

THE MIXER

THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

‘AN AUSSIE ABROAD, DRUNK AND SOBER’

God willing, next week I will celebrate 8 years. A friend of ours says, "there are no big deals in AA, except birthdays". And I agree - birthdays are a big deal. I love to celebrate sobriety, for myself and also for others. It's important that the newcomers get to see the joy. Because when I first came into AA, this is not what it looked like to me - I didn't forecast happiness. It was the end for me, my life was 'over'. There was to be no fun and I'd have no friends. That isn't the case - I'm the happiest I have ever been. And I have more loving friends than I have ever have. I literally have a life beyond my wildest dreams.



I am from Melbourne but got sober in Singapore. I had been living in Asia working in Finance for almost 10 years. So for 10 years I partied and partied hard. I was a member of 'out with the boys, in with the men'. Although there were many times the men were in without me.

I drank alcoholically from the start. I started drinking properly at about 17. Prior to that I drank the odd shandy with my Dad and grandparents. At 17 I would get into fights drunk and have memory loss. I would defend myself by blaming everyone else for the fights and thought memory loss was normal. But none of it was normal. At 18 and in the early days of University a new friend gave me a button - 'Instant arsehole, just add alcohol'. When drunk I resembled nothing like the man I was when not drunk, and most definitely nothing like the man I wanted to be. I knew I had a problem early - a work colleague took me to a meeting in Sydney when I was about 25, but I couldn't bear the idea of giving up alcohol so I went out for more. All I wanted was to fit in. And drink like a normal person.

My career was taking off despite all the trouble I was getting into with my drinking.
[Continued p. 2]

Are you an Australian AA member abroad or know one? We would like to hear from Aussie members overseas: contact us at editor@aamixer.com

1-3	AN AUSSIE ABROAD: DRUNK AND SOBER
2	CONTENTS; STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
4-5	A NECESSARY DEPENDENCE: TRADITION ONE
5	A TRADITION ONE/ 12TH STEP EXPERIENCE
6-8	OUR THREE-PART PROGRAM
9-10	STEP TWO - AND THAT ALL-IMPORTANT WORD
10	AROUND THE TRAPS
11	CONCEPT III: EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN AA
12	EDITOR'S NOTE; AA PREAMBLE

I left to Hong Kong in 2000 and found cocaine. Cocaine was the answer - it would keep me somewhat sober, I wouldn't get memory loss. And would stay alert. The problem was, I would go for 3 days. And then I would be drinking to come down from the coke. So I would begin the 3 day binge regulating my drinking with cocaine, and then 3 days later drinking red wine to come down off the cocaine. Not my idea of fun.

I found my way into AA again in 2009, and thank God - have stayed ever since. It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I don't miss the drinking. Sometimes I wish I was normal - I feel like a drink, but I know I can't. I know I am bodily and mentally different from my fellows. I know that to drink spells disaster for me. Getting sober was tough. Sure. Coming into the rooms was the toughest part; that final surrender. But the alternative was much tougher. To be 'out there' still, trying to drink like a normal person. Living an unmanageable life with no real substance. Living a life without spiritual principles. Without the tools to handle life's challenges and enjoy peace of mind. That's tough.

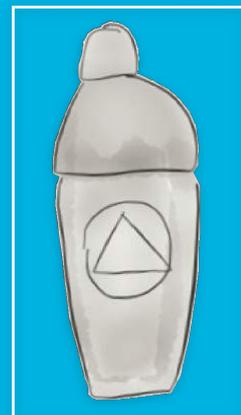
I got sober in Singapore, amongst a Motley Crüe of drunks. We had them from all over the world and all walks of life. They held me from the very first day. They didn't push me, tell me what to do - they welcomed me and showed me by example what was on offer. And after

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.

Shares 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.

(Logo by Dave)



a little while - of just showing up - I wanted what they had. They laughed like they meant it, and never at one another. They laughed with one another. So I started to do what they do. I joined in. I got a sponsor and did some work. I got a service position. And attended regular meetings. And I began to feel peace inside. Since getting sober my life has changed more than I could ever have imagined. I never expected my life to look like it does today. I never had any hope of this sort of happiness, really. Looking back on it - I had absolutely no hope. I was doomed to a miserable life and an alcoholic death.

My Mum passed away when I was 1yr sober. Which is a gift. She got to see me happy before she passed. She knew I battled with life and drank too heavily. She never judged, but she knew I struggled and wanted something different. So when she saw me sober - she was happy. I come from good Alcoholic stock. My brother is sober 3 years now. Of my other 2 - 1 is trying, desperately. And the other is in and out of denial. They both see that they have a problem. They just can't accept the solution. For me, that was because I didn't really understand the problem. My sponsor talks about a Step 1 experience. And a true understanding of the problem. Which I get from the Dr's opinion in the Big Book.

I love AA. It's changed my life. It's changed my internals. It's changed pretty much everything. I have the tools, they key to happiness. It sounds pretty lame - but it is exactly what AA is for me - the key to happiness. It's where I get to change my attitude. The way I think and see a situation. Today I am married, to a sober member of AA. We met in the rooms. She is my best friend and wife. Prior to meeting my wife I had never had a successful relationship. That part of my life was really unmanageable. And then I did a fearless and thorough sex inventory - and boom - married. I'm not kidding, that's my experience - I was sober almost 5 years and hadn't done a sex inventory. I had done the steps 3 times but never a fears and/or sex inventory. So in 2014, with a new sponsor, I did sex, and it changed my life - and soon after I was in a loving relationship. And now we are happily married. We have travelled the world. We have been to meetings all through America and Asia. We love it.

AA was once described to me, 'it's like the mafia - you have family all over the world. And if you leave, you die.' Pretty harsh, but true. I know it to be true. We have been welcomed and loved by AA all around the world. And I have seen what happens when a real alcoholic goes back to drinking. We live in Bali now. We have an amazing life over there. We have a good business. And a lot of friends. We spend a lot of time in Australia, seeing family and friends. And attending a lot of AA. We love AA, especially in big cities - with lots of meetings including book studies, men's and women's meetings. And new faces and stories. Today I have a life beyond my wildest dreams. I never thought I would actually say that, let alone believe it. But it's true. I arrived, and scoffed. Scoffed out loud. Today I pray. Smile. And thank God. Most of all I try and stay out of the way and help where I can. God bless.

(Steve. Photo by Mike, Singapore)

A NECESSARY DEPENDENCE: TRADITION ONE

Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity. (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*)

Our A.A. experience has taught us that (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Long Form):

Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

I find it hard to understand when I hear members, some who have been around for many years, say, "I don't know much about the Traditions ...". There seems to be some perception that the Traditions are for someone else, those members involved in "service". This quote below, from *AA Comes of Age* (page 119), makes it pretty clear that my recovery, and hence my life, is dependent on the Traditions:

"Unless each AA member follows to the best of his ability our suggested 12 Steps of recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. ... We must obey certain principles, or we die... The same stern threat applies to the group itself. Unless there is approximate conformity to AA's 12 Traditions, the group too can deteriorate and die".

Sure, I need the Steps to recover, but how do I learn about the Steps, how do I 'carry this message', unless there is a group which is part of the worldwide AA family? Where would I get my literature, where would I find a sponsor, where would I go to meetings? Even if am a loner, how would I make contact with other AAs? So, my survival as an individual relies on the survival of AA, starting with my home group.

As we learnt in Step 4, "...selfish and self-centeredness ..." are "...the root of our troubles ..." (Big Book, page 62), and "...defective relations with other human beings have nearly always been the immediate cause of most of our woes, including our alcoholism" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, page 80). The Traditions are guidelines to help us operate in harmony with others so that we can survive. In our own self-interest, we learn to put the common good first, instead of demanding that others conform to what we want; we sacrifice our own egotistical demands to uphold unity.

If a group becomes dominated by individuals, or the unity of the group is threatened by controversy, it will cease to be healthy and can very easily disintegrate. Individual members may be left without a group and perhaps even leave AA. So, personal recovery is put at risk when the first Tradition is not followed.

The principles embedded in the Traditions can also be applied to each member's personal life. The first Tradition, for example, can be applied to the family. Within the family, the welfare of the whole family must come first, ahead of the individual. Allowing

each member of the family to be heard, even if the final decision does not suit everyone, can mean that all members feel respected and there is much more harmony.

The questions below help me to identify how I am applying the principles of Tradition One, both in AA and in my family. They often make me squirm, and help me to see when my ego has gotten out of control:

- What am I willing to give up for AA and my group? My time? My ego? My status?
- What affect do my actions have on my group and AA as a whole?
- Am I still a taker? Or have I become a giver?
- Am I critical or judgemental of others in my group?
- Do I listen when others have something to say? Or do I always have to voice my opinion?
- Am I unwilling to accept group or AA decisions that I don't agree with?

So, do the Traditions apply to me? Are they important for my recovery, even if I am new to AA? Would I be able to apply Tradition One in my family life as well as in AA?

(Pam)

A TRADITION ONE/12TH STEP EXPERIENCE

My home group were all lining up for our group conscience, ready for pitched battle over issues of major importance, such as which brand of coffee to buy. Group conscience meetings could be long, drawn out, torrid affairs: heated arguments, personalities clashing, drunks trying to learn how to live and work together sober - not for the faint hearted. As we were about to commence proceedings, from the other end of the long basement hall in which we held our meetings, a sorry-looking character appeared:

"I am sorry, this is my first time at AA, sorry I am too late for the meeting. But I need help, can I talk with someone?"

A dozen AA members, without a word, have the same thought. The Secretary says, "Sure, welcome; we are about to have a group business meeting, but why don't you sit down and join us, it won't take long". The newcomer comes in and meekly takes a chair, while the Chair starts conducting the most friendly, cooperative, productive, and short AA group conscience meeting I had ever attended. We wrap up business in around 20 minutes, and the whole lot of us accompany the newcomer to a local cafe, where we spend the afternoon sharing our experience, strength and hope. Did the newcomer stay sober? I don't know; but I learnt a valuable lesson about Tradition One; and its vital connection to Step Twelve.

OUR THREE-PART PROGRAM

When I came to AA for help in 1969 I was 29, and for some months had been hoping that Death would hurry up and just take me out. I couldn't live with the drinking, but didn't have the courage to kill myself. I knew the alcohol was going to do the job but it just wouldn't hurry up.

I also knew that AA was the answer, but it was totally beyond me to reach out, until I met an AA member face to face. There were no Rehabs then – it was AA or Amen. This AA man was the gift from Beyond that suddenly, unexpectedly, opened the door to let me out of hell.

With the help of this guy and his wife, I stepped through that door into a world I had no idea existed. I was shown different ways to avoid the first drink ten minutes at a time, if I was willing to do whatever it took. I was so desperate, and the members told me that, if they could do it, so could I. I believed them. I'd had the Big Book all my drinking years and knew that AA was a Power greater than Alcohol. It was so exciting going step by step, day by day, into an unknown world where everything they told me seemed to work – because I desperately needed and wanted it to do so.

This joyousness lasted about two months, and then I started to realise that the reasons I had needed the alcohol were still there – the fears, the shyness, the self-loathing and the inability to mix with people, all those features of the mental and emotional side of the illness that had controlled my life throughout my childhood and made living painful and impossible. It was then that my Group explained to me that the Answer lay in Bill's statement that "rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path". I instantly asked what was this Path. They explained that the AA path was the three-part Program of Recovery, Unity and Service. They told me that only by immersing myself in all three parts could I hope to maintain sobriety – "there can be no reservations" they told me.

I tried studying the "Twelve and Twelve" book, but because I was so immature, nothing I did would work – I just couldn't understand myself nor differentiate between Truth and the Lies I had told myself all my life. In fact, I got so confused and distressed I came within a whisker of picking up a drink. Fortunately a wise woman told me that I was trying to force it on myself against the Guidance of my Higher Power, and I'd better stop and wait for Him to show me when the time was right. I'm so glad I listened and I finally was able to heed the Guidance and let it go. Eventually I began to make real meaningful progress on the Steps in my fourth year.

Meantime, my Group was introducing me to Unity and Service, i.e. by belonging to a good, well-structured Group and participating in all the Group's activities. It was through these parts of the Program that I was able to learn how to deal with the mental and emotional parts of my disease and to handle daily life. As I learned to fit in with other

Group members I began to learn little ways to be able to talk with people – “to stop thinking about what people might think of me” and to try to find out things about them, by asking them questions. They told me that people love listeners, so I decided to try to be a listener.

I began to learn that, in our Traditions, the Principle of Anonymity within the Fellowship actually meant that there are no top-dogs or members more important than any others, and that everyone’s opinions and thoughts need to be listened carefully to. I began to let go of the snobbish attitude inherited from my family that Education gave people their value. I listened to an old guy one day at a committee meeting who proposed an idea for our activity, and Wow, it was great and the whole committee took it on board... but he had no secondary schooling! I was very humbled by that experience and really valued that guy then, and all my fellow members.

About this time I was fortunate to be curious about the “third basic text”, as Bill called it: *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. AA only had three books at that time, and every one was considered a basic text for learning the Program. I picked up this one, which told in detail the history of AA and how and why the founders developed the Program of Three Legacies. I was spellbound by it, and still feel it is the best AA book of them all. Any time I want to understand any of the Principles in our three-part Program, this is where I turn. These experiences and understandings, developed by the early members, are all spelled out there, and I began to understand the reasons for them and how deeply spiritual every one of the 36 Principles is.

I loved the photos in the book of the early days too. Later in my Service adventures (and that’s what they’ve turned out to be), I found myself visiting Bill’s home, “Stepping Stones”, and having afternoon tea with his wife, Lois. She handed me the key to Bill’s little shack, “Wits End”, down the back garden, where he used to write and where he wrote “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions”. I went in and sat in Bill’s chair where he sat, and have a photo of myself there. On that same journey I visited Dr Bob’s house and sat on his front porch, where he and Bill sat together and talked about reaching out to other alcoholics, that they could not hug this miracle they had discovered to themselves. It gave me goose-bumps thinking of their work to get their message out, and that it had travelled far across the world and south to Australia, to me. This is what my spiritual concept of Service is today, and I can still get goose-bumps when I see someone else recovering today as a result of some of my activities.

Most of my service experiences have challenged me to the core of my Fears and Shyness. But I was taught by my early Group oldtimers that I should never say No to an AA job and to remember the second half of Step Eleven and ask for the Power to carry out the HP’s Will. As the result, I have learned to never again run away, but to hang on to my Higher Power’s hand and He will always be there with all the courage I need. I have also learned just how reliable He always is, and how loving, protective and always present. I owe Him and AA so much, and I feel that Service and Unity are the only ways

to express my gratitude. I hope to be always willing to be His junior partner. I am still an alcoholic, and as such, I still experience fear, but not such irrational ones that result from panic thinking into the future. And today I know that the old instinct to run away is a choice to which I can say, No.



“Stepping Stones” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stepping_Stones_\(house\)#/media/File:Stepping_Stones,_Katonah,_NY.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stepping_Stones_(house)#/media/File:Stepping_Stones,_Katonah,_NY.jpg))

Dr Bob’s house (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dr._Bob_%27s_House.jpg)

It is truly amazing to me to hear how so few members these days can pass on the AA Program fully – because they think it is only the Twelve Steps – and they think that Unity and Service are either optional or are just “Politics”. It is so damaging to AA as well, to its future and to those who will not hear it. Those who pass that “Politics” message obviously don’t understand the AA Program and how necessary all three parts are. They are denying true recovery to their sponsees. The Twelve Steps are about learning how to clear up the mess of the past and to get to know ourselves. It is the other two-thirds of the Program that provides us with the means and the principles we need to overcome the mental, emotional and spiritual sides of the disease that continue throughout our lives, for as long as the disease stays with us.

These Three Legacies are given to us by our founders to treasure and to pass on.

AA cannot survive if we don’t (or can’t).

(Anne)



Would you like to share your experience, strength and hope regarding a particular Step, Tradition, or Concept, or an AA-related Topic of your choice? Contact us at editor@aamixer.com

STEP TWO – AND THAT ALL-IMPORTANT WORD

When I came into the rooms of AA I was very sick - physically, spiritually, in financial trouble and having lost the ability to manage my life. I truly qualified for the Fellowship. I didn't know it till I got to the rooms, but Step 1 described my existence perfectly.

Of all the troubles that alcohol had brought to me, the one which troubled me most was my insane behaviour – which, like all good drunks, I used as a reason to drink: Question: 'Why do you drink so much?' Answer: 'Well...I hate what I do as a mad drunk and it's all very upsetting, so I seek to blank out the memories of my madness with...alcohol!'. That crazy round of behaviour was my daily life.

When I got to AA, and after a few days of meetings and not drinking, I rediscovered literacy – I could read the steps. I skim-read Step 1: unmanageable - check. Step 2: sanity...really? That's what I wanted most, back in my life. I hated being irrational, selfish, unheeding, antisocial. For god's sake, I was a woman in my 40s with a full-time job and children – and I was also a top-up, fall-down drunk. It was pretty awful.

It was awful, and had been for years; but it took me a long time to admit I'd been beaten by alcohol. My best thinking didn't get me into the Fellowship; I stopped being able to think, and was directed there by people who knew better than I did where I needed to go to find relief. Alcoholism is a family disease, many readers will know that personally. In my case, recovery was also a family-affair. I was directed to AA by a sober sister: something I'll never stop being grateful about. Coming into the rooms and hearing from other members' experiences that I could hope for a return to sane behaviour was, probably, the first miracle that unfolded to me.

Many people express wariness about the words of the first part of Step 2 – 'What's this about a Higher Power? Does that mean Religion, or - worse - is this a Cult'? That aspect of the step didn't bother me at all - it was so evident at the end of my drinking that I had no power in my life. For many newcomers (particularly, perhaps, for women, who read and hear for the first time the references to God as a male god), the talk of Higher Power and references to God are among the many strange and disconcerting elements to meetings: people talk freely about being beaten by alcohol, and defer thankfully to a Power outside themselves. For me, I was perhaps fortunate that my eyes and brain weren't processing too well: I didn't read the text of the Steps or Serenity Prayer in detail in early recovery. This meant that I noticed other things:

- Members at meeting were clean – I had begun to forget to wash regularly
- Members looked each other in the eye – I'd stopped doing that
- Members didn't seem miserable and terrified – I'd been both for a long, long time
- Members hugged each other freely - I'd avoided close contact for many, many months to try to hide the smell of alcohol, which often reeked from me

AA and Recovery have given me back my sanity and allowed me to behave like an adult again. The promise offered and the hope I received from Step Two I will always be grateful for. My Higher Power is the universe in general and the rooms of AA in particular. I will always be thankful that my illness took me to AA and not a wet-brain or drunken death. It's a miracle for me to be able to write that I haven't had a drink, today.

(By an AA member, sober today)

AROUND THE TRAPS

"I thought I could just sit on my ass in meetings and get recovery through osmosis; but then I realised, you can't get sober through assmosis".

"Wisdom is the capacity to learn".

A memory of a departed OSM: I was in the Chair at a large, city lunchtime meeting, the first time a much-loved and respected older sober member returned there after losing a leg to diabetes. I called him to speak, and he started slowly to make his way to the front – halfway there, he called out, 'you better call another speaker until I get there'. I saw older members nudging newcomers - listen up big. The OSM finally makes it to the microphone, pauses in his distinctive style – "...name's Mick... I am an alcoholic... and I still drink alcoholically". I look around the room – stunned faces, mouths open. A few more moments' pause... "I just don't drink alcohol".

"In the first six steps we look backwards to the wreckage of the past, and let go; in the last six steps, we look towards a vision of the future, and embrace it".

From the book, *Alkiespeak* (reprinted with permission):

"Alcohol kills a lot of brain cells. Just not the cell that tells me I can drink again" - Broken Hill Jack.

"I only let go to adjust my grip" - Wendy.

An idiot's guide to Steps 1-3:

1. I need help
2. There is help available
3. HELP!!!!



Have you heard an anecdote, saying or AA cliché around the Fellowship that you'd like to share? Contact us at editor@aamixer.com

CONCEPT III: THE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN AA

To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A.—the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives—with a traditional “Right of Decision”. (The Australian AA Service Manual, page 145).

Concept III hinges upon a word in Traditions Two, ‘trusted’ (servants): we invest trust in our elected leaders within the AA structure – including those chairing a meeting, arranging the literature table, or holding a tea towel!

Leadership is a much misunderstood phenomenon: I have heard a member say, recently, “there are no leaders in AA”! Perhaps more’s the pity. Leadership means responsibility: leaders are charged with the responsibility to lead, to act. Leaders in AA have to make decisions: that is what we are asked to do, on behalf of a group, when we are given a service role. But to go with that responsibility, there has to be the appropriate level of authority clearly defined for the role: this Concept is closely allied with Concept X, “Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.”

An example is the Chairperson of a meeting. Although the Chair, when required, may turn to the group for consultation or help (for example, when a drunk is interrupting the meeting), when we appoint a Chair we are assigning them the Right of Decision, to pick speakers, perhaps to choose a reading, or decide when to have the half-time break etc. But this freedom has its limits, defined by the Group Conscience: for example, a Chairperson might decide to ‘open the floor’ for any speaker who ‘feels the need’; but the group might tell the Chair that this is not the format of the meeting, and request the Chair to continue picking speakers. The Chairperson is given the responsibility to lead the meeting, and the right to choose speakers; but their service role as Chairperson does not, for this group, include the freedom to open the floor. One hears members occasionally complaining about the Chairperson’s choice of speakers; but this is not an issue of the Chairperson’s right to decide on speakers, but of the group’s choice of Chairperson for that meeting.

The Right of Decision also extends to our Area Delegates, for example, when they carry the group conscience of their Area to the Conference. Although they have a responsibility to faithfully represent the views of their respective Areas at Conference, having done so, Delegates are free to vote as their own conscience and intelligence dictates: arguments presented by other Area Delegates might lead them to change their mind. If they were not invested with the Right of Decision, the Conference would be unworkable: there would be no potential for sharing and discussion of experience, strength and hope, for change and growth in our ideas. (Anon.)

GENERAL EDITOR'S NOTE

We know how important sharing our experience, strength and hope is - at meetings, one on one in cafes, by phone, in letters and emails to one another: when we share honestly with one another or with a potential newcomer, we recreate that first meeting between Bill W. and Dr Bob; which took place because Bill realised, standing in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, that unless he found another drunk to tell his story to, he would drink himself. We also know how important writing is in our work on the Steps; undoubtedly, the early Fellowship likewise benefitted from distilling into writing, in its first publication, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the 'Big Book'), the combined experience, strength and hope of the early fellowship; as did their readers. So we can appreciate how significant it is that we now have a forum for a written expression and exploration of the experience, strength and hope of AA members in Australia.

We hope that *The Mixer* will be a forum for AA members around Australia and overseas to share personal stories of alcoholism and recovery, and to discuss and reflect on issues and topics of interest to AA members and to the Australian Fellowship. In this online magazine, which can be downloaded for printing, we include stories, essays, short pieces and images, on a range of topics, from ID stories to pieces on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts, as well as anecdotes, sayings etc. We invite AA members to contribute their experience, strength and hope in writing, so that other members and, potentially, newcomers, might hear the message that saved our lives, and more importantly, our spirits!

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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