

The Maintenance Questions

Those wishing to continue to use a structured approach to maintaining their sobriety can work the Maintenance questions usually in conjunction with a sponsor who has completed the Maintenance questions themselves. The sponsee should only answer these questions on completion of Steps 1-12.

How the questions are used and how shared is a matter for you to agree with your Sponsor. The questions relate to and cover the 12 Steps.

As an alternative and depending on the circumstances you may choose instead to re-work the Steps as already set out in this guide. The choice lies with you, your Higher Power and your Sponsor.

All references to the Alcoholic Anonymous Big Book are to the Fourth edition, unless otherwise specified. Third edition material is tricky to find, and so these stories are included in an appendix to this document.

*Most of the older material is available on **silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/***

*This document is available at **augustinerecovery.org***

The 60 questions

- 01 “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” Re-read Step 1. List the areas of your life that you have surrendered to your Higher Power.
- 02 Re-read Step 1. How is admission of powerlessness the first step in liberation for you? Do you believe the program can liberate you?
- 03 Read Chapter 2 in *The AA Big Book*. Write on your feelings regarding the statements made in the italicised paragraph on page 24.
- 04 Read page 43 in *The AA Big Book*. Discuss the idea that “at certain times (the sex and love addict) has no effective mental defence against the first act out.”
- 05 Read Chapter 6 in *The AA Big Book*. Discuss how reaching out and helping someone else can be part of our willingness to have all our defects removed.
- 06 Take time out today and plan a ‘special set of moments’ during your day. Time alone, time with a friend, time meditating. Discuss and reflect on the idea, “we know how to feel bad and we are learning how to feel good.”
- 07 Read Step 2. Discuss and reflect on the idea, “this is the rallying point to sanity.”
- 08 Read Chapter 1 in the *AA Big Book* (‘Bill’s Story’). “Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning.” Discuss and reflect on the idea that making a new beginning each day is testimony to our belief in a Higher Power.
- 09 “Service leads to sanity.” Discuss and reflect on how service has kept sanity in your life.
- 10 Read in *AA Big Book*, pages 268-76, ‘Keys To The Kingdom.’ Take a ‘Recommitment Inventory.’ Discuss what you were like, what happened and what is happening in your life now.
- 11 Read Step 3. “Willingness is the key.” Discuss and reflect on what affirmative action you have taken in the last two weeks within the context of the program.

- 12 Read in *AA Big Book*, Chapter 4, 'We Agnostics.' Discuss and reflect on "the great reality (that) is deep down within us."
- 13 Read in *AA Big Book*, Appendix II, 'Spiritual Experience.' Discuss your awakening or reawakening spiritually.
- 14 'I listened but I didn't hear.' How have you learned to listen to yourself and others and stay quiet within?
- 15 Read in *AA Big Book*, pages 289-300, 'Fear of Fear.' Discuss and reflect on the idea that our greatest fear is often that we will become a different person.
- 16 Read Step 4 in the *AA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)* book. Take a spot inventory that can update the inventory you gave away in Step 5. Discuss defects that have arisen, emotions that won't be placed on hold and physical cravings about these two other states.
- 17 Read the Serenity Prayer in Step 12. Read it four times. Write on what you accept that you cannot change. Then, the things that you have changed. How do you know the difference?
- 18 Read *AA Big Book*, Chapter 5, "people of faith have courage." Discuss and reflect on the courage your faith has given you.
- 19 Discuss how you use the tools of reading, writing and sharing to deal with your reality.
- 20 Read in *AA Big Book* the last paragraph on page 68-69, "Now about sex..." Discuss and reflect on what the knowledge of this part of your recovery has done for you.
- 21 Read in *AA Big Book*, (3rd Edition) pages 400-421, 'Stars Don't Fall.' Discuss and reflect on "now came the black and endless dismal night..." as it was in your life. [*See Appendix for reading.*]
- 22 Read Step 5, "this is the beginning of true kinship between man and God." Discuss and reflect on how this has continued to be true in your life.

- 23 Read in *AA Big Book*, Chapter 6, 'Into Action' pages 72-75. Discuss and reflect on what you have learned about fearlessness, humility, and honesty. How do you utilise these realities in your life today?
- 24 Review what happened to you when you wrote your inventory your feelings, your hopes, your defects. Discuss what happened when you finally took Step 5. How did you feel afterward? Is anything still hanging on?
- 25 Read in *AA Big Book* (3rd edition) pages 464-473, 'Promoted to Chronic.' Discuss how your disease has made you vulnerable to acting emotionally and compulsively. [*See Appendix for reading.*]
- 26 Read Step 6. Discuss and reflect on the idea that our defects of character can be lifted if we are willing to turn over the burden.
- 27 Re-read Step 6. Discuss and reflect on the idea that, "half measures avail us nothing." How are these components of your life – the emotional, physical and spiritual – coming together today?
- 28 Read in *AA Big Book*, page 75, 3rd paragraph, "Returning home..." Meditate on this passage, and then answer all the questions posed on page 75, "if we have omitted... mortar without sand." Discuss and reflect on what your answers tell you about yourself.
- 29 Read in *AA Big Book* pages 301-8, 'Physician, Heal Thyself!' How is the SLAA program a testimonial that you do not have to do it alone?
- 30 Read in the table of contents in the "Twelve and Twelve" the synopsis of Step 7. Discuss and reflect on the idea that, "God has removed a great deal but there is still work to be done."
- 31 Read Step 7. Discuss and reflect how taking this Step indicates a change of attitude for you.
- 32 Read in *AA Big Book*: 'A Vision For You.' Write on the concept: God's vision for you includes the concept that you cannot transmit something you haven't got. What must you do to maintain what you have?

- 33 Read in Step 7, page 75, the prayer, "Of myself I am nothing." Discuss and reflect on what is working in your life and what you must let go.
- 34 Take a Step 7 inventory. Discuss and reflect on programme accomplishments & setbacks.
- 35 Read Chapter 17 in *AA Big Book* pages 407-420, 'Acceptance was the answer.' Discuss and reflect on the idea that, "if I focus on the answer, the answer increases."
- 36 Discuss and reflect on your ability to apologise. Write down the name of someone who needs an apology from you. Then create an action plan to make that apology.
- 37 Read Step 8 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*. Focus on page 78, "These obstacles... are very real." Discuss and reflect on your need (past and present) to control and manipulate others. Be specific.
- 38 Read chapter 8 in *AA Big Book*, (3rd edition) pages 261 on 'From Farm to City.' Re-read top half of page 269, ending "... but I have laughed." Discuss and reflect on your need to make amends. Have you the willingness to do so? [*See Appendix for reading.*]
- 39 Make a list of those persons you have harmed. Is this your first list? What is the difference between this list and prior lists? Are you willing to work this Step?
- 40 Discuss and reflect on how well you deal with "and became willing to make amends to them all." Who was not on your list? Is there anyone you are still emotionally battling with?
- 41 Read in the table of contents for the *AA Twelve and Twelve* the synopsis of Step 9. Discuss and reflect on the idea "prudence means taking calculated chances." How does this translate into "courage to work my program" for you?
- 42 Read Step 9 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*. Write down a name of someone you owe an amends to, what you intend to say and how you intend to contact this individual. Then do it!

- 43 Read pages 76-84 in *AA Big Book*, “Now we need more action...” Write on, “The spiritual life is not a theory, we have to live it.” Reference page 83.
- 44 Someone may reject an amend. Has this happened to you? Please detail what you did and how it was or was not translated into rejection. If you have not experienced this, create a plan for dealing with a rejected amend.
- 45 Read page 87 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*. Discuss and reflect on, “Above all, we should try to be absolutely sure that we are not delaying because we are afraid”.
- 46 Discuss and reflect on the idea that “(only) when your past is settled (can) present challenges be met”.
- 47 Read Step 10. Discuss and reflect upon the idea that “self-centredness remains a dire threat.”
- 48 Create a ‘Relationship Inventory.’ On one side put the name of the individual with whom you are involved (friend, lover, child, family) and, on the other side, discuss your relationship. Next, create another column in which you note whether the relationship works or needs work. What actions does this inventory call for?
- 49 Discuss and reflect on the idea that, “we safeguard our abstinence by frequent mental audits.” Write a mental audit for today.
- 50 Re-read Step 10. Discuss and reflect on the idea that, “those who forget their past are condemned to repeat it”.
- 51 Read page 105 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve* from “The moment we catch... purely human affairs.” Discuss and reflect on the idea that self-centredness continues to create problems in your life.
- 52 Read Step 11 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve* – Discuss and reflect on how working Step 11 is the only way to conquer fear.
- 53 Read in *AA Big Book* pages 85-88 from the bottom of page 85. Discuss and reflect on how this *AA Big Book* segment is an instruction in learning how to let go.

- 54 Read pages 99-101 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*. Discuss and reflect on how you can channel your Higher Power to lift you out of bondage and help others.
- 55 Read Chapter 11 in the *AA Big Book*, 'A Vision for You.' Discuss and reflect on the idea that "no amount of willpower could stop this acting out".
- 56 The 'joy of living' is the theme of Step 12. Discuss and reflect on what is joyous in your life. How have these things come about?
- 57 Read Step 12 in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*. Discuss and reflect upon the actions you have taken to carry the message.
- 58 Read Chapter 7 in *AA Big Book*. Discuss and reflect on how practicing self-forgetting is the result of not trying so hard. Be specific.
- 59 Read 'Dr Bob's Nightmare' in *AA Big Book* pages 171-181. Focus on pages 180-1, "spend... against a possible slip." How is service to others an insurance policy in your life?
- 60 Read *AA Big Book*, pages 544-553, 'Freedom from Bondage.' Discuss and reflect on the idea that, "I will have peace of mind in exact proportion to the peace of mind I bring to the lives of others." Discuss and reflect on how this becomes "practicing these principles in all areas of our lives."

Appendix. Additional readings from AA Big Book (3rd edition)

[Page references] come at the end of pages.

Q21 STARS DON'T FALL (401-418)

A titled lady, her chief loss was self-respect. When the overcast lifted, the stars were there as before.

MY ALCOHOLIC PROBLEM began long before I drank. My personality, from the time I can remember anything, was the perfect set-up for an alcoholic career. I was always at odds with the entire world, not to say the universe. I was out of step with life, with my family, with people in general. I tried to compensate with impossible dreams and ambitions, which were simply early forms of escape. Even when I was old enough to know better, I dreamed about being as beautiful as Venus, as pure as the Madonna, and as brilliant as the President of the United States is supposed to be. I had writing ambitions, and nothing would do but that I'd write like Shakespeare. I also wanted to be the queen of society, with a glittering salon, the bride of a dream-prince and the mother of a happy brood. Inside, I went right on being a mass of unlovely self-pity, queasy anxiety and sickening self-debasement. Naturally, I succeeded in nothing. Until I reached A.A. my life was a shambles; I was a mess, and I made everybody near and dear to me miserable. I had to go through extreme alcoholism to find my answer.

There was no material or external reason for this. I was born in a castle, in pre-war Austrian territory. [401]

My father had a title; there was plenty of means in the family. When I was a baby, my mother brought me to America, and I never again saw my father. But again, the living was easy. My family, on my mother's side, was brilliant, gifted and charming. They were ambitious, successful, strong and famous. They inherited wealth and acquired more.

They did the best they knew how as far as I was concerned. It took me three psychoanalysts and several years in A.A. to really get this through my head.

Up to my early thirties, when my drinking had become a major problem, I lived in large houses, with servants and all the luxuries that I could possibly ask for. But I did not feel a part of my family or a part of the set-up. I got a good non-academic education; my intellectual curiosity was encouraged. I learned how to hold a terrapin fork. Otherwise, I got nothing out of it.

Before I started to drink seriously, I tried a couple of other escapes. At eighteen I ran away from home. Showing all the courage and ingenuity that I had not used in a positive way, I covered my tracks and hid from my family so successfully that they did not find me for months. I went out to the West Coast, waited on table, washed dishes and sold newspaper subscriptions. Like most sick people before me, I was implacably selfish, and chronically self-centered. My mother's heartbreak, or the unpleasant publicity I had caused did not bother my pretty head. After eight months, the family found me. Their telegram was kind and nice. But I was afraid. I was still untrained for any work but washing dishes and waiting on table. [402]

So I married a nice, well-meaning young newspaperman, so as not to have to go home. It did not occur to me that marriage might be a job, too. We came back East and met both families. His were good, simple Quaker folk who accepted me with love. But I did not fit into this pattern either. The birth of a daughter filled me with new fears. Responsibility again. Her father became both mother and father to her. At the tender age of twenty-three, I got a divorce. My husband was made miserable by this, but I had already made him and myself miserable. He got half custody of our child, but later kept her during most of the school terms. It was the only real home she knew. I resented this, but I did nothing constructive about it.

Now I had done some living but I hadn't learned a thing. This was where I started my first drinking lessons. Up to this time it just hadn't occurred to me to drink. My Quaker mother-in-law, bless her heart, used to set the Christmas pudding ablaze with lumps of sugar dipped in rubbing alcohol. But now I was a young divorcee, leading a Washington social life. Prohibition meant nothing. My family always bought the best, and the embassies were flowing.

I think I had the physical allergy right away. A drink never gave me a normal, pleasant glow. Instead it was like a tap on the head with a small mallet. I was a little bit knocked out. Just what I wanted. I lost my shyness. Five or six drinks and I was terrific. Men danced with me at parties. I was full of careless chatter. I was so amusing! I had friends.

I got a novel written. It was all about Scott Fitzgerald's little lost debutante, abused, misunderstood [403] and running wild. The book was published, but the reading public said—So what? I did not see that the book dripped with self-pity. I only saw that I had not become Mrs. Shakespeare.

I met a wonderful man. He was the dream prince, the answer. I, who did not know how to give love, was head over heels "in love." I wanted him to love me and make up to me for everything. He was brilliant and ambitious. He was well behaved, and idealistic where women were concerned. But he noticed that I was not a good mother to my child, that I relegated her to nurses when she was with me. He saw that I was unsettled, living away from my family and renting houses here and there. A house in Virginia, during the fox hunting season; a little chalet in Switzerland, during the summer or a place on Long Island—each house complete with cooks, butlers and maids. Above all, he noticed that I drank a good deal, often got tight in his company and told him naughty stories. He did not like naughty stories, so I made them naughtier. He finally decided that he did not love me enough, and soon he told me so and said he was engaged to another girl.

He has since become famous and distinguished, an asset to his country. I saw him recently and he told me that he had always felt guilty, because, after our separation, I had become a serious alcoholic. With ten years of A.A. behind me, I was able to tell him that I'd have been an alcoholic, no matter what; that I had been a sick person, unfit for marriage.

Even then I knew in my heart that I was unfit for the very things I wanted most, a happy marriage, security, a home and love. But when this happened [404] to me, I declared to friends that I would get drunk, dead drunk that very night, and stay drunk for a month. A normal person, hit with adversity, can go on a drinking spree and then snap out of it. But I got drunk that night and stayed drunk, getting increasingly worse until I found A.A. ten years later.

That first night I blacked out at a large dinner party. In the morning, because I was young and healthy, my remorse was worse than my hangover. What had I said? What had I done? I experienced my first real guilt and shame. This was in Virginia, where I had rented a house with

stables and a swimming pool, and the fall fox hunting had begun. The people I knew rode hard, and some of them drank hard. Many of them carried a flask and sandwich case, strapped to their saddles so they could stay out all day. But whereas my horse was always equipped with a flask, I merely endured the fox hunting so I could start drinking at lunch time. I would pull out early, and go to the hunt breakfast and the flowing bowl of milk-punch. By two-thirty in the afternoon I was always tight.

During these years, I did acquire some good friends. A few stood by me, at least in their hearts, throughout the whole of my drinking career. Others have come back, others I have lost. But at this time, I began gravitating toward the really hard drinkers, hanging around with them more and more. My old friends showed distress. Couldn't I drink less? Couldn't I stop, after a few? It was nothing to my own inner distress, my self-reproach, and my self-loathing, for was I not bearing out all the horrible things I had always suspected of myself? [405]

I accepted a big tax-free income from the family, but I didn't like it when they told me how to live. I went to Europe to escape them, so I thought. I was really trying, once more, to escape from myself. Imagine my surprise when I came to, in Europe, and discovered I had brought myself along! I rented a beautiful apartment on the banks of the Seine in the winter, and a chalet in Switzerland in the summer. I read sad poetry, cried, drank red wine, wrote sad poetry, and drank some more. I also wrote another novel, all about Scott Fitzgerald's poor, misbegotten, unloved, tipsy little debutante. Even the critics kidded me about this one. I had worked the previous summer on a New York fashion magazine, a job I really enjoyed. I was now with the Paris office. I stayed with them until I got drunk and had a row with the Paris editor.

During this period I married again. This was an Englishman who, at least at this time, drank as much as I did. What we had in common was alcohol. On our honeymoon in Egypt, he cuffed me around quite a bit, and subsequently he hit me some more. I can't blame him. My tongue had become increasingly skilled at venomous home truths. He had not developed this art and had no recourse but his fists.

We went through the two years of deadlock required by the English divorce laws. During this time, you are supposed to behave yourself, but I took a little wine-tasting tour through France, all by my lone, with car and chauffeur. Tasting the best of burgundy at a famous restaurant one night landed me passed out on a park bench in the public square. I came to and found a man leaning over me. When he reached for [406] me, I rose and smote him. He, in turn, kicked me so I fell to the ground. Bruised, and deadly ashamed, I told no one. I began, here and now, to fear the answer to the question—what is the matter with me? I had already been to one analyst at home. We had not gotten anywhere. Was my mental state more serious than he said? Was I insane? Was that it? I did not dare to think. I drank and I kept on drinking.

Drunk or sober, I was hectic, unpredictable, irresponsible. At a large party in Geneva, with people from many countries represented, the kind of party that is “protocol” in the extreme, I swayed, laughed hysterically, made naughty remarks in an unhusbed voice, and was finally led from the scene. My friends understandably hurt and angry. Why had I done it? Why? I could not tell them. I was afraid to think why. Now I hid when I wanted to drink. I drank alone or with someone, anyone who would stay and drink with me. I passed out frequently in my home, alone.

An American doctor in Paris said I had an enlarged liver. He also said, “You are an alcoholic and there’s nothing I can do for you.” This went in one ear and out the other. I did not know what he meant. An alcoholic cannot accept the news that he’s an alcoholic unless there is a meaningful explanation given, and an offer of help, such as you get in A.A.

I returned from Europe shortly before the war broke out and I never went back. Things were no better with the family, so I moved to New York. Here, also, I had good friends, but I became more and more separated from them. Why did I have to have at least three cocktails to sit through dinner? Other girls [407] whom I had known all my life asked for one weak scotch after dinner. Sometimes they’d put it on the mantel, and forget it. My eye would be glued to that glass. How could anybody *forget* a drink? I would have three quick strong ones in order to endure the evening.

My first analyst said, “You are becoming more and more of an alcoholic,” and sent me to another analyst. This good and gentle man, a brilliant research doctor, got nowhere with me fast. I was accepting help with one hand and pushing it away with the other. The liquor counteracted the help I was getting.

Meanwhile I had found another escape. This one was a dandy. It combined running away from my world, and drinking all I wanted to. I had met a bunch of gay young Bohemians who lived in the Village, and were sowing their wild oats. They were all kids, most of them younger than I was. All of them have since settled down to jobs and good marriages. None of them were alcoholics, but at this time they were drinking as much as I was. They introduced me to beer in the morning to kill hangovers. This was the life! I was the center of attention, just what my sick ego craved. They said I was so funny, and told me, with shrieks of laughter, what I’d done the night before. Ribaldry was the substance of the conversation, and I set out to be the funniest and most ribald of them all.

They woke up with hangovers, but with no remorse. I woke up filled with secret guilt and shame. Underneath, I knew this was all wrong. Now it was semi-blackouts every night, outrageous behavior, passing out in some friend’s Village studio or not knowing how [408] I got home. The horrors of increasing hangover sickness to occupy the entire day; nausea, dry heaves, the rocking bed, the nightmare-filled mind.

At this stage, I began a daily mental routine. I must drink less, I would tell myself. Or: If I’m really a genius, I must produce a great work, to show why I act like a genius. Or—this is a little too much! I’d better taper off. I must use self-will, self-control. I must go on the wagon for a while. Drink only beer or wine. I used all those well-known phrases. I also thought that I must have *power over myself*. I was an agnostic, so I thought. My new friends made fun of God and all the orthodox beliefs. I thought I was the captain of my soul. I told myself that I had power over this thing. One day soon, the analyses would reveal why I drank and how to stop.

I did not know that I had no power over alcohol, that I, alone and unaided, could not stop; that I was on a downgrade, tearing along at full speed with all my brakes gone, and that the end would be a total smash-up, death or

insanity. I had already feared insanity for a long time. Certainly, when I was in my cups, I was not just drunk, I was crazy. Now my whole thinking was crazy. For, after those daily self-punishing sessions with myself, after the vows to stop, I would change entirely as evening came on. I would get wildly excited and look forward to another night of drinking. The remorse would turn inside out, and become anticipatory pleasure. I was going to get drunk again—Drunk!

My child was being exposed to all of this. She was also the victim of my scolding and incessant nagging. I was really scolding my mortal enemy, the inner me. [409]

My poor child could not know this. Her father, quite rightly, wanted to put her in a school. When I protested, his lawyer, my lawyer, and my third and last analyst had a conference. She was duly sent to school, away from me.

This new analyst was a woman doctor, one of the best in the country. She did all she could to help this situation and to protect my child. She was endlessly patient as we looked together for an answer. She, more than the others, showed me what ailed me basically, why I was immature and insecure. But I was not able to make use of this knowledge until after I became sober. A.A. had to stop my drinking first. Then I was able to do something about me.

There were a couple of good things. And again these were things that I really profited by after I sobered up. I saw that my Village friends, all of whom had small jobs, were living happily on about a tenth of my sinecure. It had never occurred to me before that I could live simply and be independent of my family. So I did the right thing in the wrong way. I had a drunken quarrel with my family, denounced them, and left them forever. They were awfully good about not cutting me off. It was I who had to tell the bank, after a certain time, to refuse all further deposits. I had saved my allowance. I now had quite a nest egg. I had a tiny trust fund, and I moved into a small apartment where I learned to cook, keep house, and do the things that normal people do. I learned a whole new sense of values. I wrote and sold some short stories. These things were carried out in moments of less severe hangover or short stretches on the wagon. But the money I had saved up went for cases [410] of liquor. I was, when drunk, just

as undisciplined and erratic as ever. My new friends had a social conscience. They were bright and well read, they held various political views. In the course of drunken arguments, I found my own views and a sense of responsibility as a citizen. Now it was wartime. But as an air raid warden my attempts to serve my country ended in a drunken and abusive row with a fellow warden.

By this time I had ceased to be the life of the party. I became a menace, the fish-wife, the common scold. I took everybody else's inventory. Finally my new friends told me, one by one, that I could not come around any more.

Now came the black and endless dismal night. I went to bars alone to drink. There was one Village bar in particular for which I formed an obsession. I had to go there every night. I rarely remembered getting home. The bartenders took care of me, not out of brotherly love, but through enlightened self-interest. An obstreperous woman in a bar is a nuisance, and they wanted no trouble with the police. On the other hand, I was a marvelous customer. For three generations my family had had a charge account in one of the big New York hotels. I stopped at the cashier's any hour of the night on the way to the bar and cashed a check. In the morning I would wake up with a dollar or two. I suspect that those bartenders would wait until I had shot my wad, then call a cab and send me home. This too is how the nest-egg went.

So here, in this dive, this hangout for dead-end alcoholics and neurotics, here was I. In a sick people's place, myself among the sickest. I despised the other barflies and, naturally, they loathed me. In my cups [411] I used to tell them off, giving them lengthy advice on how to lead the right life. They got so they moved their barstools when they saw me coming. The bartenders too, treated me with contempt. Yes I, the queen of them all! The glittering society belle, the modern Shakespeare, the happy wife, the loving and beloved. I, who had dreamed these sick dreams, now reaped the nightmare. What I had secretly believed myself to be all along, this I had become. I was not beautiful or good, as I had yearned to be. I was fat, bloated, dirty and unkempt. Most of the time I was covered with bruises from "running into doors." I wore a man's raincoat, turned inside out, a present from a friend, for now my funds were low. I could not live on that tiny trust fund and still drink all I wanted to. My tweed suit, once a very

good one, was shapeless and baggy with bare places worn in the elbows from leaning on the bar.

Once, in a strange gin mill, I stole a bottle from behind the bar. The bartender, a tough Irishman, came around and “gave me the elbow,” which means that he raised his elbow and smacked me in the face. I literally hit the sawdust. Luckily a friend was with me, who dragged me out, screaming and cursing, while the bartender threatened to call the police. But I never got into jail. I didn’t get into a sanitarium either. I wanted to die and often I would think of ways. I would walk up and down under the 59th Street bridge, trying to get up the nerve to go up there and jump. Once, when I called my analyst, and told her I was contemplating death, she came over and tried to get me into a sanitarium. Frightened and shamed, I refused, and sobered up temporarily. [412]

I was not mugged, or manhandled. I did not resort to semi-prostitution for the price of a drink. But all these things *could* have happened. The sanitarium *should* have happened. I was not fit to be on the loose, and there was no one to commit me.

I think now that a God, in whom I did not believe, was looking after me. Perhaps it was He who sent my analyst to a psychiatrist’s meeting at which Bill spoke. In those days, psychiatry and A.A. had not gotten together as they have since. My analyst was one of the first to learn of A.A. and to make subsequent use of it in her work. Having heard Bill speak, she was instantly sold. She read this book that you are reading now. She asked me to read it.

“These people all had your problem,” she told me.

Anybody who had my problem was beneath contempt!

I read the book and God leapt at me from every page. So this was a group of reformers! What intellectual interests could we have in common? Could they discuss literature or art? I could just hear their sweet, pious talk. Nobody was going to reform me! I was going to reform myself!

I returned the book to my analyst and shook my head. But now a strange thing happened. In my cups I began to say, “I can’t stop.” I said it over and over, boring my fellow barflies. Something in the book had reached me

after all. In a sense, I had taken the first step. My analyst pricked up her ears.

“Why don’t you just go down and see Mr. W.?” she asked. “See what you think.”

I now said a lucky and wonderful thing. I said, “O.K.” [413]

In those days the A.A. Foundation was down in the Wall Street district of New York. As I went in I was dying of mortification. They would all stare at me and whisper! Oh, poor self-centered, sick little me. I did not reflect that half the office was composed of A.A. members, and that I was as unexciting as any client in any office.

Bill was tall, grey haired, with the kind of asymmetrical good looks and pleasant easy manner that inspires confidence in the shaken and afraid. He was well dressed; he was easy going. I could see he wasn’t a quack or a fanatic.

He did not take out a folder and say, “What is the nature of your problem?” He said to me, gently and simply, “Do you think that you are one of us?”

Never in my entire life had anyone asked me “Are you one of us?” Never had I felt a sense of belonging. I found myself nodding my head.

He now said that we had a physical allergy combined with a mental obsession, and he explained this so that I saw for the first time how this could be. He asked me if I had any spiritual belief, and when I said No, he suggested that I keep an open mind. Then he called Marty and made an appointment for me. I thought, “Aha, he’s passing the buck. Now comes the questionnaire.” I did not know who this Marty was. I did not want to go and see her, but I went. A friend of Marty’s, another A.A. let me in. Marty was late. I felt like a gangster’s moll about to be interviewed by the Salvation Army. The strange A.A. put me at ease. The apartment was charming; the shelves were full of books, many of which I owned myself. Marty came in, looking clean, neat, well-dressed and, like Bill, she [414]

was neither a bloated wreck nor a reformer. She was attractive; she was like the friends I had once had. Indeed, she had known my cousin in Chicago. Years of drinking and general high jinks had cut her off from old friends. She too had gone to cheap bars to drink. With more physical courage than I had

possessed, she had twice tried to take her life. She had been in sanitariums. Her luck had been worse than mine, but not her drinking. I, who had feared questions, now began trying to interrupt and tell my story. I couldn't get a word in edgewise! Marty was smart. A load weighing a thousand pounds came off my back. I wasn't insane. Nor was I the "worst woman who ever lived." I was an alcoholic, with a recognizable behavior pattern.

I went to my first meeting with Marty and some other girls. I was sold, intellectually. But my life, even sober, was all askew and so were my emotions. In those days there was only one big meeting a week in New York. On non-meeting nights I was lonesome, or so I told myself. I went to several Village bars, and drank cokes or tea. I had been on the wagon when I came to A.A. and this sobriety-tension eventually popped. Not understanding the twenty-four hour plan, or not wanting to, I began drinking and was off-again on-again, during that first month.

A fellow A.A., called Anne, who had helped me, went on a terrible bender. Priscilla, an A.A., who, like Marty, has become one of my greatest friends, decided that I was a stubborn case. Since they could do nothing with Anne either, Priscilla suggested that I go and look after Anne. Now, I am big and weak, but Anne was bigger than I and strong. Her idea of fun [415]

on a bender was to hit sailors and insult cops. We were to go up to our A.A. farm in Kent, and I spent the evening before riding herd on Anne. I was so busy keeping her out of trouble, and so scared she'd swing on me, that I had my last two drinks that night. The farm, in those days, was primitive. There was no central heating, and this was the dead of winter. Anne and I went up in ski clothes and fur coats, and it was so cold we slept in them. I tried to wash a little, but Anne refused to wash at all. She said she felt too horrible inside to be pretty on the outside. This I understood. This was how I had looked and acted a few short weeks ago. I completely forgot about myself in trying vainly to help Anne, whose misery I understood.

On the train going back, Anne's one idea was to get to the nearest bar. I was really scared. I thought it was my duty to keep her from drinking, not knowing that if the other fellow is really determined to drink there is nothing you can do about it. However, I had phoned New York from the farm, appealing for help, and there in the station to meet us were two

A.A.'s, John and Bud. They were a couple of normal, sober, attractive men. They took Anne and me to dinner. We, who were dirty, bedraggled and in ski clothes. They did not seem ashamed to be with us, these strangers. They were taking the trouble to try and help. Why? I was astonished and deeply moved.

All these things together brought me into A.A. I got off the so-called wagon, and on the twenty-four hour plan. I had never had the physical courage to shake it out before.

John and Bud became my friends. John said, "Keep [416] going to meetings." And I did. He himself took me to many of them, including the ones out of town.

Except for one short slip, during the first eight months, which was an angry "the world can't do this to me" reaction to a personal tragedy in my life, I have been sober for twelve years. I, who could never stay on the wagon for more than a week. The personality rehabilitation did not come overnight. In the first year there were episodes such as kicking Priscilla in the shins, getting the lock changed on the desk in the A.A. Club, because I, as secretary, didn't want the Intergroup secretary "interfering," and taking an older woman member out to lunch for the express purpose of informing her that she was "a phony." All the people involved in these flare-ups took it with remarkable grace, have teased me about it since, and have become good friends of mine.

A.A. taught me how not to drink. And also, on the twenty-four hour plan, it taught me how to live. I know I do not have to be "queen of them all" to salve a frightened ego. Through going to meetings and listening, and occasionally speaking, through doing Twelve Step work, whereby in helping others you are both the teacher and the student, by making many wonderful A.A. friends, I have been taught all the things in life that are worth having. I am no longer interested in living in a palace, because palace living was not the answer for me. Nor were those impossible dreams I used to have the things I really wanted.

I have my A.A. friends, and I have become reacquainted with my old friends on a new basis. My friendships are meaningful, loving and interesting because I am sober. I have achieved the inner confi- [417] dence

to write quite unlike Shakespeare, and I have sold a good deal of what I have written. I want to write better and sell more. My spiritual awakening in A.A. finally resulted in my joining a church some years ago. This has been a wonderful thing in my life. I consider that I was taking the Eleventh Step when I joined this church. (This was for *me*. Many good A.A.'s never join a church, and do not need to. Some even remain agnostics.)

Every day, I feel a little bit more useful, more happy and more free. Life, including some ups and downs, is a lot of fun. I am a part of A.A. which is a way of life. If I had not become an active alcoholic and joined A.A., I might never have found my own identity or become a part of anything. In ending my story I like to think about this. [418]

Source: <https://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/25-stars-dont-fall/>

Q25. AA Big Book (3rd edition) pages 464-473, 'Promoted to Chronic.'

This career girl preferred solitary drinking, the blackout kind, often hoping she'd stay that way for keeps. But Providence had other ideas.

I WASN'T ALWAYS an alcoholic.

In fact it has been only within the last fifteen years that I changed from a fairly normal, controlled drinker into an alcoholic. I don't mean that I went to bed one night a normal drinker, and awoke the next morning an alcoholic.

It wasn't that simple.

I started drinking socially and at parties and proms when I was about twenty years old. I didn't like it particularly at first, but I did like the effect I got from it. It made me feel quite grown-up and mature, and I think another added attraction was the fact that so far as my family was concerned, it was forbidden, and it had a special attraction for that reason. After a while I really did enjoy drinking and what it did to me, and I became dependent upon it for every occasion. Eventually the day came when I was dependent upon it even when there wasn't any occasion. When I didn't have anything else to do—a dull evening at home—I'd sneak a few drinks upstairs in my room, and that began to be a habit.

In 1939, I went on my first week's bender of solitary drinking, locked up in a hotel room, because my family [485] opposed my coming marriage. I figured that perhaps if I went ahead with that marriage, which I was sure was right for me, that would be the answer to my drinking problem. I thought I would be quite happy and never would I drink too much again. So—I tried that.

(I think my first feeling of fear came with my first week's solitary drinking, locked up in that hotel room. The hotel management, knowing that something was wrong, sent for a doctor. The doctor, apparently realizing that one thing that I certainly needed was sleep, left a bottle of sleeping pills there and in my drunken state I took them all, instead of the one or two he had prescribed. If it hadn't been for an alert hotel maid, I might have died then. From that time on, fear was with me because I realized that not only would I not *remember* what happened to me while I was drinking, but apparently I couldn't *control* what happened. And there didn't seem to be anything to do about it.)

Having passed over the border line, the next five years were filled with fear, failure and frustration. Tragedies during those years that were caused by my drinking, such as the breaking up of my marriage, the death of my child, other things—had little restraining effect. In fact, sometimes they served as good excuses to drink more, to forget. It was in Washington D.C., that this transition took place, and that the really bad part of alcoholism began happening.

The last Christmas I spent in Washington, fourteen years ago, comes to mind. Only a few days before Christmas I went to the dentist for a periodic check-up. X-rays showed that a couple of teeth had to come out. I hadn't been drinking much about that time, for [486] I had begun to realize that there was something abnormal about my drinking, although as yet, I didn't realize that it was so out of control. On the day set for the extractions, on my way to the dentist's I felt a little nervous, so I had a couple of drinks, and after the teeth were out I was *very* nervous, so I had a few more.

When I got home my mouth was very painful, so I got an ice-bag and went to bed. The next day the ice-bag and I were still in bed—but we had a bottle too! My pattern of drinking at that time had reached the point where

once I really started, I would retire to my bed and drink myself into oblivion. The rest of that week is pretty hazy.

And so it went. I remember vaguely violent quarrels with my husband, his finding my liquor supply time and time again and throwing it out. And then my waiting until I was sure he was asleep, and stealing money from him to replenish the supply.

Then I remember him coming into my room one night with a friend, and telling me to get dressed—we were going away.

I fought and struggled, but to no avail. I was taken out of the house and put bodily into a waiting car with nothing on but a robe and gown. We were on our way to New York, where he planned to leave me with my sister. On the way I tried, and I mean really tried, to throw myself out of the car. Finally they stopped and bought me a bottle; they knew so well that would keep me quiet.

We pulled up in front of my sister's house just as dawn broke. There was a long discussion between my husband, my sister and her husband. It was ob-[487]vious even to me, in my drunken state, that I wasn't wanted. My parents were due for the holidays that day, and she didn't want them to find their drunken daughter there. So we turned around and started back to Washington. I was too weak and exhausted to even try to throw myself out of the car. The trip back was completed in one of those dead, awful silences.

My husband helped me into the house, packed himself a bag, and gave me some money. He said he didn't care what I did with the money, but there was going to be no more until I was completely sober. He said he was finally and completely through—that he never wanted to see me again.

I was frightened—terribly frightened, and in about three days I was sober. On the day before Christmas I telephoned him and told him I was sober and asked him to come home. He said he'd see. I waited all the rest of that day and paced the floor all that night.

At noon on Christmas Day I called my family in New York, wished them a Merry Christmas, and assured them everything was fine with me. I almost

broke down and cried when I talked with them but I didn't. It was the one redeeming act of that Christmas.

Then in a couple of hours, when there was still no word from my husband and no sign of him, I had the feeling we alcoholics all know. "What's the use? What's the sense in trying to do the right thing?" There was that awful alcoholic loneliness.

I went out to a restaurant, found a booth way back in the rear, and started drinking. All afternoon I sat there and drank and played Bing Crosby's recording of "Silent Night" over and over again on the juke box. [488]

To this day I can't hear that song without remembering that awful Christmas of 1940.

What happened afterwards I don't know. I completely blacked out. The next recollection I have is of my husband coming into my room (I later found out it was on New Year's Eve) accompanied by two policemen. This time I didn't put up any fight because I knew why they were there and where I was going, the psychopathic ward of the City Hospital, where I had been once before.

Did that stop my drinking? Temporarily, but not for long.

Things went from bad to worse, and since I had finally and completely failed at the job of being a wife and a mother, my marriage ended. And then I went back home to live with my parents, and the merry-go-round started again—only this time I didn't have to worry about waking up behind bars in a psychiatric ward.

Instead, I started going to a nice private sanitarium which, after the first visit, turned out to be more like a country club than anything else. After the first two or three days you were allowed the run of the place and it was a lot of fun. Also, after the first visit I learned I could refuse to sign myself in unless they gave me a glass of whiskey in one hand and a glass of paraldehyde in the other. This easy method of sobering up would last at least three days.

There were doctors and psychiatrists there who tried to help me, but at that point I wasn't having help from anyone. I didn't want help. I had

decided I was no good—never would be any good, and the sooner I could drink myself out of this life, the better. [489]

My visits to that sanitarium went on for nearly three years, until in March of 1944, my father died and I was too drunk to attend his funeral. At that point everyone decided something drastic had to be done. They held consultations and discussions, and finally decided to give me the “Conditioned Reflex” treatment. I won’t go into detail about that, but I can assure you it’s no fun.

The idea behind it is that, having taken the treatment, your system is so “conditioned” that the mere sight or smell or taste of alcohol produces a violent reaction, and you become ill. But it didn’t condition this girl’s thinking.

You may wonder why, since I was having all this trouble, and was having to seek the assistance of others, A.A. hadn’t come into the picture. Actually it had, way back in 1940.

The same doctor who had sent me to the psycho had asked my husband, “Why don’t you send her to this Alcoholics Anonymous?”

My husband said, “What is A.A.?”

At that time there hadn’t been any publicity such as we have now. Even the Jack Alexander Saturday Evening Post article hadn’t been written, and there was only a tiny group of people in Washington.

So the doctor said, “I really don’t know too much about it, but they tell me it is a bunch of drunks who get together...”

My husband interrupted, “She’s bad enough now without getting mixed up with a bunch of drunks.”

And so, in those following years, whenever A.A. was mentioned I would have no part of it. In my screwed up mind I kept thinking I could have gone to A.A. way [490] back there in 1940, and perhaps saved my marriage and home. I even wanted to—but I wasn’t allowed to, so I won’t go now.

Finally, however, in November of 1944, at long last I went to A.A.

And A.A. took this wreck of a woman and brought her back to life.

Why did it work for me when all other agencies had failed? Was it because they told me in A.A. that I was an alcoholic?

No, I had known that.

Yes, I even knew I was a “chronic alcoholic.”

On one occasion when I was serving time in my favorite drying-out place while I was having a session with the psychiatrist, she left my case history on her desk when she was called away from the room. Sly and crafty, I thought now I'll find out what they think of me here, what they “have on” me, what I've said coming in here drunk. There at the top of the folder was my name, age and address, and underneath were the words, “Periodic Drinker.” Only they had been scratched out and over them was written, “Chronic Alcoholic.”

As an indication of just how confused and mixed up I was, just as soon as I could I left the office and hurried around to tell other patients that I was getting better. I had been promoted from a periodic drinker to a chronic alcoholic! I honestly didn't know the difference. A.A. didn't teach me I was an alcoholic; rather it taught me that because I was an alcoholic my life had become unmanageable.

It seemed to me that those A.A.'s to whom I talked knew all about me. It is true that the doctors and [491] nurses in the various institutions I attended knew too. But the difference lay in the fact that the A.A.'s knew from their own bitter experience.

In other words, the kindest doctor in the whole world, and I had one such, couldn't help me because I always felt, “You can't know about me—you can't possibly know—you don't even drink!”

But to another woman, the first woman I met in A.A., I could talk. In all the sanitariums and psycho wards I had never met a single woman who said she was an alcoholic. They were always there because of a nervous breakdown, or for a “rest cure”—any reason except because of drinking.

(I've met some of these same women since in A.A.) But by listening and talking to these A.A.'s—talking to them as I had never talked to anyone in my whole life, I saw that it was my *life* that was unmanageable—not just my drinking. With their help I also saw that certainly, because of some of

the things I had done during the years, I was bordering on insanity, and so, facing the record, I tried to believe that a Power greater than I could and would restore me to sanity.

The other of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous seemed insurmountable to me at first.

But the older members in A.A. told me, “Easy does it.” In the light of subsequent events it became evident that I took their advice far too literally, for, after some months of happy sobriety I drank again. Had I tried honestly and sincerely to practice the Twelve Steps I would have seen from my continuous moral inventory that I was getting off the beam—I would have found that there were some active resentments in my life, a terrific amount of self-pity. But more [492] important, I would have found that once again I was sitting in the driver’s seat—I was running the show.

The Higher Power to whom I had turned, and who had sustained me, had once again been thrust into the background, while my emotions were running my life and, as always, my emotions ran me to the bottle.

It came about in this way.

When I first came into A.A., the woman who was my sponsor was the first woman I had ever met who admitted that she was an alcoholic. And she was a charming, delightful, lovely person. She gave me such hope and inspiration that I set her right up on a pedestal. And so for three months this one woman was my A.A. I went to meetings, I spent a lot of time at the clubroom, but it was all centered in this one woman. But she couldn’t carry me forever. She realized that, and the way I felt, and so for my own good she gradually began to pull away. Of course, I had the sensitive, hurt feelings of the alcoholic. I thought, “Oh well, these people are just like all the people I’ve known all my life. They build you up with a lot of false hopes and promises, and rush you around here and there and then, all of a sudden, it’s gone.” And when she broke a luncheon date with me one Saturday, after I had been in A.A. for about three months, I said, “I’ll show *her!* She can’t do that to me!” And I got drunk.

Well, you know who I showed. I showed myself. And I landed right smack back in that sanitarium that I had gone to so often. While I was there I

realized that I had missed something. I realized that I was trying to pin everything on an individual—not the book or the group or the Higher Power, or anything else. So I concentrated and studied the book during [493] that time, and I liked a lot of the things it said in there. I remember particularly one sentence that seemed to say, “This is for you.” It read something like this: “Faith without works is dead. Carry this message to other alcoholics. You can help where no one else can.” Here was a book that said I could do something that all these doctors and priests and ministers and psychiatrists that I’d been going to for years couldn’t do!

That was over seven years ago, and thank God and A.A., I haven’t had a drink since. During these seven years a thing called the Twenty-four Hour Program—a gadget I used to think was only a snare to trap the newcomer—has come to mean much to me, not only as regards my drinking but in the whole pattern of my life.

I realize that all I’m guaranteed in life is today. The poorest person has no less and the wealthiest has no more—each of us has but one day. What we do with it is our own business; how we use it is up to us individually.

I feel that I have been restored to health and sanity these past years not through my own efforts nor as a result of anything I may have done, but because I’ve come to believe—to really believe—that alone I can do nothing. That my own innate selfishness and stubbornness are the evils which, if left unguarded, can drive me to alcohol.

I have come to believe that my illness is spiritual as well as physical and mental, and I know that for help in the spiritual sphere I have to turn to a Higher Power. [494]

<https://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/32-promoted-to-chronic/>

Q38. AA Big Book, (3rd edition) pages 261-274 ‘From Farm to City.’

*She tells how A.A. works when the going is rough.
A pioneer woman member of A.A.’s first Group.*

I COME FROM a very poor family in material things, with a fine Christian mother, but with no religious background. I was the oldest in a family of seven, and my father was an alcoholic. I was deprived of many of the things that we feel are important in life, such as education particularly, because of

my father's drinking. Mine was far from a happy childhood. I had none of those things that children should have to make them happy.

We moved in from the country at the age when girls want all sorts of nice things. I remember starting to city school, coming from a country school, and wanting so very, very much to be like the other girls and trying flour on my face for powder because I wasn't able to have any real powder. I remember feeling that they were all making fun of me. I feared that I wasn't dressed like the rest. I know that one of the outfits I had was a skirt and a very funny looking blouse that my mother had picked up at a rummage sale. I look back and remember these things because they made me very unhappy, and added to my feeling of inferiority at never being the same as other people.

At the age of sixteen, I was invited to spend the summer with an aunt and I, very delightedly, accepted [261] the invitation. It was a small town—Liberty, Indiana. When I came to my aunt, she knew that I had had an unhappy childhood, and she said, "Now, Ethel, you're welcome to have boy friends in our home, but there are two boys in this town that I don't want you to date, and one of them comes from a very fine family, one of the best. But he's in all sorts of scrapes because he drinks too much." Four months later, I married this guy. I'm sure his family felt that it was a marriage that—well, I was a girl from the wrong side of the tracks—definitely!

I felt that his family were accepting me because it was good sense. I could do something for their Russ. But they didn't do anything for me to build up my ego. And Russ didn't tell me he'd stop drinking, and he certainly didn't stop. It went on and grew worse and worse. We had two daughters. I was sixteen when we were married and he was seven years older. I remember one instance when he took off and went down to Cincinnati and was gone for a week on a drunk.

Finally, it got so bad that I left him and went back home and took my two children with me. I didn't see him for a year, or even hear from him. That was seven or eight years after we were married. I was still bitter because I felt that drink had completely ruined my childhood and my married life, and I hated everything pertaining to it. I was about twenty-five then, and I had never touched a drop.

I got a job in the woolen mills in Ravena—very hard work. I looked much older than I was, I was always large, and I went back to work in this job. I kept my children with me. At the end of a year, the children got a card from their father, which I still have and [262] cherish. He said, “Tell Mommy I still love her.” I had gone to an attorney to see about getting a divorce during that year.

Then he came into town on the bum. He had taken up light work, and he had a safety valve and a pair of spurs and the clothes on his back, and that was all. I welcomed him with open arms. I didn’t realize how I still felt about him. He told me that he would never drink again. And I believed him. As many times as he would tell me that, I still believed him. Partially so, anyway. He got a job and went back to work.

He stayed “dry” for thirteen years! Dr. Bob often said that it was a record for what he felt was a typical alcoholic.

We built up a splendid life. At the end of those thirteen years I never dreamed that he’d ever take another drink. I had never taken one. Our oldest daughter got married; they were living at our house. Our other daughter was in her last year of high school, and one night the new son-in-law and my husband went out to the prize fight. I never was concerned anymore, anywhere he went. He hardly ever went to anything like that without me. We were together all the time, but this night I got up and saw it was late. I heard my son-in-law coming upstairs, and I asked him where dad was. He had a very peculiar look on his face, and he said, “He’s coming.” He was coming, on his hands and knees, up the stairs. As I look back, I was very broken up about it. But I don’t believe now that it was with any deep feeling of resentment that I said to him, “The children are raised, and if this is the way you want it, this is the way we’ll have it. Where [263] you go, I’ll go, and what you drink, I’ll drink.” That’s when I started drinking.

We were the most congenial drinkers you ever saw. We never rowed or fought. We had the grandest time ever. We just loved it. We’d start out on the craziest trips. He’d always say, “Take me for a ride, Ma.” So, sometimes we’d end up in Charleston, West Virginia, or here or there, drinking all along the way. These vacations became quite something, and he always had two weeks vacation the first two weeks of every September.

One year we got as far as Bellaire, Ohio. We always started out on the Saturday before Labor Day. I'm pretty near afraid of Labor Day yet. One Sunday afternoon, the only time I ever got picked up for drunken driving, I got picked up in Bellaire. They threw us in the jail. I wasn't nearly in the condition I had been in many times to be picked up. I really wasn't very high. They called the Mayor in so we wouldn't have to stay in there over the holiday. He took his one hundred and seventeen dollars and let us go, and we proceeded. That to me was the greatest humiliation, to think that I'd finally landed in jail. My husband said that I said, "Can you imagine them giving us that jail fare?" And he said, "What jail fare?" And I said, "Well, they brought a pitcher of coffee, and a sandwich wrapped up for me." And he said, "That wasn't jail fare. They didn't give me anything to eat. Somebody must have taken pity on you and gone out and got it for you." And another thing, it's a wonder they didn't throw us back in because I could become very dignified and sarcastic. As we left, and they were escorting us across the bridge into Wheeling, I, [264] with great dignity and sarcasm, told them if their wives were ever visiting in Akron, and they, too, were looking for their route signs as I was, that I hoped that I could extend to them the hospitality that had been shown to me in Bellaire.

The next time vacation time rolled around that was a bitter lesson to us. Of course, this year we were drinking heavier and heavier and we decided on staying home and being sensible, doing a little drinking, and painting the house. So, on that Saturday before Labor Day, I got drunk and set the house on fire—so we didn't have to paint it. I think that was the last vacation before sobriety.

I hated myself worse and worse, and as I hated myself I became more defiant towards everything and everybody. We drank with exactly the same accord that we finally accepted A.A. We comforted each other.

My defiant attitude became worse. There was a very religious family that lived down the road from us, and we were on the same party line. I'd hear them on the phone having prayer meetings and so forth, that sort of talk over the phone, and it completely burnt me up. They used a sound truck some. It would stop out in front of our house, and I still believe those people sent it! They'd sit out there and play hymns and I'd be lying in there

with a terrific hangover. If I'd had a gun I'd have shot the horns right off the thing, because it made me raving mad.

It was just about this time, in 1940, that we met up with A.A. Russ read a piece in the paper, and he kind of snickered, and said, "See here, where John D. has found something to keep him from drinking!" "What's [265] that?" I said. "Oh, some darn thing they've got here in the paper about it." We talked about it afterwards, and we felt that there might be some time we'd need it. It was a thought that there might be some hope for us.

One morning after a terrific drinking bout, I was in a little bar near our house, and I shook so that I was very much ashamed, because I was getting the shakes worse and worse. I sipped the drink off the bar because I couldn't hold it in my hand, but I was still a lady, believe it or not, and I was deeply ashamed. There was a man watching, and I turned to him and said, with a defiant air I carried with me all the time, "If I don't quit this I'm going to have to join that alcoholic business they're talking about." He said, "Sister, if you think you're a screwball now, all you have to do is join up with that. I'll get you the password, and I can find out where they meet because I know a guy that belongs. But they are the craziest bunch! They roll on the floor and holler, and pull their hair." "Well, I'm nuts enough now," I said to him. But right then the hope died that had been in my heart when we read about John D.

Time went on and the drinking got worse and worse, and I was in another barroom, down the road the other way, a small one, and I took my glass—that morning I'd been able to lift it from the bar—and I said to the woman behind the bar, "I wish I might never take another drop of that stuff. It's killing me." She said, "Do you really mean that?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, you better talk to Jack." (Jack was the owner of the place. We always tried to buy him a drink, and he always told us he had liquor trouble—couldn't drink.) [266]

She said to me, "You know, he used to own the Merry-Go-Round. He used to drink, and then he found something that started up in Akron that helped him quit drinking." Right away, I saw it was the same outfit this other guy told me about, and then again hope died.

Finally, one morning, I got up and got in the car and cried all the way down to the M.'s—the people who owned the bar—and told her I was licked and wanted help. I thought, “No matter how crazy they are I’ll do anything they say to do.” I drove these three or four miles down the road only to find that Jack was out. (This was funny. They owned this joint, she ran it, and he sold for a brewery. That was his job. And he’d been dry a year. I don’t think Jack was hospitalized. I think his entry into A.A. was through spending some hours with Dr. Bob at his office. He brought many people into A.A. through his barroom.) Mrs. M. said she would send Jack over as quick as he came in.

He came with two cans of beer. He gave my husband one and me one about ten-thirty on the eighth day of May in 1941. He said, “There’s a doctor here in Akron. I’m going in to see him, and see what can be done.” Dr. Bob was in Florida, but Jack didn’t know that.

That was our last drink of anything alcoholic. That nasty little can of beer! At two-forty-five that morning I thought I would die. I lay across the bed on my stomach with nothing but pain and sickness. I was scared to death to call a doctor. I thought when people did what we did that they just locked them up. I [267] didn’t know that anything was ever done for them in a medical way. So I stayed awake.

Men from A.A. started coming out to the house the next day. I paced the floor with a bath towel around my shoulders, the perspiration running off me. An attorney sat at the side of the bed where I was lying, and he sat on the edge of his chair and looked as innocent as a baby. I thought, “That guy never could have been drunk.” He said, “This is my story,”—real prim. And I thought, “I bet he’s a sissy. I bet he never drank.” But he told a story of drinking that was amazing to me.

Jack brought the Saturday Post with Jack Alexander’s story. He said, “Read this.” Jack didn’t seem to have too much of the spiritual understanding. He said, “I think this will tell you more. This is based, really, on the Sermon on the Mount. Now, if you’ve got a Bible around...” One of our gifts from the family was a very lovely Bible, but we’d let the bulldog chew it because we weren’t too interested in it. I had a little Testament, which was very small print. When you have a hangover and can’t even sit still, try to read small print! Russ said, “Mother, if this tells us how to do it, you’ll have to read it.”

And I'd try, but I couldn't even see the letters. But it was so important that we do the things we were told to do! Jack said there was a meeting in Akron every Wednesday night and that it was very important that we go. Jack said, "Now you start and go to these meetings, and then you'll find out all about it." I don't think that there was anything said about religion. I didn't know anything about the Sermon on the Mount.

I had the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) that [268] had been brought to me. Paul S. had just called me, and I remember he stressed reading the Big Book. I was reading it for all that was in it, and I said to Russ, "We can't do this. We couldn't begin to." And Jim G. had such a wonderful sense of humor, and when he came I was in tears, and I told him, "I want to do this, but I can't. This is too much. I could never go and make up to all the people I've done wrong to." He said, "Let's put the Big Book away again, and when you read it again, turn to the back and read some of the stories. Have you read those?" No, I was all interested in this part that told you how to do it. That was the only part I was interested in. And then he got us to laugh, which was what we needed. When we went to bed my sides ached, and I said to my husband, "I thought I would never laugh again, but I have laughed."

"Well," I said to dad, when the A.A. people kept coming with these lovely cars and looked so nice, "I suppose the neighbors say, ' Now those old fools must have up and died, but where's the hearse?'"

On Wednesday night Jack M. said, "You meet me at the Ohio Edison Building, and I will take you to the meeting." And we went down through the valley, and I remember ed reading about the Ku Klux Klan and how they burnt crosses, and I thought, "God alone knows what we are getting into this time!" I didn't know what they were going to do because he didn't tell us much. So we came to King's School. And they introduced me to Miriam and Annabelle. They told Annabelle to take me under her wing, and I shall never forget how she sort of curled up her nose and said, "They tell me you drink too." I often think how [269] that could have turned some people away, because there were no other women alcoholics there then. And I said, "Why sure, that's what I'm here for." And I was glad, and I have been ever since, that I said that. And I wasn't resentful toward her, either.

There was a young fellow who led the meeting and that was a beautiful thing to me. He talked about his wife taking his little boy away from him because of his drinking, and how he got back together with them through A.A., and we began feeling grateful right then that all these things hadn't been taken from us. They opened with a little prayer, and I thought it was very fine that we stood, all of us together, and closed with the Lord's Prayer.

I'd like to say here how important it was to us then that we do all the little things that people said were important, because later when Russ was so sick that I had to hold him up, they had a meeting out at the house. When we closed the meeting with the Lord's Prayer, Russ said, "Mother, help me stand." This was after his illness. We were in A.A. three and a half years when he was taken from me. We had never missed a Wednesday night at King's School for a year. We had that record.

I always feel that our God consciousness was a steady growth after we became associated with A.A. And we loved every minute of that association. We had big picnics out at the house with A.A. We had meetings at each other's homes and, of course, that was a grand place for people to get together out there; they seemed to think so too.

I give a great deal of credit to Doc and Anne for changing our life. They spent at least an evening a [270] week in our home out there for weeks and weeks. Sometimes saying very little, but letting us say. Russ used to be very much pleased because he'd say, "I think Dr. Bob thoroughly enjoys coming out here. He can relax and it's quiet."

At that time they didn't let us know that people ever had trouble. I mean slips. I remember sometime, it was possibly six months after we had been going steadily to King's School, that we were coming home from a meeting and saw a car along the way, and a fellow in back drinking a bottle of beer. And Russ said, "I would have sworn that was Jack M." The next morning his wife came dragging him in before Russ went to work, while I was getting breakfast. It had been Jack M. We wept and Russ didn't go to work.

Jack had been sober about a year and a half. His wife was cussing him, raving at him, "I just brought him over to show you what kind of a guy he is! He wants to go to the hospital, and I'm not paying for the hospital again!" We were so mad at her because she talked to him that way. Russ said,

“Don’t do another thing today but help him. Do something for him! If he thinks he needs to go to the hospital, I’ll pay for him.” She said, “He’s not going to the hospital, whether you pay for it or I pay for it, he’s not going!”

In the spiritual strength I had found, because of A.A., I finally felt that I had made a complete surrender, that I had really turned my life over that summer. I thought I had done that until Russ’ second collapse, and the doctor told me very candidly that he wasn’t long for this world. I knew then that I hadn’t made a complete surrender, because I tried to bargain with [271] the God I had found, and I said, “Anything but that! Don’t do that to me!”

Russ lived a year longer than they expected him to live, and in that year he was in bed for at least six months. I can’t express what A.A. meant to us during that year. Before the end finally came, I had, I guess, made the surrender because I finally had been able to say that I would not mind too much. And I realize that there was one salvation for me. Thank God I had no desire for a drink when he died.

There were two women in the St. Thomas Hospital at that time in a room. (Russ was buried on Friday, and on Sunday afternoon Hilda S. had invited me there to dinner Sunday night, and I didn’t think I could do it. I knew Doc and Anne were going to be there, and all of them thought it would be good for me, but the first thing I did was to go to St. Thomas and try to talk to those women.) I sat down on the side of one of their beds, and I started to weep, and I couldn’t stop, and I was so started to weep, and I couldn’t stop, and I was startled, and I apologized again and again for it. And that woman told me long after that was the surest proof to her that this program could work. If, on Sunday, I could be there, trying to think of something that would help her with this problem, then we must have something that could work. I felt it certainly must be very depressing to her that I should sit there by her bedside and cry.

I feel that one of the things that I still have to guard against is that I used to be set in my way about what I considered the old-time A.A. I have to tell myself, “Other things are progressing and A.A. must too.” We old-timers who get scattered and separated and then witness the construction of services to get in more [272] people and to make this thing function, we

think that A.A. has changed, but the root of it hasn't. We are older in A.A., and we're older in years. It's only natural that we don't have the capacity to change, but we ought not to criticize those who have.

There's another thing I would stress. I think it's awfully hard on people, especially if they're new people, to hear these long drawn – out talks. I don't ever remember that I was bored myself when we first came in, and they came out to the house and talked to us about these things. I ate up every bit of it, because I wanted to find out how to stay sober.

Before I stop—I always was a great talker—I want to say that nobody will ever know how I miss Annie's advice about things. I would get in the biggest dither about something. I hadn't been in too long when one of the men's wives called me one Sunday and told me she didn't think I had any part of the program. Well, I wasn't sure I did, and it was awful foggy, and I wept and asked her what she thought I ought to do about it. She said she didn't know, but that I sure showed plain enough I didn't have any part of it. I didn't think I was going to get drunk right then, but I remember how comforting it was then, but I remember how comforting it was when I called Anne and told her. I was crying, and I said, "Alice says she knows I don't have any part of the program." She talked to me and laughed about it and got me all over it. Another thing that was helpful to me. I used to think I was cowardly because when things came out pertaining to the program that troubled me, I said to her many times, "Annie, am I being a coward because I lay those things away on the shelf and skip it?" She said, "I feel you're just being wise. If it isn't anything that's [273] going to help you or anybody else, why should you become involved in it, and get all disturbed about it?"

So there you are. That's my story. I know I've talked too long, but I always do. And, anyhow, if I went on for ten or a hundred times as long I couldn't even begin to tell you all that A.A. has meant to me.

<https://silkworth.net/alcoholics-anonymous/10-from-farm-city/>

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