
Essay

March 1992

Post Office Box 300
Simi Valley, California 93062

GREAT PRAISE FOR SAN DIEGO CONFERENCE

I've continued to get feedback regarding the conference, even as recently as this week [Feb. 12]. Ninety-nine percent of this is great. The most encouraging has been from the "old timers" who have been to more than one or two assemblies. They commented that there seemed to be an easy flow throughout the conference and a healing of broken factions in the fellowship. God was definitely in command, as I certified throughout the convention. I personally had several S-Anons come up to me afterward and thank me specifically for the joint SA/S-Anon meetings — it was good for them to hear and understand the "other side of the picture." There was also an overwhelming response for the couples' meetings, even overflow crowds. Progress must be happening in our fellowships!

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by ESSAY or the Central Office.

April 10, 11 and 12, 1992 — Sixth Annual SA/S-Anon Couples Retreat in Tucson, Arizona. Contact Burt S. and Jennifer S., 3052 Palomino Park Loop, Tucson, AZ 85712 (602) 326-4980.

May 1, 2 and 3, 1992 — Spring '92 SA/S-Anon Family Reunion. Spiritual Life Center, Wichita, Kansas.

May 15, 16 and 17, 1992 — European SA Convention. Place: Maria-Laach, Germany, between Cologne (Koln) and Aachen. Call Helmut at 011-49-2361-33911.

June 20, 1992 — One Day Retreat, Long Island, NY. For details call Jerry J. (516) 379-7113.

July 10, 11 and 12, 1992 — Vancouver International Convention. "Progressive Recovery." To register, mail check for \$79 (before May 15) or \$89 (after May 15) to: P.O. Box 4801, Vancouver B.C., Canada V6B 4A4. For SA or S-Anon information call Forbes (604) 980-8119 or Anna (604) 538-9323.

October 1, 2 and 3, 1992 — Weekend Retreat, Spiritual Life Center, Wichita, KS. Host: Tulsa SA.

Basically the conference was one of “God can, I can’t, I think I’ll let Him!” and everyone complimented us for what a great job we did. Fortunately, I was able to reiterate that this is a “spiritual program.”

The conference committee also received a letter from a prisoner in Texas requesting literature. I didn’t share it at the conference but took it to the San Diego Intergroup at our last meeting. We unanimously voted to “sponsor” the purchase of the requested materials. From talking with Pat at C.O., she said that the C.O. will send literature to any prisoner who asks. I didn’t find out how much that costs the fellowship on a yearly basis. My thought was maybe other intergroups or meetings could possibly take on the responsibility of sponsoring one of these individuals. Maybe that’s something we can put in the *Essay*, or maybe it can be done on a regional basis.

God bless you all,

Dan H., *Conference Chair*

Some Additional Thanks For . . .

“The healing of the fractures in the fellowship culminating in New York receiving the bid for Jan. ’93.”

“. . . allowing me to be a part of this wonderful conference. Central Office is only the channel of the fellowship, and my personal gratitude is that there is SA for those that hurt.” **Pat, Central Office**

“Dale J’s skilled and serene chairing of the business meeting and the resulting smoothness of the meeting.”

“The singleness of purpose was palpable.”

GROUP NEWS

Welcome to the Following New Groups

Atlanta, GA	Bud W.
Gladstone, OR	Andrew
Hemet, CA	Larry R.
Lincroft, NJ	Herbert J.
Logan, UT	Tim M.
Muskogee, OK	Bill G.
Ogden, UT	Kevin G.
Seal Beach, CA	Bill W.
South Bend, IN	Wm. G.
Grandvaux, Switzerland	Andrew
Quebec City, Que., Canada	Nicole

NOTE: If your group is not listed with the CO, call Pat at (805) 581-3343, or write to Post Office Box 300, Simi Valley, CA 93062.

Muskogee, OK: "Our group consists mostly of 2 to 4 people at a time. I myself am unemployed and some of the other people are also. Moneywise it has been very difficult. We are meeting at the AA Clubhouse every Monday night. I am determined to make a go of this. I have been encouraged by a mental health clinic and also the probation office here. I am a convicted felon because of my lust. I am 57 years old and I have been addicted for 50 years of my life, fighting all the way. I just wish I had known about SA sooner. With the help of God and SA, I have been sober for almost a year now. Thank you so much for keeping up the good work. Please include us in your prayers, especially in reaching those who are suffering." B.G.

Syracuse: "May the New Year 1992 bring you peace and prosperity in your service to SA groups throughout the country. May these contributions from the groups in Syracuse, NY and Binghamton, NY (spelled without the P) help you in your work. We thank God, our Higher Power, for the gift of SA, and the gift of sobriety that comes as a result of working the Steps. We are grateful for increased sobriety in the groups, and for new members. We are

aware of the struggles, and downright pain, that some members are enduring, so we stick together, with mutual support, in a world that by-and-large, does not support us.” A.B.

Phone Meeting: “A second SA conference call is being organized. It will be the Tuesday after the 15th of every month. The first conference call is full and is going well and has become a close-knit group. It took some time for people to get comfortable with each other, but it came about.

These calls are a means for sexually sober people to improve their sobriety. As a start, 30 days’ sobriety will be a requirement to participate in the call. The cost of the call is \$20 each when the call is within 40 minutes, \$30 each when the call is within an hour. The present call, with 7 to 9 people per month, tends to run an hour and permits adequate sharing time. For sign-up, call Jesse L. (406) 586-3688 between 8:00 am and 12:00 noon, and 7:00 pm and 10:00 pm (Mountain time).”

Portland, OR: “Our Thursday evening group in Portland, OR, has enjoyed an attendance of 10–15 people with one or two newcomers. This year we were proud to recognize anniversaries of five 1-year members, one 2-year member, two 3-year members, and one 4-year member.” D.B.

Westfield, NJ: “We now average 6–9 members per week and are a nice, small, intimate group. Our leader has over one year of sobriety and five of us are in the 3–5 month category, which includes myself, the treasurer. I have had 3 and 4 months several times before, and have found that slips can be a time of growth in recovery in the program, a time for further reflection and deeper surrender. Recovery is what is most important and in my two and a half years in the program, I have never felt more free, more full of life, and more free from lust. Pray for us, that we may continue to surrender more and more and grow in recovery and length of sobriety.” T.N.

Morges, Switzerland: “An English-speaking SA meeting has been established in Morges, Switzerland (outside of Geneva). The group is still in its early stages. At present, there are only two members—myself and another man. As such, the time and place of our meetings vary from week to week. I am writing for two reasons: First, to provide you with my name, address and home phone number so that you may refer me as a contact to

SA members visiting the area. Second, if there is any material that may assist our fledgling group, I would appreciate it if you could send it to me." A.W.

Laurel, MD: "We are happy to report that a steady core group attends the meetings, and over the past few weeks several persons have come to find out what we are all about." T.G.

Casper, WY: "My group directed me as secretary to write and ask if SA as a whole has some experience with leaving SA pamphlets with counselors or other professionals. Our group is considering this as an option. As for me, I've been sexually sober for 315 days [12/16/91]. It's been rough, very emotional, but I am committed to the program and I think we might see a fellowship grow up around us here in Casper." D.W.

FEEDBACK CORNER

Anyone for the Steps?

The SA conference in San Diego gave me a strong sense of fellowship and a great hope for our future in recovery and growth. Something that struck me, however, was an experience which brought some questions to mind regarding our commitment to the Twelve Steps as an ongoing foundation for recovery.

Throughout the course of the conference, numerous "break-out" meetings were offered with subjects ranging from boundaries, intimacy and couples' recovery, to First Steps and other Steps. I decided to attend a meeting that had the Tenth Step as its focus. To my surprise and dismay, I was the only person to go to that room. So, we combined that meeting with a Step Six through Nine meeting, and there were about eight of us in that room.

Imagine, over 200 people at the conference and only eight interested in discussing Steps Six through Ten! It was a powerful meeting, for me, and I learned a lot, even though Step Ten never really came up. Discussing the Steps, and how they are working in our lives, is the rock upon which all other SA and S-Anon experience sits. Yes, we need to share our pain and to grieve, but we also need to grow as a result of working these principles called the Twelve Steps.

My recovery process is a miracle which has come about as a result of working the Steps, going to meetings, and using the phone (especially when I am overcome with lust). I need to hear about the success of others who have worked the Steps and have made them a part of their lives. And, I need to share my victories of overcoming lust, one day at a time, as a result of working the Steps and "practicing these principles in all my affairs."

Anonymous

Principles Before Personalities

In the December 1991 issue of *Essay*, I was disturbed that you allowed the following line into print: "We are firmly pro-California and Roy K. on the sobriety definition issue." I believe this was inappropriate for the following reasons: Using a person's name introduces "personalities over principles." Secondly, no one person speaks for SA. And finally, printing such a statement keeps the fires of discord and controversy burning. **J.R.**

MEMBER NEWS

Climbing Aboard

For the past two years the SA literature and *Essay* newsletter have been like a rescue ring thrown at me from a passing vessel. I hung onto it and very slowly I was pulled toward this vessel by people I could not see. My first conference, in Baltimore, was like reaching the side of the boat. Looking up I saw some of the faces of these people that were now starting to pull me up. The San Diego conference was my coming on deck where I could embrace my rescuers and every one rejoiced. While this happened I saw a light above the boat which was God, as I presently conceive Him. Y.M.

Gratitude Lists

My recovery calendar page today says "*Gratitude turns problems into blessings and the unexpected into gifts.*" I am grateful for the reminder of how important gratitude lists have been to my recovery from sexaholism. During the first several months of sobriety, I wrote gratitude lists daily. My sponsor said to put 20 items on it per day. Some days I wrote them down in one sitting. On other days I kept an on-going list as my Higher Power provided the experiences.

When I was first told to write a gratitude list I was not at all sure what to put on it. Being just barely sober, I felt awful much of the time. I was shocked at how continuously I sexualized women, body parts, fantasies, places around town such as motels, conversations with women or men, and even objects in the room. I kept testing my limits by being in uncomfortable or even dangerous lust situations. As some sobriety developed, I saw how often I took drinks of lust from everyday situations and used sexual memories or anger to get drunk. These unpleasant experiences, I realized, were the material for my gratitude lists.

Although I was an atheist, I had heard enough at meetings to know that I needed a Higher Power and finally had access to one. When I began to write the gratitude lists, I decided to begin each one with "Thank You" to my Higher Power. Then I would detail the sexualizing, limit testing, fantasizing or emotion which was disturbing me. My attitude with each gratitude was to thank my Higher Power for the opportunity to surrender

whatever it was I could not handle. Over the past several years I have maintained the same attitude, except that now my Thank You is addressed to God *as I understand Him*. The need for the list is, however, unchanged. Any day I am sober and working the Steps is due to my willingness to let God be in charge. As the Big Book says, if I “trust God, clean house and help others” I will keep getting better. Gratitude lists have been an important part of that process, one day at a time. **Anonymous**

Abstinence and Sobriety

At first glance, sobriety questions seem easy to resolve. I think it’s so simple because I think, okay, so long as I don’t masturbate or sleep with another woman or a prostitute, then I’m sober. But is this really the case? Doesn’t sexual acting out begin when I go looking for a porno shop or porn flick or when I go into the sleazy part of town? My lust knows the narrowest recesses of my heart.

Or if I want to have a lust-dream? Previously, I had the notion that so long as I never reached orgasm, then I didn’t act out. I wondered why I never had much recovery, even though I tried to work the program. In spite of meditation and lots of praying and some honesty, I never got very far. My relationship with my wife was based on resentment. Something wasn’t right. I’ve got this suspicion that my lack of progress has to do with the fact that I interpreted sobriety for myself.

After almost three years of sobriety, I felt so secure that I took a college course called, “Pornography and Sexism.” After taking this course, I acted out. Or had I acted out already by deciding to take the course? I’m also not totally sure if I’m sober when I desire certain sexual practices with my wife. I’ve determined for myself that lust always accompanies such activity.

Today I measure my sexual sobriety by this criterion—*what would my SA friends say about this or that activity?* Since I have begun using this criterion, I seem to be making progress in my recovery. The relationship with my wife seems to be improving tremendously. I’m entering into a real union with her and am no longer extremely touchy.

Please forgive my candor. I hope I have not offended anyone. But this topic was something which I have been dragging around with me for a long time, and my sharing with SA friends has convinced me to write about it. Perhaps this will provide the occasion for an exchange of experiences. It

seems to me that this subject is taboo, even in our meetings. W. [Taken from *German SA Newsletter*, 11/90.]

Flirtations with Lust

Why is it so hard to give up those flirtations with lust? It's because I can't fully surrender my will over my own choices that causes me trouble. Even though I often know I should not do something or go someplace, I have trouble giving it up because I don't want to admit that I can't handle it. I want to believe that this time it will be different. Somehow I will be stronger this time. Or I can just squeeze by and not be affected by what's out there. Maybe I can just have a quick look and it won't affect me. Wrong!

Every time I flirt with lust I pay the price in my spiritual life and my thought life. I have to then battle twice as hard the next few days over my lustful thoughts and drives. I have to be more careful. I become preoccupied with trying to avoid acting out. I have to sift through the cloud of lust over me to just get through to God. To do the normal things of life I have to swim through my lust that's right in front of my face. It affects those around me. I may have less patience and tolerance of others. Why? Because it's me I'm mad at and disappointed at and it's easier to blame those close to me than look at myself and my addiction. It says in a very wise book, "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?"

I'm a sexaholic. I can't handle situations where I have to make a choice whether to say yes or no. I don't have that power of choice in many cases anymore. I am weak in this area. I have used up all my willpower a long time ago. It's God that gets me through these situations without harm. Left to my own devices, I will act out every chance I get. Without His help I would be lost in the sea of lust without a lifejacket. But thanks be to God, by His grace I can ask for forgiveness and surrender the lust before it takes a hold of me and I can't get loose.

It would be so much easier if I didn't put myself in those situations where I have to make a choice. One day at a time, little by little I am learning this lesson. Each time hopefully I will listen to my inner voice and stay away. With God's help I can let go of the anchor around my neck of things I think will make me feel better but only cause me to suffer from lust so strongly.

I must give up the right to these and give them back to God. Maybe when I do that He will give them back when I can handle them. Or show me an alternative way to enjoy them that is safer for me. But first I must give them up for the sake of sobriety and living in God's will, not mine. Oh Lord, please help me surrender the things that I need to surrender so I can see you more clearly and stay on the right path, turning neither right or left. **J.**

Light in the Window

On December 28, 1990, I walked through the door of my first SA meeting. I had been brought to my knees by the disease of lust and sex addiction. I had used it to run from life and myself for 30 years. My time was up. I had tried to manage my life and could not. I was truly powerless. But that night turned out to be my homecoming. God was offering me one last chance, a path to the light. I accepted His offer. The war was over. I had lost.

This past year has, in many respects, been the most difficult and the wonder-filled of my life. You see, I am what the AA Big Book refers to as a "double amputee." Without the support of SA and my Higher Power, there is no hope for me. I have no more recoveries in me.

My "program" has been simply a willingness to do whatever it takes. I cannot afford to lust or fantasize. Each lustful look or thought must be immediately dealt with by acknowledging my powerlessness, followed by a Third Step surrender to my Higher Power's care, without a willingness to turn my life and will over to Him, there is no hope for me.

Tonight I am giving my First Step away through the fellowship to my Higher Power. I am one-year-old in recovery and it is time to take my very first step, to begin to walk my walk. I cannot remember ever being filled with more excitement, joy and gratitude than I am at this moment. Someday I would like to share my story with you in hopes that the addict who still suffers might see the light in the window and come in from the night. **D.W.**

A Loner's Prayer

After four months of living the SA way of accepting temptations which come and go in subtle forms, and trusting in the Lord of my understanding to "shield me from sudden misfortune," I am glad to let you know I am

progressing in victory over lust in my life. I look at every girl I encounter as God's sacred and unique creation. Reverence for the Giver behind the gift precedes my wild or lustful imaginings of any kind. I love . . . and lust fades away. I feel very much at home in our common journey toward sexual sobriety. May God bless and comfort us, encourage and guide us, not to give in to the many passing attractions, but to keep a steady pace of trust, of caring, of service, slowly but surely, a day at a time. **B.S., Papua, New Guinea**

Box 300

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REPORT BY THE CENTRAL OFFICE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

At the San Diego International Conference business meeting, the Central Office Oversight Committee reported that the committee meets monthly by conference phone call. There have been nine such meetings. Each meeting has an agenda and is limited to one to one-and-a-half hours. The COOC has managed Central Office business since the departure of Roy K. as administrator.

According to the report, "Overall we believe we have improved the efficiency and decision making of Central Office operations. Due to the ebb and flow of contributions from groups and individuals, we have had to monitor expenses, ensure that literature inventory is sold, and ask the fellowship to continue or increase donations. We are seeking more involvement in CO operations by sexaholics in the Los Angeles area as well as world-wide as time goes by.

"The COOC should continue to represent each region and each region should develop its own means to replace a COOC member as necessary. Larry M. and Harry B. will develop a proposal concerning replacement of COOC members. The requirement for service on this committee is two years of SA sobriety, as voted at the Chicago International Conference in June 1991. COOC members should make reports to their region through whatever mechanisms possible, including local conferences and intergroups. They should consider themselves representatives of the Central Office.

“The fellowship should be aware that with the growing need for SA, the drop in cash flow to the Central Office is a serious problem for operations. Groups and intergroups need to send in regular donations to ensure that the Central Office is self-supporting through our own contributions.”

At the business meeting, a motion was passed that authorized the COOC to continue to function, at least until February 1993. The General Service Board Study Committee also will continue to work toward the development of a service proposal for the fellowship as a whole.

Jim O. of COOC, and Pat, our non-sexaholic Central Office administrator, presented a financial report to the fellowship. According to the report, the *Essay* mailing list is up by 1,300 names for the past year to make a total of about 3,200. “Contributions are down by \$8,200 for the year. Our overall income is down from that of three years ago. Net Central Office income has been running at a deficit of between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a year for the past three years. Fortunately, total expenses for 1991 also were down by \$9,400. The *Essay* costs about \$20,000 per year. The mailing list is constantly updated. Names are promptly added and deleted, as directed.”

While meeting at San Diego, the COOC recommended that the *Essay* continue to be made available to all members free of charge and that, due to the high cost of printing and distributing the *Essay*, a request for a voluntary annual subscription of \$10 or more be included in each issue. To save funds, the COOC will no longer have white covers put on the SA “full cover” big book, as it has done in the past. The Central Office will ship the “full cover” versions until our stocks are down and we can afford to reprint the white book. Finally, Jim O. and James M. are developing a proposal to establish a prudent reserve fund for the SA Central Office.

[The COOC is pleased to hear from the SA membership. Either contact us in our regions or write to us in care of the Central Office in Simi Valley.]

David M., *COOC Secretary*

A PLEA IN SAN DIEGO

At the San Diego convention in January, Roy K. suggested that in gratitude for the guidance and presence of God, and the Unity of Spirit currently being experienced in SA, groups consider passing a second basket at each meeting, the proceeds to be earmarked for the Central Office. This would show in a tangible way each group's support for the purpose of the SA fellowship—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers. He said this was the first time he had ever made such a direct plea, and he was doing so now as just another member of SA, not as a representative of the Central Office.

The Central Office Oversight Committee has advised that at present, only 30 percent of the expense of carrying out our purpose at the national and international level is covered by 7th Tradition donations from individual groups, a considerable decline. The remaining 70 percent is covered by the profit realized on the sale of SA literature. Roy suggested that this is not a healthy situation, and he told of another Twelve-Step group which is presently threatened with bankruptcy as a result of a situation in which income from individual group support of the world service office fell to only five percent of the total.

Roy believes that our fellowship should strive to support the Central Office through individual group *contributions*, as our 7th Tradition suggests. Then it might be possible to decrease the price of SA literature, making it available to more people, and we would experience the joy of being truly self-supporting.

STUDY COMMITTEE ASKS FOR FEEDBACK

The General Service Board Study Committee is interested in hearing from members of SA who may have ideas that they would like to share for the eventual utilization of a General Service Board. Share with us how you've adapted other 12-Step service structures into your local intergroup. Let us know what's working and what's not working. Also, why would a general service structure in SA be necessary, or unnecessary, from your perspective? Please send your comments to the SA Central Office, Attn.: Service Board Study Committee, P.O. Box 300, Simi Valley, CA 93062. **Michael B., Chair**

NOTES FROM CENTRAL OFFICE

Please help us reduce inventory by asking for full-cover books . . . And, please note that any orders for literature **must** be sent to us in U.S. funds, especially orders from Canada.

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY 1, 1991 TO DECEMBER 31, 1991

	Current Period	(%)	Year-to-Date	(%)
<i>INCOME</i>				
Contributions – Unrestricted	\$7,467.41	100.0	\$94,534.59	100.3
(less) Refunds	0.00	0.0	325.39	0.3
TOTAL INCOME	\$7,467.41	100.0	\$94,209.20	100.0
<i>EXPENSES</i>				
Salaries & Wages	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0
Auto expense	0.00	0.0	36.57	0.0
Bank service charges	0.00	0.0	3.00	0.0
Dues & Subscriptions	0.00	0.0	12.00	0.0
Insurance – General	0.00	0.0	367.24	0.4
Legal & Accounting	250.00	3.3	3,683.00	3.9
Miscellaneous expense	0.00	0.0	590.99	0.6
Office expense	75.67	1.0	1,766.52	1.9
Outside expense	2,692.50	36.1	36,774.70	39.0
Postage expense	1,450.48	19.4	10,075.08	10.7
Printing & Tape Duplication	1,989.64	26.6	20,717.06	22.0
Rent expense	800.00	10.7	9,600.00	10.2
Repairs & Maintenance	0.00	0.0	555.50	0.6
Supplies expense	0.00	0.0	877.86	0.9
Taxes – Payroll	0.00	0.0	902.00	1.0
Taxes – Other	0.00	0.0	192.00	0.2
Telephone	1,257.14	16.8	11,952.06	12.7
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$8,515.43	114.0	\$98,105.58	104.1
NET OPERATING INCOME (LOSS)	\$1,048.02	14.0	\$3,896.38	4.1
NET INCOME (LOSS) BEFORE TAX	\$1,048.02	14.0	\$3,896.38	4.1
<i>INCOME TAXES</i>				
State income tax	0.00	0.0	10.00	0.0
TOTAL INCOME TAXES	0.00	0.0	10.00	0.0
NET INCOME (LOSS)	\$1,048.02	14.0	\$3,906.38	4.1

DR. BOB'S LAST MAJOR TALK

[as transcribed from a recording made at Detroit in December 1948;
reprinted from June 1973 AA *Grapevine*]

Although a good many of you have heard or have read about the inception of AA, probably there are some who haven't. From that brief story, there are things to be learned. So, even at the risk of repetition, I would like to relate exactly what did happen in those early days.

You recall the story about Bill having had a spiritual experience and having been sold on the idea of attempting to be helpful to other drunks. Time went by, and he had not created a single convert, not one. As we express it, no one had jelled. He worked tirelessly, with no thought of saving his own strength or time, but nothing seemed to register.

When he came out to Akron on a business mission, which (perhaps for the good of us all) turned out to be quite a flop, he was tempted to drink. He paced up and down the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, wondering whether he had better buy two fifths of gin and be "king for a night," as he expressed it, or whether he had better not. His teachings led him to believe that he possibly might avoid difficulties if he found another alcoholic on whom to work.

Spying the name of our good friend the Reverend Walter Tunks on the bulletin board in the lobby of the Mayflower, Bill called him up and asked him for the name of some local member of the Oxford Group, people with whom he had affiliated and through whose instrumentality he had acquired sobriety. Dr. Tunks said he wasn't one himself, but he knew quite a number and gave Bill a little list of about nine or ten.

Bill started to call them up, without very much success. They had either just left town or were leaving town or having a party or had a sore toe or something. Anyway, Bill came down very near to the end, and his eyes happened to light on the name of Mrs. Seiberling — our good friend Henrietta. He called Henry and told her what he wanted, and she said, "Come right out and have lunch with me." At lunch, he went into his story in considerable detail, and she said, "I have just the man for you."

She rushed over to the phone and called Anne and told her that she had just the fellow to be helpful to me, and that we should come right over. Anne said, "Well, I guess we better not go over today."

But Henry is very persistent, a very determined individual. She said, "Oh, yes, come on over. I *know* he'll be helpful to Bob." Anne still didn't think it very wise that we go over that day. Finally, Henry bore in to such an extent that Anne had to tell her I was very bagged and had passed all capability of listening to any conversation, and the visit would just have to be postponed. So Henry started in about the next day being Sunday and Mother's Day, and Anne said we would be over then.

I don't remember ever feeling much worse, but I was very fond of Henry, and Anne had said we would go over. So we started over. On the way, I extracted a solemn promise from Anne that fifteen minutes of this stuff would be tops. I didn't want to talk to this mug or anybody else, and we'd really make it snappy, I said. Now these are the actual facts: We got there at five o'clock, and it was eleven-fifteen when we left.

Possibly, your memories are good enough to carry you back to certain times when you haven't felt too good. You wouldn't have listened to anybody unless he really had something to tell you. I recognized the fact that Bill *did* have something, so I listened those many hours, and I stopped drinking immediately.

Very shortly after that, there was a medical meeting in Atlantic City, and I developed a terrific thirst for knowledge. I had to have knowledge, I said, so I would go to Atlantic City and absorb lots of knowledge. I had incidentally acquired a thirst for Scotch, but I didn't mention that. I went to Atlantic City and really hung one on. When I came to, I was in the home of a friend of ours in Cuyahoga Falls, one of the suburbs of Akron. Bill came over and got me home and gave me a hooker or two of Scotch that night and a bottle of beer the next morning, and that was on the 10th of June, 1935, and I have had no alcohol, in any form that I know of, since.

Now the interesting part of all this is not the sordid details, but the situation that we two fellows were in. We had both been associated with the Oxford Group, Bill in New York for five months, and I in Akron, for two and a half years. Bill had acquired their idea of service. I had not, but I had done an immense amount of reading they had recommended. I had refreshed my memory of the Good Book, and I had had excellent training in that as a youngster. They told me I should go to their meetings regularly, and I did, every week. They said that I should affiliate myself with some church, and

we did that. They also said I should cultivate the habit of prayer, and I did that — at least, to a considerable extent for me. But I got tight every night, and I mean that. It wasn't once in a while — it was practically every night.

I couldn't understand what was wrong. I had done all the things that these good people told me to do. I had done them, I thought, very faithfully and sincerely. And I still continued to overindulge. But the one thing they hadn't told me was the one thing that Bill did that Sunday — attempt to be helpful to somebody else.

We immediately started to look around for prospects, and it wasn't long before one appeared, in the form of a man whom a great many of you know — Bill D., our good friend from Akron. Now I knew that this Bill was a Sunday-school superintendent, and I thought that he probably forgot more about the Good Book every night than I ever knew. Who was I to try to tell him about it? It made me feel somewhat hypocritical. Anyway, we did talk, and I'm glad to say the conversation fell on fertile ground.

Then we had three prospects dumped in our laps almost simultaneously. In my mind, the spirit of service was of prime importance, but I found that it had to be backed up with some knowledge of our subject. I used to go to the hospital and stand there and talk. I talked many a time to a chap in the bed for five or six hours. I don't know how he stood me for five or six hours, but he did. We must have hidden his clothes. Anyway, it came to me that I probably didn't know too much about what I was saying. We are stewards of what we have, and that includes our time. I was not giving a good account of my stewardship of time when it took me six hours to say something to this man that I could have said in an hour — *if I had known* what I was talking about. I certainly was not a very efficient individual.

I'm somewhat allergic to work, but I felt that I should continue to increase my familiarity with the Good Book and also should read a good deal of standard literature, possibly of a scientific nature. So I did cultivate the habit of reading. I think I'm not exaggerating when I say I have probably averaged an hour a day for the last fifteen years. (I'm not trying to sell you on the idea that you've got to read an hour a day. There are plenty of fine people, fine AAs, who don't read very much.)

You see, back in those days we were groping in the dark. We knew practically nothing of alcoholism. I, a physician, knew nothing about it to speak of. Oh, I read about it, but there wasn't anything worth reading in any of the textbooks. Usually, the information consisted of some queer treatment for DTs, if a patient had gone that far. If he hadn't, you prescribed a few bromides and gave the fellow a good lecture.

In early AA days, we became quite convinced that the spiritual program was fine if we could help the Lord out a little with some supplementary diet. Bill D.,

having a lot of stomach trouble, had stumbled across the fact that he began feeling much better on sauerkraut and cold tomatoes. We thought Bill should share that experience. Of course, we discovered later that dietary restrictions had very little to do with maintaining sobriety.

At that point, our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of. When we started in on Bill D., we had no Twelve Steps, either; we had no Traditions. But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book. To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians and the Book of James.

We used to have daily meetings at a friend's house. All this happened at a time when everybody was broke, awfully broke. It was probably much easier for us to be successful when we were broke than it would if we'd had a checking account apiece. We were, every one of us, so painfully broke that . . . well, it isn't a pleasant thought. Nothing could be done about it. But I think now that it was providentially arranged.

Until 1940, or maybe early in 1941, we held the Akron meetings at the residence of that good friend, who allowed us to bang up the plaster and the doorjambs, carting chairs up- and downstairs. And he had a very beautiful home. Then we outgrew that, so we rented the auditorium in King School, and the group I attend personally has been there ever since. We attempt to have good meetings, and I think we're usually successful.

It wasn't until 1939 that the teaching and efforts and studies that had been going on were crystallized in the form of the Twelve Steps. I didn't write the Twelve Steps. I had nothing to do with the writing of them. But I think I probably had something to do with them indirectly. After my June 10th episode, Bill came to live at our house and stayed for about three months. There was hardly a night that we didn't sit up until two or three o'clock, talking. It would be hard for me to conceive that, during these nightly discussions around our kitchen table, nothing was said that influenced the writing of the Twelve Steps. He already had the basic ideas, though not in terse and tangible form. We got them, as I said, as a result of our study of the Good Book. We *must* have had them. Since then, we have learned from experience that they are very important in maintaining sobriety. We *were* maintaining sobriety — therefore, we must have had them.

Well, that was the way things got started in Akron. As we grew, we began to get offshoots, one in Cleveland, then another one in Akron, and all have been continuing ever since. It is a great source of satisfaction to me to feel that I have kicked in my two bits' worth toward getting this thing started. Maybe I'm taking too much for granted. I don't know. But I feel I was simply used as God's agent. I

feel that I'm no different from any of you fellows or girls, except that I was a little more fortunate. I got this message thirteen and a half years ago, while some of you had to wait until later.

I used to get a little peeved at our Heavenly Father, because he had been a little slow on the trigger in my own case. I thought I would have been ready to receive the message quite a while before he got around to presenting it. And that used to irritate me no end. After all, maybe he knows better than I. But I felt sure that I would have been glad to have *anything* presented to produce the sobriety that I thought I wanted so badly. I even used to doubt that at times. I would go to my good friend Henry and say, "Henry, do you think I want to stop drinking liquor?"

She, being a very charitable soul, would say, "Yes, Bob, I'm sure you want to stop."

I would say, "Well, I can't conceive of any living human who really wanted to do something as badly as I think I do, who could be such a total failure. Henry, I think I'm just one of those want-to-*want* guys."

And she'd say, "No, Bob, I think you want to. You just haven't found a way to work it yet."

The fact that my sobriety has been maintained continuously for thirteen and a half years doesn't allow me to think that I am necessarily any further away from my next drink than any of you people. I'm still very human, and I still think a double Scotch would taste awfully good. If it wouldn't produce disastrous results, I might try it. I don't know. I have no reason to think it would taste any different — but I have no legitimate reason to believe that the results would be any different, either. They were always the same. I always wound up back of the dear old eight ball. I just don't want to pay the bill, because that's a big bill. It always was, and I think it would be even larger today because of what has gone on in the past thirteen years. Being a bit out of practice, I don't believe I'd last very long. I'm having an awfully nice time, and I don't want to bump myself off, even with the "pleasures" of the alcohol route. No, I'm not going to do it, and I'm never going to as long as I do the things I'm supposed to, and I know what these things are. So, if I should ever get tight, I certainly would have no one but myself to blame for it. Perhaps it would not be done with malice aforethought, but it would certainly be done as a result of extreme carelessness and indifference.

I said I was quite human, and I get to thinking every once in a while that this guy Bob is rather a smart individual. He's got this liquor situation right by the tail — proved it and demonstrated it — hasn't had a drink for over thirteen years. Probably could knock off a couple, and no one would be the wiser. I tell you, I'm

not trying to be funny. Those thoughts actually do enter my mind. And the minute they do, I know exactly what has happened.

You see, in Akron we have the extreme good fortune to have a very nice setup at St. Thomas Hospital. The ward theoretically accommodates seven alcoholics, but the good Sister Ignatia sees that it's stretched a little bit. She usually has two or more others parked around somewhere. Just as soon as that idea that I could possibly polish off a couple enters my mind, I think, "Oh-oh. How about the boys in the ward? You've been giving them the semi-brush-off for the last few days. You'd better get back on the job, big boy, before you get into trouble." And I patter right back and am much more attentive than I had been before I got the funny idea. But I do get it every once in a while, and I'll probably go on getting it whenever I get careless about seeing the boys in the ward.

Any time I neglected them, I was thinking more of Bob than I was of the ward. I wasn't being especially loving. Those fellows had come there indicating their desire for help, and I was just a little too busy to give them much of my time, as if they had been panhandling on the street. Don't want to be bothered with that fellow? Ten cents to get rid of him — why, that's easy! He could even stand two bits — not because you love the fellow, but just to be relieved of the nuisance of his hanging on your coat sleeve. No unselfishness, no love at all indicated in that transaction.

I think the kind of service that really counts is giving of yourself, and that almost invariably requires effort and time. It isn't a matter of just putting a little quiet money in the dish. That's needed, but it isn't giving much for the average individual in days like these, when most people get along fairly well. I don't believe that type of giving would ever keep anyone sober. But giving of our own effort and strength and time is quite a different matter. And I think that is what Bill learned in New York and I didn't learn in Akron until we met.

The four absolutes, as we called them, were the only yardsticks we had in the early days, before the Steps. I think the absolutes still hold good and can be extremely helpful. I have found at times that a question arises, and I want to do the right thing, but the answer is not obvious. Almost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can't be very far out of the way. If, however, I do that and I'm still not too satisfied with the answer, I usually consult with some friend whose judgement, in this particular case, would be very much better than mine. But usually the absolutes can help without bothering your friends.

Suppose we have trouble taking the First Step; we can't get quite honest enough to admit that John Barleycorn really has bested us. The lack of absolute purity is

involved here — purity of ideas, purity of motives. Absolute unselfishness includes the kind of service I have been talking about — not the dime or two bits to the bum, but actually giving of yourself.

As you well know, absolute love incorporates all else. It's very difficult to have absolute love. I don't think any of us will ever get it, but that doesn't mean we can't *try* to get it. It was extremely difficult for me to love my fellowman. I didn't dislike him, but I didn't love him, either. Unless there was some special reason for caring, I was just indifferent to him. I would be willing to give him a little bit *if* it didn't require much effort. I never would injure him at all. But love him? For a long time, I just couldn't do it.

I think I overcame this problem to some extent when I was forced to do it, because I had to either love this fellow or attempt to be helpful to him, or I would probably get drunk again. Well, you could say that was just a manifestation of selfishness, and you'd be quite correct. I was selfish to the extent of not wanting Bob hurt; so to keep from getting Bob hurt, I would go through the motions of trying to be helpful to the other fellow. Debate it any way you want to, but the fact remains that the average individual can never acquire absolute love. I suspect there are a few people who do; I think maybe I know some who come pretty close to it. But I could count them on the fingers of one hand. I don't say that in any disparaging manner; I have some wonderful friends. But I'm talking about the final aspects of absolute love, particularly as it applies to AA.

I don't think we can do anything very well in this world unless we practice it. And I don't believe we do AA too well unless we practice it. The fellows who win great world awards in athletic events are people who practice, who have been practicing for years, and still have to practice. To do a good job in AA, there are a number of things we should practice. We should practice, as I've said, acquiring the spirit of service. We should attempt to acquire some faith, which isn't easily done, especially for the person who has always been very materialistic, following the standards of society today. But I think faith can be acquired; it can be acquired slowly; it has to be cultivated. That was not easy for me, and I assume that it is difficult for everyone else.

Another thing that was difficult for me (and I probably don't do it too well yet) was the matter of tolerance. We are all inclined to have closed minds, pretty tightly closed. That's one reason why some people find our spiritual teaching difficult. They don't *want* to find out too much about it, for various personal reasons, like the fear of being considered effeminate. But it's quite important that we do acquire tolerance toward the other fellow's ideas. I think I have more of it than I did have, although not enough yet. If somebody crosses me, I'm apt to make a rather caustic

remark. I've done that many times, much to my regret. And then, later on, I find that the man knew much more about it than I did. I'd have been infinitely better off if I'd just kept my big mouth shut.

Another thing with which most of us are not too blessed is the feeling of humility. I don't mean the fake humility of Dicken's Uriah Heep. I don't mean the doormat variety; we are not called upon to be shoved around and be stepped on by anyone; we have a right to stand up for our rights. I'm talking about the attitude of each and every one of us toward our Heavenly Father. Christ said, "Of myself, I am nothing — My strength cometh from My Father in heaven." If he had to say that, how about you and me? Did you say it? Did I say it? No. That's exactly what we didn't say. We were inclined to say instead, "Look me over, boys. Pretty good, huh?" We had no humility, no sense of having received anything through the grace of our Heavenly Father. I don't believe I have any right to get cocky about getting sober. It's only through God's grace that I did it. I can feel very thankful that I was privileged to do it. I may have contributed some activity to help, but basically, it was only through his kindness. If my strength does come from him, who am I to get cocky about it? I should have a very, very humble attitude toward the source of my strength; I should never cease to be grateful for whatever blessings come my way. And I *have* been blessed in very large measure.

You know, as far as everybody's ultimate aim is concerned, it doesn't make much difference whether we're drinking or whether we're sober. Either way, we're all after the same thing, and that's happiness. We want peace of mind. The trouble with us alcoholics was this: We demanded that the world give us happiness and peace of mind in just the particular way we wanted to get it — by the alcohol route. And we weren't successful. But when we take time to find out some of the spiritual laws, and familiarize ourselves with them, and put them into practice, then we do get happiness and peace of mind. I feel extremely fortunate and thankful that our Heavenly Father has let me enjoy them. Anyone can get them who wishes to. There seem to be some rules that we have to follow, but happiness and peace of mind are always here, open and free to anyone. And that is the message we can give to our fellow alcoholics.

We know what AA has done in the past thirteen years, but where do we go from here? Our membership at present is, I believe, conservatively estimated at 70,000. Will it increase from here on? Well, that will depend on every member of AA. It is possible for us to grow or not to grow, as we

elect. If we fight shy of entangling alliances, if we avoid getting messed up with controversial issues (religious or political or wet-dry), if we maintain unity through our central offices, if we preserve the simplicity of our program, if we remember that our job is to get sober and to stay sober and to help our less fortunate brother to do the same thing, then we shall continue to grow and thrive and prosper.

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