

# THE MIXER

THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



## ACCEPTANCE WAS MY ANSWER

*My name is Gaye and I am an alcoholic.*

*I picked up my first drink when I was fourteen and I drank until I passed out. By fifteen I was drinking and passing out every weekend. I never drank because I liked the taste, I hated it; I never drank to be sociable: from the very beginning, I only drank for oblivion.*

*I believe I was an alcoholic long before I picked up a drink: I hated myself, I felt like I didn't fit in anywhere. I just felt like a total misfit, and for as long as I can remember, I wanted to die. But I was afraid of dying; so, for me, oblivion was the closest I could get to death. It meant I didn't have to deal with me.*

*Within the next two years I progressed to drinking through the week as well, I wasn't getting enough to satisfy me on the weekends. At seventeen I got a job away from home, training to be a nurse, and I lived in the nurses' quarters. Every night after work I would go to pubs, clubs and anywhere that had alcohol. I could recall leaving the quarters and those first few drinks but I could never remember returning. I always woke up in my bed having no idea how I got there.*

*One night I remember going out, having my first drink, and coming to in hospital with nuts and bolts coming out of my leg and a 30 lb weight pulling the bones back together. I was told by the staff that I had been in a car accident, I had been trapped for 6 hours and had to be cut out of the wreck. The right side of my body had been crushed and needed multiple operations. They told me that I had a lengthy stay in hospital ahead of me.*

*My first thought was, "How can I get a drink?". Inside, I started to panic; but it didn't last long, because every time I looked sideways I was given pills, sedatives to keep me calm, as I was in traction and had to be kept immobile to allow the bones to*

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*reset: several types of pain killers and injections and sleeping pills to help my body get enough rest to promote healing. On top of that were the anaesthetics needed for the many ongoing operations.*

*I loved the anaesthetics. It was death without dying, plus it took me to that state of oblivion in an instant and I didn't have to spend time drinking glass after glass of alcohol. I ended up being in hospital for 18 months. At 17 months the staff told me I only had 4 weeks to go. That terrified me: I didn't fit in the big world out there, I never had and I felt I never would. I started saving my medication, I took some and saved some, I couldn't face life without anything.*

*While saving my medications and planning on killing myself when I had enough, I tried a few other ways of dying that didn't work. I was insane...crazy. At one point I remember getting a bedpan and pretending I couldn't go, and for hours spraying air freshener into a cup and drinking it to try and poison myself, but*

## The Mixer Statement of Purpose

*The Mixer*, for "people who normally would not mix" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 17), is a forum for AA members in Australia to share their experience, strength and hope with each other, that they may stay sober and help others to recover from alcoholism.

Stories are collected by a group of volunteer editors around Australia, who form an editorial group conscience for the magazine, together with the General Editor and technical and design team.

We, the editors and other volunteers contributing service to *The Mixer*, try to practice the AA principles in our work, being guided by the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts. All contributions present the views of the contributors, and do not represent the AA Fellowship as a whole.

*The Mixer* can be accessed online at our website: [www.aamixer.com](http://www.aamixer.com).

You can subscribe, contribute or offer service to *The Mixer* by contacting us by email at: [editor@aamixer.com](mailto:editor@aamixer.com).



*just making myself very sick - at that time I didn't have any access to alcohol.*

*By the time I had hoarded enough of my medication to hopefully kill myself, it was the day before I was due to go home. I took them and woke up 18 hours later in the psychiatric hospital, and was diagnosed with all sorts of things and put on psyche drugs; but they didn't take me to oblivion as the alcohol had, and I was extremely anxious.*

*I had heard about a cough mixture that contained alcohol, so every time I had day leave I would smuggle bottles of the stuff in, and like the first alcohol I had tasted...I hated it, but it did what I needed it to. On page xxviii in our book, the Doctors Opinion reminds us we cannot have alcohol "in any form at all"; cough mixture, at that time, was the alcohol I needed and had easy access to.*

*I finally left the psyche hospital and moved into a boarding house. Not long after that, I met a man and fell in love, and thought marriage would "fix" me. We lived together and he was a kind, gentle man. I loved him and he loved me, I thought at last my fear would go and I would be a worthwhile person. I fell pregnant and we got married; but guess what? That didn't "fix" me.*

*I was drinking and adding sedatives, just like Bill W. in his story in the BB. Doctor shopping filled the gap when I wasn't able to get alcohol, and I drank until I passed out. Over the next couple of years I had my two children, first a girl then a boy. I thought that would make me worthwhile...but it didn't.*

*I loved them and my husband, but they didn't make me better, and I started hating myself more and more. By this time I was drinking continually, and I had quite a list of doctors, and I said and did anything to get myself to that unconscious state. I even had long periods of time where I made up illnesses to get anaesthetics administered. I started blaming my husband for everything, took the two kids, and left him.*

*I went further and further down. I kept telling myself I was okay because I still had my kids and I did love them. Looking back, I see that I put my kids through hell, but I couldn't see that, things kept getting worse and worse, I was drunk and unconscious more than I was awake. At the ages of 6 and 3, my kids were looking after me; one day I went to sleep with a cigarette with my little son in bed with me...I don't know what woke me up, but when I did I saw that the pillow between us was on fire.*

*That scared me enough to want to do something.*

*I put my kids in a home and went into rehab. That was to be the beginning of my “rehab shuffle”. I left after 4 days to save my kids from being hurt in the home — at least, that is what I told myself anyway. By the time I reached the home where they were, I was halfway gone. We didn’t have a proper place to go to, so we lived on the streets and in cheap motels. Finally, desperation drove me to another rehab where I could take the kids with me. I detoxed and stayed sober on fear alone.*

*This rehab was very strict, and I was just too scared to screw up. I was there for 4 months, when my husband showed up and took the kids away from me. I was devastated, and for the first time I had a good excuse to drink again...but I didn’t.*

*I stayed there for 6 months, then went to live in a halfway house. From there, I started going to AA meetings, feeling worthless and afraid of everything. I kept going to meetings. I read the Steps on the wall, and thought I could do them — except for the God ones. At this point I hated God.*

*At the meetings I got mixed messages: I really thought this program was for me; however, I had some people tell me I didn’t drink enough to be a real alcoholic and to try another 12 Step program. But there were a few older members telling me to come back. I knew that, when I listened to people sharing, I related to all they said about their desperate need to drink...but these mixed messages really fed my feelings of being a misfit, and on a couple of occasions I was abused for mentioning how I drank on top of the pills.*

*I only went to meetings occasionally, and stood at the back of the room and listened; but those older members still told me to come back. By this stage I wasn’t drinking or taking anything else, just like in the Big Book where it says, “Today I feel I have used up my right to chemical peace of mind”. I had nothing: I had lost my kids, my marriage, my home and my family.*

*On the suggestions of AA members, I went to another 12 Step program, where I was told I didn’t take the right kind of drugs for that fellowship and to try AA. I became very suicidal; but I didn’t relapse. I had 2 years’ sobriety when I went into another rehab, but nothing was working for me.*

*I kept going to the meetings where the older members were, and they always gave me hope that one day I would fit there. Throwing myself into volunteer work kept me active 7 days a week and I wasn't thinking of dying all the time.*

*By now I had about 14 years of sobriety. I moved in with my parents, and had the great honour to be able to make amends by nursing both of them until they passed; and I know they have forgiven me.*

*My family, which I hadn't seen for about 10 years, started to come back into my life, and I was building a new relationship with them. I was still going to a few AA meetings, and felt I related better there than the other fellowship. I was working the Steps as best I could from the banners and standing at the back of the room; sadly, at no stage was I offered sponsorship.*

*By this time I had re-established a relationship with my son. He was now married and had 3 children, I was blessed to be able to spend time with them, and this is something that I never thought would happen.*

*I was happier, but I would not call it sobriety or recovery. Around two years ago, my son realised he had a problem with alcohol, and 9-10 months ago he detoxed in hospital and started to go to AA. His Home Group has an annual dinner for the members and their families and he invited me.*

*I was so proud of him...I had never had a Home Group. After the dinner, the group had a meeting and asked me to stay. It was a Big Book study meeting. I had heard about the Big Book, but had only read parts of it that had been photocopied in some of the rehabs I had been in.*

*Something special happened in that meeting. Firstly, I didn't stand at the back of the room, I sat with the members. I got asked to share. I was terrified, but I did; and to my surprise, no one said I didn't belong. In fact it was the opposite; and as the meeting went on, I started to feel, for the very first time, that I belonged.*

*After the meeting, someone asked me if I wanted a sponsor and they gave me their number. I rang her and we started immediately on the Steps. I had attempted them before, but never the way the Big Book suggested.*

*While doing the first Step my sponsor showed me the story, "Acceptance was the Answer". From that moment I knew I belonged; and no one can ever tell me again*

*that I don't. So here I am in my 31st year of recovery, not drinking, not using anything else to change the way I feel, and I feel like a baby in AA. I now have a Home Group that I share with my son. I know I belong, and I am very excited to work the program the way the Big Book suggests.*

*I am doing service, and for the first time ever I am the secretary of one of the meetings my Home Group runs. The most exciting thing of all is that I am not just sober, I am experiencing recovery, and it's all thanks to my Higher Power for holding me safe until the right group and the right members crossed my path.*

*(Gaye C, "There Is A Solution" AA Recovery Group Nowra)*



## WHY CONFERENCE APPROVED LITERATURE AND HOW DO I TELL?

My interest in the importance of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) 'Conference Approved Literature' (CAL) was aroused by a couple of recent incidents. Firstly, I heard a new member share from the floor that they were having trouble getting sober because the AA literature had too much God in it for them. They went on to say they were referring to the Twenty-Four Hours a Day book (published by Hazelden). Coincidentally, a few weeks later an AA member, when asked to lead an AA meeting and share on a reading from the AA literature, couldn't decide between the Twenty-Four Hours a Day book and Daily Reflections (CAL) - and they were three years sober!

It became clear to me that some members may not understand the difference between AA Conference Approved Literature and non-AA Literature – and why there is a need for an approval process before literature can become CAL. It also occurred to me that if we display and sell non-AA literature alongside our AA literature, this could confuse the newcomer and make it appear that we as a group support the organisation that publishes it. I could see how easy it would be for us to be diverted from our singleness of purpose and why we need to have a process that assures that our message remains clear and consistent. As Bill W. said in *Language of the Heart*, "sometimes the good is the enemy of the best". I want to be sure that wherever I go throughout the world, now and in the future, AA's message of recovery, unity and service will be consistently there.

Of course, many people (including me) have found other literature helpful in their recovery. I find this is addressed in the following passage, 'Non-AA Literature', taken from the *AA Service Manual*:

*"Several books, which are published by outside organisations and therefore are not AA literature, are sometimes seen around AA meetings. Although they may refer to AA and its program this does not mean they are AA literature.*

*Many members find them useful personally and gain special insights when reading them. However, it should be realised that they do not contain the AA message in its fullness because they are expressions of individual opinion and have had no AA scrutiny or approval.*

*Every AA member is at liberty to read any literature, of course. For an AA Group, however, to sell, endorse or promote literature from other outside enterprises is not in the best interests of either our Fifth or Sixth Traditions. Our primary purpose, as a Group, is to carry our Fellowship's message."*

Just to clarify this point further, there are three different types of AA literature:

a) Conference Approved Literature is the literature that contains **our message as understood by the fellowship as a whole**. How do I recognise CAL? Easy! 'AA World Services Literature' is identifiable by checking, on the back cover or inside the front pages, for the statement, "This is AA General Service Conference Approved Literature". CAL produced in Australia carries the above statement as well as the circle and the triangle with the words Alcoholics Anonymous Australia inside the circle and the letters AA inside the triangle (Australian Conference Seal). This literature goes through an extremely careful approval process that could take between two to five years so that new literature will contain the true AA message.

b) AA Grapevine literature and similar individual sharing is produced by an AA entity and **supervised by a Group Conscience**. Examples of these are *The Mixer*, *The Grapevine* magazine, and one-off collections of best articles from these meetings in print, e.g. *Language of the Heart*, *The Best of Bill*, and *This is Alcoholics Anonymous Australia* among others. These items are given a different form of approval, not of the text itself but for the production and distribution only. The CAL seal of approval is not given in these cases.

c) AA Service items which include a long list of publications, i.e. *AA Guidelines*, District and Area newsletters, *AA Around Australia* and many other items that facilitate our service structure.

The *Australian AA Service Manual* and *AA Guidelines* are both excellent sources of information on this topic and where I obtained most of the information for this article.

YIS,

(Dennis T, Western Unity Group)

## WILLINGNESS

At one of my first meetings I heard someone talk about praying for the willingness to be willing. I thought it was one of the craziest things I'd ever heard. Why would one need to pray for that? I certainly didn't.

I had a sponsor. She told me to go to 90 meetings in 90 days, call her every night, read pages 60-63 in the Big Book for 30 days and a variety of other things. I did them all — well, most of them. I prayed every day, but not on my knees. I got phone numbers from other members, but didn't call them. I heard people talk about the

importance of humility as you work the steps, and made plans to substitute it for something else, perhaps charity. I wasn't interested in humility. Charity was an admirable quality, too.

As I worked my program in this fashion, although the obsession for a drink was lifted, I still couldn't figure out how to apply the tools of the program to my everyday life situations. I wasn't even sure what the tools were. I watched as other newcomers began to successfully navigate through their day, pulling out the right tool to use in a trying situation. And this frustrated me, made me wonder if AA was for me, made me think about throwing in the towel and grabbing a drink or two.

There are two lessons I learned during that time. One, don't compare myself to others; try to identify, but don't compare. The second lesson, for me, is that willingness is the key to the program. I can only go through the motions so long and expect results. Suggestions from sober people are suggestions in much the same way as using a parachute as you jump out of a plane is. If I want to live, I have to take the suggestions; they certainly aren't going to make me any worse.

I am one of those people who looked for the easier, softer way. What I discovered is that this IS the easier, softer way. Half measures did avail me nothing. I am that person, making excuses about why this won't work for me, which is unnecessary.

When asked recently if I was doing the reading that was suggested to me, my response was, "Well, here's the deal." At that point, I was reminded, in a matter of words, that deals won't keep me sober. Today, I get on my knees twice a day. I pray for the willingness to be willing, because without the willingness to work this program the way it's designed, to do the things that recovered alcoholics who have come before me have done, I'm left alone with my thoughts. And my best thinking got me here.

(Michelle)

## SERVICE BEYOND THE GROUP

My name is Brian and I am an Alcoholic. My home group is the Brisbane Traditions Group in Queensland which is in the North Eastern Region of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Australia. My sobriety date is the 20th June 1977.

Over the last 41 years, I have been actively involved in all Three Legacies of the Fellowship. My journey began when I was taken through the 12 Steps of AA by my sponsor, the late John R. Using the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, John assisted me greatly in my introduction to AA's First Legacy of Recovery. Through this process I learned the importance of one alcoholic working with another and that this was one of the main requirements for a continual sobriety.

When I was approximately nine months sober, I went around to John's house for coffee following a Sunday morning AA meeting. After some general discussion, John started to talk about the AA Group and how groups such as my own had started. He asked me to consider this: "Do you think your group and the other AA groups you attend

just happen? Did they set themselves up just by a magic click of the fingers?" Of course I knew that somebody had started these groups at some point, but I had not really given it much thought until that morning conversation with John so long ago. The point John was making to me was that, if that 'someone' did not take the action to set up the groups I attended, I may not have been able to stay sober. I would not have met all the sober people in the rooms who, by sharing with me, contributed to my desire to move forward with the AA Program. Without these groups, I would, most likely, have been lost. It was the significance of this realisation that got me thinking of not just looking at the trees but the vista of the forest. John's words stayed with me as I started to think outside the square, so to speak, about service beyond the bounds of my home group.

My first home group was the Queanbeyan group in New South Wales. It had approximately 30 members, and its format was based on discussion about the 12 Steps. It was in this group that I took on my first service position, which was to collect the group's mail from the postbox at the local post office, once a week. The post office box was a revelation to me, as we received all information from Alcoholics Anonymous Australia and the rest of the world, via that box. The box number was 602. That is the same number that I had as a prisoner some four years before. It was ironic that this number now represented something far more positive in my life!

In early 1978, Australia held its National Convention in my home city of Canberra. Canberra is the National Capital of Australia and is within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). My old home group in Queanbeyan is on the New South Wales side of the ACT border. At this convention I had the privilege of meeting two AA members from the United States. They were Wesley P. from Florida and Bob P. who was the office manager of the General Service Office (GSO), New York. Both men, who were keynote speakers at the Convention, talked about the Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous - Recovery, Unity and Service. Each Legacy was dependent on the others, just like a three-legged stool - without one of these Legacies, AA could not stand on its own. AA could not survive! I recall how they impressed upon me the idea that it all starts with the home group. Without the home group, these Three Legacies would not exist!

A short time after the Convention I was elected as the General Service Representative (GSR) for my Group, and it was then that I really appreciated that 12th Step work - one alcoholic working with another - took on multiple dimensions. I saw that 'Carrying the Message' could be done in a number of ways complementary to the 'one to one' guide provided in Chapter Seven of the Big Book. It was kind of like the metaphor, "don't just give a man a fish, teach him how to fish!" With this in mind, my new GSR job opened up the world of service outside the Group on the pillars of the 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of World Service.

As a GSR, I recall one of the first projects in which I became involved was a public information (PI) campaign with the insertion of advertisements in the local newspapers. Like the collaborative process in my home group, I participated in a 'Group Conscience' at the local District level to determine how best 'we' could deliver information about AA to the general public. We were able to decide what was needed to

be done, such as the wording for the PI ad, who was to write it, who was to approach the newspapers to make the arrangements and how we were going to pay for the ads. Other details decided on for the advertisement included the phone number of the local Intergroup Office - an office, by the way, staffed by AA members doing their voluntary 'service' by being there to answer the phone from troubled callers who had read our ad.

Some years later I had moved to Southern Victoria and was working in a small rural town. I had just finished reading the most unpopular book in the fellowship, according to Wesley, called *AA Comes of Age*, and was fascinated by the ripple effect that the Rockefeller dinners had in the early days of the Fellowship. I was again involved with service work outside my new home group when I was approached by a local woman who pointed out that the professional folk who work with alcoholics in the community knew very little about AA. She suggested that perhaps we could do something to improve our communication with these professionals.

I followed up on this idea at the next AA District meeting, and after some robust discussion, the District decided to host a dinner for the professional people in the local community who had anything to do with treating or dealing with alcoholism. As a District, we hired a venue and arranged catering for the dinner accordingly. Among the 23 professional people who attended were two senior police officers, two school principals, two psychologists and two drug and alcohol counsellors. At each guest's table seating, we placed a small package of AA literature that was specifically selected for the profession of that guest. Also attending were 20 'recovered' AA members who were strategically seated next to each professional guest. These 20 members were requested to read the pamphlet, "Speaking at Non-AA Meetings", before attending the dinner.

The event began with a couple of AA members giving a talk about the Program of AA and how it changed their lives. After the speakers finished, the meal was served. This gave an opportunity for the other 20 AA members to chat and perhaps elaborate on some points about AA with their guests. I believe we were successful in getting the message across to these professionals that we were a valuable, yet free, community resource for them to utilise when trying to help the sick alcoholic. There was a definite knock-on effect following the dinner. In that community, I observed our numbers begin to swell in AA meetings, with a lot of people being able to attain a solid and continuous sobriety. The success of this event was further testimony to the value of service work done on a structured basis within our Fellowship. As I write this in Brisbane, 30 years later, we are continuing with this successful formula of hosting dinners for professionals in the local community. In late November this year, we will be holding a luncheon for the decision makers within the Queensland Corrective Services. It is my hope, should my AA Area agree, that this will become an annual event.

If there is one area of concern that I would like to speak of here, it is about my country's attitude towards 'rotation' of our service positions. Based on my own observation and experience, there is the mindset that one rotates 'off' a position rather than rotating 'on'. It is common practice for a member whose time is up in a service

position to automatically rotate off the position irrespective of whether it is filled by another member or not. Even when there is an elected replacement for the position, there is very little support for him or her from the previous holder of the position. The new incumbent is commonly left on their own to fathom through an unnecessarily steep learning curve to learn the job. I give you an aspect of this mindset with the following example. I recall a member who was doing PI coordination across a large region, who would not pass on information of any contacts that were gained in the position on the basis of confidentiality. This person took the view that such information was provided to him/her personally rather than it being gained as a result of the PI position she/he was doing. This situation left the new incumbent to start all over again. This distortion of AA Principles, in my view, is not uncommon. There seems to be a lack of building on the experience of one's predecessors — something I find unique to Australian AA.

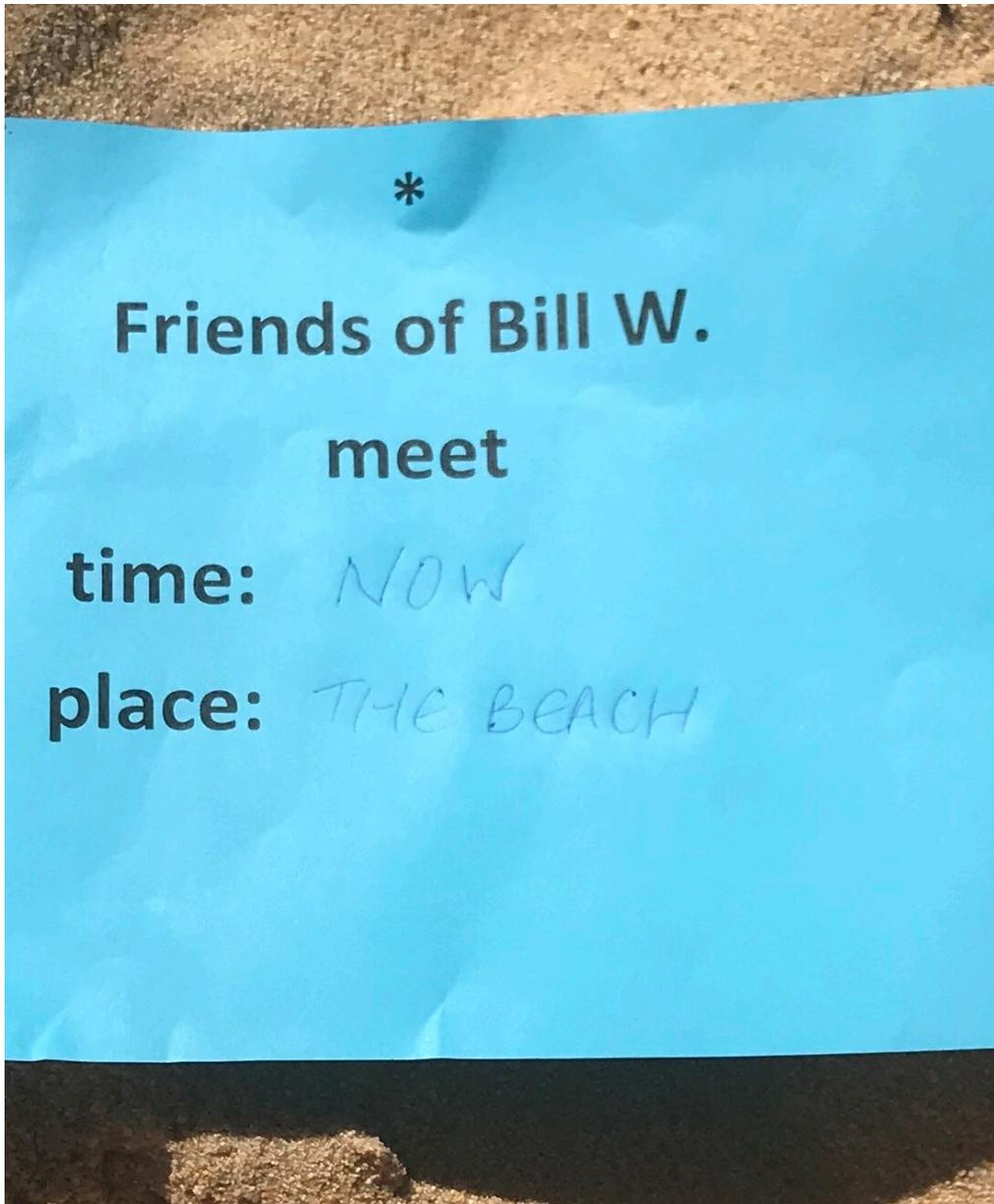
In the 41 years of my sobriety I have always been active at the group level through sponsorship, as well as being engaged with various service positions within the General Service Structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. As well as being a GSR in a number of groups, I have held the position of District Committee Member (DCM). I have also had the great privilege to serve on the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia as a Regional Trustee.

All AA service starts at the home group level; and for the group to survive, such service work must extend beyond the group. Our Book states: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail". This is a truism that cannot be questioned. However, the meaning of that quote translates into many ways to 'intensively' carry the message of AA. It is my experience that service beyond the AA group is a necessary and rewarding way to carry our message. Although my efforts are minuscule when seen within the Fellowship as a whole, those efforts have provided me with joyful and unforgettable memories. Like the three-legged stool analogy, the 12 Steps, the 12 Traditions and the 12 Concepts of World Service are the three pillars of guidance to effectively carry AA's wonderful message of recovery to the sick and suffering alcoholic.

In closing, I would like to relate to a relatively minor incident that had a major impact on me when I initially came into contact with AA. John R. (my first sponsor) was the man who attended my house on a 12th Step call. I was somewhat skeptical and negative in my attitude, as John was doing his best to make conversation with me. While he was sharing his story with me, my 14 month old daughter came into the room and called out 'catch' as she threw a plastic toy egg his way. He failed to catch the toy. Instead, it hit him in the head. He quickly bent down and picked the toy up and said to my daughter, 'here love'. My mood with the family was that of an angry bear - I would not have been so cheerful if the toy had hit me in the head. However, John's reaction had impressed me so much that, at that moment, I yearned for what he had and agreed to go to a meeting with him at his home group.

Over 41 years later, my daughter is at my side typing this presentation up for me!!

(Brian S, World Service Delegate, Term 1)



Meeting notice at Phu Quoc, Vietnam (courtesy of Nagani and Tomas)

### BOB'S KEYS OF CHANGE

[Editor note: The following are some excerpts from the experience, strength and hope of an OSM, Bob H. from Wollongong, who passed these keys on to me after a meeting. We will print more over later Issues of *The Mixer*]

- Spirituality. A relationship with my reality. There are 2 parts, truisms and truth.

- I suffer from addictions, a container of negative energy made up by me, coming from my past and my re-actions, forming sick emotions that I learnt to hide from and escape with alcohol and drugs, until I came into Alcoholics Anonymous in 1982.
- Do you want to get well????
- Power greater than self, inside/outside self.
- To make me a better person, not better than.
- Why are preachers and nuns alcoholic....they were children first.
- God can do for us what we can't do for ourselves.
- Drank and drugged not to feel painful emotions.
- Anger with a "D" = Danger
- Found in AA there is another way.
- Work things out to get full inside.
- The will needs a leader. Can't change my mind on my own.
- One big resentment...Loss of choice. Turned inwards is self pity. Don't tell me why you love me, just tell me you love me, that's the greatest gift you can give.
- Resentment is to "re-feel loss".

## FREEDOM

I just attended my father's funeral and I don't want to drink. Through my grief, this phrase keeps popping up in my brain. Because I am sober, because of the Steps, because of a sponsor, because of a higher power, and above all, because I no longer have to live through anything alone, I do not want to drink today.

My father has just lost a year-long battle with lung cancer. Our relationship has been complicated. Like for many alcoholics, my relationships with most people, especially family members, was not easy. I always oscillated between intense love and deep resentment for my father. When I was drinking, I was often absent from family gatherings. If I attended, I was full of judgment and shame inside. I felt detached and alone, especially with close ones.

When my father was diagnosed, I was hit with many feelings. I was mad, sad, scared, and sometimes even numb. I was sober, therefore I felt all those feelings. It was all so real. Sobriety has given me the freedom to choose how to react (mostly not to react) to difficult situations. I shared with other people in the program about it, and found the experience of others helpful and soothing. I kept going to meetings and working with sponsees. I cried a lot too. My sponsor reminded me that I have the freedom to take action today. I had not seen my father in quite some time, but chose to fly home to spend some time with him this summer. AA is everywhere, and I will never forget the members there and their welcome during my stay. Far away from my home and my program, I was still home.

I was able to show up and spend time with my father. For once, I didn't make our relationship all about me. I was able to accept his limitations as well as mine. I was able

to tell him I love him and receive his words too. We went to his first chemo appointment together, and he took me on his last motorcycle ride.

I worked very hard to apply the program, especially Step 10, this year. I received much relief, and I was able to soften the peaks and valleys of our relationship this past year. In December, I travelled again to see him and we spent the only sane Christmas I ever remember spending with him. Now, I understand that this program has given me real freedom.

Two days ago, I was able to speak at his funeral and hold my sister and grandmother's hand. And I did not want to drink.

(Laure A.)

## A.A. DISTRICT: THE ROLE AND MY EXPERIENCE.

My name's Chris and I'm an alcoholic.

I had found sobriety through the practice of the twelve steps and attendance at meetings. Inside was an uneasy feeling that my sobriety wasn't solid. My obsession had been broken up, but I was sitting in meetings feeling critical of the speakers and of A.A. My home group was vacant in the G.S.R position. I put my hand up and was elected.

The district meeting was really overwhelming at first. It felt like there was so much going on, I could hardly follow the flow of the meeting. Most service positions were shortened to acronyms, and even when the full title was given, I still didn't understand or remember the information. It wasn't that the meeting was particularly fast paced, or that people weren't friendly, or even that they didn't explain things, it was all just a lot to take in. Blessedly I had my sponsor with whom I could go over everything.

"What did you understand?"

"Well," I replied, "It seemed like there were all these different reports from people doing things, and then reports from groups and then business where they voted. But I still don't know what they were talking about."

"Give it some time. Let's start by having a group report ready for next time. You don't have to go back if you're not comfortable."

But I wanted to continue. And boy did I put everything into that report. I may have understood nothing, but I had a reputation to uphold!

So, gradually this thing called the district began to make sense. There was a "Public Information and Co-operating with the Professional Community Committee" which was responsible for making A.A. known to the general public and for communicating A.A.'s availability to professionals such as G.P.s and Psychiatrists. These activities formed links to alcoholics unaware of A.A. and in need of an answer.

The "Rally Committee" organised a weekend long event to carry the message and bring enthusiasm to the groups.

Our district was one quarter of a larger location called an "Area". The Area was made up of groups from Ipswich, Toowoomba, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. When all these groups got together at the Area Assembly, they voted on topics, which are

requests from home groups to aid in carrying their message to alcoholics, or ideas on how things could be done better.

Each individual General Service Representative was representing their home group and the District Committee Member spoke on behalf of the District.

The District communicated its activities to the Area and brought Area happenings back to the groups.

So, the District sought out connections with alcoholics, shared enthusiasm, and communicated between the Home Groups and the Area Assembly.

As things became clearer to me, I wanted to find new ways to contribute. When a “subcommittee” formed to host a workshop titled, “The role and function of a District”, I was keen to participate. The venue was booked, AA cooperation and unity swung into action; all the usual organisational needs were attended to. A presentation with the title of the workshop was produced. We were eager to share what we had learned.

Our District then hosted a Regional Forum. Again, I saw teamwork and unity in action. This gave us the chance to connect with members from other areas and participate in panels and presentations. Experience was shared by some of our indigenous members, which gave us insight into some of the challenges they faced when they came to A.A. We were informed that every group in Fiji had representation at the 2015 convention, held in that country. I caught a glimpse of the scope and reach of A.A., and just how far, beyond what I’m able to see, it actually is.

My experience with District has added depth to my sobriety and rounded my understanding. Pushing further into what A.A. offers has sprung enthusiasm in myself, an enthusiasm which has strengthened through mixing with others who are doing the same. My attitude has changed from “what’s wrong with A.A.?” to “what can I contribute to A.A.?”. This attitude is much lighter and goes with me both in and outside of the rooms.

(Chris H.)

## WHAT I’VE HAD TO FIGURE OUT IS THAT I CAN’T FIGURE ANYTHING OUT

While still in my late teens, I appeared in court for the third time that year. The judge told me that I had disgraced my mother and my father and that he had no sympathy for the likes of me: “Ninety days in Juvenile Detention!” My heart sank. Happily, my wonderful father spoke with the local policeman, who put in a good word for me, and I was released on probation and ordered not to drink. Trembling with fear, I resolved to quit drinking forever — I was nineteen. I figured that I had solved my problem; but not one of the following twenty years passed without me resolving to ‘quit drinking forever’, especially during times of another release from the drunk-tank or being fired.

I just couldn’t figure out why ‘quitting drinking forever’ just got me drunk. Another thing I couldn’t figure out is why I couldn’t leave the pub until closing time and often went on a non-stop spree for several days. I couldn’t figure out why, once the boozing

started, I couldn't stop, but when I finally stopped, I couldn't stop starting up again. What a dilemma! But, when I came through the doors of A.A., I learned that my mind contained a mental obsession and that my body was possessed by a physical allergy that demanded I continue drinking once I started. So, I then concluded that I had my alcoholic problem all figured out.

After scanning the Big Book, I figured that if I would just go to meetings and pray the Third Step Prayer everyday, I would then be home free! But alas, that drunken monkey still chattered incessantly and I feared I was headed for trouble. So, I figured I needed a sponsor who would teach me the rest of the steps — I did, and he did, and then I figured out that I had solved my problem.

Nope! Even as I began living in the spirit of Steps 10, 11 & 12, the monkey chattering continued. I figured out that I was destined to be a goner. All I knew to do was, "Let go and let God."

Then, all at once, that exasperating obsession left me and has never returned. I have never been able to figure that one out either! But what I have figured out is that, I can't figure anything out. I can't, but God can.

(Bob S.)

### AA PREAMBLE ©

*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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization 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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