

# THE MIXER

THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

## RESPONSIBILITY AND COURAGE IN A WOMEN'S PRISON MEETING

My name is Judy and I am an alcoholic. For over 32 years I have been working the 12 steps of our program. I believe what got me well, will keep me well. That includes working with others as is spoken about in our beautiful Step 12, which promises me a spiritual awakening. I want stay awake and not fall back to sleep. So, what better way to stay awake then, than to carry the message to the suffering alcoholic who is locked behind the walls of a gaol. So here is my experience of carrying our message to the women in the gaol in Canberra.

This is something I have always wanted to do, but I must confess, until September last year I never got around to it. After getting the paperwork done and attending a security course, I anxiously turned up with another woman for my first meeting there.

The process of getting in can be a bit daunting but I soon learnt which door I can open and which doors you need to wait to have opened. Most weeks it has been pretty smooth but I needed to be prepared at times to be patient as different guards seem to have different ways of doing things. I am not there to question this, and as a guest and an AA member I need to be polite and just go with the flow. I am an example of AA in action, not only to the inmates but also to the staff.

What surprised me though, as I was walking in, was that among this non-descript plain building with high steel fences, there were rows of pretty white roses flowering. A beautiful reminder to me of the beauty of life and the hope that is always here to anyone who hears the message of AA. Recovery from this hopeless disease, is possible. I think to myself, hope is what I have to offer these women.

As I arrive I ask the guards to announce the meeting and soon a few women arrive. Attendance varies between 2 to 6 with a couple of consistent attendees. But sometimes there are none from the gaol. I am not there to question motivation for attending, although my wish is that their attendance is based on a desire to stop drinking.

The meeting here is run much like any other meeting with the preamble, a reading from our Big Book and the chair (usually someone in the gaol) asking people to share. I remember that I am just an attendee at the meeting which is run by the gaol women and share only if asked. The women here only get one hour a week to hear the AA message from recovering women AA on the 'outside'. So I need to keep in mind when

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sharing that I am here to carry AA's message of recovery and not to dilute that message or detract from it by focussing on my own issues whatever they may be.

The women there do it tough and it takes courage to attend. In fact, I think that these women are among the most courageous women I know. As I said before, they only have one meeting per week, limited literature, and anonymity is a big issue as the meeting is announced over the PA and others know what they are doing in the visitor's room. Sometimes other inmates and guards walk in and out during the meeting, which isn't ideal. At times they can be reluctant to share in the meeting itself, in front of others, so I always make some time for a 'meeting after the meeting' and a hug for those who want one. The women need to know that AA members care about them and their recovery.

I hope the women get something out of it. They say they miss the meetings when, at times, usually due to a lockdown, we can't go into the gaol. A lot of the women are in for a fairly short sentence and it's good if they can get some grounding in the AA program and some AA contacts for when they are released.

So what have I got out of this? Well, this is an experience that I should not have missed for so long. I

## 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 volunteer Editor in each Area, thus ensuring a voice for all AA members around Australia; and these Area Editors 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 or contribute by contacting us by email at:

[editor@aamixer.com](mailto:editor@aamixer.com).

For any members wishing to contribute service as part of *The Mixer* team, you can also contact us at the above email address.

have a renewed appreciation for my life, my recovery and sobriety. I can see where this disease can take women, who in other ways appear to be loving daughters and loving mothers. But for the “Grace of God go I”, I say to myself as I leave.

I have admiration for the courage of the women who turn up week after week and try to practice the program in spite of the difficult environment they live in. Well, if they can do it, surely I can. It’s the 12th Step in action with some of our most marginalised women who would otherwise perhaps not have the opportunity to hear our message of hope.

How better can I ‘live’ our Declaration of Responsibility than this?

“I am Responsible.

When anyone anywhere reaches out for help

I want the hand of AA always to be there

And for that:

I am responsible”

I AM ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE

(Judy W. Interchange Group, Canberra ACT)

## THE INVISIBLE BOAT AND THE ALCOHOLIC

There was a drunk who was staggering down a dock, He was a mess and he really wanted to recover. Like all drunks he didn’t really know what recovery was, he thought it was just not drinking, and he wanted to stop drinking – he knew it was killing him slowly. He’d heard about a place where he could recover and life would improve for him. That place was on an island across a sea. He tried and tried to book passage on all the boats at the dock but none knew where it was and they could not take him there. All the money that he had could not get him to this mythical island that he’d heard about. In fact, most of the time he was laughed at when he spoke about it.

All of a sudden he heard a voice speaking to him. He looked down and there were several people and they looked like they were sitting in an invisible boat. They invited him to join them and said they would all row to the island together. They said they knew how to get that island.

He looked at these people and they all looked happy joyous and free. There were a couple of people who looked like they really had it all together. He liked the looks of those two, and the others looked like they believed in them.

They invited him again to join them; and the others on the dock said, “No, don’t go near them!”; but he turned away from their angry pleas and said, “There’s no boat, how are you sitting there?”

They said, “The boat is invisible but it’s seaworthy.” Now, this guy wanted to get to that island very badly, so he gingerly lowered himself into the boat while holding onto the rope ladder for dear life. Still the others tried to talk him out of joining the ones in the boat, and he was ready to run at the first sign of sinking.

He found that there was a boat even though he couldn't see it. They handed him an oar and told him to start rowing. Together they headed out across the sea. He found that, the harder he rowed, the higher off the ocean the boat got. When he stopped rowing, the lower into the sea the boat sank.

It was the same with the other people in the invisible boat. As long as they all rowed everything went smoothly but when they got tired and stopped rowing the boat started to sink.

Now, remember of course, those in the boat, searching for that island where life was more manageable, were all desperate alcoholics.

So, being alcoholics, just what is that sea, which constantly threatens to overwhelm us when we get tired of rowing, made out of?

Just what is overwhelming to most alcoholics? Resentment and Complacency!

These are the things that will swamp my boat and sink me, these are the things I and most alcoholics constantly have to be on guard against.

We know that the solution is to work through the 12 Steps, to keep going to the meetings that remind us that we are alcoholics, and to keep 'rowing', to keep carrying this spiritual message of hope to other alcoholics through love and service.

As long as we do this, the boat will stay high in the water; and whether we get to that island in this lifetime or not, the journey across that Sea of Recovery will be very exciting, interesting, and rewarding as long as we maintain our spiritual condition one day at a time.

Though it may be a free ride at the beginning, it's not free forever. We have to work for our recovery and help others into the boat, no matter what others may say in order to keep them out of it; only then will we realise the real meaning of "Give it away to keep it".

Agatha M

## SOUTHERN REGIONAL FORUM

A.A. unity means as much to me as the other 2 legacies, service and recovery. There has to be a reason why, together, they form the equilateral triangle that is the central visual representation of our way of life. The 12 Traditions that articulate just what A.A. unity is were very much alive at the recent Southern Regional Forum – a whole day on unity, and in particular, the future of our treasured fellowship. Numbers hit 70 from my personal head count – pretty good for a day where recovery was barely discussed!

The best aspect of the day was the conviviality of members in the room. To say that the fellowship here in Victoria has been through some rocky times of late is somewhat of an understatement, and yet whilst this subject was raised during a couple of the 5 one-hour sessions that were held, no conflict or agitation seemed present. Instead, there seemed to be some genuine interest in the A.A. service structure and how the national fellowship needs to move forward and stay relevant.

All manner of subjects were covered, from A.A. and Facebook, through to PI, raising conference topics, the service structure (what it is and what it should be), and keeping members at meetings safe.

Each session was unique and different. Approaches ranged from slick PowerPoint presentations, to simulated Group Consciences, to a one-on-one interview conducted by Penny, our Southern Region Trustee, with Ruby, a Class A Trustee, who flew all the way from Brisbane just to participate!

Oh, and the food was to die for!

Thanks to Area D for hosting the event, as well as the cross-Area committee I was a part of. I'm chair of a very young Area F (Peninsula) and it was eye and heart opening to interact with mature reps from mature Areas. I learned heaps!

A member from the Peninsula recently passed on to me that when the Big Book mentions 'those who have thoroughly followed our path', what it might be referring to is those who have turned the entire equilateral triangle of A.A.'s 3 legacies into a way of life, affecting the psychic change many of us need and seek.

A day like the Southern Regional Forum made feel a little closer to exactly that.

Derek R

## THE BIG BOOK - EIGHTY YEARS OF SAVING LIVES

In May 1938, Bill W. began work on the first draft of a book that would eventually be called, Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book). He had been sober about three and a half years. Dr. Bob was sober a few months less, and the other 100 early members who contributed to the book had been sober for periods ranging from a couple of years to a couple of months.

This rag-tag bunch of drunks, many of whom had failed utterly at life up to this point, were about to launch a book to share with other alcoholics what they had learned from their own experience. The book was to be an escape map from the prison of alcoholism to any who wished to follow it.

The book was to be called "The Way Out" until it was realised that another book already had the title. So the pioneering authors settled for their second preference, "Alcoholics Anonymous".

Published in April 1939 (before TV, before the Internet) it was designed to be a text – a book that an alcoholic on the other side of the United States – and eventually the world – could pick up, read and by so doing, access the 12 steps of the AA program and be freed from their addiction to booze.

According to "A Brief History of The Big Book<sup>1</sup>" [see link below] it has been translated into 69 languages and is read by millions in around 180 countries. Approximately 35 million copies of the first four English editions have been distributed. The book sells about one million copies per year, worldwide.

In April 2012, a bloke in Canberra started reading the Big Book on the Internet, being too frightened and ashamed to go to a meeting, or God forbid, a bookshop or



**The Joy of living**  
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**54<sup>th</sup> Australian National Convention**  
Alcoholics Anonymous with Al-Anon and Alateen participation  
**National Convention Centre Canberra, ACT**  
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library, to get a copy.

Reading it in the dead of night while his wife was asleep, he scoffed at the old 'Yank' language, the ideas of a higher power, and the seemingly insane concept of powerlessness. ('Giving away' my power – how was this going to help?) Time and time again he'd get to the point of putting the silly 'book' down and just accepting that there was no way out of his drinking problem...and then he'd read something that made him realise that the people who wrote this book, back in the 1930s, had experienced the same feelings of hopelessness and bewilderment as he had.

They knew what it was like to want to stop drinking – to want to get control of your life and to have failed again and again. But they had found a way out – and through this 'silly book' were sharing what they had learned, across distance and decades with this bloke in Canberra, just as they had with millions before him.

The book led to an email. The email led to a meeting. The meeting led to more meetings, to identification, to hope, to fellowship and to recovery.

That Canberra bloke from 2012 has not had a drink since that first meeting. He's living a life of happiness and purpose that he just couldn't imagine. Equally unimaginable to someone who couldn't go a day without a drink – he's living a life without booze.

Eighty years and a world away from where it was penned, that 'silly book' has changed his life – and that of his family.

The silly book turned out to be a good read.

The 2019 AA National Convention to be held in Canberra will celebrate eighty years of the Big Book. Tickets are now available <https://www.aanatcon2019.com.au/>.

(1[https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/f-166\\_BigBook\\_BriefHistory.pdf](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/f-166_BigBook_BriefHistory.pdf))

(Paul K., AA Area B (ACT/NSW),

2019 AA Australia Convention (Canberra), Public Information Coordinator)

## STEPPING IT OUT IN STEP 10

Let's look closely at what p.84 (of the 'Big Book') says about Step 10:

"This thought brings us to Step Ten, which suggests we "continue" [keep doing the same action] to take personal inventory [Step 4] and "continue" [keep doing the same action] to set right any new mistakes as we go along [Step 9].

We vigorously commenced this way of living [Steps 4-9] as we cleaned up the past [Step 9].

We have entered the world of the Spirit.

Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should "continue" for our lifetime.

"Continue" to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear [Step 4].

When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them [Steps 6, 7, 11].

We discuss them with someone immediately [Step 5] and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone [Step 9].

Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help [Step 12]. Love and tolerance of others is our code."

Pretty obvious Bill wanted us to continuing using the same action to keep us God that brought us to God.

As you can tell by the step markings above, in my experience Step 10 is 4 thru 9.

My daily reprieve of prayer and mediation is dependent on whether or not I am doing Step 10, as is my ability to sponsor.

There is one thing indisputable about Step 10, which is we cannot get past the word "continue."

Not only does it say 'continue' in the actual written Step 10 on p.59, "Continued to take personal inventory [Step 4] and when we were wrong promptly admitted it [Step 5]", it says it in the very first sentence about Step 10 on p.84, "This thought brings us to Step Ten, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory [Step 4] and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along [Step 9]." And then it says "continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear." What does continue mean??

Some definitions I have heard are - to keep doing something without ending; another is - to maintain without interruption; and another is - to do something repeatedly; but my personal favourite definition for 'continue' is one that goes perfectly with Step 10 - to keep doing a specified course of action.

The specified course of action is Steps 4 through 9. Why would I not continue to the same simple specified course of action that got me to God?

I mean, it did rocket me into the 4th dimension. And I can only continue something I have already done. One thing that is fact, we know it works. Why not continue it?

Even though I look at Step 10 as 4 thru 9, I actually look at the 10th step as simply the action of those steps inventory, talking to another about it with another, giving it to God, making amends quickly and turning my mind over to a person I can help. That is truly what we are continuing. Practicing the principles in all our affairs.

**If you do not consider Step 10 is Steps 4 thru 9, I have 5 questions for you:**

1. How do we get past the word continue?
2. If am not continuing Steps 4 thru 9, what am I continuing?
3. If Step 10 is not 4 thru 9, is my will and life still turned over to the care of God?
4. Why wouldn't we want to continue the course of action that awoke us to God?
5. If it is not 4 through 9, are you doing something that is not in the Big Book?

Step 10 is all about repetition, repeating the same action over and over again. We must continue it the rest of our life. I don't believe in annual house cleaning.

Annual house cleaning is for people too lazy to do Step 10 when things come up. Since they don't do Step 10 they get stuck in accumulated garbage.

I have personally known recovered people be overwhelmed by problems such as a family member passing away, a bad break up or divorce, even depression, and fears such as fear of losing their marriage, job, house, etc.

After a while the old actor reappears and they disappear simply because they did not get rid of all the garbage when it came up in 10.

I watched them go from a spiritual way of life to complete insanity all because continuous inventory became seldom or annually. They became full of fear and harbored resentments. Life just bothers them.

P.66 describes perfectly what happens to the spiritually awoke alcoholic who harbors resentment: "For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit [world of the spirit]."

The insanity of alcohol (obsession) returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die." If that is not a warning, I do not know what is.

The Step 10 promises on p.83-84 state, "Sanity has returned"; this where the promise of Step 2 occurs. Step 2 is just asking us to believe that we could be restored to sanity, and now it actually happens.

The greatest promise in the entire Big Book is, "We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed."

Later it says, "That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition." Step 10 is all about staying in fit spiritual condition.

The last sentence in the 12th step tells us to "practice these principles [Steps 4 thru 9] in all our affairs."

Next time you look in the mirror, ask yourself honestly, in my recent situations, with my thoughts, and actions, am I practicing those principles [Steps 4 thru 9] in "all" my affairs?

It can be the difference between life and death.

We need to maintain and grow.

P.84 states, "This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime."

Agatha M

## THE ATHEIST PATHWAY - THE OFFER OF HOMEOSTASIS AS PART OF STEP 2

The idea came from the BB story about the doctor who realizes he does the operations, but some unexplainable power does the healing.

We know scientifically that it works in our bodies. I suggest I can see how it works in the world, so I also conclude it works in the universe.

Science accepts that it works in the physical realm. Why not in the spiritual (nonphysical) realm?

Homeostasis is a power we take for granted but absolutely cannot control. ...Like turning on the light switch and taking it for granted there will be light...like drawing our next intake of oxygen to live.....like not even considering the next heartbeat or that we are a body awash with minerals and electrolytes and other basic chemicals required for life itself.....we just take all that for granted and accept it.

Borrowing from the tactic Bill suggests when talking to a religious person, I

accept that the person I'm talking to may know much more about the science than I. He certainly will cling to his idea that he's neatly explained God away.

So, I ask ... what if homeostasis is all God is? What if people like me have assigned the personification of "God" to that power?

Here, we usually step onto some common ground.

I suggest that pouring alcohol poison down my throat for years has disrupted my physical homeostasis. My way of thinking disrupts my mental and emotional homeostasis.

Dr Carl Jung taught us the neuropathways in our brains have become hardwired, so I can't just think or will myself back to sanity. Those pathways MUST be rewired, but how?

I explain how the steps did it for me. Action against the will. It breaks the signals and redirects them. Homeostasis, that force over which I have no power, has room to work in me.

Attributes I don't want (envy, fear, anger, judgement, selfishness, etc.) start being replaced with attributes I DO want (humility, love, faith, serenity, etc).

And so it begins.....only willingness, honest and open-mindedness are needed and we are on our way to Step 3.

Agatha M

## HEARD AROUND THE TRAPS

'Getting sober, staying sober, living sober'

'Meditation is cultivating the soil; prayer is planting the seed'

## STEP 2 – THE BEGINNING OF SANITY

A lot of people talk about this as the step about insanity; but I have always thought, and heard others say, that first two steps represent the beginning of the return of sanity: the opening of my hitherto habitually closed mind through the first Step; and the hope that comes with the practice of Step 2. The first step is me admitting that I am in darkness; in the second step I am seeing that there is a light, which of course gives me the option of deciding to set out towards that light (in the third step). I always associate Step 2 with hope.

The key words for me are 'that' and 'could': it is just a recognition that it is possible to recover from the terrible state of active alcoholism, including the restlessness, irritability and discontent that characterises the unrecovered alcoholic between drinks. As with the following step, there is no action at this stage: this step reminds me that the steps overall are a statement of experience, rather than directions ('We did' rather than 'Thou shalt': which is perhaps reflective of Bill W's journey, from his hot flash experience in the hospital to pacing up and down the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel and realising that he need to talk to another alky to keep himself sober).

This step has been an important experience of humility for me: just because I can't see a way out (1st Step) doesn't mean that there isn't one; my own power is not the last word on the matter of my alcoholism! There are those drinking who will admit to being powerless, even boast of it from the barstool, but then say that, therefore, it is impossible for them to stop drinking, that AA doesn't and can't work for them. Step 2 tells me that a more humble attitude is required, to recognise that, although I can't get myself sober on my own, it doesn't mean I can't become sober through the help of a power greater than myself - whether I take up the offer or not, the levelling of pride is to accept that it is possible to stay sober even though I have failed in all my attempts. I can see that others like me have recovered. The question then becomes one of choice and humility, of asking for and accepting help (Step 3). 'Could', then, refers me to the remaining steps: Step 2 is what is on offer in AA ('sanity')\*; but it can be that I see sobriety as a 'good idea' but still don't make any commitment or action towards it. Nowadays, Steps 1-3 are a daily practice: each day I accept my need for a programme for sober living and that there is such a programme that works, and then I commit to this programme for this day.

(Brad S.)



From our friends overseas, Nagani and Tomas, a photo from one of the oldest Swedish meetings, in Stockholm.

## GENERAL EDITOR'S NOTE

There are a few principles guiding our approach to *The Mixer*: we should publish original contributions, although we feel that stories already published in local newsletters etc. make a welcome contribution; we should stick to stories, and leave announcements, meetings lists etc. to those local publications that do the job so well (our only exception is the National Convention - being a national event!); and our stories should come from our readers, in Australia and overseas, both to provide a distinctly Australian perspective while also allowing members overseas who have taken an interest in our magazine to contribute - such as our great friends, Nagani and Tomas from Sweden, former visitors to the Australian fellowship, who have told many members around the world on their travels about *The Mixer* - one of the reasons, no doubt, that our publication reaches members across several continents and many countries (now including, they tell us, Germany and Italy). We also continue to feel that the principle 'Keep it simple' works best: we publish online to keep financial and organisational requirements to a minimum; and our stories come from Area Editors and other members in different locations around Australia, ensuring a geographic diversity in experience, strength and hope. We encourage anyone wishing to be involved with *The Mixer*, or to submit a story, to contact us at the email address at the bottom of this page. Over time, our magazine is building up a fine collection of stories: you can find all past issues on our website, [www.aamixer.com](http://www.aamixer.com).

## 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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