrase precisely spells out '*you can't see until you see*'. Perhaps the only thing I got right was that I never gave up on meetings allowing

AA to eventually get me. Strange to say I never enjoyed the taste of alcohol yet swallowed copious amounts of the stuff. So there had to be something wrong, and there was. Long before I had my first drink as a young teenager, fear, lack of confidence and loneliness (I was an only son) were my constant companions. Alcohol changed all that, it became my best friend until turning into my worst enemy. I had a total dependence on it, afraid to give it up, it would have been like losing a limb.

The problems I had at meetings were manifold. I was inclined to compare rather than identify. I found it difficult to share honestly, talk about my emotions and all that was going on in my life. I was closed to outsiders, no one was getting in. I was simply faking it. I became judgemental of others, both inside and outside the rooms, a typical procrastinator, leaving to another day what needed done today, thus curtailing any meaningful degree of progress. But as I wasn't drinking and being a good provider for family, house and home, I foolishly believed I had a licence to do what suited me and saw little harm in it. In hindsight, how I could have been so selfish, self-centred, egotistical, non-caring, and so on, this can still baffle me at times. It was all about me!

The answer nevertheless is fairly straight forward. I had failed to take ownership of my disease, was very much caught up in the blame game, finding fault and being



critical of others. If only they could see it my way and do what I wanted. I kept pounding away at the impossible. Today I keep it simple, after all I complicated it for long enough. I do my best to avoid conflict and controversy, they are luxuries I can't afford. I find that by minding my own business there is less chance of activating the number one offender - RESENTMENT! I work on applying the programme to my life other than preaching about it. It's all about ACTION, walking the walk rather than talking the talk. What a blessing, what a gift! When I learn about such worldwide AA statistics that only a few per cent get this, I realise just how privileged I am to be counted amongst the chosen few. This is something I never want to lose sight of.

To sum it up I have been around AA for 53 years, all but ten of those years' alcohol free, but certainly not sober. The good news is that by the Grace of God I finally changed to the AA way of life by completing the steps and working them to the best of my ability. When the Armagh Group celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2024, I never experienced a more soothing feeling of being happy in my own skin, something I had always yearned for. I invariably get that added sense of fulfilment when Jim and I are present at a meeting of our Group which we started all those years ago.

Going back to that hotel bar encounter. From a packed function room Jim singled

me out in his 12th step duty of carrying the message. It was no coincidence, God was working. Like AA, I probably owe my life to Jim and will be eternally grateful to both. I am now 81 and whilst I will never be perfect or cleansed whiter than white, beyond my wildest dreams, is no longer a myth but a joyous reality. I have a full trust in God, handing my life over in the morning and thanking him at night. Acceptance of His will is now the key to my day at a time living.

Whilst AA is now first and foremost in my life, I have not sidelined or substituted my religious upbringing, I find both work in tandem. I continue to attend my place of worship. The way I see it, if it's good enough to invite God into my house, what can be wrong with return visits!

My wife died from cancer in June 2025 and whilst I am still in the grieving process, I can see today it was God's Will that she should go first. It has given me the opportunity of seeing exactly just how wonderful a wife, mother, grandmother and homemaker she really was and how God brought us together in the first place. Things I took for granted. Thankfully I was given time to make my amends and show the love that was always fundamentally there but difficult to express at times due to my alcoholism. She was my rock in life, very much part of my AA journey, always fully supportive. In death she remains that inspirational presence. I pray to her.

Joe, Armagh

Experience, Strength and Hope

I cannot sleep nor eat
For pain within I fail
To comprehend the meaning
Of love thine enemy
Pray for him you say
But I cannot live
Nor sleep nor eat but
Smoke and drink I must
To kill the pain of solitude.

I pray you not to tell
Mine enemy of my plight
For he might like to hear
And that would hurt my pride
My hateful pride that absorbs me
And every ounce of love I need
To carry me out of here
Where I may be better off
In that strange world of love
You tell me of that I
Don't understand at all
But hope to do someday
By the Grace of God to love
My enemy for he is sick too
And care of others save myself
I hope to overcome.

*by Charlie R
Ballygally, Larne*





Eamon's Story

I was born in 1968, the youngest of four children, both my parents were pioneers, my two elder brothers and sister take a drink on occasions, yet I became alcoholic, poor me, how did that happen? I have an idea it might have something to do with the amount of alcohol I drank over the years, the doctor's opinion describes five different types of alcoholics, I believe I am type five (Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them).

My father died when I was one and my mother passed away when I was in my mid-teens, did this make me alcoholic? No! but it shaped how I lived life and how I thought others lived me. Really, I was a people pleaser from as far back as I can remember.

I arrived in Alcoholics Anonymous through a treatment centre. I graduated with flying colours and went back to my everyday life minus the alcohol, I was a chef so went back to working long hours, gathering up money but not doing anything else. Slowly but surely the feelings and emotions that I'd used alcohol to curtail started to build

up to the point I had to drink because I had no other answer. Dipping in and out of AA, taking up a seat, expecting to have a hot flash just like Bill W. wasn't sufficient. I returned to drink. I was drinking then out of necessity, absolutely no enjoyment. It is true a belly full of drink and a head full of AA do not mix. I went through that torture two more years with the odd trip to AA still hoping for the hot flash which never appeared.

Eventually I ended up back in that same treatment centre very much broken, a half bottle of vodka and a strip of Librium was a half-assed attempt at suicide because I couldn't go on, but thank God that attempt failed and from that day to this I have not had to lift a drink.

This time when I came out of the treatment centre, I threw myself into AA, got involved in service, went to plenty of meetings but more had to be done. I made the mistake of asking someone to sponsor me based on the length of time he had been around rather than the quality of his sobriety which unfortunately wasn't much. We arrived at step three without the Big

Book being produced, question can you drink? No good that's Step One, do you believe in God? Yes. that's Step Two, now we'll take the third step prayer. Step Four started with "once upon a time there was an alcoholic" but it didn't end with "they all lived happily ever after", it was about 40 pages of pure justification of every drink I took, I learned nothing from it. I read it to him, asked what we do now? To which he replied I'm not sure, but I think you burn it. As a good friend of mine would say he shouldn't be allowed out on his own, let alone sponsor people.

Thankfully, soon after I was introduced to a man I was to go through the program with. We started at the doctor's opinion where I found out about the nature of the disease I suffer from. From the doctor's opinion to the three pertinent ideas is dedicated to steps one and two, a lot of information.

Then there are three and a half pages on step three, and eight pages explaining Step Four. This time when I had done it properly, I brought it to my friend, before we started Step Five, we said a prayer inviting God into the room with us. We went through one column at a time, I'd listed my resentments and analysed them. I had listed my fears and my harms done to other people and we analysed them, my sexual conduct was listed, and it too was analysed. After a long talk with my friend my character defects were clear, some more glaring than others, but all had to be dealt with in the upcoming steps.

My friend told me to hold on to my inventory as I would need it later when I was going out to do Step Nine. I had my list already made, all I had to do was put it in order, that was quite a few years ago now and as a result of applying the steps in my life, continuing to invite God into my life daily, regular attendance at meetings and service to AA I haven't had to make another list.

The second paragraph on page 86 of the Big Book gives me the tools for living, it says:

***"When we retire at night,
we constructively review our day,
were we resentful, selfish,
dishonest or afraid?"***

Really that's a continuation of Step Four. "Do we owe an apology" back to step eight and nine. "Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once?" which is Step Five.

Further on in that same paragraph, it goes on to say, "after making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken". That would be steps six and seven. Very simple but not always easy; however the rewards are great, WE STAY SOBER.

Eamon D

Heard at Meetings

I WAS SO MAD AT THE MEETING THAT I FILLED THE SINK AND WASHED THE ASHTRAYS FIRST, THEN WASHED THE COFFEE CUPS.

MY SPONSOR SAID, "YOU NEED TO LEARN PATIENCE." THEN HE PUT ME IN CHARGE OF THE LITERATURE TABLE.

MY GOD BOX IS BECOMING SO FULL, PRETTY SOON IT WILL BE A GOD CRATE.

I USED TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY. NOW I HAVE THE MEETING KEYS.

I ASKED MY SPONSOR HOW LONG I HAD TO DO SERVICE. HE SAID, "UNTIL YOU STOP ASKING."

I WAS ASKED UNDER OATH IF A HALF EMPTY BOTTLE WAS MINE. I REPLIED, "IF IT WERE MINE, IT WOULD BE EMPTY".

Following discussions among members at Conference, several briefing papers were prepared and circulated to the Fellowship by email. Their purpose is to provide clearer information on how AA's Traditions, Concepts and Service Handbook apply in practice within our service structure. The papers do not introduce new policy or replace the Service Handbook, Conference decisions or the conscience of our Groups. They bring together and explain information already contained within AA service literature, the Twelve Traditions, the Twelve Concepts, Conference decisions and other relevant guidance.

To make this information more accessible, over the next few editions of The Road Back we will revisit the papers in Service News, taking two at a time.

In this edition we look at:

1. **Communication in the AA Fellowship**
2. **Working Through Group Conscience, Structure and Trust**

These papers look at how communication works through the AA service structure and the importance of informed Group Conscience. They also explain delegated responsibility and why some decisions are properly left with the trusted servants or service bodies given responsibility for them.

AA works through informed group

Conscience. These briefings are intended to provide members with useful information and background to support discussion and understanding. Groups, Areas and Intergroups remain free to consider these matters through the service structure and to bring forward recommendations or motions to Conference where appropriate.

Communication in the AA Fellowship

Why sound communication matters, and the vital place of the GSR and GSCD in the service structure

In simple terms: AA communication is meant to begin with the Group, move through the structure, and return to the Group again. When that chain is strong, the Fellowship is better informed, more united and more able to carry the message. When that chain is weak, misunderstanding, misinformation and frustration quickly take hold.

The Service Handbook makes the position very clear. Conference begins with Group Conscience and leads back to the Group. That means communication is not a side issue in AA service. It is one of the main ways the Fellowship remains connected to its own conscience, its own decisions and its own primary purpose. If Groups are not informed, Group Conscience cannot be well informed. If Areas and Intergroups are not informed, service discussion becomes

weak, fragmented and reactive.

This is why the role of communication in AA must always be understood in the light of principles rather than personalities. Tradition Two reminds us that our leaders are trusted servants and do not govern. Tradition Five reminds us that our single purpose is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Tradition Nine shows that our service boards and committees exist only because they are directly responsible to those they serve. Put simply, communication in AA is not about control. It is about helping the Fellowship think clearly, act together and stay close to its primary purpose. It also means working through the service structure rather than around it, and through Group Conscience rather than through individuals acting alone.

How communication is meant to flow

The normal communication chain is straightforward. The Group forms its conscience. The GSR carries the Group's views, concerns and questions to Area and reports back from Area to the Group. The Area sends representatives to Intergroup. The GSCD attends Area and Intergroup, participates fully at Conference, and helps carry information, understanding and Conference decisions back down through the structure. In that sense, the structure is not meant to be top-down. It is meant to be circular and accountable, beginning with the Group and returning to the Group.

That point needs to be stressed. In AA, important service matters are not meant to be settled by strong personalities, private Conversations or individual opinions presented as if they were Group Conscience. The right route is through the structure: Group, Area, Intergroup and Conference, each responsible at its own level and each answerable to those it serves. When matters are worked through properly, the Fellowship is better informed, decisions are sounder and unity is better protected.

Group Conscience → GSR → Area → Intergroup → GSCD/Conference → back to the Group

The vital place of the GSR

The GSR is the vital link between the Group and the wider service structure. The Handbook describes the GSR as the trusted servant of both the Group and the Area Committee. The GSR carries the views of the Group to Area and reports back to the Group on the discussions and decisions taken there. Without an active GSR, the Group can very quickly become detached from what is happening in AA as a whole. That is one reason Bill W placed such importance on this role.

The GSR is not expected to act as a personal authority. The role is to listen carefully at Group Conscience, carry that conscience faithfully to Area, and then bring accurate information back again. The

GSR helps the Group understand what is being discussed, what has been decided, what questions are coming through the structure, and what issues may need prayerful consideration at Group level. Just as importantly, the GSR helps members see that service questions should be brought to Group Conscience and worked through together, not left to individuals to decide privately or informally. In many Groups, the GSR is the person who helps members see how service, unity and recovery all belong together.

The vital place of the GSCD

The GSCD plays a similar communication role at a wider level. The Handbook says GSCDs attend Conference as full participants and also attend Area meetings, Intergroup meetings and relevant sub-committees. They give Conference reports, meet with their Provincial Trustee, and become familiar with the issues arising in the Areas they attend. Appendix 8 goes further and says Conference members should attend Area and Intergroup meetings in order to become familiar with local issues and offer support and encouragement to find solutions within AA Traditions where required.

That means the GSCD is far more than an annual Conference attendee. The GSCD is one of the Fellowship's principal communicators in service. The role is to help carry accurate information, explain how Conference works, help members understand how change is properly made through the structure, and support Areas

and Intergroups in keeping their thinking rooted in AA principles, Traditions and Concepts. The GSCD should help answer service questions in the AA way, not by personal opinion or force of personality. A good GSCD keeps bringing matters back to the proper channels of service and to the principle that the Fellowship works through informed conscience rather than individual authority.

Communication is shared, but these roles are central

It would not be correct to say that all responsibility for communication sits with the GSR and GSCD alone. Group officers, Area Secretaries, Intergroup Representatives and Intergroup Secretaries also have important communication duties. Minutes must be sent out. Mailboxes must be used. Reports must be given. Correspondence must be read. But it is fair to say that the GSR and GSCD are the two most important representative communication links in the structure. They are the principal human links through which conscience, understanding and accountability are meant to travel.

Recent Conference reporting has underlined the practical consequences when communication is poor. Where Groups or Areas do not use their official AA mailboxes, where minutes are not read out, or where regular Group Conscience meetings are not held, members become badly informed and misinformation begins to fill the gap. Time then gets wasted going



over old ground, and service suffers. Good communication does the opposite. It steadies the Fellowship, reduces confusion and helps members trust the structure because they understand how it works

What good AA communication looks like

Good communication in AA is accurate, timely, principled and respectful. It does not exaggerate. It does not use service positions to push personal agendas. It does not bypass the structure when the structure itself is the proper route. It explains matters by reference to the Service Handbook, Conference decisions, the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts. It remembers that the point of structure is not administration for its own sake, but support for the carrying of the message. Good communication in AA keeps asking the right questions: Has this been brought to Group Conscience? Has it been worked through the proper service level? Has it been reported back clearly to those affected?

Where service matters are dealt with through individuals instead of through the structure, confusion usually follows. One member may speak strongly, another may react, and before long opinion is mistaken for guidance. AA experience points us another way. We pause, inform the Group, bring the matter to Group Conscience, and then use the service structure that the Fellowship has already put in place. That protects unity, fairness and accountability.

- Groups hold regular Group Conscience

meetings and make time to discuss minutes, reports and service matters.

- GSRs attend Area, listen carefully, report back faithfully and help their Groups understand what is happening in the wider Fellowship.
- Areas and Intergroups issue minutes promptly and use official AA mailboxes properly.
- GSCDs visit Areas, support Intergroups, explain Conference decisions clearly and help members understand how structure and change actually work.
- Questions are answered in the spirit of the Traditions and Concepts, with principles before personalities.

A word on staff and trusted servants

Tradition Eight draws a clear line between voluntary AA service and paid service support. Our service centres may employ special workers, but AA itself remains non-professional. That is important in communication too. GSO staff perform essential administrative work and support the Fellowship well, but they are not a substitute for Group Conscience or for the representative service structure. The spiritual and representative communication of AA belongs chiefly to the trusted servants elected and appointed through the structure. Members should therefore be encouraged to use the structure, understand the structure and support the structure, rather than treating service communication as something separate from Fellowship life or as something that can be resolved person to

person without reference to the Group.

Conclusion

Strong communication protects unity, strengthens service and helps the Fellowship carry the message more effectively. Weak communication creates confusion, weakens trust and leaves room for misinformation. For that reason, the GSR and GSCD roles deserve renewed respect and support throughout the Fellowship. They are not decorative offices. They are vital communication links. When they function well, and when Groups, Areas and Intergroups also do their part, the whole service structure works more as it was intended to work: beginning with Group Conscience, moving through the proper channels of service, guided by the Traditions and Concepts, and always returning to the Group in the spirit of service rather than individual authority.

Working Through Group Conscience, Structure and Trust

Guidance for the Fellowship on what should return to Groups, what is properly delegated, and what must remain confidential within AA service

This paper is intended to help members understand an important balance in AA service. On the one hand, Groups are the spiritual foundation of the Fellowship and Group Conscience is the proper authority for Group matters. On the other hand, AA could not function if every operational decision, every discussion or every employment

matter had to be sent back to every Group for approval. The Service Handbook, the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts all point to the same truth: some matters must return to Groups for discussion and understanding, while other matters must be entrusted to those chosen to serve, within clearly defined authority and sometimes in confidence.

1. The foundation in AA principles

Tradition Two tells us that 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. The Service Handbook applies that directly by saying that authority and responsibility for making decisions affecting the Group rest with Group Conscience.

At the same time, Tradition Four says each Group is autonomous except in matters affecting other Groups or AA as a whole. Tradition Nine allows service boards and committees directly responsible to those they serve. Tradition Eight allows service centres to employ special workers. Tradition Twelve reminds us to place principles before personalities.

The Twelve Concepts explain why delegation is not a betrayal of Group Conscience but one of its necessary expressions. Concept I places final responsibility and ultimate authority in the collective conscience of the whole Fellowship. Concept II recognises

Conference as the voice and effective conscience of the Fellowship in its world services. Concept III gives a Right of Decision to trusted servants once responsibility has been entrusted. Concept X says every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority. Concept XI says the duties, rights and proper compensation of staff and special workers are matters for serious care and concern. Concept XII says AA service bodies must remain democratic, avoid unqualified authority, avoid personally punitive action, and act in the spirit of the Traditions.

2. What should go back to Groups

As a practical rule, matters should go back to Group Conscience when they directly affect the life, practice, identity or finances of the Group itself or when the Fellowship is being asked to consider wider policy through the proper structure.

Usually for Group Conscience

- Election of Group officers and GSRs; opening, closing or changing a Group meeting; local Group expenditure; use of Group funds; matters that directly affect the Group's own practice and unity.
- Whether the Group wishes to submit a motion or express a view through the structure; matters published in advance for Conference discussion; significant changes in Fellowship guidance that are properly brought through structure.

Reports back from trusted servants so members can understand what has been

- decided, why it was decided, and how the structure is working.

Usually not for Group Conscience

- Routine administration already entrusted to Area, Intergroup, Conference, the Board or salaried special workers acting within defined duties.
- Every item of operational detail, every spending line, every staffing adjustment or every Board-level discussion.
- Confidential Board deliberations, legal advice, disciplinary matters, safeguarding issues, grievance or complaint processes or sensitive matters affecting named individuals.

Good communication does not mean that every matter returns for another vote. It means the right matters return to the right place and that delegated decisions are reported back in a truthful and understandable way.

3. What is properly entrusted and may remain confidential

One of the mistakes that can arise in AA is to assume that because the Fellowship is spiritually based, every detail should be opened out to everyone. That is not how the Concepts describe service. Once the Fellowship has entrusted responsibility through the structure, those serving are expected to exercise judgment, protect confidentiality where necessary and act

within the authority given to them. This is particularly true of Board decisions, employment matters and sensitive records. The Board's code and governance documents make clear that certain matters are reserved to the Board, including annual budgets and corporate plans, the appointment and assessment of employees and amendments to employee pension benefits. The same documents also require confidential handling of sensitive information, compliance with data protection law and respect for legal and employment obligations.

For that reason very few Board decisions should be circulated and not every financial detail should be disclosed. Individual salaries, personnel files, performance concerns, disciplinary matters, complaints involving named persons and legally sensitive discussions should not be distributed through the Fellowship. That is not secrecy for its own sake. It is part of responsible stewardship, proper governance, fairness to individuals and respect for principles before personalities.

Tradition Twelve is highly relevant here. It reminds us that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. In service practice, that means the Fellowship should be slow to turn service questions into discussion about named people, their earnings, their faults or their employment circumstances. The proper question is not 'what is that person paid?' but 'is the structure acting responsibly, lawfully

and in line with AA principles?'

4. Finance, GSO & service administration

Groups often become most uneasy around money. Members may see funds being sent through the structure and then ask why money is being spent at GSO or elsewhere in AA service administration. The concern itself is understandable. Tradition Seven teaches self-support and members are right to want care, prudence and accountability in the handling of AA funds.

But AA could not operate if every staffing decision, salary review, supplier invoice, equipment purchase or administrative adjustment had to go back to Groups. Tradition Eight says our service centres may employ special workers. The long form explanation of that Tradition makes the point plainly: the job of these workers is not to be paid for Twelfth Step work, but to make Twelfth Step work possible. Concept XI then says the composition of committees and service boards, the rights and duties of executives and staff and the proper basis for the financial compensation of special workers are matters for serious care and concern. In other words, these are real responsibilities but they are not meant to be managed by loose opinion from the floor.

It is therefore proper to use the term GSO in the right context. But GSO is not the whole Fellowship and its employees are not the spiritual authority of AA. They are



salaried special workers employed to carry out defined administrative and service - support duties under delegated authority.

Whether an employee is or is not an AA member is not the point; in employment terms they are serving in a staff role, not as the Fellowship's conscience. Individual members and Groups do not direct employees personally. Accountability works through Group Conscience, the service structure, Conference decisions, Board responsibility and proper reporting.

5. What should still be reported back

Confidentiality does not cancel accountability. The Fellowship should still receive what it genuinely needs in order to understand and trust the service structure. That includes annual accounts, major policy decisions, Conference decisions, explanations of how money supports the primary purpose and clear reports from GSRs, Areas, Intergroups and Conference members.

Members are entitled to understand the direction of service, the broad use of funds, the reasons for major decisions and the proper route for raising concerns. What they are not entitled to demand is unrestricted access to every confidential paper or every piece of personal data. Trust in AA service is not built by exposing everything; it is built by a right balance of delegated authority, truthful reporting and principled restraint.

6. A simple rule of thumb

Take Group matters to Group Conscience. Take Fellowship matters through the service structure. Report back faithfully. Entrust what has been delegated. Protect what is confidential. Avoid private influence, pressure and personality-driven control.

If a question arises, it is usually enough to ask: Does this directly affect our Group? Does it affect AA as a whole? Has this responsibility already been entrusted elsewhere? Does this require reporting back for understanding, or does it involve confidential information that should remain within proper authority? Those questions keep the Fellowship away from both over-control and unhealthy secrecy.

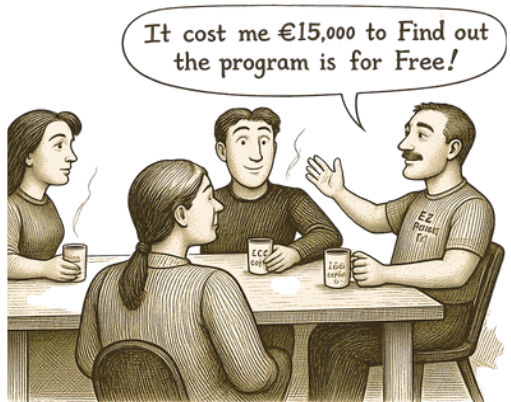
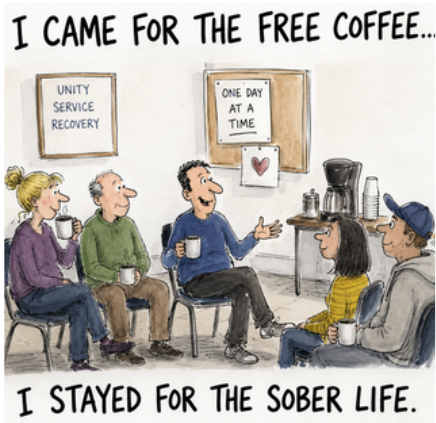
Conclusion

AA works best when Groups use Group Conscience for Group business and when the wider Fellowship allows entrusted servants to carry responsibility for wider service matters. Not every budget detail, salary matter, confidential Board decision or staff issue should return to Groups. But the Fellowship should be kept properly informed about the broad direction, principles, finances and decisions of the structure. The safeguard is neither chaos nor total exposure. It is informed Group Conscience, proper delegation, clear authority, faithful reporting, lawful confidentiality and principles before personalities.

HUMOUR in AA



"I THOUGHT I WAS A GREAT STORYTELLER WHEN I WAS DRINKING. TURNS OUT I JUST TOLD THE SAME STORY 47 TIMES."



"THIS TOO SHALL PASS. IT MIGHT PASS LIKE A KIDNEY STONE. BUT IT WILL PASS".



I'm Blessed I Found AA

Francis's Story

Irish Overseas

When I had my first drink around the age of 12 or 13 (I was in 2nd or 3rd year at secondary school), alcohol gave me a sense of ease and comfort that I hadn't experienced. I now knew what all the fuss was about and why alcohol was so prevalent in our society. Naturally, I wanted to have this feeling as much as possible. From the beginning, I drank to achieve this effect – I wanted to feel good being me.

My relationship with alcohol developed from one, two or three drinks initially, into one, two and three days of drinking, each time I would have a drink.

"After they have succumbed to the desire again... they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery."

The above quotation from the Big Book very

accurately describes the relationship I had with alcohol in my late teens and early 20s. Around this time, because of my drinking (and drug usage), I could not manage my life and I did not have the tools to apply myself to university studies or hold down a meaningful job. Indeed, I had attempted several courses in different locations and failed them all.

Having grown up in an alcoholic household, I was loosely aware that there was such a thing as recovery, and of the existence of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was first formally introduced to AA and brought to a meeting at the age of 22 and I liked the things that I heard at that meeting. I was in a state of fear, worry and anxiety having come off a three-day spree in the lead-up to Christmas, which was financed by money that wasn't my own.

I can clearly remember the conversations I had with two fellows who would later bring me to that first meeting in Tyrone. They talked of things such as taking things

at one day at a time, and the fact that I had helped them in their recovery – go figure.

I readily accepted that I was an alcoholic, and I had known this for some time before I first attended a meeting however I would not come back to another meeting for some 5 years – I suppose I just wasn't ready. I had somehow ended up on an English-teaching adventure in China and Taiwan.

My existence in Asia was such that I was spending each minute either recovering from a spree, or actively on one. Incident after incident, spree after spree, I once again received the gift of desperation. It was in Taiwan in the year of 2012 that I would come into AA at the age of 27 and stay there. An Australian gentleman, Trevor W., would become my first sponsor.

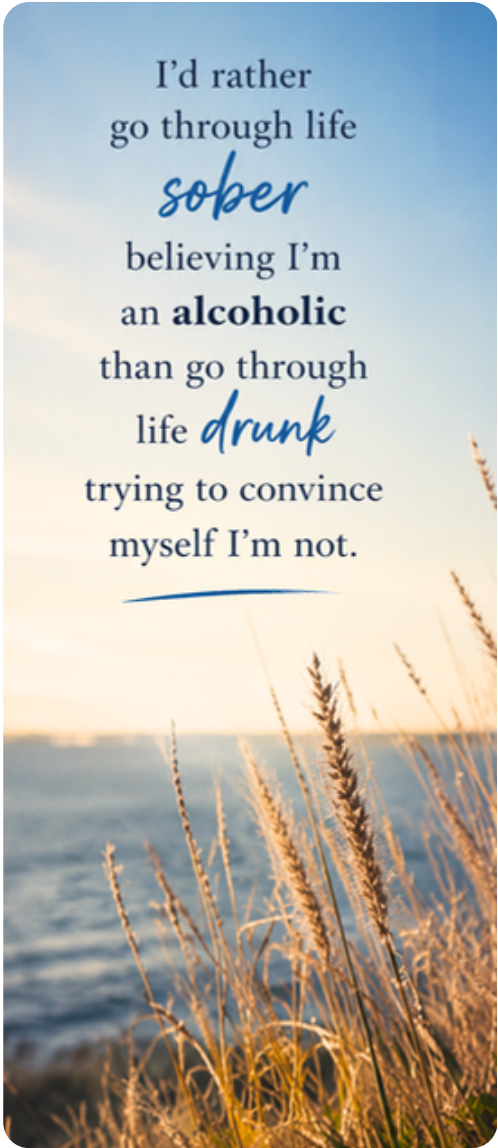
In my sobriety, I have gone on to gain qualifications that have enabled me to go and teach in international schools in Dubai (7 years), and now Bangkok (3 years). I come home to Ireland during the school holidays each year, and I enjoy reconnecting with local AA. It is important that I stay connected with meetings and fellowship because of the type of thinking that occurs if I stray towards isolation. During my time abroad, I have made lifelong friends in recovery and made some wonderful memories of the people I have met in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I am blessed that I found AA. Gratitude and

thanks to those who have sponsored me over the years - Trevor W. (Australia), Tony A. (England), Kirk K. (USA) and Broc S. (USA).

Keep coming back.....

Francis. H



I'd rather
go through life
sober
believing I'm
an **alcoholic**
than go through
life *drunk*
trying to convince
myself I'm not.

Donna's Story

Experience, Strength and Hope



When I first entered the doors of AA, I was beaten in every way possible. Though I did not get sober the first time or the second time, it took me to the third and literally on my knees to surrender to king alcohol.

I was totally aware of the damage I had caused to my two lovely girls and my family but with all my being and might, I couldn't stop drinking.

Certainly the words "cunning, baffling and powerful" were all very real and true. I sat around meetings and couldn't speak for a long time, I couldn't say the words "my name is Donna and I'm an alcoholic" nor did I want to, but that's what my life had become, a complete mess and totally unmanageable.

I listened to people sharing and could identify greatly with them all, I got myself a sponsor. A lady who I had been listening to for a while and liked what

she had and the way she shared. I felt all my life I was being judged but for once I wasn't. Such was the wreckage of my past that I thought I could never admit to myself and especially to another human the exact nature of my wrongs. With plenty of emotional pain I put down on paper my step five and eventually faced up to all the harms I had caused. Things that I thought I could never speak about came flooding out but with listening and sharing at meetings I have learned to trust God, clean house and help others.

I no longer have to seek the approval of others or the people I love. AA has opened its doors for me, a door to a new and wonderful life "ONE DAY AT A TIME".

And from the help of the good people in the fellowship, I am forever a grateful alcoholic.

Donna D

Join Us in Belfast

Date for your diary

70th All Ireland Convention

16–18th April 2027

Crowne Plaza Belfast



Earlier this summer Belfast welcomed the world as it hosted the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. Over 1.6 million people visited the city to enjoy the music, the atmosphere and the famous Belfast welcome. It was a wonderful example of how a city can embrace visitors from near and far, something we hope AA members will also experience when they gather in Belfast next April.

A few members of the committee spent some time at the Fleadh. For many of us it brought back memories of similar occasions from our drinking days. This time it was different. We enjoyed the music, the atmosphere and the company of others while being happy, joyous and free. It was another reminder of the new life AA has given us.

The Fleadh also showed how a large gathering can leave a city with lasting positive memories. We trust the same will be true when the AA Fellowship comes together in Belfast. Through our conduct, our respect for others and the way we carry ourselves, we have another opportunity to let the message of recovery

speak for itself. It has been heartening to see the response already received. Members from across Ireland and overseas are already making plans to come together in Belfast and we are especially looking forward to welcoming members attending their very first All Ireland Convention alongside those who have supported Conventions for many years.

If you are thinking about coming, why not make a long weekend of it? Belfast has changed enormously over the years, and many members may enjoy taking the opportunity to explore the city before or after the Convention. Whether you enjoy history, music, good food or simply spending time together, there is plenty to experience. If time allows, the Antrim Coast, the Giant's Causeway and the Mourne Mountains are all within easy reach.

Traditionally, All Ireland Conventions have often become more than just a weekend of meetings. Many members have brought partners, family and friends with them even though they may not attend the AA



meetings themselves. While the AA meetings are for members, the entertainment and social events are open to both members and non-members. They provide another opportunity to enjoy the gift of recovery and spend time with those close to us.

Above all, we are looking forward to seeing the Fellowship come together in Belfast. Alongside the meetings we hope to include some opportunities that members may recognise from conventions around the world but which have been less common at conventions in Ireland.

Every Convention develops its own character. A committee can prepare the programme and organise the venue, but it is the Fellowship that makes a Convention memorable. It happens in conversations between meetings, in welcoming a newcomer, in listening to another member's story and in friendships that begin or are renewed over the weekend. Those are often the memories we carry home.

For many of us, one of the greatest gifts of any Convention is the reminder that none of us ever has to do this alone.

If you have never attended an All Ireland Convention before, perhaps this is the year to come. Many members remember their first Convention for the rest of their lives. You will find the same welcome you found at your first AA meeting, only shared with a much wider Fellowship.

Accommodation at the Crowne Plaza proved very popular and the initial allocation of rooms was booked much sooner than anticipated. The hotel expects to release a further allocation of bedrooms in mid-November 2026, and Convention pre-registration will also open at that time. More information to follow in due course.

Discounted rates are also available at a number of the hotel's sister hotels. These rates are available only by booking directly through the Crowne Plaza reservations team between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, and mentioning that you are attending the 70th All Ireland AA Convention. Belfast also offers a wide range of accommodation to suit every budget. Decisions regarding room availability remain entirely with the hotel and are outside the Convention Committee's control.

In keeping with our Seventh Tradition, the Convention is fully self-supporting. Unlike a regular AA meeting, the costs of organising a Convention have to be committed well in advance. The registration fee simply allows those attending to share those costs while remaining true to AA's principle of self-support.

An All Ireland Convention belongs to the whole Fellowship. If you decide to join us, we would be delighted if you became part of it. Whether it is welcoming a newcomer, sharing your experience at a

meeting, reaching out to another member, lending a hand or simply sharing fellowship with someone you have never met before, every act of service helps carry the AA message. We would be humbled by your willingness to help make the weekend memorable for someone else.

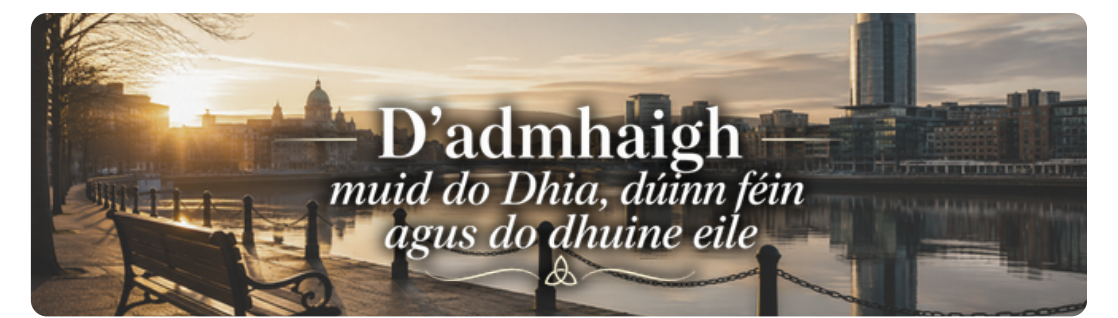
Whether you travel from near or far, we hope you will join us in Belfast from 16th –

18th April 2027. We look forward to sharing the weekend with friends old and new.

Wherever we go in Alcoholics Anonymous, we are among friends.

For convention enquiries, email allirelandconvention@alcoholicsanonymous.ie





D'admhaigh

muid do Dhia, dúinn féin agus do dhuine eile

D'fhreastail mé ar chruinniú amháin de Alcólaigh gan Ainm agus mé 19 mbliana d'aois. Bhí mé ag ól bliain go leith faoin am sin. Thuig mé go raibh fadhb mhór ann; ba mhinic mé scanraithe ag an easpa cuimhne ón oíche roimh ré. Chuir mo mháthair scairt orm maidin agus í ag caoineadh fá mo chuid rámhailí ar an ghuthán an oíche roimhe. Ní raibh cuimhne agam ar an chomhrá a raibh sí ag trácht air. Ach ba láidre an eagla fá éirí as an ól ná an eagla fán easpa cuimhne. Ba mhinic a theipeadh ar an chuimhne fosta agus an t-alcól ar fad imithe as an chóras: ní raibh sé chomh holt sin, thig liom greim a fháil air, ólfaidh mé pionta uisce idir gach deoch feasta (rud nár tharla riamh), etc.

An chéad iarracht eile a rinne mé ná nuair a bhí cinneadh le déanamh agam idir obair agus ól, tamall de bhlianta ina dhiaidh. 'Mhair' mé bliain go leith gan bhraon, ach gan aon chuidiú a lorg ná aon fhadhb a admháil i gceart d'fhill mé ar an deoch. Deoch amháin a rinne an dochar. Smaoinigh mé ar an deoch sin ar feadh trí lá ina dhiaidh agus b'in a chuir tús le hocht mbliana go leith eile de chrá a d'éirigh ní ba mheasa de réir a chéile agus ní amháin domsa.

Níor tharla rud ar bith chomh tubaisteach sin díreach roimh dom teacht chuig an dara cruinniú, 17 mbliana i diaidh chruinniú a haon. Ach tharla rud éigin taobh istigh. Tháinig duine muinteartha liom, nach maireann, chun cuimhne agus thuig mé go soiléir nach saol mar a bhí á chaitheamh agam an mhian a bheadh ag an duine sin domh. Rinne mé cinneadh, nó threoraigh rud nó neach éigin mé leis an chinneadh cheart a dhéanamh. D'aimsigh mé cruinniú ar líne an oíche sin, ach in ionad a raibh dúil agam leis bhí dóchas ann agus gáire taobh leis an ghol. Thóg sé cúpla lá orm glacadh leis an lipéad 'alcólach', agus ghlac.

Níor fhág mé AA ó shin, ach admhaím gur thóg sé tamall orm géilleadh i gceart do gach rud agus bhínn sa tóir ag an tús ar leithscéalta le himeacht. Nach mé atá buíoch nár imigh. Is breá liom an rogha fairsing shaibhir atá againn ó thaobh cruinnithe de agus bíonn deis agam fónamh don ghrúpa baile. Éistim go han-ghéar agus foghlaimím neart fán dóigh a gcuireann daoine a gcaidreamh le daoine eile (agus leo féin) ina cheart. Cibé rud a chuireann ag smaoineamh faoi dhuine ar bith eile seachas mé féin mé, is é is fearr!

An tréimhse sin a luaigh mé thuas, an staonadh gan chuidiú, tuigim anois gurb in an ceacht is luachmhaire—agus ceacht searbh a bhí ann—atá foghlamtha agam. Tuigim go rímhaith nach dtig liom seo a dhéanamh i m’aonar. Tá fianaise shoiléir agam: tá cuidiú de dhíth orm. Faighim sin ó dhaoine eile. Goidim smaointe ó dhaoine eile in achan chruinniú. Déanaim iarracht ligean don tuiscint atá agam ar chumhacht is airde ná mé fás i gcónaí.

Mhóthaigh mé slán sábháilte nuair a d’iarr mo chomrádaí coimirce orm nótaí a bhreacadh fá ghnéithe den tsaol nach ndeachaigh go rómhaith go dtí sin. Bhí i bhfad ní ba mhó eagla ann nuair a chuaigh muid siar ná mar a thuig mé. Phléigh muid gach rud de réir a chéile. Tháinig pointe nuair ba léir gur chóir bogadh ar aghaidh. Deirtear liom gur tábhachtach gan éirí sáinnithe.

Bhí mé chomh cuimsitheach agus ab fhéidir agus má thagann rud ar bith eile chun solais feasta thig a phlé ansin. Déanaim iarracht rud éigin a rá i gcruinniú más féidir ach tuigim nach gá leithscéal a ghabháil as éisteacht. Is aoibhinn liom an tslí nach dtugtar agus nach n-iarrtar aiseolas. Tá mé ag socrú síos in AA, tuigim cad é le déanamh má bhíonn deacracht ann agus tá an cloigeann ag socrú síos (lá ar lá!) dá bharr. Is breá liom an cruinniú úr seo ar pár atá againne na baill a bhfuil Gaeilge againn ar an aistear seo ar ais chugainn féin. D’fhreastail mé ar chruinniú Gaeilge i dtús na bliana; seans go réiteofar an bealach do thuilleadh dá leithéid go rialta amach anseo.

Darren is ainm dom, alcólach atá ionam.

As drinking alcoholics, we all ran
from life and toward death. When
we join AA, we reverse the process
— we give ourselves to life as it is,
rather than as we would like it to be.

*Key West, Fla., February 1973,
“Self-Pity Can Kill”,
Best of Grapevine, Volume 1*





with Belinda

Q. How long have you been sober?

A. *"I have been sober for 20 years, since the 6th of February 2006"*

Q. What brought you to the fellowship?

A. *"I realised that I had a problem with alcohol and I thought if I went to AA that these people would teach me how to drink like a lady because there was no way I was an alcoholic"*

Q. Did you know about AA prior to this?

A. *"I knew a neighbour of mine who got sober with the help of the fellowship. So one morning I was leaving out my empty bottles in the bin and I was rattling from the night before. I was very sick and feeling sorry for myself and I caught my neighbour in my peripheral vision and something had changed within her. She looked free, fresh and content going off to work. She looked all the things that I wasn't that morning. I approached her and asked her if she could help me with the laptop that I had bought my daughter and I said when you're around we can have a drink. She told me that she didn't drink that she went to AA and that she was a year sober. That was the first interaction with Alcoholics Anonymous."*

Q. What were your thoughts at your first meeting?

A. *"At my first meeting I was so broken. I was very much full of guilt, shame and remorse. But I realised I was no longer alone. They had given me a bit of hope so I was able to cope and they kept telling me to keep coming back. It had been a very long time since someone had told me to come back."*

Q. What age were you when you got sober?

A. *"I was 31 years old."*

Q. Did you have any doubts about your chances of recovery?

A. *"No, I believed in the guarantee"*



with Belinda

Q. Was there any aspect on offer that made you think “no way”?

A. *“When I walked in, I saw the Twelve Steps on the wall, I said there is NO way I am doing any of that. There is no way I owe anyone an apology, they owe me an apology. However today I have come to see it’s a program of action.”*

Q. What slogan would you say is your favourite?

A. *“There are many slogans that I love but my favourite is ‘this too shall pass’.”*

Q. Have you played any roles in the fellowship in your recovery?

A. *“Yes. From when I entered AA it was suggested to me when you have enough days get into service and give back. So my roles have been GSR Secretary for the group and prison sponsor.”*

Q. Does your family feel the ripple affects of your sobriety?

A. *“100%, they know where I am at and they don’t have to worry about me today.”*

Q. Is taking what’s on offer enough or do you have to give back?

A. *“You have to give back. I have to give back what was freely given to me, it’s my primary purpose to stay sober and help the next suffering alcoholic.”*

Q. What would be your message to a newcomer?

A. *“Keep coming back it works if you work it. Stay away from one drink one day at a time if a day is too much breach it down to one hour and if an hour is too much break it down to one minute and always remember lift the phone before you lift the drink.”*

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?

A. *“AA has given me a life and it’s a life beyond my wildest dreams and it’s not a big car or fancy house, it’s peace between my ears.”*



FOUND A NEW FREEDOM

Earlier in my drinking career. During my twenties, I knew that once I took the first drink I could not stop, it was only after I came into Alcoholics Anonymous that I heard about the physical allergy and the mental obsession, often referred to as the “phenomenon of craving” described in the ‘Doctors opinion’ in the Big Book.

At the age of 40 I decided to stop drinking, by that stage, my drinking had progressed to daily drinking on my own, it was during this period that I experienced the mental obsession and physical craving, I, was drinking against my own will, each morning I woke up disappointed to be alive and would swear of drinking that day, but by the afternoon I was drinking again and stopping tomorrow, each day was a repeat and getting darker.

Through the grace of God at nearly 43 years of age, I reached the jumping off place, I was no longer fit for living, yet not fit to take my own life, in desperation I cried out for help.

When I came into the rooms of AA, I heard

many people say that their craving for alcohol was removed from day one, that was not my experience, instead I was tortured daily by the craving for alcohol, although I was no longer drinking the obsession remained strong. Because of the hope I felt in the rooms and my strong desire to stop drinking I did what was suggested, I kept going to meetings, got a sponsor and started on the 12-Step programme of recovery, I resisted all the steps and Step 5 was no exception, it brought up mixed emotions I dreaded sharing my innermost self with another person because I was full of fear, the fear of being judged at the same time I wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible, a part of me also wanted someone to hear my ‘poor me’ story.

Throughout my Step 5, I felt heard with compassion through honest feedback and discussion, I was able to change my perspective on my resentments and was gently guided away from seeing myself as the victim, through shared experience and reference to the Big Book I was shown how to deal with my resentments, how to

forgive others by seeing my part, even if not my fault, I learned to pray for the person I had resentment towards and how to handle my fears, how to let go of anger and how to trust God. For the first time, I felt that I could turn things around, even if I didn't fully know it at the time, I believed it.

After finishing my Step 5 I was exhausted and didn't have the immediate relief which I expected, however, about a week later I was driving to an annual drinking event when I had an overwhelming feeling of lightness, everything looked brighter and I had a deep feeling within me that I was going to be ok, I then realised I was not thinking about having a drink, the obsession for drinking had been removed.

For me Step Five brought and continues to bring me complete freedom. I have completed the steps a few times since and, on each occasion, more has been revealed to me about myself, today I love this step, when I become agitated with a person, place or situation I use step ten which often involves doing a quick step four inventory, and when necessary, sharing it with another person through step five.

Sharing allows me to hear the truth; it halves the problem and through honest discussion changes my perspective, it helps me to laugh at myself with love and enables me to feel freer, and live more peacefully with myself and others.

Today I know that when I share something that is troubling me, it loses its power, it is brought into the sunlight of the spirit and no longer keeps me trapped in darkness and isolation.

Today I remain grateful for the help I received from the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12 Steps, a power greater than me (which I call God) and for the opportunity to live fully and contribute to life, one day at a time.

Anon

Happy, Joyous, and Free

We are sure God wants us to be happy,
joyous, and free.

We cannot subscribe to the belief that
this life is a vale of
tears, though it once was just that for
many of us. But it
is clear that we made our own misery.
God didn't do it.

— *Alcoholics Anonymous (The Family Afterward)* p. 133

So Long Pal

BY JOHN

I remember the first time
The excitement, the thrill
Unequalled to this day and still,
I reached for you again and again
We fitted together perfectly.

A beautiful bond I couldn't disarm you
I never really tried
I really didn't want to
They saw me so differently when we gelled
I came and I conquered,
And what a title I held.
The funny guy.

The muted little boy,
Now a star in the making,
My head held so high,
Would they know I was faking?
Could they tell that my friend
Was pulling the strings
Without you I would've
been so far from the singing.
It felt good to be lauded,
It felt good to be wanted,
And appreciated and encouraged
and recognised and needed.

The versions of me I never knew existed
All came to the surface
The lead entertainment.
The confident charmer
Or brooding, mysterious
A social chameleon,
I could be mischievous or serious.

But where did these personalities go
when I was alone
You had deserted me
Left me all on my own
Malignant thoughts colliding in my head
Wake in the morning wishing I was dead
I needed your help
You were happy to save me
Embraced me like you always did
Stopped all the crazy.

The cycle continued
Come with me,
Self hatred
Please help!
Absolutely
I've got your back kid.
Our connection grew stronger
I loved and I needed you
I didn't ever want to see
All the things I was going through.

It was so good until it wasn't.

The adulation grew distant
No longer as wanted
Not desired, not envied
Not even invited
To take part,
Because of all my character defects
Your presence brought the opposite
To the required affects.

I remember I judged those
who had all gone before me
Who battled and struggled
That would never be my street
But here I was an unwilling resident
One of the unfortunates
Cast aside, full of torment

I called for you
Please, I need your assistance
Something else answered
I was given some guidance
That I didn't want
But so badly needed
Told how to live
Reluctant, but agreed with.

You still hang around
Always tempting my ego
You'll be alright with me you say
Just go with the flow
I can't and I won't
We're not as perfect as we seemed
You see I have learned
Through this pain
That I shouldn't believe
Your lies and deceit
The poison you peddle
I'm better being just me
I don't need you to meddle
In my affairs any longer
I can now see the signs
I guess,
It's so long pal
Well,
One day at a time.



The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA 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 AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA 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. AA, 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.

**BA BHREÁ LINN BHUR SCÉALTA I NGAEILGE A CHUR SAN
ÁIREAMH INÁR N-IRIS. DÉAN TEAGMHÁIL LINN!**

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